

Aromatherapy and Arthritis

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a common condition that causes pain and inflammation in a joint. The word arthritis comes from 'arthr' (joint) and 'itis' (inflammation). It is used to describe a wide range of diseases of the joints and related tissues that cause pain, stiffness and, sometimes, joint deformities and loss of function.

The two most common types of arthritis are:

- Osteoarthritis
- Rheumatoid arthritis

Osteoarthritis

It most often develops in adults who are in their late 40s or older. It's also more common in women and people with a family history of the condition. However, it can occur at any age as a result of an injury, or be associated with other joint-related conditions, such as gout or rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoarthritis initially affects the smooth cartilage lining of the joint. This makes movement more difficult than usual, leading to pain and stiffness. Once the cartilage lining starts to roughen and thin, the tendons and ligaments have to work harder. This can cause swelling and the formation of bony spurs, called osteophytes.

Severe loss of cartilage can lead to bone rubbing on bone, altering the shape of the joint and forcing the bones out of their normal position. The most commonly affected joints are those in the hands, spine, knees and hips.

Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid and osteoarthritis are two different conditions. Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when the body's immune system targets affected joints, which leads to pain and swelling.

The outer covering (synovium) of the joint is the first place affected. This can then spread across the joint, leading to further swelling and a change in the joint's shape. This may cause the bone and cartilage to break down.

People with rheumatoid arthritis can also develop problems with other tissues and organs in their body.

Other types of arthritis and related conditions;

Ankylosing spondylitis, Cervical spondylosis, Fibromyalgia, Lupus, Gout, Psoriatic arthritis, Enteropathic arthritis, Reactive arthritis, Secondary arthritis and Polymyalgia rheumatica.

For more information please visit www.nhs.uk

What causes arthritis?

- Being a woman – Some types of arthritis, such as lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia primarily affect women. Overall, nearly twice as many women as men get arthritis.
- Being a man – Ankylosing spondylitis and gout primarily affect men.
- Heredity – A tendency towards some types of arthritis may be inherited, including susceptibility to autoimmune disease and a weakness in joints or bones that makes you more at risk from injury.
- Repeated joint injuries or stresses – Sports or work activities can damage or even wear away cartilage in the joints.
- Obesity – Being overweight puts extra strain on knees and hips and can contribute to osteoarthritis and gout.

The symptoms of arthritis will vary depending on the type. This is why it's important to have an accurate diagnosis if you have:

- Joint pain, tenderness and stiffness
- Weakness and muscle wasting
- Swelling in one or more joints, especially if accompanied by warmth and/or redness.
- Stiffness around the joints that lasts for at least an hour in the early morning.
- Sudden difficulty using or moving a joint normally.

How aromatherapy helps for arthritis?

Aromatherapy works on the sensory system and enhances the parasympathetic response, which is closely linked with endorphins (Weil 1996). Inhaling sweet aromas has been found to increase pain tolerance (Prescott & Wilkie 2007), and aromatherapy can be helpful in alleviating chronic pain (Buckle 1999). The analgesic effects of aromatherapy can be traced to several factors, depending on whether the essential oils are used topically on the area of pain or inhaled to reduce the sensation of pain.

Many people with chronic pain report that an aromatherapy massage can give relief for some time after treatment. Many different oils can be used such as lavender, marjoram to relieve muscle spasm; ginger if you have a circulatory problem, as well as other oils such as rosemary or peppermint which are thought to have stimulating properties.

Essential oils can be used to treat a wide range of common complaints. Special care must be taken regarding the use of oils which can cause dermal irritation in concentration and those oils which are known to be phototoxic, such as bergamot, lemon and bitter orange. Before using a particular oil, the safety data information on the individual oils should be consulted.

Essential oils which can be used for arthritis conditions:

- **Ginger** oil (*Zingiber officinale*)
- **Peppermint** oil (*Mentha piperita*)
- **Chamomile, German** oil (*Matricaria recutita*)
- **Chamomile, Roman** oil (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- **Lavender** oil (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- **Rosemary** oil (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- **Eucalyptus** oil (*Eucalyptus globulus*)
- **Patchouli** oil (*Pogostemon cablin*)
- **Frankincense** oil (*Boswellia sacra*)
- **Myrrh** oil (*Commiphora myrrha*)
- **Plai** oil (*Zingiber cassumunar*)
- **Juniper** oil (*Juniperus communis*)
- **Thyme** oil (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- **Pine, Scotch** oil (*Pinus sylvestris*)
- **Lemon** oil (*Citrus limon*)
- **Sweet Marjoram** oil (*Origanum majorana*)
- **Black Pepper** oil (*Piper nigrum*)
- **Bergamot** oil (*Citrus bergamia*)

Blending suggestion: for pain relief

- Chamomile, Roman (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- Sweet almond oil (*Prunus amygdalus var.dulcus*)

Blending suggestion: for anti-inflammatory

- Ginger oil (*Zingiber officinale*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Lemon oil (*Citrus limon*)
- Coconut oil (*Cocos nucifera*)
- Evening prim rose (*Oenothera biennis*)

Blending suggestion: for anti-rheumatic

- Lavender oil (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Juniper oil (*Juniperus communis*)
- Pine, Scotch oil (*Pinus sylvestris*)
- Sweet almond oil (*Prunus amygdalus var. dulcus*)
- St John's Wort oil (*Hypericum perforatum*)

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

Reference:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/arthritis/>
- Overcoming arthritis, Dr. Paul Lam & Judith Horstman
- <https://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/complementary-and-alternative-medicines/complementary-therapies/aromatherapy.aspx>
- <https://draxe.com/essential-oils-for-arthritis/>
- <http://blog.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/aromatherapy-arthritis-pain-essential-oils/>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/essential-oils-for-arthritis>
- The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils, Julia Lawless
- <https://www.rheumatoidarthritis.org/living-with-ra/diet/essential-oils/>
- http://www.holisticonline.com/Remedies/Arthritis/arth_article-arthritis-and-aromatherapy.htm
- <https://www.avena.co.uk/arthritis-rheumatism-massage-oil/>
- Carrier Oils, Infused Oils & Hydrolats/Hydrosols, Linda Lee Smith
- Clinical Aromatherapy – Essential Oils in Practice, Buckle, Jane

Three Research Trials:

- 1) [The effects of aromatherapy on pain, depression, and life satisfaction of arthritis patients](#)
- 2) [Curcumin: a new paradigm and therapeutic opportunity for the treatment of osteoarthritis: curcumin for osteoarthritis management](#)
- 3) [Effect of Lemongrass Oil on Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)

To find a practitioner to discuss your needs [click here](#)