

Aromatherapy and Massage

Karrie Osborn

Aromatherapy, a process utilizing the purest essence of a plant, is a 4,000-year-old technique that has enhanced the health of everyone from modern-day pop divas to the scholars of ancient Greece. The art of massage has its own deeply rich roots, with even Plato and Socrates touting the value of hands-on bodywork for good health.

Separately, these two therapeutic traditions hold individual prowess in the realm of personal health and well-being. Together, however, they become a formidable health alliance that can address not only a person's physical health, but the health of the mind and spirit as well.

Let's see how it works. Essential oils are extracted from herbs, flowers, and plants with the intent to improve a person's health and well-being. Addressing everything from arthritis to whooping cough, effects of the approximate 3,000 oils found globally can range from sedative to stimulating and antibacterial to antispasmodic. The benefits derived from aromatherapy during a massage come in part from the contact the essential oil has on our skin, but even more so how it affects us when it's inhaled and absorbed through the soft-tissue linings of our nose and mouth.

The scientific explanation suggests that the essential oil's molecules, when

*Wise people
are not sick.
They are sick of
being sick, so
they are well.*

-Tao Te Ching



What essential oil is your favorite?

A Natural Complement

Our senses were designed to work best in conjunction with one another. Our sense of taste would not be as acute without our nose lending its support to the process. Our auditory senses might seem hollow if we weren't gifted with sight as well. Indeed, there exists a quiet partnership between all our five senses that's built on synergy.

inhaled, lock onto receptor cells at the back of the nose, sending an electrochemical message to the brain's limbic system. This message appears to trigger memory and emotional responses, causing messages to be sent to other parts of the brain and body. "In this way," says aromatherapist Danila

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Office Hours and Contact

414-949-SKIN

DeepRootsMassage.com

Shannon@DeepRootsMassage.com

Autumn Store Hours: Tues, Thurs 3pm-8pm

Wed, Fri 10am-5pm

Sat 11am-4pm

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Mansfield, "the production of euphoric, relaxing, sedative, or stimulating neurochemicals is stimulated."

Judith Fitzsimmons and Paula Bousquet, authors of *Aromatherapy Through the Seasons*, say the use of essential oils creates a multifaceted effect: "The real beauty of aromatherapy is that it works on a cellular and physical level and also in the emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic areas of your life."

It's really quite amazing when you think about it. Imagine an area the size of a small apricot pit, a 1-inch square area, filled with millions of sensory neurons that can capture, process, and store 10,000 odors. This is our olfactory system at work, and part of its job is to create a personal history for us based on scent, says clinical aromatherapist Ava-Marie Lind-Shiveley. "None of our other senses so well establishes a memory database." She says our response to scent is both physiological and psychosomatic. "Within an instant of smelling an aroma, we can be sent back to the first moment we were introduced to it."

By enabling us to recognize, revisit, and/or reclaim these various emotions and memories, aromatherapy allows another avenue of access for healing during a bodywork session. It creates a path through which the somatic experience can find its full strength.

When the powerful effects of aromatherapy are combined with massage, it can take us to another level, say aromatherapy educators Shirley and Len Price. "When, during a massage, the touch of the therapist is combined with the mental and physical effects of the essential oils, the client is helped to achieve a temporary separation from worldly worries, somewhat akin to a meditative state." Helping clients reach this level of relaxation is a primary goal of massage therapists and aromatherapists alike, so it makes sense that a partnership could beautifully exist.

A Scent Journey

"Scent is not simplistic," Lind-Shiveley says. "It is voluminous." She illustrates this point with a quote from Helen Keller: "Smell is a potent wizard that transports us across thousands of miles

and all the years we have lived. The odors of fruits waft me to my Southern home, to my childhood frolics in the peach orchard. Other odors, instantaneous and fleeting, cause my heart to dilate joyously or contract with remembered grief."

If you decide to do some personal exploration into the world of scent therapy, proceed with due caution in both the quality of the oils you buy and how you dose and administer them. There is a dichotic nature inherent in aromatherapy. It is gentle, yet powerful; subtle, yet intense. There are essential oils strong enough to cause miscarriage, but there also are many oils safe enough to use on infants. The key is knowing how to utilize nature's gifts to provide the best, most effective therapeutic collaboration possible. Talk with your massage therapist about incorporating the science of aromatherapy into your

sessions or ask about a referral to an aromatherapist in your area.

Karrie Osborn is contributing editor to Body Sense.

BALANCING

Bay Laurel, Cedarwood, Geranium

CLARIFYING

Juniper, Lemon, Peppermint

COMFORTING

Bergamot, Frankincense, Rose

ENERGIZING

Eucalyptus, Grapefruit, Rosemary

FOCUSING

Angelica, Sweet Basil, Lime

SEDATING

Chamomile, Clary Sage, Patchouli

UPLIFTING

Lavender, Orange/Mandarin, Pine, Tea Tree



Aromatherapy has roots in ancient cultures.

The Health Benefits of Ginger

Easing Nausea, Joint Pain, and Allergies

This pungent spice is found in cuisine around the globe, but ginger has also been used for more than 2,500 years for its medicinal properties. The ancient Chinese knew that it aided in the absorption of many herbal preparations and they prescribed it extensively as a digestive tonic.

A native root of southeast Asia, ginger is a potent ally in the treatment of nausea, motion sickness, and joint pain. Current research confirms ginger's efficacy as an anti-inflammatory, GI calmativ, and antihistamine. The active ingredients found in ginger -- gingerols and shagoals -- lower levels of prostaglandins, the chemicals responsible for pain and inflammation in joints and muscles. By reducing prostaglandins, ginger can even have a positive effect on heart health and circulation because chronic, systemic inflammation increases the risk of heart attack and blood vessel compromise.

Ginger comes in several forms. Fresh

and dried ginger is available in supermarkets for use in cooking. It's also available in capsules, an extract pill form, prepackaged tea bags, crystallized, and as a topical oil.

Recommended Uses

MOTION SICKNESS AND NAUSEA

Most medications for nausea and motion sickness work to calm the nervous system and can cause drowsiness and dry mouth. On the other hand, ginger calms the digestive tract directly and has been shown to reduce nausea after surgery and chemotherapy. For motion sickness, take 100 mg two hours before departure and every four hours afterwards or as needed.

ARTHRITIS AND MUSCLE ACHES

Massage ginger oil into affected areas and/or take up to 1 g of powdered ginger daily to reduce inflammation.

COLDS AND ALLERGIES

Drink up to 4 cups of ginger tea daily or enjoy authentic ginger ale (made from

real ginger).

While ginger has no known side effects, it's always a good idea to consult your health care practitioner to make sure it's right for you.



The ginger plant has many medicinal uses.

Flotation Tanks

Brandon Twyford

If you want to take the concept of completely stopping even further, try totally unplugging from the noise of everyday life in a flotation tank.

Developed in 1954 to test the effects of sensory deprivation, the flotation tank is now used in a range of restorative and healing practices, including recovery from exercise or injury. It is also an effective tool for visualization techniques.

The tank contains water heated to the exact temperature of the skin--thereby removing the sense of touch--and 800-1,000 pounds of Epsom salt for buoyancy. The result is a unique sensation that's completely unlike floating in a pool. It's more like floating in space. When we float in a normal pool, or even when we are asleep in bed, tiny muscles throughout our body are constantly working to adjust and support

us. The flotation tank, however, allows you to completely let go.

I first experienced floating in 2006 on the recommendation of a friend. The idea sounded intriguing to me, so I decided to try it out by booking a session at my local yoga studio. I disrobed, put my earplugs in, and climbed into the tank. I laid back, stretched out, and closed my eyes.

Total isolation. The thoughts in my head, previously a subconscious presence of constant background noise, were suddenly deafening. I opened my eyes into pitch-black darkness. I was momentarily disoriented, and it took several minutes before I was able to consciously allow my body and mind to relax. As I did, I felt the dense water support every inch of my body.

At the end of the one-hour session, I was still discovering parts of my body

where I had unconsciously been holding tension. The nape of my neck. My ankles. My ears. My hips. Places I hadn't even known I was using when my body was at rest. As I consciously let go of each of these body parts, I slipped further into a state of total physical relaxation. By the time I left the tank, my body felt more relaxed than it had in years.

Flotation tanks can be found in most cities, often as an auxiliary service at a yoga studio or wellness center, and an hour-long session runs about \$40-\$60. Until the average person can hitch a ride into space, this is as close as we'll get to experiencing total removal from the constant barrage of external stimuli on our overworked senses.

Lie back, close your eyes, and unplug.
Brandon Twyford is assistant editor for Associated Bodywork Massage Professionals.

*MINDFUL –
The act of being
mindful opens
you to the
experience of the
moment.*

-unknown

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Love and light,

Shannon Ellis
LMT, Licensed Aesthetician
Shannon@DeepRootsMassage.com

Deep Roots Massage

2241 S Kinnickinnic Ave
Bay View, WI 53207-1932



Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals