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FILE: ▪Lavender (*Lavendula angustifolium*)
▪Psychological Well-being
▪Baths

HC 050233-241

Date: September 30, 2003

RE: Effect of Lavender Oil Baths on Mood and Well-being

Morris N. The effects of lavender (*Lavendula angustifolium*) baths on psychological well-being: two exploratory randomised control trials. *Complementary Therapeutics in Medicine* 2002; 10(4):223-228.

Psychological well-being is a state in which optimism and positive mood predominate. Physical illness can cause anxiety and depression, which undermines recovery. Attaining psychological well-being may improve health. Individuals can increase their psychological well-being through psychotherapy, a healthy diet, regular exercise, and relaxation techniques. Self-administered aromatherapy may be efficacious, but existing evidence is anecdotal. This report discusses two scientific studies evaluating the effect of lavender (*Lavendula angustifolium*) oil on the psychological well-being of healthy volunteers.

In the first study, 40 healthy women (mean age 28.2 years) participated. They were told to take one 10 minute bath per day for 14 days at approximately the same time each day and to add oil provided by the investigators to the water. Randomly, 20 participants used 3 mL grapeseed massage oil and 20 participants used 3 mL 80% grapeseed oil plus 20% lavender essential oil. The participants were blinded to the treatments. After the first and 14th bath, they answered a mood questionnaire.

According to the author, the bath, not the oil, produced psychologically positive mood changes for energetic arousal, tense arousal, and hedonic tone. The bath had no effect on general arousal. The results show that anger-frustration was reduced by lavender oil; this appeared to be the only specific effect of lavender.

In the second study, 40 healthy women (mean age 26.2 years) participated. The same materials and procedures were used as described above. Rather than studying mood, this study evaluated pessimism about possible future events. A negative mind set about future

events is an important component of depression. Decreasing a negative mind set may improve mild, sub-clinical depression. Prior to the first bath and within 24 hours after the last bath the participants verbally answered questions about future scenarios. The following is an example of a question: "You will have lots of good times with your friends."

There was a significant reduction in the number of negative responses after bathing in lavender ($P < .01$). The procedure showed no effect on the rate of positive responses to possible future events.

The authors conclude that daily bathing is mood enhancing. Since bathing was not compared to showering, there is no way to say definitively that taking a bath is mood enhancing. Alternately, it could have been the time set aside for privacy and cleansing that enhances the mood. The selective effect of lavender on anger-frustration suggests a reduction in aggressive feelings. The authors say that these findings should be treated with caution because this dimension of the questionnaire has poor psychometric properties. The source of the lavender essential oil is not discussed, so there is no way to determine the quality of the essential oil used. Finally, adding lavender to the bath may help reduce pessimism in individuals who are not clinically depressed. More research is needed to confirm this finding.

—*Heather S. Oliff, Ph.D.*

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