

## Aromatherapy and Multiple Sclerosis

### What is multiple sclerosis?

The Multiple Sclerosis Society website describes this condition as follows:

**“Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a condition that affects your brain and spinal cord. In MS, the coating that protects your nerves (myelin) is damaged, and this causes a range of symptoms.**

Once diagnosed, MS stays with you for life, but treatments and specialists can help you to manage the condition and its symptoms.

We don't know the cause and we haven't yet found a cure, but research is progressing fast.

To understand what happens in MS, it's useful to understand how the central nervous system works. A substance called myelin protects the nerve fibres in the central nervous system, which helps messages travel quickly and smoothly between the brain and the rest of the body.

In MS, your immune system, which normally helps to fight off infections, mistakes myelin for a foreign body and attacks it. This damages the myelin and strips it off the nerve fibres, either slightly or completely, leaving scars known as lesions or plaques. This damage disrupts messages travelling along nerve fibres – they can slow down, become distorted, or not get through at all.

As well as losing the myelin, there can sometimes be damage to the actual nerve fibres too. It's this nerve damage that causes the increase in disability that can occur over time.

### MS symptoms

The central nervous system links everything your body does, so MS can cause many different types of symptoms. The specific symptoms that appear depend on which part of your central nervous system has been affected, and the job of the damaged nerve.

Physical symptoms of MS might commonly include vision problems, balance problems and dizziness, fatigue, bladder problems and stiffness and/or spasms.

Other symptoms might include problems with:

- Bowel
- Speech
- Swallowing
- Tremor

MS can affect memory and thinking, and also have an impact on emotions. Like all MS symptoms, you might experience this in varying degrees, or not at all."

### **How could aromatherapy help with MS?**

Firstly, Aromatherapists would never claim to cure a disease. The aim of Aromatherapy is to improve the overall well-being of the individual rather than focusing on specific diseases.

As Robert Tisserand suggests, "*Aromatherapy seeks to induce relaxation, to increase energy, to reduce the effects of stress and to restore lost balance to mind, body and soul.*"

Aromatherapy training and experience teaches awareness of the limitations of this therapy and sets realistic expectations for every client. A qualified Aromatherapist takes into account the individual as a whole, including their medical history, emotional and social factors rather than just the symptoms of disease. The overall treatment is then tailored to the client's specific needs with a bespoke blend of essential oils created for each individual.

### **So, how can Aromatherapy help those living with Multiple Sclerosis?**

Aromatherapists have found that the combination of massage and carefully selected essential oils may assist in:

- relieving specific areas of pain;
- easing the symptoms of poor circulation;
- relieving muscle spasm;
- boosting the immune system,
- increasing energy levels;
- reducing levels of stress and anxiety;
- promoting good quality sleep.

There are many essential oils that a qualified Aromatherapist could use on a client with Multiple Sclerosis and listed below is a selection that may offer some relief. (NB: the following in no way constitutes or substitutes medical advice and takes no account of individual contraindications to essential oils and/or massage).

- Lemon (*Citrus limon*)
- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- Frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Neroli (*Citrus aurantium var amar flos*)
- Rose (*Rosa damascena*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*)
- Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Sweet Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*)

#### **References:**

- The Multiple Sclerosis Society - [www.mssociety.org.uk](http://www.mssociety.org.uk)
- The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy - Salvatore Battaglia
- Essential Oil Safety - Robert Tisserand
- The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Essential Oils - Julia Lawless
- The Brain's Way of Healing - Norman Doidge MD

#### **Research Trials and Articles:**

- 1) [Complementary Therapy Use by Persons with Multiple Sclerosis](#)
- 2) [Uses of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Multiple Sclerosis](#)
- 3) [Multiple Sclerosis Society – Guidelines to Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#)