

SLEEP MANAGEMENT

HOW ESSENTIAL OILS CAN HELP YOU SLEEP BETTER

NCIM & Dr Sue Jackson, Chartered Psychologist



Aromatherapy is the therapeutic application or medicinal use of aromatic substances known as essential oils. Aromatherapy works by stimulating smell receptors in the nose, which send messages through the nervous system to the limbic system—the part of the brain that controls emotions. Essential oils are plant extracts (plants, flowers, citrus fruits, etc.), obtained through distillation with water or steam, dry distillation or mechanical processes, and have been found to have varying degrees of antimicrobial, antiviral, antifungal and antioxidant properties. Essential oils can support your health and well-being and should be used in a safe way.

USING ESSENTIAL OILS

- Essential oils are very potent. It is important that you follow the guidelines on the product that you buy, or get advice from an aromatherapist. When it says two or three drops of lavender that's what it means. Less is more. More than 3 drops of lavender could act as a stimulant and keep you awake!
- When testing to find out which oil you would like to use, try wafting the bottle under your nose a reasonable distance away, or use tester strips provided, rather than smelling from the top of the bottle, as some essential oils can be very potent
- Essential oils are widely available in health food shops, pharmacies, in some supermarkets and at well-known high-street shops, as well as online.
- You can buy oil burners where you put a few drops of oil in water with a tealight underneath, although these should not be left unattended. Alternatively choose an essential oil diffuser, which uses water and electricity. These turn off themselves, which is great at bedtime, and often come with colour-changing lights.
- There are a variety of products which contain essential oils that you might want to try. These may include bubble baths and shower gels/oils specifically formulated for night-time use. There are also some wonderful body lotions and body oils formulated to help you drift off to sleep, which can be lovely to use.
- Some people prefer to use scented candles. Again, you don't want to leave these burning unattended or while you are asleep.
- There are also pillow sprays which some people find very effective – remember to follow the instructions on the bottle.
- You could bathe with essential oils, diluting them in a carrier oil or full-fat milk or similar, or if you prefer showers, put a few drops onto a washcloth and place it in the bottom of the shower. You can also buy shower steamers that are placed in the shower. The fragrance of the oil will waft up in the steam and have a beneficial effect.
- You can also blend oils to create the effect that you want, so 2-3 drops of lavender with 2-3 drops of geranium might work for you.

ESSENTIAL OILS FOR SLEEP THERAPY



Lavender

Probably the most popular oil, often used to reduce anxiety and improve mood. Available as English or French lavender, organic or non-organic. It can also be bought in the form of a cooling headstick, or essential oil roll-on, which can be applied to the temples prior to sleep.



Sweet Marjoram

Creates a warm relaxed feeling. Not to be confused with Spanish marjoram.



Roman Chamomile

Gives a feeling of warmth and relaxation. Chamomile can also be drunk in the form of tea. Adding honey to it can make it more palatable.



Geranium

Counteracts nervous tension.



Sandalwood

Popular with men and has a lovely velvety fragrance. Quite often found in soaps which can be used at bedtime. Blends well with lavender and chamomile, helps manage feelings of anxiety and stress.



Neroli

Very expensive, but specifically helps with problems related to insomnia.



Mandarin

'You can add a few drops to a base oil (grapeseed, sweet almond or similar), and massage into feet last thing at night.

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DEALING WITH DAYTIME SLEEPINESS

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ONE MINUTE MEDITATION TO START YOUR DAY

Excessive daytime sleepiness can be an indicator of a sleep disorder, but assuming that that's not the case, then analysing how you're feeling at the start of your day is a good place to start.

For one minute, bring your focus first to your breathing, then to your body, then to your thoughts, and finally to your emotions. The idea is not that you judge but that you become aware of what your body is trying to tell you and thus where your vulnerabilities lie for today.

1 Did your breathing tell you anything?

Was your breathing shallow or deep? Were you aware of your breathing changing during the meditation?

2 What was your body saying to you?

Was there any pain or discomfort that you became aware of?

3 What were your thoughts telling you?

Was it a list of things to do? Were there more worries hiding under the list of things to do? Is there a problem hovering in the background that was difficult to pin down because of all the other noise?

4 What about your emotions?

How did you feel during the meditation? Was it easy to get started, or difficult? How are you feeling now it is over?



CORIANDER



BERGAMOT



LEMON



THYME



PEPPERMINT



GINGER

CLEAR YOUR HEAD

While essential oils can be used for relaxation purposes, they can also be used to clear your head and help you feel more energised. You might want to try the following either in shower/bath products, in a diffuser or placed on a tissue for you to sniff occasionally.

Stimulating essential oils include: Basil, Eucalyptus citriodora, Eucalyptus radiata, Grapefruit, Lemon, Patchouli, Peppermint, Spearmint, and Rosemary.

Some people might find the following are also helpful on their own or added to blends: Bergamot, Cypress, Coriander, Ginger, Geranium, and Palmarosa.

WHAT ARE YOU EATING AND DRINKING?

Research tends to suggest that those who consume fatty foods are more likely to feel tired afterwards. You might want to keep an eye on what you eat and make sure you balance your energy levels by eating more protein, complex carbohydrates, healthy fats (this includes nuts, avocados, olive oil) and avoiding refined sugars.

While caffeine can help give you a morning boost, too much can be a problem – a bit like unnecessarily revving your car's engine while waiting at the lights. It's better to make sure you stay properly hydrated, as dehydration is known to increase feelings of fatigue.

WATCH YOUR POSTURE & MOVE REGULARLY

When we're tired we tend to slump which compresses our lung space making it difficult for our body to breathe effectively increasing the feelings of fatigue. Slumping also reinforces the message of tiredness that the brain is sending the body, sitting up and taking an interest in your surroundings helps to counter these effects.

If you're feeling very tired, getting up and moving around regularly during the day is very helpful. Peak time for daytime fatigue is approximately 2:00pm, so a lunchtime walk can really help you manage this.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU TALK TO YOURSELF

If all you do during the day is keep reminding yourself how poor your sleep was and how tired you are, you're going to make it more difficult to manage your daytime energy.

That's not to ignore how you're feeling, but it's better to acknowledge that "my energy is feeling low – I need to get up and move" than it is to say "I feel tired".

If you would like to learn more about Sleep Management and the courses we run with Dr Sue Jackson, contact enquiries@ncim.org.uk

If you are concerned about your Sleep and how it is affecting your wellbeing, speak to our NCIM Wellbeing Team (Holistic Doctor, Holistic Pharmacist, Medical Homeopathy, Mindfulness, Nutrition), or contact your GP to get the support you need.