



## Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of essential oils made from plants and flowers. It is a healing art that aims to rejuvenate body, mind and spirit. The different smells (aromas), and the chemical constituents of the oils, are said to produce different emotional and physiological reactions. Essential oils can be massaged into the skin, added to bath water or vaporised in an oil burner. Although aromatherapy has been practised in some form or another in various cultures for thousands of years, the modern version was developed mainly in France. Aromatherapy hasn't yet undergone the same scientific scrutiny as other complementary therapies, but research so far shows that it can be an effective treatment for some complaints. Used in a professional way, aromatherapy can never have any side or negative effects.

### A range of disorders

Aromatherapy is of great benefit as a form of preventative health care. It detoxifies the body, increases blood circulation, and boosts the immune system and the lymphatic system. The oils stimulate, balance, uplift, soothe and calm. The release of stress and tension can allow the body's own healing process to begin.

Aromatherapy is used to treat a range of disorders, including:

- Digestive problems
- Eczema
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Stress.

### Using essential oils

Most essential oils are extracted from plant material using steam or water distillation. Selected plant materials are heated with steam, water or both until the essential oil vaporises. The oil then condenses as it cools.

All essential oils are concentrated and potent. They should be used very sparingly, only a few drops at a time, and always diluted in some other medium, such as plain massage oil (cold pressed vegetable oil) or unscented base cream (not a mineral oil cream, such as Sorbolene). Essential oils do not dissolve in water unless mixed with a dispersant first. Some of the ways in which essential oils can be used include:

- Massage - **a small amount added to a vegetable-based oil.**
- Oil burner - **a few drops mixed with water and vaporised in a burner.**
- Bath - **half a dozen drops added to a full bath.**
- Inhalation - **two to three drops added to a basin of hot water.**

### The sense of smell

The nostrils open up inside the skull to form the nasal cavity, which sits directly beneath the brain. Embedded in the ceiling of the nasal cavity are the olfactory cells. Each cell has tiny, moist hairs that trap odour molecules. It is thought that an odour is translated into electrical impulses by these cells, then passed on to the brain via the two olfactory bulbs. The message is interpreted by a part of the brain called the cerebral cortex. The sense of smell is poorly understood, but we do know that it is linked to the oldest, most primitive part of our brain and seems to have a direct link to our emotions.

### Change is triggered in the brain

According to aromatherapy theory, the essential oil molecules bring about changes in the brain. These brain changes, in turn, bring about alterations in various body systems, such as digestion or blood pressure. Some researchers believe that when people experience mood changes or physical changes, it is because the smell has triggered a memory. For instance, if a person feels relaxed when they smell cinnamon, it might be because cinnamon conjures up pleasant childhood memories. However, practitioners maintain that inhaling an essential oil will usually trigger a predictable response, even if the person doesn't have any memories associated with the smell.

### Some examples

A few of the popular aromatherapy oils and their uses include:

- Peppermint - **digestive disorders.**
- Rosemary - **muscular pains, mental stimulant.**
- Sandalwood - **depression, anxiety and nervous tension.**
- Tea tree - **respiratory problems, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and anti-viral.**
- Lavender - **headaches, insomnia, burns, aches and pains.**

### Special considerations

Some oils should be avoided by people with certain conditions, such as high blood pressure, epilepsy and pregnancy.

See over ...



## Pregnancy

Oils to **avoid** during pregnancy include:

- Basil
- Cedarwood
- Clary sage
- Cypress
- Fennel
- Jasmine
- Juniper
- Sweet marjoram
- Myrrh
- Peppermint
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme.

## Epilepsy

Oils to **avoid** with epilepsy include:

- Fennel
- Hyssop
- Sage.

## High blood pressure

Oils to **avoid** with high blood pressure include:

- Hyssop
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme.

## Some people may be sensitive to essential oils

Some oils can irritate or burn the skin, while others can bring on an allergic reaction, such as a skin rash, in susceptible people. Some of the oils that may cause problems include:

- Eucalyptus
- Ginger
- Thyme
- Black pepper
- Cinnamon
- Clove
- Oregano
- Lemongrass
- Some citrus oils.

## Handle with care

Some essential oils are toxic and should never be used at all - for example, camphor, pennyroyal, and wintergreen. Essential oils are very potent and should never be swallowed or applied undiluted to the skin. People with asthma and those prone to nose bleeds should use caution when inhaling vaporising oils.

## Where to get help

- Qualified professional aromatherapy practitioner
- Doctors or naturopaths with aromatherapy training
- International Federation of Aromatherapists, Information line 1902 240 125. Website <http://www.ifa.org.au>

## Things to remember

- Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils to bring about physiological and emotional changes.
- The limited research done so far indicates that aromatherapy is helpful for a number of disorders, such as stress related complaints.
- Essential oils should never be swallowed or applied undiluted to the skin.

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