



Clary Sage & Pregnancy: Evidence-Based Guidance for Midwives

Written By Kim Thomson, Certified Clinical Aromatherapist and Owner of Hot Oily Mumma

Why this matters:

Clary sage essential oil has a long-standing reputation as a “uterotonic” (labour-stimulating) oil. Many professional guidelines advise avoiding it in early pregnancy — but is this based on evidence, or caution?

What the evidence says:

- **Human studies at term** (38–40 weeks) show that clary sage inhalation or footbaths can slightly raise oxytocin, but **do not trigger uterine contractions**.
- **No clinical evidence** shows harm from inhalation or incidental exposure in pregnancy.
- **Animal/in vitro studies** conflict: aqueous extracts can cause contractions in mouse uterine tissue, but clary sage essential oil and its component sclareol often **reduce uterine hypercontractions** (antispasmodic).
- Warnings about miscarriage or preterm labour are **precautionary, not evidence-based**.

Does Clary Sage essential oil strengthen contractions?

One of the biggest questions I hear is whether **clary sage actually helps to strengthen contractions during labour**. The truth is, the evidence is limited. A few small studies and plenty of anecdotal reports from midwives and mothers suggest that clary sage may support the body’s natural rhythm once labour is already underway, but there’s no solid scientific proof that it directly stimulates or strengthens contractions.

What it can do, however, is create a sense of calm and relaxation, which may indirectly support the labour process by helping oxytocin flow more freely. In other words, clary sage isn’t a magic switch to turn labour on or make it progress faster, but for some women it can be a helpful part of their **essential oils for birth** toolkit.

For pregnant midwives attending births:

- **Incidental exposure** (being in a room with clary sage diffused or applied by a woman in labour) is **not shown to be harmful**.
- **Direct handling:** If applying the oil for clients, wear gloves to avoid skin irritation. Dilution is always recommended.
- Ensure **good ventilation** if essential oils are diffused.
- If concerned, midwives can step back from direct inhalation or let partners apply the oil.

Summary:

There is **no documented risk** to pregnant midwives from incidental clary sage exposure. Most restrictions stem from tradition and theoretical uterotonic concerns, not clinical evidence. Used appropriately at term, clary sage appears safe, and for midwives in early pregnancy, routine presence around its use poses **no evidence-based danger**.

If used during labour, stick to **aromatic** routes, **avoid ingestion**, **avoid concentrated topical application over the abdomen** and instead dilute the essential oil in a carrier oil. (General maternity guidance still tends to advise avoiding Essential Oil use before term out of caution.)

References:

- Hur MH et al. (2017). Effects of aromatherapy on salivary oxytocin in term pregnancy. BMC Research Notes. <https://rdcu.be/eBRqp>
- Tadokoro, Y., Horiuchi, S., Takahata, K. et al. Changes in salivary oxytocin after inhalation of clary sage essential oil scent in term-pregnant women: a feasibility pilot study. BMC Res Notes 10, 717 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-017-3053-3>
- Murata T et al. (2022). Effect of clary sage & lavender foot baths on oxytocin and uterine contractions in term pregnancy.
- Tadokoro Y, Takahata K, Shuo T, Shinohara K, Horiuchi S. Changes in Salivary Oxytocin Level of Term Pregnant Women after Aromatherapy Footbath for Spontaneous Labor Onset: A Non-



Randomized Experimental Study. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023 Jun 30;20(13):6262. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20136262. PMID: 37444109; PMCID: PMC10341564.

- Jeong M et al. (2014). Relaxant effects of clary sage oil on uterine contractions in a dysmenorrhea model. J Obstet Gynaecol Res.
- Various aromatherapy safety guidelines (IFA, WebMD, BabyCenter AU, WellBeing AU).
 - **WebMD** lists clary sage among essential oils that **should not be used during pregnancy** [WebMD](#).
 - **BabyCenter Australia** also advises against it, unless used very carefully by a trained midwife when past the due date [BabyCenter Australia](#).
 - **WellBeing Magazine** includes clary sage in the list of oils to **avoid entirely during pregnancy** [WellBeing Magazine](#).
 - The **International Federation of Aromatherapists** explicitly cautions against using clary sage before 37 weeks, especially in maternity care contexts with complications [ifaroma.org](#).
 - Clinical guidance from **ObgynKey** warns of neurotoxic risks and contraindications, and suggests clary sage should be used only under strict conditions [Obgyn Key](#).