



Oils *for* *optimal health*

Aromas surround our senses, affecting us incessantly. Smells can sedate or stimulate us at the speed of a sniff. Whiff these eight wonderful essential oils to enhance your health and happiness.

WORDS / CAROLINE ROBERTSON

Life is a perfumed path where each essence encountered evokes mental and physical changes. Scents shift us; as Helen Keller said, "Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived." Do you remember your mother's milky odour, your childhood garden bouquet or your favourite food's fragrance? How did they make you feel? These all moved your mind and body in unique ways. When you smell them again, they unlock the same sensations instantly.

Smell is the only sense to immediately impact on the brain and is 10,000 times stronger than other senses. An inhaled essence travels via olfactory nerves directly to the brain's limbic system, which governs memories, emotions, libido, hunger, pleasure, instincts, immunity and hormones.

When you incorporate essential oils into your life, they become nurturing nurses preventing problems and supporting you through sickness. Oils offer a broad range of balancing benefits that you can apply by adding them to a diffuser, carrier oil, body product, spray, perfume, sachet or inhaler. They won't break the bank, either, as a few drops go a long way.

FRAGRANT TRAIL

Aromatherapy existed long before French chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé coined the term in 1937. For

centuries, civilisations have harnessed aromas for healing, hygiene, spirituality and sensuality. Archeological evidence reveals essential oils were used by Egyptians for rituals, Persians perfected perfumes for pleasure, Romans used them for rites and Greeks for health. Greek physician Hippocrates said, "Healing begins with an aromatic bath and massage daily."

Aromatherapy is intrinsic to Indian culture with odoriferous oils used for worship, beauty and healing. For example, the Tantric text *Kama Sutra* recommends aphrodisiac essential oils such as musk, rose and saffron. China's ancient *Materia Medica Pen Ts'ao* cites 20 essential oils, including jasmine as a general tonic, rose for digestion, chamomile for headaches and ginger for coughs.

Eventually, essential oils' status seeped into all cultures. Each embraced the benefits of local flowers such as antibacterial French lavender, calming German chamomile and throat-soothing English sage.

Awareness of aromatherapy's benefits is constantly blooming to the point where it's difficult to find a personal-care product without essential oils in it. Smells are used to attract customers, sell homes, lure lovers and stir appetites. Medical research has increasing evidence of aromatherapy's efficacy. For example, eucalyptus has proven antiseptic agents, ylang ylang eases epilepsy, spearmint soothes

"Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived."

Photography Getty Images



BODY ESSENTIAL OILS

nausea, lemon improves mental cognition in Alzheimer's and rosemary can increase memory by 75 per cent.

Among the thousands of essences available, a small supply is ample to meet everyday needs. Ensure you purchase pure essential oils in dark glass bottles labelled 100 per cent essential oil and only use as directed. These eight essential oils will prove invaluable help when home or away.

CHAMOMILE

Feeling frazzled, anxious, achy or crampy? Let chamomile calm you like a mother cuddling her child. The distilled essence from these dried daisy-like flowers has brought peace and patience to many over millennia. The world seems more serene over a chamomile cuppa. But whose restless, colicky child is going to sit and sip tea? Try the essential oil as a tranquilising tool. It sedates nerves, soothes skin and pacifies pain. German chamomile is better for local inflammation, such as psoriasis and bursitis, due to its chamazulene content. Roman chamomile is better for sensitive skin, period problems, headaches, aches and allergies. However, both chamomiles are relaxing, relieve colic, improve digestion and ease eczema.

Chamomile effectively calms kids through teething, tummy upsets, earache and skin irritations. It's used medicinally in the Mediterranean for stress, dyspepsia, dysmenorrhoea, to soothe skin and to allay allergies. Dab diluted chamomile on cuts as its antiseptic power is 120 times stronger than that of salt water. Perk up with chamomile swilled with a carrier oil into a blissful bath. Try chamomile balm on headaches, sinusitis, toothaches and the chest to appease asthma and coughs: just mix five drops with 1 teaspoon of base oil and rub into the aching area.

A few drops of chamomile in a basin of warm water is a wonderful skin tonic or inhale it to clear the respiratory tract and worries.

Chamomile is known as *Matricaria*, from the Latin for womb, as it eases



“Healing begins with an aromatic bath and massage daily.”

menstrual issues. Apply as a compress, oil, bath, in skincare, diffuser or vaporiser for a mellowing mist.

Chamomile blends beautifully with bergamot, clary sage, eucalyptus, lavender, lemon, neroli, geranium, grapefruit, jasmine, tea-tree, rose, ylang-ylang, palmarosa and sandalwood. Avoid if allergic to the ragweed family.

EUCALYPTUS

Evergreen eucalyptus is Australia's aroma. Aborigines prepare the camphorous leaves as a respiratory tea, a body pain salve and fumigation for fever or infection. Eucalyptus essential oil increases one's will to get well and uplifts emotions. First Fleet surgeons distilled eucalyptus oil to treat colonists and, since 1852, Melbourne's Bosisto family have produced mass eucalyptus oil.

Diluted eucalyptus has powerful antiseptic properties perfect for cleaning surfaces and clearing the air. Its refreshing scent stimulates and helps congestive headaches, and eucalyptus vapour added to steam inhalation or sprinkled inside a sauna is superb for easing asthma, coughs, colds and sinusitis. Eucalyptus in a diffuser helps one to breathe easy, and blended with bath oil or salt, dissolves stress.

Dabbed dilute on bites, stings and sores, it reduces inflammation and infection. Eucalyptus massage oil or liniment soothes pains, sprains and strains. Comb through hair to evict lice and splash diluted eucalyptus on skin to clear pimples. You can even deodorise the garbage bin with a eucalyptus wash and add to laundry for extra-fresh fabric.

Enhance eucalyptus with earthy

cedarwood, frankincense, lemon, marjoram and peppermint. Spritz a mix of eucalyptus, lemon and pine for an alpine-fresh atmosphere.

LAVENDER

This purple panacea is unbeatable for burns, bites and brain strain. Romans used lavender lavishly in their bathing rituals; its name is thought to be derived from the Latin word meaning "to wash". Lavender's long history includes 1900s French chemist René Maurice Gattefossé using it after a bad burn to discover it hurt less and healed faster. French Provence is famous for its lavender fields; their crop was used for fumigation during the great plague of the 1720s and later to ward off tuberculosis.

Lavender's antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, cooling and calming qualities heal a host of common concerns. Spritz, diffuse or dab on to de-stress, dissipate headaches and sleep deeply. Inhale for asthma, respiratory infections, dizziness and depression. Add to carrier oil for a relaxing bath and to a compress for fevers.

Lavender is one of the few essential oils that can be applied straight to skin for burns, eczema, boils or bites. Studies have shown lavender and almond oil rubbed on babies' bellies reduces colic and crying. A mix of lavender, ylang, ylang and lemon reduces blood pressure.

Spray this bed blend on your pillow for a sweet sleep: 15mL distilled water, 2 drops lavender, 1 drop chamomile, 1 drop orange and 1 drop ylang ylang.

LEMON

Lemon's sharp aroma awakens the senses just as its zesty taste tingles



BODY ESSENTIAL OILS

the tastebuds. No wonder feng shui considers it lucky to keep seven lemons in a bowl. A study in the *International Journal of Food Microbiology* marked lemon as the most powerful anti-microbial agent of all essential oils with effectiveness against *E. coli* and salmonella. Diffuse it for antiseptic air, add to olive oil for furniture polish and use straight to shine metal. Clean countertops and oily surfaces with lemon as it's a great grease cutter.

Inhale lemon's citrusy essence to stimulate the digestive, respiratory and creative juices and inhale lemon steam to clear sinuses and lungs. Research reveals that lemon counters confusion, fatigue, memory loss and depression. In a burner, blend 2 drops each of wild orange, bergamot and lemon.

Derived from lemon skin, this essential oil improves skin issues such as pigmentation, acne, sagging and oiliness. For a cleanser, splash on a litre of water with 3 drops of lemon oil. Add to your conditioner for shiny hair and a dandruff-free scalp. Improve immunity, cellulite and circulation by adding it to your moisturiser.

Lemon essential oil works well with eucalyptus, fennel, frankincense, geranium, peppermint, sandalwood, and ylang ylang. Lemon expires after 10 months, so use it or lose it.

PEPPERMINT

This minty marvel keeps you cool, clear and pain free from top to toe. Peppermint is one essential oil that can be ingested if indicated on the label, but check with a health practitioner before you do so. One drop of the essential oil equals 28 cups of peppermint tea, so a little goes a long way.

Prescribed doses can be taken orally to freshen breath, protect gums, clear sinuses and ease digestive discomfort related to gas, IBS or *Helicobacter pylori*. Peppermint cools fevers, hot flushes, heat exhaustion and sunburn when applied to the area in a lotion or oil base. Take travelling as it helps motion sickness, jet lag and nausea and is a potent deodoriser. Peppermint's strong smell repels ants, spiders, cockroaches, mosquitoes, mice, lice and ticks.

The menthol melts muscles and joints by stimulating circulation. Hence, people find peppermint aids arthritis, fibromyalgia, migraine, sciatica and bursitis. Peppermint puts pep in your step when massaged into aching feet. Try rubbing on your scalp to boost brainpower, too: Roman naturalist Pliny



suggested scholars wear a mint crown for mental clarity and the University of Cincinnati found peppermint increased mental acuity by 28 per cent.

ROSEMARY

"Rosemary, that's for remembrance," wrote Shakespeare. Hence we wear it on memorial days to remember soldiers' sacrifice. Rosemary rubbed on your head will make you brainy and beautiful. It promotes flake-free, glossy locks by stimulating scalp circulation and it uplifts mood, countering depression and fatigue. Rosemary also dissolves stress, a 2007 study showing that sniffing it decreased cortisol levels.

Inhaling rosemary clears the sinuses and chest like an ocean breeze. This "sea dew" adorning Aphrodite as she rose from the ocean symbolises its cosmetic effect. It clears acne, eczema, cellulite, varicose veins and puffy eyes. It also detoxifies the liver and clears cramps or constipation. If you're pregnant, epileptic or have high blood pressure, rosemary is unsuitable. But, if you have headaches, low blood pressure, poor circulation, thin hair, memory loss and mucous congestion, rosemary is your remedy.

SANDALWOOD

This warm, woody essential oil envelops temples throughout Asia. Sandalwood's sacred scent centres and stabilises us when we're scattered or stressed. Traditionally, a drop is dabbed on the third eye to enhance meditation and cool clarity. The fixative fragrance makes sandalwood suited to body products and perfumes, being integral to Calvin Klein's Obsession and Yves St Laurent's Opium. Since Indian sandalwood is sparse and protected, Australian and Hawaiian sandalwood are popular alternatives. Though not as strong as Indian sandalwood, they share the same antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-itch and antipyretic properties.

Blend sandalwood with a carrier oil such as coconut to soothe sunburn, calm

CAUTION

Many essential oils are highly flammable, increase sun sensitivity and deactivate homeopaths. Don't apply undiluted essential oils, take internally, use on children under six or use when pregnant unless advised by your health professional. Try a small skin-patch test to check for sensitivity. Avoid eyes, ears and nose.

itches, eliminate eczema, ease arthritis and clear psoriasis. Recent research by Vienna's Institute of Pharmaceutical Chemistry showed sandalwood massage oil significantly reduces hypertension and heart rate. To erase acne, pigmentation or bites, apply a paste of 5 drops sandalwood oil with ½ teaspoon turmeric powder and ½ teaspoon rosewater.

TEA-TREE

Tea-tree is a favourite fungus fighter. Living in the tropics, I went through a bottle a week. A spray of 2 teaspoons tea-tree oil to 2 cups water kept mould and mites off plants, surfaces, shoes and clothes. Adding a few drops to washing keeps fabric fresh and bug-free. For clear skin, wet a cotton bud, dip in tea-tree oil and dab on a pimple or cold sore to dry it overnight. Tea tree's antiseptic action also makes it an excellent wound and bite remedy.

Its pinene properties make tea-tree a terrific decongestant for coughs, colds and congestion: use as steam inhalation, put a few drops on a tissue or add to a vaporiser. Mix 5 per cent tea-tree oil to shampoo to deter dandruff and nits. For a warming diffuser, blend with cinnamon, clary sage, clove, geranium, nutmeg, rosewood, rosemary and thyme. 🌿

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