Essential Oils & Depression and Anxiety

While essential oils have been known and used by man for thousands of years, it has only been since the 1930s that medical researchers have documented their effects. Essential oils have tremendous benefits when inhaled or applied topically.

One of the most promising uses of essential oils is in aromatherapy for depression and anxiety.

In a 2006 study, British researchers from the University of Newcastle and Northumbria wrote that aromatherapy "provides a potentially effective treatment for a range of psychiatric disorders," and, "appears to be without the adverse effects of many conventional psychotropic drugs."

As essential oils are inhaled or topically applied they enter the bloodstream quickly where they exert measurable psychological effects. Essential oils are made of many natural chemical constituents that have been documented to ease depression and calm anxiety in peer-reviewed studies.

Notes

Essential Oils Beneficial For Anxiety

Lavender Often called the “Swiss army knife” of essential oils, lavender has been studied for relieving anxiety more than any other oil. Peer-reviewed studies have shown that lavender is associated with “reduced mental stress.”1 It also “produces a state of relaxation and regeneration,” “alleviates anxiety,”2,3 and has a “calming effect on the central nervous system while reducing blood pressure.”4

Orange Two studies documented the anxiety-reducing effect of orange oil on one high-stress site: dental offices.4,5 A Brazilian study also showed the anti-anxiety and sedative properties of orange essential oil.6

Lemon In addition to its significant antidepressant activity, lemon oil has impressive effects on the circuits in the brain that regulate anxiety.7

Melissa/valerian Flavonoids found in valerian oil were shown to have anti-anxiety properties.8 A combination of melissa and valerian extracts clearly showed anti-anxiety relief in volunteers taking a laboratory-induced stress test.9

Patchouli A Japanese study discovered that inhaling patchouli essential oil has a significant effect on the sympathetic nervous system.10 This system operates without conscious thought, as in the “fight or flight” response to stress.

Rose Three studies documented the anti-anxiety and anti-conflict effect of rose essential oil.11-13

Roman chamomile When used in massage, Roman chamomile caused a significant reduction in anxiety in cancer patients in a British study.14

Blue tansy & German chamomile The beautiful blue hue of both of these essential oils comes from the constituent chamazulene, which has been shown to be a muscle relaxant in animal studies.15 A USDA review of German chamomile discussed the flavonoids shown to have anti-anxiety effects.16

Ylang ylang No one with anxiety disorders should be without this essential oil. A Planta Medica study found that inhalation of ylang ylang was “harmonizing” as it caused decreases in blood pressure and pulse rate (creating a relaxing effect) while increased attentiveness and alertness (stimulating).17

Essential Oils Beneficial For Depression

Lavender A Korean study explored the effects of lavender fragrance on sleep and depression in female college students. Lavender essential oil (in a carrier oil), “had a beneficial effect on insomnia and depression in women.”18 Another study using a lavender, marjoram, eucalyptus, rosemary, and peppermint blend (in proportions of 2:1:2:1:1) on arthritis patients showed that “aromatherapy has major effects on decreasing pain and depression levels.”19

Bergamot Several studies (Depression; 2002; Vogley 2005) have investigated the effectiveness of bergamot as an antidepressant. The Vogley study also discussed a woman who had been hospitalized for depression and wanted to discontinue taking an antidepressant drug. But she was experiencing anxiety that caused difficulty with sleep. After sleeping with a cotton ball in her pillow that had several drops of bergamot essential oil on it, she remarked it was the best night’s sleep she’d had since going off the antidepressant drug.20

Ylang Ylang A new study in Phytotherapy Research found that volunteers who applied ylang ylang essential oil to the skin were more calm and relaxed than those in the control group. Researchers said that the use of ylang ylang essential oil in aromatherapy caused “a relief of depression and stress in humans.”21

Lemon This fragrant citrus oil has been shown to restore balance following stressful incidents. A study conducted at the Mie University School of Medicine in Japan concluded that treatment with citrus fragrance “was rather more effective than antidepressants.”22 Another study found that lemon and its main constituent citral had antidepressant effects.23 Researchers at Yamaguchi University in Japan recently confirmed lemon’s value as documented in earlier studies, stating that “lemon oil possesses anxiolytic [anti-anxiety], antidepressant-like effects.”24

Helpful Hints for Depression and Anxiety

The following are single oils that are helpful for depression and anxiety:

Frankincense (Depression and Anxiety)
Topically — apply to the base of the skull or forehead of the feet.
Orally — encapsulate and take internally to produce a sense of well-being and support the body systems and cellular function.

Lavender (Depression and Anxiety)
Topically — apply to the bottom of the feet or mix with bath water.
Orally — encapsulate and take internally as needed.
Diffusion — can be diffused for extended periods of time.

Ylang ylang (Depression and Anxiety)
Diffusion — inhale ylang ylang as needed. Using this will balance the body.
Topically — apply to the bottom of the feet first thing in the morning.

Bergamot (Depression)
Diffusion — diffuse at night for deeply relaxing sleep and access.

Orange (Anxiety)
Orally — encapsulate and take internally as needed.
Diffusion — diffuse in your home or office for 10 to 15 minute intervals throughout the day.

Valerian (Anxiety)
Orally — take internally. One capsule can have powerful results and it can be used as needed throughout the day or week.

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