
American Botanical Council

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FILE: · Aromatherapy

•Mind-Body Medicine

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TO: General Distribution

RE: Aromatherapy: Clinical Use of Essential Oils to Affect Positive Mental and Physical States

Tisserand, Robert. 1995. Aromatherapy as Mind-Body Medicine. *The International Journal of Aromatherapy*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 14-19.

The practice of medical aromatherapy typically involves the treatment of a severe infection with exact oral dosages (usually ranging between 0.5 ml to 2 ml) of an essential oil selected for its pharmacological effect on the specific pathogen present. Studies have been conducted on eucalyptus oil and clove oil, for instance, and several essential oil derivatives have been used in the treatment of cancer, including benzaldehyde, coumarin, and citral and citronellal. Holistic aromatherapy, on the other hand, operates on both the mental and physical levels, and typically involves the external application of diluted essential oils via massage. Although it has not been proven that oils applied topically have pharmacological effects, studies in psychoneuroimmunology have shown that the mental and the physical are intimately linked. It follows that a relaxing, "feel-good" massage which has a positive effect at the psychological level would tend to have a positive effect at the physical level. Specifically, feeling good can strengthen immunity.

The inhalation of essential oils, which can occur during massage using essential oils, via essential oil diffusers, etc., has been shown to have both physiological and psychological effects, and to affect the central nervous system, although the mechanism of action is not yet clear. Stress relief and mood enhancement are common targets for holistic aromatherapy. Research at the Monell Chemical Senses Center (Philadelphia, PA) have shown that lemon oil can "significantly improve people's sense of health and well-being," that chamomile oil can exert a positive effect on mood, that sweet fennel oil can reduce mental stress and fatigue, and that neroli, nutmeg, and valerian oils can each "significantly increase happiness and calmness" and "decrease embarrassment and anger."

The inhalation of essential oils has been studied in conjunction with what is known as “conditioned immune response.” Using Pavlovian conditioning, the scent of an essential oil associated with a particular immune response can later evoke that same immune response in the absence of other stimuli, i.e. drugs. Such scent conditioning holds great potential for therapeutic use, as it would decrease drug costs as well as drug-induced side effects.

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