

AROMATHERAPY

Aromatic plants and oils have been used for thousands of years both within and without the medical context.

Although a form of aromatherapy was documented as long ago as 5000 BC by the Egyptians, the use of herbs and plants in Europe was first established during medieval times. However with the scientific revolution of the early 19th century and the growth of the modern drug industry, the therapy lost its credibility.

Aromatherapy as practised today is a relatively new discipline. In the 1920's Gattefosse began to research the healing properties of natural essential oils and coined the term aromatherapy. In Britain the popularity of aromatherapy is relatively recent both as a therapy and as a beauty treatment. There is very little literature on the use of aromatherapy within clinical situations.

WHAT IS AROMATHERAPY?

Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of specially prepared essential oils to promote health and well-being through a variety of methods including massage, baths, inhalations and compresses.

Massage

Massage is useful for both physical and psychological purposes. Physically massage helps to:

- Loosen tight muscles
- Improves the flow of lymph fluid and helps with elimination of toxins from the body
- Releases pain
- Improves circulation
- Reduces blood pressure

Psychologically:

- Releases emotional tension
- Balances the flow of energy in the body
- Aids with non-verbal communication

The British Medical Association estimates that as much as 75% of an illness may be of psychosomatic origin.

THE OILS

Essential oils have two routes of entry into the body, through the skin and through the nose (by inhalation).

Since essential oils have fine molecules they are able to penetrate the layers of the dermis and enter the circulatory system. Essential oils have complex chemical structures which contain a variety of elements. Each essential oil will have an affinity with a particular organ or system of the body, e.g. peppermint aids digestion and lavender is useful of insomnia.

Inhalation of the various oils affects the olfactory process which is closely associated with the limbic system which in turn is concerned with the emotions, memory and intuition. Compresses either hot or cold can be utilised with essential oils for many different purposes.

Essential oils are natural, organic, highly concentrated and complex substances which are extracted from plants, flowers and resin by various methods such as steam distillation. They are natural drugs which like synthetic drugs are only beneficial if the correct dosage is adhered to. If it is not, the condition may be exacerbated.

Because of the wide variety in essential oils they are classified according to their therapeutic properties e.g. antibacterial, antidepressant or sedative etc, etc.

Assessment is carried out through an initial interview where the client's area and level of dysfunction and his/her lifestyle are used to help develop a baseline for intervention. An individual prescription of essential oils is blended in accordance with the specific needs and goals of the client.

Two separate components of oils used are:

- **Carrier oils each have their own properties:**

Sweet Almond	Softening and soothing to the skin, suitable for face and body
Apricot Kernel	Deeply penetrating, contains Vit. A
Avocado	Penetrating and nourishing. Contains Vit. A and B, good for mature skins
Jjoba	Very nourishing, recommended for dry and mature skins
Peach Kernel	Similar to Apricot kernel
Wheatgerm	Heavy and sticky. Vit. E, nourishing to skin and helps with scar tissue

- **Essential oils:**

There are many essential oils each with their own therapeutic properties and a combination of oils can be used to address certain conditions:

Aches and Pains	Lavender, Rosemary, Marjoram, Black Pepper, Ginger
Calming	Bergamot, Lavender, Rose, Neroli, Chamomile
Uplifting	Sweet orange, Grapefruit
Insomnia	Lavender, Roman Chamomile, Mandarin
Anxiety/Fear/Stress	Frankincense, Rose, Neroli, Geranium, Juniper Bergamot
Oedema	Citrus, Rosemary, Geranium Cypress
Nausea	Ginger, Peppermint, Lavender, Ginger
Respiratory tract	Eucalyptus, Teatree, Frankincense
Headaches	Chamomile, Peppermint, Rosemary, Melissa, Marjoram
Sinusitis	Eucalyptus, Teatree, Rosemary, Lavender
Palpitations	Lavender, Mandarin, Melissa, Neroli
Menstrual/Menopausal	Geranium, Clary Sage, Roman Chamomile

FORMULATION OF OILS

Important Factors

Factors determining the use of the specific oils is obtained during the first consultation with the client.

A full consultation is taken to assess the medical background, health and lifestyle of the patient

Fragrance appreciation by the client of the essential oils the therapist intends to use in the special blend

Basic Formula

This can be anything from 1-5 essential oils in a blend of 10ml of carrier oil, but it is more usual to have three. A general rule is 1% i.e. 1 drop to 5ml. Less drops are required for stronger scented oils and more for the gentler fragrances. This is so that it is possible to cover most problems and at the same time be able to appreciate the subtlety of the different fragrances.

The blend is built slowly drop by drop and top, middle and base notes are used to balance the effect.

CONTRAINDICATIONS TO AROMATHERAPY

- 1 Essential oils should always be diluted in a vegetable carrier oil and never put directly onto the skin
- 2 The caution section of each oil must be noted before treatment is given
- 3 Do not give massage if the client has a temperature
- 4 Do not give massage over infected areas, open wounds, bites, recent scar tissue and unknown rashes unless with GP approval
- 5 Do not give massage on fractures or internal disorders
- 6 Do not massage over varicose veins
- 7 Avoid direct sunlight after treatment
- 8 Seek GP approval if the client is receiving drug or chemotherapy treatment
- 9 If in any doubt about a medical condition seek GP advice

AFTERCARE ADVICE

After a treatment a client is given general aftercare advice:

- Drink plenty of water and fruit juice to aid elimination of toxins
- Try to avoid alcohol and smoking
- A light diet is advisable
- Rest
- Avoid direct sunlight

A healing "crisis" can sometimes occur after a treatment which might manifest in the form of feeling tearful or depressed. A headache, increased bowel movements and urination are all normal "after effects" of a treatment. It is possible to experience flu-like symptoms but these usually pass within 24 hours. All of these symptoms are quite normal and help with the healing process.

WHO COULD BENEFIT FROM AROMATHERAPY?

Almost everyone - Aromatherapy's holistic therapy could be of value in facilitating health within the individual as well as proving a useful preventative tool to stop disease from developing into a serious dysfunction. With increased knowledge and more research of this therapy it is possible to create a marketable intervention for use in the present health-care system which is available to everyone.

TRAINING

Training courses vary from a few days to several years in length, emphasizing the range of applications of aromatherapy from a beauty treatment to a useful therapeutic tool.

In the next few years there will be a new law governing practitioners defining who is permitted to practise and setting down minimum training requirements, thereby giving the profession a more solid basis from which to promote research into aromatherapy.