Essential Defense: Aromatherapy for the 21st Century

Aromatherapy is a word that conjures images of celebrity trends, New Age dogma, and pop-up air fresheners found on supermarket shelves. When French biochemist René-Maurice Gattefossé coined the term in the 1920s, he probably had no idea that his against-the-odds recovery from gas gangrene using lavender essential oil would prompt a global surge of followers sniffing their way toward enlightenment. Today, despite the common household word, most people are still unaware of the true capabilities of the modality, even those who keep bottles of lavender by their bedside to induce better sleep or dab tea tree oil on blemished skin.

Aromatherapy, also known as *essential oil therapy* and *aromatic medicine*, is a full-spectrum healing method that is not only capable of armoring the immune system against the common cold, it can combat drug-resistant superbugs. It can also regulate the endocrine system and re-route haphazard pathways in the nervous system. Very few mainstream medical practitioners give credence to clinical aromatherapy applications, but thousands of people who have regulated their metabolism, lost weight, or have overcome the abyss of anxiety disorders without toxic side effects know why the use of aromatics for wellbeing has been around for thousands of years – it works.

Wonderfully aromatic, essential oils appear to be pleasantries associated with perfumes, meditative practices, and drawer sachets, but they are powerful substances. A plant's essential oil is its *life force* and its *innate immune system that protects it from disease*. Essential oils can do the same for us when we apply them undiluted to the soles of the feet a few times a week during flu season, combine them with Epsom salt

and sea salt to put into a hot bath or foot bath, or dilute them with a vegetable oil for a therapeutic massage. They can also be inhaled to balance neurotransmitters, chemical messengers in our nervous system that regulate many bodily functions and affect mood. When used with a foundation of knowledge, aromatherapy can be used on everyone of all ages, as well as our pets, and even our houseplants.

There are many courses, books, and advocates passing along the complex body of knowledge about essential oils, but one must be aware that misinformation abounds. A little knowledge is not enough when approaching aromatherapy. Albeit natural, essential oils—steam-distilled essences of fresh plants, roots, barks, leaves, grasses, berries, seeds, and fruit rinds—must be treated like medications that have contraindications and specific recommendations for use.

Anyone taking any medication, especially blood thinners, should do their homework when using essential oils dermally (on the skin), for many oils could interfere with medications and cause serious, adverse effects. Epileptics are cautioned against inhaling certain oils that may prompt seizures. Pregnant women can use some, but not all, essential oils and at different stages of gestation. Hundreds of essential oils are available which means that if certain ones are contraindicated for a specific condition or prescribed drug, there are many more to choose from that can be used safely.

There is much debate about internal use of essential oils. If you are even slightly familiar with aromatherapy, you have probably come across company representatives that praise the practice like Scripture, but any certified, seasoned aromatherapist will agree that essential oils are concentrated substances, many more times concentrated than the amount found in the actual plants from which they are derived. The wise practitioner also knows that every *body* is different and has different responses and needs.

Want to know more? For expert, sound information, look for guidance by authors such as Robert Tisserand, Shirley Price, Kurt Schnaubelt Ph.D., Valerie Ann Worwood, Linda L. Smith, and Jane Buckle PhD RN. The market is flooded with books on the subject, and the best advice is to judge the material by the indexes, cross references, and resources provided in any title. Consider taking a course, especially one that includes hands-on blending and class time. It is well worth the effort and money invested, most of all, the communion with others who respect this holistic art form that can change lives for the better.

Disclaimer:

The statements contained herein have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration, and the material presented in this article is not intended to treat, prescribe for, cure, mitigate, or prevent any disease or to replace conventional medical treatments.

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