

Aromatherapy to Enhance Yoga and Meditation

The New Year is a perfect time to make changes that bring significant benefits later on. Many of us make resolutions to “get healthy”- lose weight, exercise, eat right, reduce stress and get connected, but sustaining these resolutions in order to reach your goals is the key to success. Essential oils help keep you motivated and energized, and can also help in programming yourself to stick to that new plan by smelling a particular essential oil in conjunction to specific activities you need motivation to keep doing. Essential oils help make your routines more meaningful and each new scent will cause your brain to activate neural connections creating and expanding your mental flexibility and sense of connection to the natural world.

Essential oils are derived from plants. The elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space are found in different concentrations within essential oils. Flowers like lavender, chamomile, rose, geranium and jasmine produce essential oils that are calming and sedating. The resins, woods and barks like frankincense, myrrh, sandalwood, cedarwood, juniper and cypress produce heating essential oils that actively move fluids in the body. The oils from leaves like rosemary, basil, peppermint, spruce and eucalyptus have healing and cooling properties. Oils taken from the roots of plants like spikenard, ginger and vetiver can be very grounding. Fruits such as orange, lemon, lime and bergamot produce essential oils that are uplifting and stimulating.

In Naturopathy, we emphasize self-care, and an essential part of this is self-massage (abhyanga) with oils personally blended to balance your constitution (see attached Dosha information). Once you develop a daily self-massage routine, you will find yourself looking forward to treating yourself to the balancing effects of the oils. The Sanskrit word for oleation translates to “loving your own body”. This is a simple and effective way to prevent many age-related problems and to feel your best at any age. Oil massage lubricates and nourishes the body. It improves skin tone, as well as supporting the digestive and circulatory systems. Oils release toxins and promote sound sleep.

The best time for abhyanga is in the morning. Begin by warming your oil in your hands or by placing the bottle in a bowl of warm water for a few minutes. Stand on a towel and massage the oil into your body in circular movements, with longer strokes on the limbs and smaller circles on the joints. The abdomen and chest is massaged using larger clockwise motions. You may also wish to massage your scalp. Take about 10 minutes to do this. Now spend 5 minutes to sit quietly in meditation. Finish by bathing as usual.

Another time for self-massage is before exercise as part of your warm-up. Plant-infused oils are used in India to limber the muscles prior to Yoga, a step often neglected in Western exercises. The massage oil will hasten muscle warm-up and keep them warm throughout your routine minimizing cramping. In addition to the warm up attributes, the essential oils motivate and energize you. They also move fluids, helping you to retain less water and allowing your body to free itself of toxins.

Massage, acupuncture, Yoga and other therapies utilizing the sense of touch have always played an important role in supporting spiritual practice. Diet, herbs and the sense of smell play crucial roles in helping nourish our practice. Traditionally incenses (as well as attars) were a major aspect of meditation, contemplation and the Yoga experience. Many of the “sacred scents” now have documented research confirming their antidepressant, anti-anxiety and general mood enhancing properties. Frankincense stimulates the pituitary gland in a similar fashion to meditation, increasing human growth hormone output and activating the immune system. Because of the links among olfaction, the limbic system and awareness, when botanical aromatics are used consciously and deliberately to support meditation practice their effects become more powerful than when used superficially as a background fragrance.

Today many perform Yoga in places that do not allow incense. However you can use essential oils in a very personal fashion to help with your Yoga. Their inherent properties aid in relaxation and concentration and also train the mind and body, helping you to master your moves. Essential oils used during Yoga can be used throughout the day to throw the body and mind back into that same healthful, calm state.

Essential Oils for the Chakras

- Crown : Neroli, Rose, Frankincense
- Brow: Rosemary, Juniper, Lemon, Pine, Angelica seed
- Throat: Chamomile, Cypress, Petitgrain, Basil, Peppermint, Hyssop, Rosewood, Rosemary
- Heart: Rose, Bergamot, Melissa, Ylang Ylang, Mandarin, Tangerine, Geranium, Jasmine, Lavender

- Solar Plexus & Spleen: Juniper, Cedarwood, Coriander, Lime, Hyssop, Marjoram, Cardamom
- Sacral: Sandalwood, Clary Sage, Fennel, Cardamom, Elemi, Benzoin
- Base: Myrrh, Patchouli, Vetiver, Rosewood, Thyme, Ginger

Essential Ideas

- Aroma mist- place distilled water and essential oil(s) in a spray bottle and mist yourself and/or your space
- Aroma vera rub- as an alternative to oil, use aloe vera gel as your base to dilute essential oils. Use as a cooling rub-down after exercise.
- Aroma anointing- Place diluted essential oils on your meridian (pressure) points right before you begin to exercise and breathe deeply from the bottle to bring its scent into your olfactory system and corresponding brain areas
- Aroma gel- place water holding crystals (Agrosok), water, and essential oils into a glass container, use like a room freshener
- Aroma stick- melt base oil, such as almond, and beeswax (3:1), add essential oil (3-10% dilution), pour into lip balm or other dispensing tube. Use for anointing or as perfume on meridian points.
- Aroma bracelet- place essential oil drops onto hemp or leather bracelet, wear during activities. Rejuvenate as needed.
- Aroma fountain- place 5 drop essential oil into regular or misting fountain to scent room
- Aroma inhalers- place essential oil into inhaler blank, take along and use anytime you desire
- Aroma floating candles- kits available at craft store, use pure essential oils instead of fragrance oils
 - Why not other candles? Toxins released from as little as one candle can be damaging to your health. Candles, in addition to wax, can contain a host of chemicals including colorants, solvents and fragrance. If you are looking for a healing effect from Aromatherapy and specifically essential oils, it is much safer to use a diffuser. If you must, buy candles made with 100% real essential oils, natural beeswax and nothing else!

What to look for when buying essential oils

- **Purchase 100% pure, true essential oils, rather than chemical reproductions of fragrances.** These chemical reproductions will not have the same effect as natural pure essential oils, and can sometimes create harmful effects.
 - Phantom essential oils- One source estimates 95% of all essential oils sold to date on the market are denatured in some form. While this may seem unthinkable, the problem of denatured and adulterated essential oils is a large one. Adulteration is a long used mode of making batches of essential oils stretch for more profit.
 - Pure oils may be diluted, but know what you are buying and what they are diluted with. Many oils are safely diluted with a carrier oil such as Jojoba, Almond Oil, Apricot Oil, Grape seed Oil, or Olive Oil.
 - Purchase oils that have a certificate of analysis to back them proving they are pesticide free as determined by GC/MS analysis or certified at the farm level as CO (certified organic), ECO (European certified organic), or Demeter (biodynamic). Some oils can only be obtained from plants that are harvested wild. Labels should clearly state which of these methods are used to ensure your safety. **Plants that have been treated may contain toxic and unnatural substances that may harmful or cause allergic reactions.** Do expect to pay more for oils that meet these requirements.
 - There will be some natural chemical variation in plants due to climate, harvesting time, etc. Knowledge of these variations helps ensure the quality and authenticity of the oils being purchased.
 - Testing oils for quality can be done with:
 - GLC (gas-liquid chromatography)
 - HPLC (high performance liquid chromatography)
 - TLC (thin layer chromatography)
 - GC-MS (gas chromatography-mass spectrometry)
 - optical rotation
 - refractive index
 - IR (infrared spectroscopy)
 - and possibly the most discerning...the nose.
 - It is usually best to **buy in small quantities based upon the usage.** Oxygen slowly deteriorates the oil in partially filled bottles.
 - There may be **great variations in price that depends on the extraction method and the level of dilution of the oil.** Keep this in mind for comparison purposes.

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