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Review

# Midwives' support for Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A literature review

Helen G. Hall <sup>a</sup> ... Debra L. Griffiths <sup>a</sup>

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## Summary

### Objective

There is evidence that the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by childbearing women is becoming increasingly popular in industrialised countries. The aim of this paper is to review the research literature investigating the midwives' support for the use of these therapies.

### Method

A search for relevant research published from 2000 to 2009 was undertaken using a range of databases and by examining relevant bibliographies. A total of thirteen studies were selected for inclusion in this review.

Results

The findings indicate that the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine is widespread in midwifery practice. Common indications for use include; labour induction and augmentation, nausea and vomiting, relaxation, back pain, anaemia, malpresentation, perineal discomfort, postnatal depression and lactation problems. The most popular therapies recommended by midwives are massage therapy, herbal medicines, relaxation techniques, nutritional supplements, aromatherapy, homeopathy and acupuncture. Midwives support the use Complementary and Alternative Medicine because they believe it is philosophically congruent; it provides safe alternatives to medical interventions; it supports the woman's autonomy, and; incorporating Complementary and Alternative Medicine can enhance their own professional autonomy.

## Conclusions

There is considerable support by midwives for the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by expectant women. Despite this enthusiasm, currently there are few educational opportunities and only limited research evidence regarding CAM use in midwifery practice. These shortfalls need to be addressed by the profession. Midwives are encouraged to have an open dialogue with childbearing women, to document use and to base any advice on the best available evidence.



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## Keywords

Alternative medicine; Complementary medicine; Midwife; Maternity; Pregnancy; Literature review

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