



An Introduction to Aromatherapy*

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils taken from plants to improve quality of life and reduce stress and anxiety. Aromatherapy is often used along with standard hospital treatment to strengthen recovery.

Aromatherapy oils are made from fragrant oils found in many plants. These oils are made in special plant cells, often under the surface of leaves, bark, or peel. They are made using energy from the sun to create oils from the air, soil, and water. If the plant is crushed, the oil and its unique fragrance are released.






There are many essential oils used in aromatherapy, including lavender, peppermint, bergamot, lemon and orange. Each oil has its own fragrance, and is taken in and used by the body in a different way. Even plants within the same species may differ from one another because they are grown or harvested in different ways or places.






Essential oils are very concentrated. For example, it takes about 220 pounds of lavender flowers to make about 1 pound of lavender essential oil. Essential oils evaporate easily when they come in contact with air, quickly spreading their aroma.

The simplest way to use essential oils is to inhale the fragrance by putting 2 or 3 drops on a cotton ball or tissue and place it nearby. You will quickly smell the oil. Some of the effect is from the emotional meaning of the smell to you. We also know that tiny amounts of the oil enter your bloodstream just by inhaling the fragrance and may have a physical effect on the body.

There are some essential oils commonly chosen to treat specific conditions. For example, the oils we use in the Hospital are:

| Essential oil | Picture of the plant | Psychiatric Uses |
|---|---|---|
| Lavender (<i>lavandula angustifolia</i>) |  | Helps you sleep Reduces anxiety Treats headache |
| Mandarin (<i>citrus reticulata</i>) |  | Reduces anxiety Helps you relax |
| Orange (<i>citrus sinensis</i>) |  | Helps you relax Improves sad mood |

* Information adapted from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) 2012

| Essential oil | Picture of the plant | Psychiatric Uses |
|---|---|---|
| Lemon (<i>citrus limon</i>) |  | Increases mental alertness Helps you focus |
| Peppermint (<i>mentha piperita</i>) |  | Eases migraines Clears congestion Helps you concentrate Fights fatigue Mentally stimulates Eases nausea and vomiting |
| Bergamot (<i>citrus bergamia</i>) |  | Fights fatigue Lowers stress & tension |
| Ginger root (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>) |  | Eases nausea and vomiting |
| Ylang Ylang (<i>Cananga odorata</i>) |  | Reduces anxiety Reduces stress |

Safety testing on essential oils shows very few bad side effects or risks when they are used as directed. Allergic reactions and skin irritation may occur when essential oils are in touch with the skin for long periods of time. When citrus or other oils such as Bergamot are applied to the skin before sun exposure, the skin may get sunburned more easily than usual. Never apply essential oils to the skin undiluted.

Other aromatherapy resources

- Kathi Keville and Mindy Green. *Aromatherapy: A Complete Guide to the Healing Art, second edition*. Crossing Press, 2009.
- <http://www.naturesgift.com/>
- Essential oils can be bought at most Health Food Stores

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied on for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.