



aromatherapy

BY SHANNON SEXTON

making scents

Imagine the scent of fresh-roasted coffee seeping from the kitchen, a bouquet of roses lifted to your nose, or the smell of spring rain as you step outside at dawn. Pleasant scents can lift our mood, spark memories, and improve our cognition, while unpleasant ones can cloud our minds or make us sick. Why? Because there is a direct link between our sense of smell and a part of the brain called the limbic system—the structure of basic instincts that sparks our emotions and memories.

According to Ayurveda, aromas can balance or derange the doshas, which directly affect our health and well-being. So while conventional “aromachologists” prescribe the same therapeutic scent for everyone, Ayurvedic physicians take a person’s *prakriti* (constitution) into account and tailor aromatherapy to their individual needs. For example, a warming, soothing scent like cinnamon that can reduce stress in anxious *vatas* can be overheating for a tense, hot-tempered *pitta*.

If you’re interested in experimenting with aromatherapy on your own, remember that the scents that appeal to you are probably good for you. But in gen-

eral, if you know you’re vata-dominant, warming, focusing, calming, grounding scents like geranium, wintergreen, cinnamon, orange, or rose will help rebalance you. Pitta types can opt for cooling, sweet, soothing, hydrating scents like sandalwood, gardenia, jasmine, violet, or lotus. And people with excess *kapha* do best with warming, light, stimulating, expectorant aromas such as sage, cedar, pine, or eucalyptus.





Did you know? The nose has 10 million scent-detecting cells and 20 million cilia, which can detect thousands of different odors.



consumer tip

Aromatherapy is so in vogue now that even corporate planners are using “ambient fragrancing” and “sensory engineering” to improve products, increase employee productivity, and affect consumer behavior. But corporate aromatics may do more harm than good because they choose synthetic fragrances over pure essential oils to maximize profits. Synthetic scents are devoid of *prana*, the life force that natural scents emit. They pollute our bodies (and the atmosphere) with chemicals that, once absorbed into the bloodstream through the lungs and skin, create toxic waste, or *ama*—the fertilizer for all disease. Synthetic scents can also aggravate the doshas by throwing the nervous system out of balance and precipitating allergic reactions. Whenever you see “fragrance” listed as an ingredient, synthetic scents are being used. So avoid those products and choose ones that say “essential oils” if you want the real thing. In general (but not always), the more expensive an essential oil is, the more pure and therapeutic it will be for your body, breath, and mind. ●

mood oils

Here are a few sample recipes you can try at home. Massage one of the mixtures on your pulse or add it to any Ayurvedic treatment that calls for essential oil. You can also omit the oil base and put a mixture into an aromatherapy diffuser or a hot bath.

- calming and warming** 3 drops *each* neroli & lemon +
(relieves anxiety; 2 drops *each* jasmine & sandal-
balances vata) wood + 1 drop vanilla + 1 oz.
pure jojoba oil base
- calming and cooling** 5 drops *each* sandalwood &
(relieves anger; 3 drops *each* vetiver + 1 drop jasmine +
balances pitta) 1 oz. pure jojoba oil base
- stimulating** 4 drops bergamot + 3 drops
(relieves depression; 3 drops *each* lavender & basil + 1 oz.
balances kapha) pure jojoba oil base
- sedating** 6 drops rose + 2 drops *each*
(relieves insomnia; 2 drops *each* jasmine & chamomile + 1 oz.
balances vata & pitta) pure jojoba oil base
- grounding and strengthening** 4 drops patchouli + 2 drops
(relieves fear; balances vata) *each* sandalwood & cardamom
+ 1 oz. pure jojoba oil base

—Pratima Raichur, *Ayurvedic Beauty Care*

