

6 BODY & MIND

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The natural high of essential oils affects our moods, memories and emotions

BLISSFUL soothes and 'fit for life' perks me up, but Prit Shroff, the creator of these aroma oils and the moving spirit behind Mumbai's 'The Healing Institute', moves me to tears—of joy.

She started by making blind children independent by teaching them how to grow and sell wheatgrass. Now she is conducting six-month aromatherapy massage classes for them.

"The blind students will learn anatomy and physiology, memorizing by touch, and will be given practical experience too," explains Shroff.

Fragrance plays a very important role in my life. I have frequent aroma massages and an aroma-vaporizer keeps me in good spirits.

Of course, aromatherapists use these essential oils not just to smell and apply, but also to ingest just like any other medicine. (Do remember to consult a health professional first.)



Handmade soaps often use their fragrance to essential oils

The Fragrant Mind

I've always been fascinated by the use of essential oils (the essence or 'soul' of the plant) for healing. Interestingly, the type of soil, rainfall, sunlight and humidity—the whole environment, actually—influence the quality of oil. This is because the process of photosynthesis produces these volatile aromatic essences. The aroma of oil is extracted by steam distillation.

Anecdotal evidence suggests smells affect mood. Your own experience tells you that. One study found that when a group of adults were exposed to lavender, they felt more relaxed and could tackle math questions faster than the group that was not. In Greece, sprigs of lavender were put in infants' cots to induce sweet dreams.

Here's how aroma oils work—when you smell them, the aromatic molecules fit into your olfactory nerves in a very specific way and send impulses to your limbic system, which is the seat of memory and emotions.

All our life experiences may be coded by the aroma that was present during that experience. This is why it is common to recall memories, even distant childhood memories, when smelling essential oils. Aromatherapists

use this system to release emotions held in our bodies from past experiences. They also believe that these oils have medicinal properties. Modern scientists are understandably sniffy about aromatherapy. They believe aromas do nothing to us, but when exposed to them, we do something to ourselves—we remember a more secure time and feel better or relaxed.

To be classed as aromatherapy, a smell would have to work the first time we smelled it. Otherwise it is just memory, they emphasize.

To Marguerite Maury goes the credit for developing aromatherapy as a holistic therapy in the 1950s. Even now, de-

BREATHE EASY

- Oils shouldn't be used too close to your eyes
- Check their uses with a certified aromatherapist
- Always check your sensitivity to oils by first trying them on a small area of your skin
- Store the oils away from direct sunlight to maintain their quality

BODY TALK



RASHMI UDAY SINGH

spite the lack of scientific research, European physicians and aromatherapists frequently prescribe certain oils for various complaints: Eucalyptus (for relieving congestion), jasmine (for depression), lavender (for anxiety), lemon, orange and other citruses (for improving mood), peppermint (for nausea), etc. These oils are used for massage, vaporization, hot and cold compresses, and steam inhalation, and as bath and skin oils and skin lotions.

The Healing Institute,
706 Shiv Park, West Wing Bldg 2,
Bhambhat Daxal Road, Mumbai-26.
Phone: 2495-2811 or 2493-5677.

Do keep calling and writing. And do keep smiling. For all your health queries, call 022-22161313 or write to PO Box 10946, Colaba, Mumbai-5 (e-mail: hr@rashmiudaysingh.com). Website: www.rashmiudaysingh.com