



Aromatherapy Uses and Benefits



Medically reviewed by [Debra Rose Wilson, Ph.D., MSN, R.N., IBCLC, AHN-BC, CHT](#) — Written by [Emily Cronkleton](#) — Updated on March 8, 2019

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What is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is a holistic healing treatment that uses natural plant extracts to promote health and well-being. Sometimes it's called essential oil therapy. Aromatherapy uses aromatic essential oils medicinally to improve the health of the body, mind, and spirit. It enhances both physical and emotional health.

Aromatherapy is thought of as both an art and a science. Recently, aromatherapy has gained more recognition in the fields of science and medicine.

How long has aromatherapy been around?

Humans have used [aromatherapy](#) for [thousands of years](#). Ancient cultures in China, India, Egypt, and elsewhere incorporated aromatic plant components in resins, balms, and oils. These natural substances were used for medical and religious purposes. They were known to have both physical and psychological benefits.

Essential oils distillation is attributed to the Persians in the 10th century,

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century in Germany. French physicians in the 19th century recognized the potential of essential oils in treating disease.

Medical doctors became more established in the 19th century and focused on using chemical drugs. However, the French and German doctors still recognized the role of natural botanicals in treating illness.

The term “aromatherapy” was coined by a French perfumer and chemist René-Maurice Gattefossé in a book he wrote on the topic that was published in 1937. He had previously discovered the healing potential of [lavender](#) in treating burns. The book discusses the use of essential oils in treating medical conditions.

How does aromatherapy treatment work?

Aromatherapy works through the [sense of smell and skin absorption](#) using products such as these:

- diffusers
- aromatic spritzers
- inhalers
- bathing salts
- body oils, creams, or lotions for massage or topical application
- facial steamers
- hot and cold compresses
- clay masks

You can use these alone or in any combination.

There are nearly one hundred types of essential oils available. Generally, people use the most [popular](#) oils.

Essential oils are available online, in health food stores, and in some regular supermarkets. It's important to buy from a reputable producer

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additives or synthetic ingredients. [Check out these essential oils available on Amazon.](#)

Each essential oil has an array of unique healing properties, uses, and effects. Combining essential oils to create a synergistic blend creates even more benefits.

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Aromatherapy benefits

Aromatherapy has an array of benefits. It's said to:

- manage pain
- improve sleep quality
- reduce stress, agitation, and anxiety
- soothe [sore joints](#)
- treat [headaches and migraines](#)
- alleviate [side effects of chemotherapy](#)
- ease discomforts of [labor](#)
- fight bacteria, virus, or fungus
- improve digestion
- improve [hospice](#) and palliative care
- boost immunity

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Unproven claims

Scientific evidence for aromatherapy is considered to be limited in some areas. Research to support the use of aromatherapy in treating Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and heart disease is lacking.

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Conditions it may treat

Aromatherapy has the potential to treat many conditions, including:

- asthma
- insomnia
- fatigue
- depression ✓
- inflammation
- peripheral neuropathy
- menstrual issues
- alopecia
- cancer
- erectile dysfunction
- arthritis

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Most popular aromatherapy oils

According to the [National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy](#), the most popular essential oils are:

- clary sage
- cypress
- eucalyptus
- fennel
- geranium
- ginger
- helichrysum
- lavender
- lemon
- lemongrass
- mandarin
- neroli
- patchouli
- peppermint
- Roman chamomile
- rose
- rosemary
- tea tree
- vetiver
- ylang ylang

You can use essential oils in any number of ways. For example, add them to body lotions or carrier oils, and then apply them topically. Try enhancing a facial toner, shampoo, or conditioner with essential oils. Or incorporate them into liquid soap, toothpaste, or mouthwash. You can

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Choosing a provider

You may wish to meet with a certified aromatherapist, especially when you're first getting started with aromatherapy or if you have specific issues you'd like to address. You can find an aromatherapist by using an [online directory](#). Or ask at a spa or yoga studio.

During a consultation with an [aromatherapist](#), you'll answer questions and talk about your lifestyle and health. Together, you can come up with an individual treatment plan to meet your goals and manage your symptoms. You may have a few sessions with your aromatherapist, or you could decide to have ongoing sessions for a longer period of time.

Since aromatherapy is a complementary therapy, you should talk to your doctor before starting your sessions. That way your essential oil therapy can be tailored to work together with any medical care or treatment you're receiving.

There's plenty of information available online and in books if you wish to treat yourself at home. There are also courses you can take to learn more about aromatherapy.

Consultations with an aromatherapist will vary depending on several factors, including where you live. You can expect to pay up to \$100 for an initial consultation and up to \$50 for follow-up consultations.

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Most essential oils are safe to use. But there are some precautions you should take when using them, as well as side effects you should be aware of, especially if you take any prescription medications.

Don't apply essential oils directly to your skin. Always use a [carrier oil](#) to dilute the oils. Remember to do a [skin patch test](#) before using essential oils. Since citrus essential oils may make your skin more sensitive to the sun, these oils should be avoided if you'll be exposed to sunlight.

Children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should use essential oils with caution and under the supervision of a doctor. You should avoid some [oils](#) and never swallow essential oils.

Side effects of using essential oils include:

- [rashes](#)
- [asthma attacks](#)
- headaches
- allergic reactions
- skin irritation
- [nausea](#)

Use essential oils with caution if you have:

- [hay fever](#)
- [asthma](#)
- [epilepsy](#)
- [high blood pressure](#)
- [eczema](#)
- [psoriasis](#)

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Takeaway

As you explore the uses of essential oils, pay attention to how the different oils and methods of use affect you.

Always talk to your doctor before starting any aromatherapy treatment. Remember that aromatherapy is meant to be a complementary therapy. It's not meant to replace any doctor-approved treatment plan.

Last medically reviewed on May 15, 2018

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