

YOUR HEALING KNEADS

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

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

*There are no
strangers here;
Only friends
you haven't yet
met.*

-William B Yeats



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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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 Wonders of Water

For Skin Health and More

Shelley Burns, N.D.

Creams, nutritional supplements, treatments, lotions, and potions. We are always looking for the next miracle product to keep skin looking healthy and young. However, there is one essential, inexpensive, and often overlooked nutrient right at your fingertips: water.

Just as a car cannot function without oil, our bodies cannot function without water. After oxygen, H₂O is the most important component of the body, responsible for 65-70 percent of its composition. And of this, 80 percent is dedicated to the skin.

Water is the medium for various enzymatic and chemical reactions in the body. It moves nutrients, hormones, antibodies, and oxygen through the blood and lymphatic systems, and it also helps form the matrix of the skin. Devoid of water, the skin becomes dehydrated, resulting in a dry, dull tone.

It's likely that the moment a person feels

thirsty, mild dehydration has already set in. To keep the complexion looking smooth and blemish-free, drink water upon waking and continue drinking it throughout the day at one- to two-hour intervals. At least six 8-oz. glasses of water should be consumed daily and more if you are exercising, perspiring, and/or in hot weather. Ideally, intake should be between ten and twelve 8-oz. glasses of water a day. One note: Don't increase water intake all at once, as the kidneys and digestive system need time to adjust. Add one 8-oz. glass every day or every second day.

What counts toward your daily water intake? Just the basics: water and herbal tea. Caffeinated beverages and alcoholic drinks are diuretics that can contribute to dehydration, requiring even more hydration after drinking.

Not only is water important for skin health, it can also play a key role in the prevention of disease. Drinking eight glasses of water a day can decrease the

risk of colon cancer, bladder cancer, and potentially even breast cancer.



Water helps keep the body at optimum health.

The Sunshine Vitamin

Shelley Burns

In the world of skin health, we focus on ways to improve skin quality. We work to prevent acne, cellular damage, dryness, and wrinkles. It is less common to discuss how a skin-care strategy may increase risk of developing other health conditions.

Skin cancer is one example. To prevent skin cancer, we protect ourselves with sunscreen--especially during the summer months. But by using sunscreen we are blocking the absorption of vitamin D, the "sunshine" vitamin.

Vitamin D is fat soluble and contains powerful antioxidant and anticarcinogenic properties that can prevent premature aging and cellular damage. Solid research indicates that vitamin D plays a role in reducing the risk of cancer, specifically breast, colon,

and prostate cancers. Vitamin D has been associated with preventing diabetes by reducing insulin sensitivity. It also improves heart health, reduces the risk of multiple sclerosis, strengthens bones, and decreases the effects of seasonal affective disorder.

Vitamin D can help resolve skin conditions like psoriasis, as it plays a role in skin cell regulation, including cell turnover and growth. Vitamin D can be effective in reducing the itching and flaking associated with this disorder. Ultraviolet B (UVB) treatments have long been used successfully in treating psoriasis because UVB produces vitamin D in the body.

Getting between 5-10 minutes of direct sun exposure daily on the arms, face, hands, and back (without sunscreen) can

provide enough vitamin D to meet your daily requirements, though sun exposure does present a risk. Because it is difficult to obtain enough vitamin D through food, many prefer to use supplements. Research on the health benefits of ingesting vitamin D led experts to advise an intake of 25-50 micrograms daily.

Shelley Burns is a doctor of naturopathic medicine and completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. She has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

*I don't know
where I'm going
from here, but I
promise it won't
be boring.*

-David Bowie

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