

Herbs for Labor

Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)

Black cohosh and blue cohosh are often considered the best combination to have on hand for labor. Black cohosh is not only excellent as a liniment for back labor, it is also used to relieve pain and cramping in the womb. It relieves muscle pain, which is one reason it works so well with blue cohosh, the uterine stimulant.

In more than 40 years of observed use in Germany, black cohosh has shown no serious adverse effects, contraindications or drug interactions. One study did show that 7% of patients who took it experienced transient stomach upset, but not to an extent to prevent the trial from continuing. Studies on the herb's possible mutagenicity, teratogenicity and carcinogenicity have proven negative.

Relevant properties: anti-spasmodic, alterative, nervine, hypotensive. It is high in volatile oils and contains triterpene glycosides, isoflavones and isoferulic acid.

Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*)

Blue cohosh can be used at any time during pregnancy that a threat of miscarriage occurs. Similarly, because of its anti-spasmodic action, it will ease false labor pains and dysmenorrhea. Nonetheless, when labor does begin, using blue cohosh just previous to birth will ease delivery. Blue cohosh stimulates uterine contractions and tones the uterus.

Relevant properties: emmenagogic, anti-spasmodic, anti-rheumatic, diuretic. It contains alkaloids and saponins.

Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)

Shepherd's purse has long been a number one recommendation for hemorrhage and excessive bleeding. It is a styptic herb that constricts blood vessels and tissue, lowers blood pressure and contracts the uterus. Shepherd's purse leaves provide vitamins C and K, some protein, sulfur, calcium, iron and sodium. In the United States it has been used following expulsion of the placenta since the time of the Pilgrims.

Relevant properties: astringent, anti-inflammatory, diuretic, hemostatic. It contains flavonoids, polypeptides and plant acids.

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

Though motherwort is not to be used until labor, it can ease early labor pains if they begin prematurely. It can also alleviate the restlessness, anxiety, tension and insomnia some women experience during labor. After childbirth it is given to help the uterus relax and return to normal.

Relevant properties: nervine, emmenagogic, anti-spasmodic, hepatic. It is a cardiac tonic and contains iridoids, diterpenes and flavonoids.

Trillium (*Trillium erectum*)

Trillium is used prior to labor to smooth the progress of contractions and ensure an easier delivery. It also can decrease the incidence and severity of postpartum hemorrhage.

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

Valerian is wonderful as an internal or topical pain reliever. It also can induce relaxation and sleep. Valerian has been found to slow preterm labor. This does not mean it will stop a preterm delivery. Valerian can be used to massage sore thighs and backs.

Cranesbill (*Geranium maculatum*)

Cranesbill has astringent properties and has long been used to prevent or stop hemorrhage in childbirth. It is also anti-inflammatory and can be used topically on sore tissues or hemorrhoids.

— **Demetria**