

Article for Your Health Connection

## The Essence of Nature

*The use of essential oils over the centuries has been extensive and effective. The field of Clinical Aromatherapy is now seen as a branch of plant medicine, phytotherapy, and on-going research supports the claims that aromatherapy is so much more than just a nice smell.*

Nicola Salter, Clinical Aromatherapist

Aromatherapy, or the use of essential oils, has ancient traditions reaching far back to the Egyptians, with the earliest records showing oils and resins being extracted from plants and trees for embalming and cosmetic use. In fact, the essential oil of Myrrh was the key oil effective in the embalming process owing to its natural occurring chemical component called  $\alpha$ -cadinol, that kills bacteria and fungi.

The Egyptians also used Myrrh to make their thick black kohl eyeliner, and Blue Lotus flower scents were used as narcotics and for fertility. These were just two oils out of many hundreds gathered locally, from plants and small trees along the Nile which were used for perfumes, personal care and to support the health and well-being of the local people.

For thousands of years, extracting the essential oils contained within flowers, herbs, leaves, fruits, roots and woods and using them to support specific health and emotional issues, has been well recorded. Especially in times of serious disease, the plague for example, where those who used oils of rosemary, thyme and oregano escaped the 'black death'. Even up until World War 1 the oil of clove was being used to disinfect surgical equipment owing to its powerful antiseptic properties.

It was in 1928 in Grasse, France, where the term 'aromatherapy' was officially created by chemist, Rene-Maurice Gattefosse . Whilst working in his family's perfumery, he burned his hand badly, and dipped it in a vat of lavender essential oil, over a couple of days, he noticed a rapid healing of his skin, and discovered the antiseptic and healing properties of lavender. From then on he researched other essential oils and found them to be more powerful than the synthetic chemical antiseptics he had been using, and essential oils contained many natural occurring chemicals that worked together as a synergy with many functions, compared to the synthetics that had one function only.

Today, we know that the many different species of Lavenders contain well over 100 natural chemical constituents which we can use for our well-being.

Of course, individuals respond differently to medications as they also do to essential oils, so whilst no direct claims can be made, research has shown that lavender essential oil can support:

***Insomnia*** – a couple of drops put on the forehead, temples, under the nose, and on the pillow at night, can stimulate the body to produce serotonin which helps us sleep.

***Headaches*** – as above, since the oil is cooling, it can reduce inflammation

***Anti-inflammatory*** – 5 drops of lavender essential oil mixed in 1 tspn of aloe vera gel and applied to eczema and sun burn four times a day will reduce heat and itching.

Also apply 1 drop of lavender essential oil directly to a spot to reduce inflammation and dry it up – a great tip for those emergency zits that pop up before important occasions.

Lavender is also indicated for Arthritis, IBS, menstrual pain, burns, scars and is generally the safest oil to use, ie you can use small amounts directly on the skin without the need to pre-blend it in a carrier oil like sweet almond.

There are over 350 different essential oils available each with their own unique and specific actions. Being lipophilic, (fat like), essential oils readily absorb into our skin carrying the potency of the plant into our bloodstream, and may work at a cellular level.

Oils are volatile (easily evaporate) but are therapeutically more active than dried herbs, which lose a larger proportion of their components in the drying process, and yet, are safer to ingest. Here in the US we are not legally permitted to promote the ingestion of essential oils owing to their potency. However, we do use them as topical skin applications and through smell to stimulate the release of neurochemicals to calm or invigorate us for example.

The essential oils we purchase in those little amber glass bottles, are in fact the lifeblood of a plant found mainly in its microscopic secretory sacs, either in the flowers, leaves, bark, root, rind or fruit from 0.01%- 1.0%. This means that it takes hundreds of tons of plant material to extract small quantities of essential oils. This is one of the reasons why purchasing a good quality, wildcrafted or organic essential oil can be expensive. But worth it!

Today we are seeing the use of essential oils for:

***Autism:***

*To reduce stress and behavior outbursts - Lavender*

***Intensive and coronary care:***

*Stress levels*

*- Lavender*

*Blood pressure*

*- Ylang Ylang*

*Pain*

*- Lavender/Chamomile Roman, Rosemary*

***Cancer:***

*Relaxation*

*- Lavender, Frankincense*

*Strengthen immune function*

*- Tea Tree, Oregano*

*Reduce radiotherapy burning*

*- Aloe Vera, Frankincense*

***Elderly:***

*Alzheimer's*

*- Frankincense and Sandalwood.*

*Lemon Balm*

*(contain sesquiterpenes that cross the blood brain barrier).*

*Insomnia*

*- Lavender*

And essential oils may often help with:

- *Reduced anxiety*
- *Accelerated surgical site healing*
- *Improvement in blood pressure*
- *Greater relaxation*
- *Strengthened immune function*
- *Better sleeping patterns*
- *Improved clarity and focus*
- *Reduction in fungal infections*
- *Hormone balance*
- *Fewer migraines/headaches*
- *Muscular stiffness*
- *Skin disorders*
- *Women's health issues*

## **Research**

Research is taking place in many countries including the US, Japan, Germany, Israel, Russia, France, India and the UK . In the majority of tests undertaken we see the antiviral and antibacterial outcomes of the oils as showing the strongest results.

Here are just a few of the studies:

### ❖ *Leukemia*

*2003 Israel*

Rosemary's carnosic acid hinders growth of leukemia cells in vitro.

❖ ***Detox Enzymes***

Lemon and Pine induce the activity of the liver's detoxification enzymes, and can prevent mammary congestion, liver and lung cancers in tissue cultures.

❖ ***Improved Cholesterol***

*1997 – Russia*

Total cholesterol and lipids lowered with lavender therapy.

❖ ***Emotional Stress Improves***

*1993 – US.*

2 species of lavender significantly reduced emotional and behavioral stress levels in post cardiac surgery patients.

❖ ***The aroma-mood connection***

*Dr Alan Hirsch Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation, Chicago –  
2000*

Hirsch and his colleagues have concluded that specific odors can change your mood and behavior. They found that floral aromas will affect the speed of learning.

❖ ***In vitro antibacterial activity of some plant essential oils***

*Entomology Research Institute, Loyola College, India – 2006*

Evaluated the antibacterial activity of 21 essential oils against six bacterial species. Out of the 21 essential oils tested, 19 showed antibacterial activity against one or more strains. **The oils that showed the greatest inhibitory effects were cinnamon, clove, geranium, lemon, lime, orange, rosemary oils.**

***THE ART, SCIENCE AND APPLICATION OF AROMATHERAPY***

The **art** of aromatherapy comes in the blending of the oils either for natural perfumes, or therapeutic blends taking into account the 'whole – holistic' person, how our emotions and thoughts impact on our physical well-being.

The **science** is understanding the chemical components which give an oil a particular function, or overlapping functions.

The **application**, are the various methods available to us for using essential oils for our health and emotional well-being either through smell or physical application. This can be in the form of inhalation, a massage oil blend, a spray, a diffuser, or bathing in the oils ( the most effective, since absorption is greater).

Aromatherapy is an aromatic journey of the senses where you discover that synthetic fragrances and perfumes have no depth in comparison to the real fragrance and essence of nature, and that, synthetic fragrances may actually cause allergic reactions.

*In cases of serious or recurring illness please seek the help of your medical practitioner.*