

A Holistic Synergy

We all know that in today's world stress is the number one health problem, an unavoidable consequence of life. It takes a toll on our health mentally, emotionally and physically. Stress affects the Nervous System, Musculoskeletal System, Respiratory System, Cardiovascular System, Endocrine System, Gastrointestinal System and Reproductive System. We have to break free from this trend of stressful living and learn to allow healing in our bodies. The key to reducing stress is preventing it. We have many outlets such as Massage Therapy that integrates Aromatherapy as a resource for stress management, applying these techniques is the key to a more balanced, stress free life.

Massage Therapy is an ancient therapy dating back to 722 BC where written records have been documented in the "Yellow Emperors Classic Book of Internal Medicine." Massage Therapy has many known health benefits such as stimulating Lymphatic flow which is our body's natural defense system, increasing joint flexibility and range of motion, fresh blood flow and oxygen functions to the muscles due to increased circulation, tissue regeneration, improved skin tone, faster recovery time following an injury or surgery, lessens depression and anxiety, releases endorphins- amino acids which act as natural pain relievers and all while improving overall wellbeing. Massage Therapy is a beautiful path that leads us to relaxation. There are many branches of this path that can enhance our ability to find peace and balance in our lives. Aromatherapy, Essential Oils, Herbs and Plants can greatly enhance health and wellbeing while bringing a deeper level of relaxation, balance and health to one's life. Understanding the complex components and unique properties of these medicinal oils and plants is incredibly vital and individually based. Aromatherapy stimulates the emotional part of our brain. The impression of the aroma is sent directly to the Limbic System where memories are stored by traveling aromatic molecules that make their way through the nasal passages. When stimulated, the Limbic System releases serotonin which counteracts anxiety and stress, endorphins to reduce pain while stimulating our fight or flight response, hormonal secretions, motivation and emotional feelings. As our body strives for balance, Aromatherapy is a powerful tool. A synergy of wellness blossoms as Massage Therapy and Aromatherapy are combined.

Aromatherapy is the use of plant substances that have been extracted into essential oils to encourage good health, equilibrium and wellbeing. These powerful oils are known for having a positive effect on the Circulatory System, Lymphatic System, Digestive System, Reproductive System, Endocrine System, Muscular System, Skeletal System as well as our Mental and Emotional aspects. Aromatherapy goes beyond just scent, it is a complex synergy of science and art. Each plant has its own distinctive characteristic as well as therapeutic and medicinal quality. As unique as our fingerprint, essential oils have the potential to eliminate imbalances and restore health. Essential oils are easily absorbed through the Integumentary System. Our skin is the largest organ of the body acting not only as our first line of defense but a direct impact of emotional stress by providing an interface with the world. Sensory nerves respond to the environment around us. The sense of touch is considered one of the most powerful and important senses influencing the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of a person.

The affect of essential oils can be observed in as little as 20 seconds after inhalation and within 20 minutes after being applied topically, making an Aromatherapy Massage a beneficial enhancement to relaxation, health and wellbeing.

Essential oils are blended with carrier oils to stabilize their nature and gain the added nutrients and vitamins that each carrier uniquely provides. In choosing a carrier; a cold pressed, unfiltered organic oil known to be grown without harmful pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or synthetic chemicals is key to providing the highest nutrients and benefits. These wonderfully nourishing oils are known to have a slow evaporation rate which holds the nutrients in our skin for longer periods of time, providing us with many health benefits.

Carrier Oils...

- Sweet Almond (*Prunus dulcis*,)
- Apricot (*Prunus ameniaca*,)
- Avocado (*Persea americana*,)
- Borage (*Borago officinalis*,)
- Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*,)
- Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*,)
- Grapeseed (*Vitis vinifera*,)
- Hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*,)
- Jojoba (*Simmondsia chinensis*,)
- Macadamia (*Macadamia intergrifolia* and *M. tetraphylla*,)
- Olive (*Olea europaea*,)
- Rosehip (*Rosa rubiginosa*/*Rosa musceta*,)
- Safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*,)
- Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*,)
- Shea Butter (*Vitellaria paradoxa*,)
- Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*,)
- Walnut (*Juglans regia*,)
- Wheat Germ (*Triticum spp.*)

Macerated Oils or Oil Infusions are wonderful carriers as well. This process is utilized when the plant material is too expensive for the mount of oils that would be produced. Flower heads and leaves are collected or wildcrafted, infused in oils to protect against oxidation and placed in a warm environment for up to eight weeks. At the end of this process, you are left with uniquely created carrier oils which your clients can benefit from. Arnica (*Arnica montana*,) is one of the most popular Macerated oils. Keep in mind that oils such as Hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*,) or Peanut (*Arachis hypogaeae*) should not be used in the case of a nut allergy and peanut is also not suggested in the use of Aromatherapy due to the fungus present on most peanuts and Wheat Germ (*Triticum spp*) should be avoided in cases of a wheat allergy. Health history of your client is crucial to know which carrier oils will provide the best fit for their health and wellness goals. When choosing a carrier, there are specific rations to follow, knowledge of Aromatic Botany and in combination with intuition all go into to creating a synergistic blend.

Botanical plant structure and classification is broken down into Family, Genus and Species. Vital to an Aromatherapist is identifying these plant characteristics, closely related species and ancestry so that they may choose an essential oil that is beautifully matched to your unique self. This natural system of plant relationships is made up of families, Lamiaceae- containing 5,600 species and 224 genera, Lauraceae- containing 2,500 species and 45 genera, Pinaceae- containing 194 species and 9 genera just to name a few. A complex system that is incredibly beneficial to those who have the knowledge and respect for these powerful plants.

Essential oils are highly concentrated and contain powerful chemical substances which need to be respected. Guidelines for safe and effective use must be practiced by all who have chosen this aromatic path. Remember to use 100% pure essential oils, keeping out of reach of children and away from eyes, ears, nose and mouth but if exposure does occur, flush with milk or carrier oil... not water. Dilute essential oils with an organic carrier oil and ratio of 2% for a 30 ml blend, store in a dark bottle away from heat and light to prevent oxidation, avoid contamination by not touching the plastic dropper lid, skin test on the inside of elbow for possible allergic reaction, never substitute essential oils for necessary medical treatment. If you have any serious health problems, always consult a medical professional. Know your oils, know your plants and know your Aromatherapist.

Be respectful of the endangered trees and plants such as...

- Sandalwood (*Santalum album* -replace with *Santalum spicatum*,)
- Frankincense (*Boswellia carteri/thurifera*- replace with *Boswellia serrata*)
- Rosewood (*Aniba rosaeodora*- replace with Howood (*Cinnamomum camphora*).

There are some essential oils that should be avoided at all times and considered toxic...

- Bitter Almond (*A. communis*, var. *amara*,)
- Birch (*Betula alba*,)
- Boldo (*Peumus Boldus*,)
- Cade (Juniperus oxycedrus,)
- Calamus (*Acorus calamus*,)
- Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*,)
- Costus (*Aplotaxis lappa*,)
- Elecampane (*Inula Helenium*,)
- Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*,)
- Mustard (*Brassica nigra*,)
- Pennyroyal (*Mentha Pulegium*,)
- Rue (*Ruta graveolens*,)
- Sassafras (*Sassafras officinale*,)
- Savory (*Satureia hortensis*, *Satureia montana*,)
- Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*,)
- Thuja (*Thuja occidentalis*)
- Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*,)
- Wormseed (*Chenopodium anthelminticum*,)

- Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium.*)

It is important to know if your client has High Blood pressure. These essential oils are known for stimulating circulation and raising blood pressure...

- Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora,*)
- Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus,*)
- Hyssop (*Hyyopus officinalis,*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis,*)
- Sage (*Salvia officinalis,*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris.*)

These are very important contraindications to be aware of when choosing an essential oil for massage and brings light to the importance of an educated Aromatherapist.

Creating a blend that compliments a client who is experiencing muscle and joint pain, mental and emotional stress as well as respiratory allergies is a common complaint I experience. Compiling client health history, possible contraindications and evaluating the components of each essential oil and carrier oil to individually personalize a blend based on this clients specific health and wellness needs, the synergistic art begins.

A Holistic Synergy... example of a blend.

- Orange (*Citrus vulgaris,*)
 - Chemical constituents of Nerol (alcohol,) Citral (Aldehyde,) Limonene (Terpene,) Methyl anthranilate (Ester.)
 - Precautions- Phototoxic, Skin sensitive oil
 - Orange is well known for emotional balance, relieving aches and pains, a calming, soothing, sedative effect. Great for dehydrated skin.
- Fir (*Abies balsamea,*)
 - Chemical constituents of Bornyl acetate, Terpinyl acetate (Esters,) Bisabolene, Camphene, Dipentene, Phellandrene, Pinene (Terpenes.)
 - Fir is well known aiding the Respiratory System, a tonic for the Nervous System, Rheumatic conditions as well as muscle aches and pains.
- Neroli (*Citrus anurantium/vulgaris,*)
 - Chemical constituents of Phenylacetic (Acid) Nerol, Geraniol, Linalool, Nerolidol, Terpeneol (Alcohols,) Linalyl acetate, Methyl anthranilate, Neryl acetate (Esters,) Jasmone (Ketone,) Indole (Nitrate,) Camphene, Limonene (Terpenes.)
 - Neroli is well known for stress relief, restful sleep, uplifting, anti inflammatory benefits, and alleviating chronic pain.

As for carrier oils...

- Safflower- which is known to be useful for circulatory problems, painful joints, sprains and bruises.
- Arnica- used for pain, fractures, bruises strained muscles and tendons, contusions and swelling.
- St. Johns Wort- is an anti inflammatory, soothes inflamed nerves, muscles and sprains, also anti depressant properties.

This creates a customized blend that truly meets the health and wellness needs of this client. With this knowledge, you go beyond just what smells nice and you reach the core of wellness, a true holistic approach.

I believe we need to take a look at the whole spectrum of wellness to benefits our clientele by stepping away from the standard massage creams filled with chemicals like methyl paraben (used in many cosmetics as well), TEA (irritant and possibly contaminated with carcinogenics), dimethicone (silicone derivative), propylene glycol (anti-freeze) or the chocolate, fruity dessert like blends filled with fragrance oils and open your clients eyes to a more natural, holistic approach to Aromatherapy. Looking to the Ayurvedic principles, we were taught that one should not put anything on the skin that one would not put in the mouth. True Aromatherapy is an art that can add balance and healing to those who seek it.

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