

Aromatherapy and Wellbeing

What is Wellbeing?

The World Health Organisation defines health and wellbeing as:

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

How Can Aromatherapy Help with Wellbeing?

The use of essential oils can be particularly useful in contributing to both physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

Physical Wellbeing

First Aid for Minor Ailments – many essential oils are antimicrobial, antiseptic, anti-infectious and analgesic, which means they are very useful for such things as cuts, grazes, small burns, headaches, sprains and bruises.

Nervous System - Certain essential oils are known to have a sedative effect on the central nervous system, whilst others can be very stimulating. A very few oils are known as “adaptogens”, i.e. they can have a balancing/normalising effect on a problem as and when required. Properties such as “relaxing” and “uplifting” relate to each other in the sense that an oil can be sedating to the nervous system, whilst at the same time reviving/uplifting to the ‘spirit’. Aromatherapy is well-known for its ability to calm severe stress symptoms and acute anxiety because various oils have gentle tranquillising properties which not only help to calm stress symptoms, but can also help with an irregular or rapid heartbeat, light-headedness, shallow breathing, etc. Nervine tonics are also helpful for strengthening the nervous system as a whole, particularly in cases of convalescence.

Immune System – many essential oils have antiseptic, bactericidal, anti-fungal and anti-viral properties, but some also have the ability to stimulate the production of white blood cells, thereby helping the body to resist and deal with infectious illness. In this regard, they can be used alongside conventional medicines, such as antibiotics.

Certain essential oils can be excellent in preventing and dealing with infection. Vaporisation, inhalation and dermal application of diluted essential oils can help to fight viral and bacterial infections.

Allergies are a clear sign of a body out of balance, indicating a depressed immune system, possible toxic build-up and poor digestion. Targeting all these three areas with essential oils is a particularly effective way of tackling troublesome allergies.

Circulatory/Muscular/Skeletal Problems – As a result of their absorption through the skin, essential oils are in a position to affect the circulation as a whole, so oils that have warming properties, not only stimulate local blood circulation, but can also influence the inner organs too. Oils that are warming, antispasmodic and analgesic/anaesthetic can provide considerable pain relief to aching muscles, joints, arthritis and rheumatism. Combined with massage, these therapeutic properties can ease restrictions and poor mobility caused by recent or old injuries. Certain anti-inflammatory and vasodilatory oils are effective at relieving local inflammation, causing blood vessels to expand, bringing more blood to the affected area and reducing swelling.

Respiratory Problems - Essential oils have expectorant, mucolytic and decongestant properties and these, together with their antiseptic and antiviral qualities make them extremely efficient when tackling respiratory ailments. Inhalation is usually the most efficient form of application in such cases, which can also help to deepen the breath and regulate spasmodic respiration caused by bronchitis or asthma.

Genito-Urinary and Endocrine Systems - Again, the antiseptic/bactericidal properties of certain oils can be very helpful in fighting infection, especially in connection with the genito-urinary system, and calming any inflammatory symptoms. There are also several oils that are known to influence the levels of hormone secretions.

Digestion – although not recommended to be taken orally, the application of essential oils by other means can still bring about a positive result on digestive complaints. The stomachic, calminative benefits of essential oils can be used to increase the action of peristalsis, calm any digestive spasm, thereby facilitating digestion and excretion of waste.

The Skin – Skin problems often represent the surface manifestation of a deeper condition, such as the build-up of toxins in the blood, hormonal imbalance and nervous/emotional problems. In cases like these, the versatility of essential oils, combined with an holistic approach, is an excellent way of helping to relieve the root cause of a problem. Many oils are extremely useful in cases of oily or dry skin, rashes, burns, scar tissue, dermatitis and skin infections.

Emotional Wellbeing

Many people, children and adults alike, are today recognised as experiencing increasing pressures at home, in school and in the workplace. Unfortunately, little (if any) useful strategies have been identified that enable people to 'cope' with these stressful situations. Even more unhelpful is the fact that historically society viewed any inability to 'cope' as a sign of mental weakness and so emotional health in general has been 'off limits' to any meaningful discussion.

However, medical research has now recognised that emotional support is vital in maintaining good mental health. Wellbeing needs to encourage pleasant emotions of contentment and calmness, enabling feelings of relaxation, inner peace and feelings of optimism.

The simple act of caring touch (massage) using essential oils is a highly effective way to target symptoms of stress and anxiety and the following are a list of some of the most effective:

- Clary sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- Neroli (*Citrus aurantium var amara flos*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Rose (*Rosa damascena*)
- Ylang ylang (*Cananga odorata*)
- Sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*)
- Mandarin (*Citrus nobilis*)
- Petitgrain (*Citrus aurantium var amara fol*)
- Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*)
- Frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*)

The best methods of applying these oils are through massage, vapourisers and baths.

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

References:

<http://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>

The Art of Aromatherapy by Robert Tisserand

Aromatherapy – An A-Z by Patricia Davies

The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy by Salvatore Battaglia

The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

Encyclopedia of Aromatherapy by Chrissie Wildwood



Essential Oils in Colour by Rosemary Caddy
Aromatherapy Workbook by Marcel Lavabre
Aromatherapy for Health Professionals by Shirley and Len Price

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