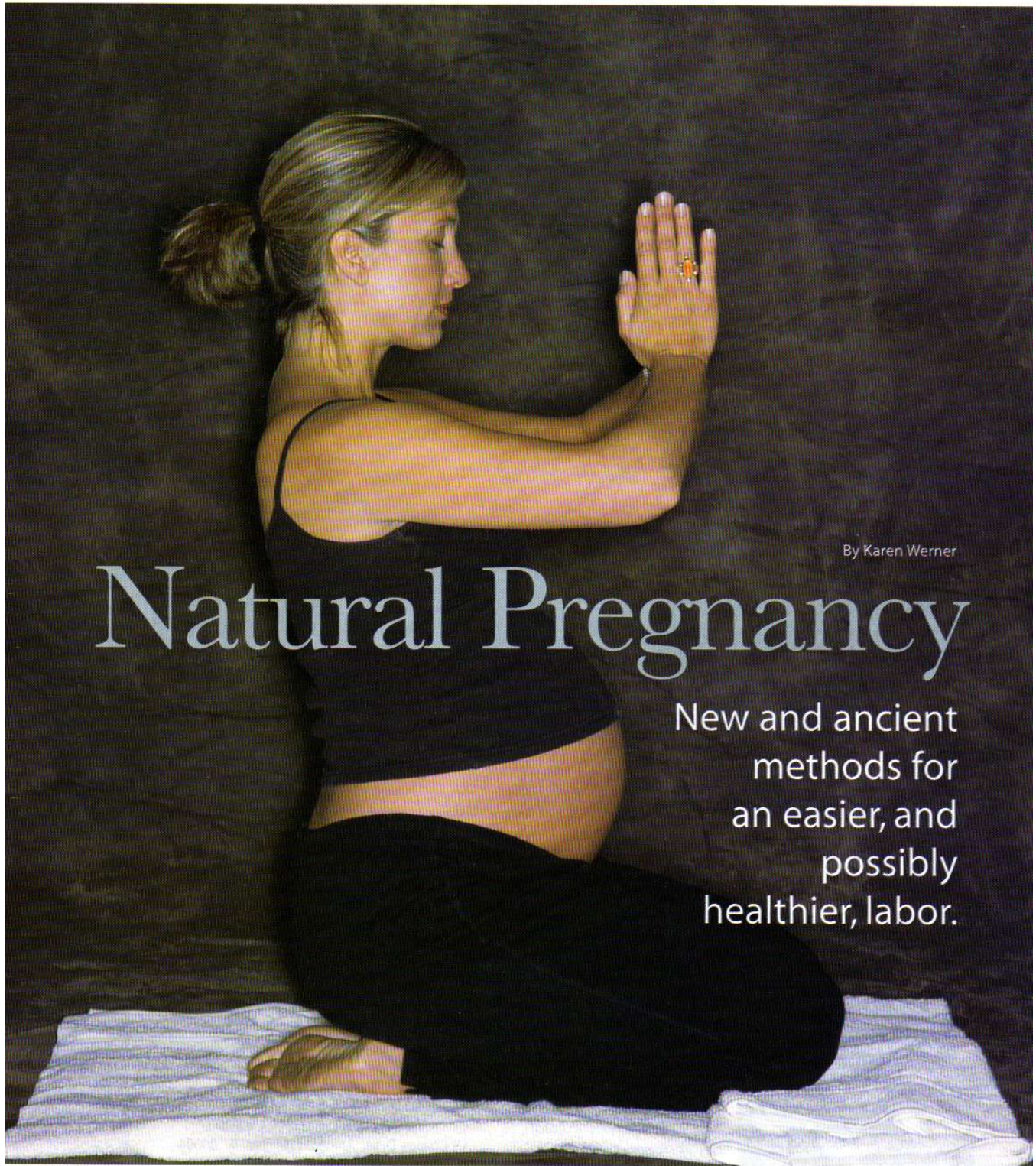


health



By Karen Werner

# Natural Pregnancy

New and ancient  
methods for  
an easier, and  
possibly  
healthier, labor.

MORE MOTHERS-TO-BE ARE SEEKING PREGNANCIES THAT FOCUS ON WELLNESS—AND FOR alternative approaches to achieve it. Because of this, techniques like acupuncture, massage, aromatherapy, and hypnosis are being embraced by both pregnant women and physicians for their ability to reduce fear, pain, and stress as well as labor time.

Here's a look at some of the methods that studies have shown to be the most effective. Because several have been used for centuries, and because each is considered unlikely to cause adverse effects, their arrival in the delivery room is anything but premature.

### ACUPUNCTURE

In the modern world of medicine, the ancient Chinese healing art of acupuncture has a lot to offer pregnant women, says Joan Laubach, the acupuncturist at the Centre for Well-Being at the Phoenixian. Useful for treating headaches, hormone imbalances, and back problems as well as reducing stress, fatigue, and insomnia, acupuncture can treat many conditions for which effective alternative drug-free treatments are rare. "It's wonderful not only for the mother, but also for the baby," says Laubach.

### PRENATAL MASSAGE

Along with the wonders of pregnancy come body aches associated with weight gain and elastin production. That may be why more pregnant women are discovering the comfort prenatal massage can bring.

Although this therapeutic bodywork is one of the fastest-growing fields of massage, it is anything but new. "Prenatal massage has been around forever," says Evelyn K. Resh, MPH, certified nurse/midwife at Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires. "Most cultures have specific prenatal massage techniques they employ for mothers-to-be."

In this country, Swedish massage—with its long, gliding strokes interspersed with kneading and friction—is the style most commonly used during pregnancy. Studies have suggested it improves circulation, decreases anxiety, promotes better sleep, and

A growing body of evidence suggests that women who use hypnosis during delivery may have shorter labors and fewer complications.

# Natural Delivery

Scientific research seems to agree. During the last decade, many studies have documented acupuncture's ability to relieve morning sickness. An article in the September 2001 issue of *Contemporary OB/GYN* cited the effectiveness of a form of acupuncture called moxibustion, which has been used to rotate breech babies for several thousand years.

But the benefits aren't only prenatal. Acupuncture can be used to stimulate contractions and provide pain relief during labor and delivery. And after the baby is born, acupuncture can help fortify a woman's constitution again. "Postpartum depression can be eased through acupuncture, along with the fatigue that a new mother experiences," Laubach says.

reduces stress and pain during labor. It's also credited with keeping skin supple, preventing stretch marks, reducing swelling in the hands and feet, and providing nurturing emotional support.

It's this honoring of the mother-to-be that is one of the biggest benefits of prenatal massage. "Often, the focus of pregnancy is baby-oriented, and people forget about the mother. It's nice for expectant moms to be cared for," Resh says. Still, the benefits of massage also impact the baby. "If a mother is more relaxed then that affects the intrauterine environment," says Resh.

Prenatal massage is usually safe, but it's important to check with your doctor for any contraindications that apply to you. Deep pressure should be avoided on the abdomen and at pressure points on

## A Pampered and Pleasurable Pregnancy

Dr. Lisa Masterson understands the discomforts of pregnancy. An OB-GYN with a private practice in Santa Monica as well as an office at the Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles, Masterson sees pregnant women on a daily basis. In 2003, she opened Ocean Oasis a medical spa geared to women in all phases of their lives. In the Ma Spa, her trademark services focus on mothers-to-be. Treatments are designed to provide relief from pregnancy-related aches and pains, as well as care for the new mother post-delivery. Services include pregnancy facials, massages, and even pre-delivery bikini waxing. For more information call (310) 451-9900 or visit [www.mastersonmd.net](http://www.mastersonmd.net)

## Finding Qualified Care

Now that using alternative modalities during pregnancy is becoming popular, it's extra important to choose certified practitioners. Always ask about a prospective provider's training, licensing, methods, and experience working with pregnant women. The best way to find a well-trained practitioner is through a doctor's referral or a professional organization. Here are a few to go to for more information:

- American Association of Oriental Medicine; [www.aaom.org](http://www.aaom.org)
- American Massage Therapy Association; [www.amtamassage.org](http://www.amtamassage.org)
- American Society of Clinical Hypnosis; [www.asch.net](http://www.asch.net)
- National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy; [www.naha.org](http://www.naha.org)

the sides of the ankles because heavy pressure there can induce labor in some women.

### AROMATHERAPY

It's been an open secret for thousands of years. Whether they're employed for their healing, cleansing, soothing, or uplifting properties—or simply because they smell good—natural plant oils strongly affect the body and the mind.

Melina Macall, an aromatherapist, mother of four, and the founder of Muti Oils, believes essential oils can provide powerful medicine during pregnancy. But she's quick to point out there are many oils that shouldn't be used during this time. In fact, when Macall was expecting her first child and searching for pregnancy-safe aromatherapy oils, the lack of them led to her blending her own. Consequently, Macall's pregnancy not only resulted in the birth of a child, but it also generated a company. It's important to learn which oils are safe and to buy only those labeled "pure essential oil."

That said, there are a number of oils that offer expectant moms real relief. Spearmint, cardamom, and ginger help allay the feelings of nausea. And, when mixed with a carrier oil or lotion, essential sandalwood, mandarin, and neroli oils nourish and condition the skin. "As your body gets tighter, [oils] can really help relieve the itching," says Macall.

Studies have shown aromatherapy to be effective in treating pregnancy-related conditions like insomnia, nausea, backache, and varicose veins. In the delivery room, essential oils like rose, jasmine, and frankincense have been proven to

induce relaxation, stimulate labor, and reduce pain—all with a minimum of side effects.

"People are looking for a kinder, gentler, more natural solution to problems," says Macall, particularly during pregnancy. So, for its ability to calm the mind and soothe the body, many pregnant women are finding the gentle, non-invasive powers of aromatherapy to be fragrant indeed.

### HYPNOBIRTHING

Though still not widespread, HypnoBirthing is nothing new. The program of relaxation, visualization, and deep breathing was developed in 1989 by Marie Mongan, based on the work of British obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read. Back in the 1920s, Dick-Read became convinced that pain was not a necessary part of childbirth. After all, women outside the Western world have relatively pain-free births.

So why is it different in the U.S.? Lea Blumberg, a certified hypnotherapist and the director of the New Life Awareness Institute, says the main culprit is fear. In the United States, we are conditioned to expect pain. It's what we learn from the media, friends, doctors, nurses, and even childbirth education classes. "When you are stressed, your body tenses up, and the oxygen flow shuts off to your muscles," she says. "Your body ends up fighting itself to birth the baby."

HypnoBirthing teaches that self-hypnosis and guided imagery can help stop the fear-tension-pain cycle, allowing women to deliver their babies with a sense of well-being and control. "Hypnosis is nothing more than operating from the subconscious side of your mind," Blumberg says. "You can be walking around, talking. You will be totally relaxed, but in complete control."

A growing body of scientific evidence suggests that women who use hypnosis during delivery may have shorter labors and fewer complications. One study found that women who practice self-hypnosis spend an average of 6.4 hours in the first stage of labor, versus 9.3 hours for women who don't.

Proponents believe the benefits don't end there. Working through anxieties about birth also paves the way to a more positive adjustment to motherhood and provides tools for dealing with the stresses that come along with a new baby. "HypnoBirthing is a life-changing thing," says Blumberg. "It's really a stress-management course, and one of the big benefits is that you get to have a baby more comfortably, with little or no medication." ☺

**25 OILS TO AVOID** Aromatherapist and Muti Oil founder Melina Macall says it's important to be cautious about the oils you use during pregnancy and advises erring on the side of caution. Contraindications may not always be listed, so it's wise to consult a trained aromatherapist or several reliable sources to make sure an oil is safe. AromaWeb ([www.aromaweb.com](http://www.aromaweb.com)) and Muti Oils ([www.mutioils.com](http://www.mutioils.com)) both contain extensive information about essential oils. Beyond that, here is a partial list of oils to avoid during pregnancy:

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|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| • Anise          | • Cinnamon   | • Hyssop   | • Mugwort    | • Rosemary    |
| • Bay            | • Clary sage | • Jasmine  | • Myrrh      | • Sage        |
| • Blue chamomile | • Clove      | • Juniper  | • Nutmeg     | • Savory      |
| • Camphor        | • Comfrey    | • Marjoram | • Origanum   | • Thyme       |
| • Cedarwood      | • Fennel     | • Melissa  | • Pennyroyal | • Wintergreen |