

## How to use aromatherapy for fibromyalgia symptoms

Christine Cioppa / December 14, 2016 / 0 Comments

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How can sniffing an aroma help a medical condition, you may wonder. Maybe you already have used aromatherapy and haven't realized it. If you've ever used a vaporizer with Vicks or applied Vicks VapoRub to your chest, when you have a cold, you've used a form of aromatherapy. They both contain eucalyptus oil, which is an essential oil.

According to the government's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Medicine, "Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils from plants (flowers, herbs, or trees) as a complementary health approach."

It's used legitimately for many health concerns. The National Cancer Institute and the University of Maryland Medical Center say aromatherapy is used in many ways, including for:

- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Improving quality of life
- Reducing pain
- Altering moods and emotions
- Helping treat insomnia

### Treating Fibromyalgia

For fibromyalgia specifically, can it help?

"Essential oils can help in fibromyalgia by easing symptoms like body pain, headache, anxiety, depression and sleeplessness. But essential oils are not 'magic.' In fibromyalgia, as in any chronic condition, they will be most effective when used in conjunction with a consistent program of appropriate dietary and lifestyle measures," says aromatherapy consultant and retired neuropsychologist, Joie Power, Ph.D.

Before getting started on what can help, it's important to know what risks and safety info is out there since essential oils have the potential to be misused and harmful.

Pregnant woman as well as people with high blood pressure, seizures, estrogen-dependent tumors, asthma, allergies, and those undergoing drug treatment should make sure they clear using any form of aromatherapy with their doctors.

In terms of safety, how essential oils are used is important. Oils need to be diluted when used on the skin, and they need to be inhaled properly. (Never take essential oils by mouth, as it is rarely used this way and can be dangerous.)

According to the National Cancer Institute, Aromatherapy is used in four main ways:

- Indirect inhalation (with a diffuser with drops of oil)
- Direct inhalation (with an inhaler with drops of oil floating on hot water)
- Massaged onto body after essential oil is diluted in a carrier oil
- Applied topically after combined in lotions, bath salts, or dressings

Used improperly in any form, essential oils can cause allergic reactions, sensitivity to sun exposure (phototoxicity), interactions with drugs, contact dermatitis, an effect on hormones, and toxicity.

"Different essential oils have different properties so the choice of oil depends on the symptom you want help with. For body pain, helichrysum (*Heichrysum italicum*), German chamomile (*Matricia recutita* aka *Matricaria chamomilla*), marjoram (*Origanum majorana*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and true lavender have been used with success in many cases. All essential oils have more than one type of action, so marjoram and lavender can also help in many cases of insomnia and/or anxiety because in addition to having pain relieving properties, they are also calming. Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*) has been reported by some people to help relieve fatigue," explains Dr. Power.

When you're just learning to use aromatherapy, a trained aromatherapy professional can help since it can get quite complicated. There's a lot of mixing and combining that can go on, which may be daunting for a beginner.

Power says "essential oils are generally most effective when three or more are combined into a blend."

Also a professional can help you understand any safety information you need. "While most essential oils are very safe to use externally, there are a few that are not or that have specific restrictions on who should use them and/or how they should be used. Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), for example, should not be used by any route (topically, internally or by inhalation) by anyone with a history of seizures or an increased risk for seizures; some essential oils should not be used by children; some should not be used by people on certain medications; a few are strong skin irritants, and so on."

But, if you're doing it on your own, Dr. Power says, "A person who wants to use essential oils in the most effective and safest way possible should start with a good reference manual and spend at least a little time reading up on the properties of essential oils and should know of any safety issues or restrictions that apply to an oil before they use it."

### **Proper use of Aromatherapy**

Specifically for treating fibromyalgia, Dr. Power explains how essential oils may or may not help. "People's response to aromatherapy varies, so some people will find essential oils very helpful in providing symptom relief while other people may not. To get a good result from aromatherapy, it is absolutely crucial that you start with good, therapeutic quality essential oils. So do not buy cheap essential oils in an effort to save money. Be especially wary of those cheap essential oils that you see on mass market web-based selling platforms because many of those products are not even real essential oils. Buy your essential oils from companies that have aromatherapy professionals on staff and who list the names of the company's owners and key staff, with a description of their credentials."

Find an aromatherapist who can help you get started in selecting essential oils and using them safely, if you need help. The National Association of Holistic Therapy and the Alliance of International Aromatherapists can guide you to a trained professional closest to your location.

Once you get the right oils, you have to know how to use them. "Another factor that determines whether or not you get good symptom relief from essential oils use is choosing the proper essential oils and using them in the best way. To do that you need to know something about their properties and recommended methods of use. For example, if you are trying to use essential oils to help you sleep, inhalation of lavender can be a good choice for oil and method of use but if you want to relieve muscle pain with helichrysum, topical application will be more effective. Anyone wanting to use essential oils to help themselves cope with fibromyalgia needs to take the time to do some reading; since some essential oil companies make unwarranted claims about their products I do not recommend relying on information you get from their websites. Get a good reference book by someone who is well-known and respected in the field. (The National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy's website provides a list of recommended books.)

### **Staying Safe**

"People need to be aware that there is a lot of very bad advice and misinformation out there about essential oils. The worst of this advice is to use essential oils internally. While a physician or nurse practitioner who is trained in internal use of essential oils should be able to make appropriate and safe recommendations for using essential oils internally, this is NOT something you should do on you own or under the advice of anyone who is not a licensed medical professional. Another piece of bad advice is to put essential oils directly on your skin without first diluting them in a vegetable oil; this practice greatly increases your chances of having a bad skin reaction so you should always dilute essential oils before using them topically."