

Essential Oils and You



Researchers have been looking into the effects of essential oils on the human body and mind, and have made some fascinating discoveries. For instance, sesquiterpenes are compounds found in some oils, including **Frankincense**. Sesquiterpenes are able to cross the blood/brain barrier and subsequently increase oxygen in the brain, heightening the level of activity in the limbic system and positively impacting emotional health, hormone balance, and immune function. Sesquiterpenes have also been found to be anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and can even impact the growth of tumors. Additionally, recent research on **Frankincense**, an essential oil superstar, has found it to be effective in treating anxiety and depression, and may have put researchers on a path to developing a new class of antidepressants. **Citrus** and **Lavender**, two more heavyweights of the essential oil world, have been tested extensively and have been found to aid in relaxation, as well as reductions in stress, depression, and anxiety

Our sense of smell, or our olfactory sense, can have a very important impact on our health and wellness. This is partly because our olfactory sense, which becomes activated when inhaling a scent through our nose, is the only sense that is directly connected to our limbic system. The limbic system is known as the “emotional center” of our brain, where it supports functions such as emotion, behavior, and motivation. Within the limbic system is our amygdala, sometimes referred to as the brain’s “smoke detector” as it activates the *fight/flight/freeze response*. The limbic system is also home to the hippocampus, the area of the brain responsible for consolidating memories. Your olfactory system’s close connection with your limbic system may explain why a familiar smell can send us back into the archives of our life quite suddenly, resulting in an experience ranging from comforting and pleasant, to highly anxious and disturbing.

As our sense of smell is the only sense that goes straight to the emotional part of our brain, it also bypasses the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for cognitive, or intellectual functioning. Therefore, each person will have a unique response to certain aromas based on their own life experiences, including emotions and memories that are activated by each scent. For instance, even though the research has shown that many people can increase relaxation with the scent of lavender, if the smell activates a negative response for you, then it won’t be helpful for relaxation purposes.

There are many essential oils to choose from when seeking relief from specific conditions, and finding the ones that are right for you is of utmost importance. Aromas, such as those from essential oils, can be used in the course of psychotherapy to aid in healing and growth. Clinicians may use scents to activate calming, and decrease hyperarousal from the *fight/flight/freeze* response by signaling the brain to return to a safe and calm state. Additionally, scents can be used to empower or energize clients by magnifying important and useful qualities, such as confidence, wisdom, or protection. Perhaps more importantly, clients can use essential oils to help manage their mental health on a daily basis as part of an overall self-care regiment. For example, scents that may assist in concentration, increase energy, or improve sleep.

Here at Coherence Associates, Inc., counselors may invite you to smell essential oils to assist you in discovering which aromas seem to have the effect you are looking for, such as a calming effect after talking about a loss, or processing a painful memory; an energizing effect when dealing with depression, fatigue or when preparing for a competition or presentation; or even stimulating a concentration and focusing effect when studying. Learning how aromas effect your mind and body can develop into a proactive approach to maximizing your potential in all areas of your life. This is an educational endeavor to help you add meaningful tools to your psychological tool belt! Building mental toughness and resiliency, and enhancing psychological well-being, is a lifelong endeavor. We hope this information is useful in your journey!

For more information on Frankincense visit: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3709812/> or <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/05/080520110415.htm>

For more information on Citrus and Lavender visit: <http://petrichorapothecary.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/researchpaper.pdf>