

# ***Aromatherapy***

Aromatherapy is an alternative medicine used to help reduce stress, anxiety, depression and pain. It can also be an aid in overcoming an eating disorder and/or substance abuse. Essential oils have been known to increase circulation, decrease blood pressure and stimulate the immune system.

Aromatherapy uses essential oils from certain plants to improve a person's health and mood. These oils are taken from the plants' flowers, leaves, stalks, bark, rind and roots. The oils are often mixed with other substances such as lotions, other oils or alcohol to create several different aromatherapy methods.

The essential oils work in two ways. One is that the essential oils aroma has influence on the brain through the limbic system using the olfactory system. The aroma stimulates the nerves in the nose, then sends impulses to the part of the brain that controls emotion and memory. Depending on the type of essential oil used, the body will determine whether it will be stimulated or calmed. The second way has direct pharmacological effects. The essential oils interact with the body's hormones and enzymes, which changes blood pressure and pulse rates.

## **Ways to Use Essential Oils**

Essential oils can be used in a variety of ways. Essential oils can be inhaled by placing 3 or 4 drops of oil on to a napkin or tissue and placing it underneath the nose, breathing deeply.

Another method is steam inhalation. For this method, combine 2 cups of boiling water, then add 3-6 drops of the essential oils to water. Standing about 12"-15" away from the bowl, inhale the vapors. Steam inhalation can also help with flu and cold symptoms.

A third method is general household freshening by simply putting a few drops of the essential oils in the trash can, drains and/or washing machine. To keep clothes smelling clean, a few drops on a tissue can be placed in dresser draws and linen closets. A more relaxing method would be to use the essential oils in a bath or in massage oils.

## **Common Essential Oils**

There are many different types of essential oils. Some have more benefits than others and some oils work better for some than others. The oils listed below are the most common oils used today.

**Basil Oil:** used for sharpening concentration, decreasing depression symptoms. It can also help relieve migraines and headaches. This oil should not be used if pregnant.

**Bergamot Oil:** used in insect repellent; however, it can also be helpful for the urinary and digestive tracts. It has also been shown useful in stress related skin conditions such as chicken pox and cold sores.

**Black Pepper:** used to increase circulation.

**Citronella Oil:** used as an insect repellent.

**Clove Oil:** used as a topical analgesic. It is also used as an antiseptic, typically in dentistry.

**Eucalyptus Oil:** used to clear the airways in the case of a cold or flu.

**Geranium Oil:** used as a antiseptic, astringent and a diuretic.

**Ginger:** used to increase circulation, relaxation, and ease nausea, as well as aiding the immune system to fight colds.

**Grapefruit:** used to help regulate emotions, ease stress and help treat colds and respiratory conditions.

**Juniper:** helps to clear the mind and improve concentration. It also eases aches and pains.

**Lavender Oil:** used as an antiseptic to soothe burns and minor cuts. It can also be used to soothe headaches and migraines.

**Jasmine, Rose, Sandalwood, Ylang-ylang Oils:** are all used as an aphrodisiac.

**Tea Tree Oil:** used as an antiseptic and disinfectant.

**Yarrow Oil:** used to reduce joint inflammation and relieve cold and flu symptoms.

### **Common Household Uses**

There are endless ways in which aromatherapy can be used in the home, the most commonly used being scented candles and bath oils. Below are more ideas to keep in mind when wishing to use aromatherapy:

- Place a few drops of essential oil in the rinse cycle of the washer when washing towels or bedding.
- Add a few drops of an essential oil to a cotton ball and place it into the vacuum cleaner bag to help eliminate pet odor.
- A scented cotton ball can be placed in corners of the home, kitchen drawers, cabinets, or bathroom corners to help give a room a fresh new scent. This works well when trying to sell a home.
- Put a drop of essential oil on a light bulb or radiator to make a room smell better.
- Add a few drops of essential oil to water in a spray bottle for a natural air freshener.
- Peppermint oil on a cotton ball can be placed in problem areas to keep mice away.

- Rub a drop of lavender oil on the outside of window frames to keep flies and moths out of the house.
- A drop of Chamomile oil placed on a washcloth wrapped in an ice cube can help soothe gums while teething.

### **Precautions**

Essential oils are highly concentrated; this can create great risk when not used properly. Most oils are made diluted with carrier oil, to reduce risk of skin irritation. Prior to use, it is advisable to test it on the inside of the elbow and wait a few hours to make sure there is no reaction.

Some essential oils should not be used during pregnancy or if breast feeding; consult a doctor before using essential oils. Those with asthma or any other respiratory problems should also consult their doctor before using the oils.

Some oils are not safe to ingest; therefore, children need to be supervised when using oils. In addition, oils are flammable and must be kept away from any possible fire hazard.

For more information on aromatherapy, visit [www.aromatherapy.com](http://www.aromatherapy.com)

Written by: Aimee Harrison, Recreational Therapy, an Intern from Central Michigan University

Reference:

Harrison, A. (April 2008). Aromatherapy. *Mental Health Matters*. 5(6). Gratiot Medical Center: An Affiliate of MidMichigan Health.