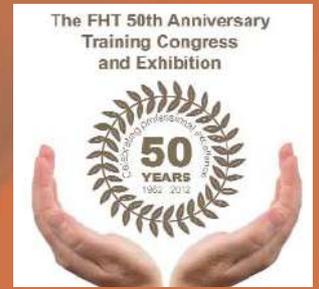


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Instinct, intuition and health via the use of essential oils



Essential oils are a powerful tool in the support of your mental–emotional health care. When stress affects you, your body responds with the fight/flight mechanism, and as this occurs, your conscious-thinking brain (the cortex) gets largely by-passed as older more primitive areas take over.

The result of this process is that various survival strategies emerge that try to help you get through the threat and your body gets prepared for physical action.

If your stress is a genuine threat to your physical life, the above process is ideal and should ensure your maximum chances of survival.

If your stress is not genuinely life threatening, then the above process actually makes it harder for you to deal constructively with the situation, as you will need the resources of your cortex (logic, imagination, creativity and verbal communication skills).

In order to deal with a non-life-threatening stress you need to use your cortex to find a new way of dealing with the challenge. And, in order to use the cortex most effectively you need to be in a relatively relaxed state.

This, of course, is where essential oils are so powerful. Essential oils enter your olfactory sense (your sense of smell) and their signal is taken directly to the older parts of the brain, namely the limbic system, which governs your memories and emotional states.

If you are already in a stressed state you can smell one of the relaxing oils such as lavender and help to calm yourself. As you calm yourself you can access the cortex more easily and start to investigate solutions rather than remain stressed by the problem.

It can be helpful to use essential oil therapy alongside counselling or something similar so that you can take full advantage of your cortex, which is your communication centre.

The cortex contains over a million brain cells and each of these has hundreds of connections that can link to other brain cells. The net result is you have the potential to create an almost infinite number of connections, and each connection represents the potential for a new idea!

Imagine how different your life would be if you absolutely knew that, given time, you could come up with a solution to any problem, what would happen to worry and depression?

Our emotional states are Nature's signalling system that something needs attending to and it is interesting that certain essential oils relate to specific emotions. In our modern world where there seems to be little time to even catch your

breath, emotional experiences are often suppressed in the need to 'carry-on'. Your physical body on the other hand is still responding to the stress factors associated to the emotion. Over time, this leads to implications for your physical health.

At the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, a study was done on the stress levels of nursing staff. 1 Staff had the perception that stress was higher during the winter months compared to the summer (65% reported suffering moderate to extreme anxiety in the winter, with 54% in the summer).

Nurses working in A&E were given two, 12-week sessions of aromatherapy (each session lasting 15 minutes) together with relaxation music over the course of a year. Interestingly, workload figures indicated that case loads were actually fairly equal between winter and summer periods with staff dealing with just over 10,700 patients each season.

Massages were provided by a qualified therapist who sprayed an aromatherapy mist above the heads of the participants and then massaged their shoulders, mid-back, neck, scalp, forehead and temples, while they listened to relaxing music on headphones.

Participants, who were seated in a quiet room, were able to choose the essential oil used, from rose, lavender, lime or ocean breeze – a combination of lavender, ylang ylang, bergamot and patchouli.

At the conclusion of the study, Dr Cooke

commented, "What is clear from this study is that providing aromatherapy massage had an immediate and dramatic effect on staff who traditionally suffer high levels of anxiety because of the nature of their work. Introducing stress reduction strategies in the workplace could be a valuable tool for employers who are keen to tackle anxiety levels in high-pressure roles and increase job satisfaction."

The results showed that the number of staff feeling stressed fell to 8%. This represented a significant reduction, especially in the winter season when anxiety was experienced as being higher.

The human brain has evolved over millions of years to help us cope with the stresses of life, beginning with intuitive responses that are processed in the limbic and brain stem areas, and more recently via speech and communication in the cortex.

In the study above, it is interesting to note that the nurses were given the opportunity to make a choice between a selection of essential oils. Presuming there was no prior knowledge of each oil in the selection, the individual would have been using an instinctive olfactory response. The nose is a sensitive organ and your sense of smell allows the nervous system its most direct contact with the external world.

How often have you walked past an aromatic plant and been captivated by its scent? Yet, at the same time, another person walking past the same plant may feel unmoved by the experience. The aromatic qualities of the plant have

therapeutic properties that will either be needed or not needed by an individual, and as the signal from your nose travels directly to the limbic areas of the brain, its impact registers in a centre where there are no words. Words are the domain of the cortex and as can be seen in literature, there is a relatively small vocabulary to describe aromatic experiences.

Modern life may have moved us as a species away from listening to, or trusting our intuitive responses, yet animals still have this ability and when living in a natural environment, will use this innate ability to select plants for self-healing.

This is a fast and growing field of study, that it is hoped will have positive benefits for us humans. Scientists and researchers are keen to study animal behaviour and selection processes to uncover new plant medicines and remedies that we are not aware of. The race is of course on as natural habitats are in decline the world over and this resource is threatened.

This field of work is called Zoopharmacognosy. Dr Rodriguez of Cornell University coined the term and is now joined by other leaders in the fields of science and conservation, such as Michael Huffman of Kyoto University, to fully explore this potential. In the UK, Caroline Ingraham has pioneered the field working and studying with domestic animals such as dogs, cats and horses where she re-introduces plant extracts that have been lost to an animal. The work is so effective that Caroline has been invited to work internationally with more exotic animals such as elephants, rhinos and tigers!

This is all good news for humans in that we can also relearn that our sense of smell is fundamental in our ability to self-select essential oils that will help us with the stresses of life, but being human and having a complex cortex filled with words, we might benefit most when essential oils can be incorporated together with counselling.

The future is therefore very exciting and essential oils are one way that we can reconnect with our natural environment that is full of potential remedies for us. Try experimenting with smelling essential oils and see which ones you are drawn to most. Only then look them up and see what properties they have. Does this reveal something pertinent to you? If so, you can then learn the best ways to use those oils for yourself or see an Aromatherapist. **CHW**

© Written by Martin Stubbs, ex-chair and vice chairman of the IFA, essential oil therapist, zoopharmacognosist, counsellor and life coach

Resources for further information:
www.mjs-lifesolutions.co.uk
www.ingraham.co.uk
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoopharmacognosy>

1 Reference: "The effect of aromatherapy massage with music on the stress and anxiety levels of emergency nurses: comparison between summer and winter." Cooke et al., Journal of Clinical Nursing. 16, pp. 1696-1703 (September, 2007).

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