

# Back to wellness with aromatherapy



Getting back on your feet after illness or injury is not always easy. Aromatherapist and herbalist **Robyn Minski** reveals how reaching into the 'aromatherapy chest' can yield some surprising remedies.

**W**hether recovering from the flu or recuperating after surgery, aromatherapy can change our emotional state as well as assisting the physical body to heal itself.

The process of recovery from illness or injury occurs on every level of our being. A return to total wellness requires spiritual and emotional recovery as we deal with varying states of lethargy, depression and despondency that can afflict us for varying periods of time. Regular use of aromatherapy works in subtle ways by slowly strengthening the immune system and progressively detoxifying and balancing the body's systemic functions.

Essential oils, which are both psycho-active and life promoting, have the power to reach into our very core, relaxing, calming and uplifting our mind and spirit, bringing back homeostasis while healing our physical body of wounds and irritations.

## Psycho-spiritual effects

Aromatherapy involving the use of specific essences can influence the central nervous system in broadly predictable

ways. For example, scientific testing has shown that constituents in essences like Roman chamomile and lavender will quieten the mind/body, whereas other essences, such as black pepper and lemongrass, have an enlivening effect on the mind.

However, it is important to select essences which suit the particular aroma preference of individuals, as well as the symptoms they wish to treat. If the aroma of the chosen essence is perceived as a pleasant stimulus, the limbic system of the brain triggers a release of the body's own 'happiness chemicals', known as endorphins, which will help to control pain and further create a sense of wellbeing. On the other hand, many aromatherapists believe that when a disliked essence is used, the results are considerably

minimised. So for best results when blending together various essential oils, chosen according to their therapeutic properties, ask recipients to check that they like the final aroma.

## Healing digestive symptoms

Aromatherapy can make a real difference where longer-term stress, nervous tension and anxiety associated with ill health have caused digestive system symptoms such as dyspepsia and gastritis. Topical self-application via massage to the abdominal area (at three per cent dilution in carrier oils) that have antispasmodic and carminative actions, such as peppermint, petitgrain, marjoram, rosemary, black pepper, sage and fennel, will help relieve these symptoms.

These conditions would also benefit from ▶

### Good to Remember

- \* Always refer a customer to a healthcare professional when dealing with serious symptoms.
- \* If skin rashes appear when using essential oils, discontinue use immediately and consult an aromatherapist.
- \* In a 'recovery phase', it is usual to feel tired, sluggish and at times suffer from mild depression, or even develop a skin reaction. These are all quite normal reactions.
- \* The expected outcomes of aromatherapy treatments are dependent on the use of only 100 per cent pure and natural essential oils.

# AROMATHERAPY

herbal infusions (teas) of the fresh or dried herb such as peppermint, fennel, chamomile or orange. The hot water releases the essential oils from the herb and the infusion delivers these healing properties directly into the digestive tract.

## Strengthening the immune system

Recovering from Winter ills can be greatly enhanced by aromatherapy practices. If it is necessary to stay indoors, choose rooms that have the most light. Vaporise uplifting and antibacterial aromas, such as rosemary, lemon, grapefruit, petitgrain or spike lavender. These same oils can be used in a massage blend at three per cent dilution, which can be applied to the body each morning after a bath or shower.

Once again, herbal teas are efficient at stimulating the immune system. Try infusing fresh leaves of basil or peppermint and add a slice of lemon and a pinch of cinnamon.

## The elderly

The body's ability to heal itself slows down as we age. Some of the common problems experienced by the elderly are

due to a reduction in peripheral blood flow to their arms and legs. This manifests as skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis, dry and flaky rashes, leg ulcers and poor wound healing. Other conditions like osteoarthritis can be more painful overnight or when sitting for long periods due to the reduced blood flow through the joints.

Be aware of anti-inflammatory oils such as frankincense, German chamomile or lavender. Add to these oils the circulatory stimulants that promote an increase in blood flow and provide a systemic warming effect, such as marjoram, black pepper or ginger, and you have a helpful topical rub for painful arthritic joints. These oils can be made into a two per cent blend which can be applied during the day or before going to bed at night.

Oils that are more highly antibacterial or antimicrobial (such as lemon, sage, niaouli and tea tree) are excellent added

## Safety

- \* Never apply undiluted oils to the skin or take internally.
- \* For pregnant women, essential oils are not recommended to be used on the body prior to 16 weeks.
- \* Keep dilutions of formulations to one-to-two per cent when making recommendations for the elderly and children.
- \* Recommend electric vaporisers for use with the elderly and children.

to warm saline solution and used as a swab for cleansing skin infections or to assist with wound management.

The calming and sedative properties found in lavender, bergamot or rose assist with reducing anxiety and sleeplessness by simply inhaling these oils from a tissue or a safely monitored vaporiser.

In the case of acute conditions, topical aromatherapy treatments can be repeated every two hours, eg via inhalation or massage blend or by wearing an oil-soaked occlusive bandage around the affected area. ■

**Robyn Minski** is Director of Studies at the International Academy of Aromatherapy ([www.iaaromatherapy.com.au](http://www.iaaromatherapy.com.au)) and is a practising aromatherapist and herbalist. Robyn is also on the Advisory Panel of the TGA Complementary Medicines Evaluation Committee. Robyn Minski is an independent aromatherapist and herbalist and does not endorse any commercial product.

## Aromatherapy and recovery

Condition	Essential oils	Effects	Application method
<b>Pain management</b>	Lavender, bay, German chamomile, marjoram	Analgesic and anti-inflammatory	Compress, immersion bath, massage
<b>Poor circulation</b>	Ginger, black pepper, coriander, lemon, rosemary	Promotes circulation	Immersion bath, hand/foot baths, massage
<b>Childhood chickenpox</b>	Roman chamomile, bergamot, lavender	Soothing to lesions	Blend into aloe vera gel or St John's wort infused oil and apply on sites with a soft brush
<b>Common cold</b>	Lime, lemon, eucalyptus, cardamom	Boosts immunity and regulates body temperature	Full body massage, hand and foot massage blends, immersion baths, footbaths
<b>Depression (mild)</b>	Bergamot, clary sage, geranium, rose	Uplifting to the mood and balancing to nervous system	Steam inhalation, direct inhalation from hand or tissue
<b>Grief</b>	Jasmine, neroli, rose	Strengthening to the emotions	Immersion baths, inhalations, full body massage
<b>Post-natal conditions</b>			
<b>Post-natal depression</b>	Bergamot, tangerine, jasmine, melissa	Calming and rebalancing for the mood soothing and anti-depressant	Direct inhalation from tissue, steam inhalation
<b>Exhaustion</b>	Rosewood, petitgrain	Uplifting for mood	As above while breastfeeding
<b>Post-surgery wellbeing</b>			
<b>Digestive upsets</b>	Rosemary, frankincense Spearmint, fennel, palmarosa	Assists with re-orientation Settles digestion	Inhalation from tissue Abdominal self-massage
<b>Anxiety</b>	Lavender, neroli Petitgrain, frankincense	Reduces symptoms Re-establishes deep breathing habits	Self-massage (head/shoulders) Steam inhalation
<b>Wound management</b>	Tea tree, thyme, lavender	Antibacterial wash for around wound area, reduces swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3/4 cup Epsom salts</li> <li>• 1/4 cup sea salt mixed with essential oils</li> </ul>
<b>Sweet dreams</b>	Petitgrain, lavender, melissa	Regulates breathing and sedative	Inhalation from tissue or electric vaporiser
<b>Over-exertion (muscular)</b>	Juniper, cypress, lemongrass	Increases circulation, relieves pain and spasm	Immersion baths with sea salt
<b>Viral flu</b>	Eucalyptus, tea tree, cedarwood, ginger	Boosts immunity and warms the body	Full body massage, hand and foot massage blends