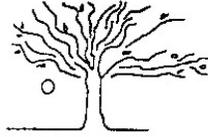


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THE USE OF ESSENTIAL OILS & AROMATHERAPY IN RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

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Nature has demonstrated the importance of the sense of smell:

- ~ in-utero, the first portion of the brain to develop is the olfactory lobe
- ~ the first cranial nerve (olfactory) is not really a nerve, but brain tissue the closest brain matter gets to the outside world
- ~ smell has an almost immediate impact on the limbic system of the brain - the primary center of mood, memory, behavior, emotion, wakefulness, appetite
- ~ smells create an almost immediate electro-chemical response on the nervous system
- ~ odors can have an almost immediate impact on the entire hormonal system
- ~ newborns will pull themselves to their mother's breast, led by their sense of smell
- ~ when exposed to certain scents, people of all ages achieve higher test scores
- ~ all living things emit an odor that serves as a form of communication

The power of the sense of smell has not been missed by man:

- ~ aromatic plant matter has been used for centuries in spiritual/mental/physical care - can be traced back to about 60,000 BC
- ~ perfumes have been prized in every culture throughout history - the perfume industry is a multi-billion dollar business
- ~ the search for odiferous plants has led to numerous explorations and 'discoveries' - Columbus' journey to the new world was a search for the "Spice" Islands
- ~ the food industry enhances the scent of their foods to entice consumption
- ~ the tobacco industry uses large quantities of various plant scents to enhance taste
- ~ retail stores use scents to lower shoppers' inhibitions so they will shop longer
- ~ people of both genders use scents to attract potential mates

The sense of smell is so very powerful and probably the most taken-for-granted sense we have. Smells warn of danger, calm our nerves, trigger memories, excite us, and repel us. When looking at a beautiful flower, we smell it. Prior to sampling a new food, we smell it. This incredible sense is now being abused, often to our detriment. We purchase cleaning products not by their safety or cleaning ability but by the smell they emit. Most of us buy our personal care products not with purity in mind, but because of their odor. Our homes are deodorized with synthetic odors so they can smell like "Spring Rain", "Deep Forest", or "Lemon Orchard". Even our babies' rooms are saturated with manufactured scents regardless of the impact of the chemicals on young respiratory and nervous systems. Our day care centers, schools, places of worship, office buildings, automobiles are inundated with synthetic odors. When we think of the physiological responses that take place in the nervous and hormonal systems when exposed to scents, do we really want to trust our wellbeing and the wellbeing of our loved ones to artificially created odors of unknown impact when the natural aromas are so easy to use and readily available?

The US Environmental Protection Agency classifies synthetic fragrances in the same category as pesticides and heavy metal solvents for potential adverse health effects!

The primary cause of asthma and many other respiratory challenges is artificial fragrances. The number one cause of an asthmatic attack is artificial fragrances. Artificial fragrances are also listed as a possible cause of sinus infections.

SO, LET'S GET REAL

Recreation Therapists have a unique opportunity to share the wonderful scents of nature with their clients/patients and at the same time promote their own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. There are scents that can be used with all age groups, under almost any condition. A drop on a cottonball can lead to fun and learning.

Newborn & Infants – When working with this age group and their families, we do not recommend the use of any scent, including essential oils unless treating a health related challenge. If needed we look at minute amounts of **Lavender** (*Lavendula angustifolia*) for inflammation and calming, **Fragonia** (*Agonis fragrans*) for respiratory challenges and inflammation, or **Chamomile, Roman** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) inflammation and calming. These are best used in a diffuser or humidifier. If one wants to use products that contain essential oils they need to know that the oils they are using are pure and of high quality.

Toddlers – Let these little ones begin to associate certain odors with their sources. Some fun essential oils to use in this play are **Carrot seed** (*Daucus carota*), **Orange** (*Citrus sinensis*), **Rose** (*Rosa centifolia*) and **Spruce** (*Picea mariana*). Exposure to a carrot, orange, rose, and spruce tree sprig and then making the association using only the sense of smell can be fun, educational and healthy. Carrot seed can lower stress and anxiety; Orange is a powerful mood elevator and a great air cleaner; Rose is calming to the nervous system; Spruce is uplifting, an excellent air cleaner and disinfectant, and is a gentle decongestive.

Pre-schoolers – A is for **Aniseed** (*Pimpinella anisum*); B is for **Bergamot** (*Citrus bergamia*); C is for **Cinnamon** (*Cinnamomun zeylanicum*). Who says you have to stick with the old alphabet soup? Looking for the pictures of various plants, smelling them and associating them with the various letters can be fun, educational, and healthy. Aniseed is a mental stimulant (smells like licorice); Bergamot is mood elevating and calming and a good anti-microbial; Cinnamon is a strong air purifier that can ease coughs. D is for Dill seed.....

Elementary – Curiosity is running high and the quest for creating continues to blossom. Planting the seeds of various "easy to grow and use" aromatic plants is an opportunity to watch life in motion. Comparing the plant and the scent the plant emits in the form of an essential oil can be fun. **Spruce needle** (*Picea mariana*) has a fresh air smell that is brings to mind a fresh forest and is a powerful antiviral; **Lavender spike** (*Lavandula spica*) grows well just about anywhere and has a camphorous yet sweet scent that is a good expectorant and air purifier; **Spearmint** (*Mentha viridas*) grows ceaselessly (watch out it can take over a garden) and is warming in the winter and cooling in the summer, can freshen the breath and ease stomach aches; **Thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*) is a great spice used in many food dishes and is also a very powerful antibiotic -a drop of Thyme linalol to the bottom of the foot can enter the bloodstream and be distributed throughout the body.

Puberty – Hormones running high, fast physical and emotional changes are taking place. Skin difficulties can often begin to erupt along with emotions of unknown origin and pushing the limits becomes an art form. Undefined aches and pains are quite real as the body magically takes leaps in growth. Essential oils can be most helpful to pubescents and pubeparents. Developing a personal scent, unique to just that one person can be a great activity that may take days to put together. **Clary sage** (*Salvia sclarea*) has a green, herbal scent and is a great balancer of female hormones (eases cramping and PMS challenges), is mildly sedative to the nervous system; **Geranium** (*Pelargonium graveolens*) has a green, rosy scent and is another hormone regulator, is quieting to the nervous system and a delightful skin tonic; **Patchouli** (*Pogostemon cablin*) has a distinctive invigorating, soothing, stimulating, strong masculine scent and is excellent in treating acne and other skin difficulties; **Bay rum** (*Pimento racemosa*) is spicy and mentally uplifting. In a four ounce spritzer bottle, add 8 drops to 1 ounce witch hazel and 3 ounces of distilled water for a great room deodorizer.

Adolescence – The desire to see the world (often anywhere but home is just great!) and understanding their role in the bigger picture of things often begins to take form. The use of essential oils to learn more about their world can be entertaining and improves the ability to retain information...all this with the added bonus of health enhancement. Eucalyptus comes in many forms from many different parts of the world. **Eucalyptus Radiata** (*Eucalyptus radiata*) hails from South Africa and is powerful in treating acne, sinus difficulties and headaches; **May chang** (*Litsea cubeba*) from China, has a powerful lemony in scent and is outstanding for mood elevation and balancing hormones; **Rosalina** (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) from Australia is renown as a cold and flu preventative, calm agitation, and treating infected wounds; **Nutmeg** (*Myristica fragrans*) is from Sri Lanka and possesses a warm nutty scent, it lifts depression, eases fatigue and stress, and is a powerful antibacterial air purifier; **Vetiver** (*Andropogon zizanioides*) is grown in Java, and is extremely grounding, it quiets tension and eases physical and mental exhaustion as well as being a good skin care oil. Almost every country produces an essential oil...this exercise can be almost unlimited. These can be tied to a geography lesson.

Adults – Beginning a new phase of life, developing new relationships, possibly beginning a family, starting a new career, moving to a new locale...all can be very exciting but can also be quite arduous. Prolonged periods of high stress can play havoc on our digestive systems and that all-important immune system. Project: how to balance everything and hold on to our good health. **Peppermint** (*Mentha x piperita*), a drop on the tip of a toothpick, can be a gift of the gods after that quick "drive-thru" meal or that "expense account gourmet delight" as it calms indigestion and eases flatulence, it is also praised for it's ability to warm in the winter and cool in the summer due to its impact on circulation (this oil is never to be used with very young children, can cause respiratory spasms); **Ylang-ylang** (*Cananga odorata*) exotic, sexy and joyfully floral is known as the great balancer - it lowers anxiety, quiets a racing heart, slows fast breathing, regulates blood sugar, and is said to raise self esteem; **Juniperberry** (*Juniperus communis*) is known to improve sluggish circulation, ease the pain of gout, detoxify the body and support memory; **Marjoram** (*Origanum marjorana*) can be used to induce sleep, lower blood pressure, calms any extreme emotion, ease muscle, and joint pain and chase away a headache.

Middle Age – Ah, that age of increased freedom, self-fulfillment, and a search for our personal and spiritual truths. **Elemi** (*Canarium luzonicum*) instills centering and peacefulness, it stimulates the thymus gland and strengthens the immune system and is a blessing for aging skin, and healing old/stubborn wounds; Frankincense (*Boswellia carteri*) lowers stress, frustration, and aggression; **Grapefruit** (*Citrus paradisi*) is a great airborne disinfectant that doubles as a reliever of edema and a major antidepressant; **Rosemary** (*Rosemarinus officinalis*) eases mental exhaustion, headache, stimulates memory, enlivens the brain and it is also renowned in the treatment of almost all respiratory infections, sore muscles, arthritis, calms an upset stomach and is an outstanding airborne disinfectant. Using any of these alone or in combination in a diffuser can create a joyful, playful environment that allows for increased awareness.

Seniors – A joyful phase filled with a lifetime of experiences and memories. This time of life can also bring grief as loved ones depart, confusion as life changes, and physical changes that can be challenging. Smell is the first sense we develop and often the last one that goes. Smell triggers memory and often a desire to share, it can boost our spirits and our immune systems, it can stimulate our minds and our appetite, it can bring us calmness and peace. Often, we can associate certain scents with a person's life style and history and thereby bring happy memories. **Bergamot** (*Citrus bergamia*) is mentally uplifting and lowers anxiety, and is also a pulmonary antiseptic; any consumer of Earl Gray Tea will recognize the joyful scent instantly; **Fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is powerful in treating respiratory difficulties of almost any nature, it is an astringent for older skin, it relieves sore muscles and joints, is recognized as an airborne preventative for flu, it is also a nerve tonic and relieves stress and tension; **Frankincense** (*Boswellia carterii*) is a major anti-inflammatory and antiseptic, it is most beneficial in treating wounds that won't heal, soothes numerous respiratory difficulties, it is an immune stimulant, and this well known resin is recognized as a reliever of nightmares and of grief – there are many reasons this was selected as a gift from the Magi; **Spikenard** (*Nardostachys jatamansi*) another sacred oil mentioned in the texts of almost every major religion, has numerous uses including allergies, rashes, inflammations, wound healing/incurable skin problems, staph infections, as an anti-spasmodic great for regulating heartbeat, it cools fever, balances the nervous system, brings calmness, inner peace and promotes peaceful sleep, this oil is used to stir memories of people from farming communities due to its earthy scent. Diffusion is an excellent method of use for this population.

Not only do singular oils have many benefits, blends have been developed to address many needs of special populations. What started out as blends for people with dementia and their care partners are now being used with many arenas such as hospice, palliative care, nursing homes, mental health programs, programs for people with developmental disabilities, as well as members of the general public. This program, known as Scentsible Solutions, include blends to address anxiety, insomnia, pain (physical and emotional), mental stimulation, undesired weight loss, and general stress reduction. LovingScents.com-click on ScentsibleSolutions.

These are just a few of the many oils, hopefully just enough to stimulate your curiosity and spur your creativity. You are invited to enjoy some of nature's most bountiful gifts...the sense of smell!