

Aromatherapy and Allergies

What are Allergies?

NHS Choices states that, “An allergy is a reaction the body has to a particular food or substance.” Allergies are very common. They're thought to affect more than one in four people in the UK at some point in their lives. They are particularly common in children. Some allergies go away as a child gets older, although many are lifelong. Adults can develop allergies to things they weren't previously allergic to.

Having an allergy can be a nuisance and affect your everyday activities, but most allergic reactions are mild and can be largely kept under control. Severe reactions can occasionally occur, but these are uncommon.

Common allergies

Substances that cause allergic reactions are called allergens. The more common allergens include:

- grass and tree pollen – an allergy to these is known as hay fever (allergic rhinitis)
- dust mites
- animal dander (tiny flakes of skin or hair)
- food – particularly nuts, fruit, shellfish, eggs and cow's milk
- insect bites and stings
- medication – including ibuprofen, aspirin, and certain antibiotics
- latex – used to make some gloves and condoms
- mould – these can release small particles into the air that you can breathe in
- household chemicals – including those in detergents and hair dyes

Most of these allergens are generally harmless to people who aren't allergic to them.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction

Allergic reactions usually happen quickly within a few minutes of exposure to an allergen.

They can cause:

- sneezing
- a runny or blocked nose
- red, itchy, watery eyes
- wheezing and coughing
- a red, itchy rash
- worsening of asthma or eczema symptoms

Most allergic reactions are mild, but occasionally a severe reaction called anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock can occur. This is a medical emergency and needs urgent treatment.

How Can Aromatherapy Help with Allergies?

By their very nature, allergies have to be treated cautiously in order not to make the situation worse. Essential oil blends need to be highly diluted before applying to allergy prone skin and many oils are not suitable for use on dermal or respiratory allergies at all. However, where used appropriately, the following essential oils have been helpful:

- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclerea*)
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- German Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*)
- Helichrysum (*Helichrysum italicum*)
- Rose Otto (*Rosa damascena*)
- Neroli (*Citrus aurantium var amara flos*)

Apricot Kernel (*Prunus armeniaca*) and/or Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) oils are generally considered to be suitable carriers on allergy-prone skin.

Always contact a qualified Aromatherapist who will guide you on the oils that are suitable for your individual needs.

References:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergies/>
- <https://www.allergyuk.org/information-and-advice>
- The Art of Aromatherapy – Robert Tisserand
- Aromatherapy – An A-Z – Patricia Davies
- Encyclopaedia of Aromatherapy – Chrissie Wildwood
- Aromatherapy Workbook – Marcel Lavabre
- The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy – Salvatore Battaglia
- The Encyclopaedia of Essential Oils – Julia Lawless
- Essential Oils in Colour – Rosemary Caddy
- Aromatherapy for Health Professionals - Shirley and Len Price

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