

Aromatherapy

What is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is an integrative (complementary) therapy that uses essential oils from the roots, leaves, seeds, or blossoms of plants to help support emotional, physical, or spiritual well-being. Integrative or complementary therapies, like aromatherapy, are used in addition to (or along with) standard treatments like chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. Aromatherapy may help cancer-related symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, pain, nausea, fatigue, or loss of appetite.

How does aromatherapy work?

Aromatherapy uses your body's sense of smell to connect the smell receptors in your nose with different areas of the brain that control emotion and memory. When you breathe in essential oils, it makes the nerves in your nose send messages to the area of the brain that controls emotion and memory.

Each essential oil has its own kind of scent (smell) and uses. It is important to use true or pure essential oils for aromatherapy. Perfume or scented flavors for foods are not essential oils. Examples of aromatherapy scents and uses include:

- Lemon – may help you to relax or boost your energy and mood
- Peppermint – may help with nausea, an upset stomach or pain
- Lavender – may help you to relax, help with sleep or reduce anxiety

How do I use essential oils for aromatherapy?

There are different ways to use essential oils for aromatherapy. This may include breathing in essential oils by using a room diffuser, vaporizer, or cotton ball. Another way to use essential oils is to mix them with other products (carrier oils such as body lotions, creams, or massage oils), and apply onto your skin. Follow the instructions below for more information.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- **Cotton Balls:** Put 2 to 3 drops of essential oil onto a cotton ball. The cotton ball can be placed in a sealed plastic bag to keep it clean and from drying out. When you want to use aromatherapy, open the plastic bag and gently breathe in the scent for a few seconds. The same cotton ball can be used until it becomes dry or is no longer scented. Tissues or wash cloths can be used instead of cotton balls.
- **Room Diffuser or Vaporizer:** Put 2 to 3 drops of essential oil into an aromatherapy fan, mister or diffuser. It is important to choose a fan or diffuser that is made for use with essential oils and to follow the directions on the package. A mister or diffuser system that does not use standing water may be easier to keep clean and dry in-between each use.
- **Carrier Oils:** Add 2 to 3 drops of essential oil to lotion, cream, or massage oil and rub onto the skin, hands, or feet.

Important Safety Concerns

It is important to talk with your doctor or health care provider before you use any complementary or integrative therapies or essential oils. Aromatherapy can make certain health conditions or illnesses worse. Here are some important safety concerns when using essential oils.

- Keep oils away from children.
- Keep oils away from your eyes.
- Use only the suggested amount of each oil.
- Read and follow all warnings on packages or bottles.
- **Do not swallow essential oils or put them in food.** It could be dangerous to swallow certain essential oils. Certain medicines could interact with essential oils.
- People with certain health conditions or illnesses should not use aromatherapy. Talk to your doctor if you have any of these conditions or illnesses and want to use aromatherapy:
 - ▶ Lung conditions, asthma or respiratory disease
 - ▶ Skin allergies
 - ▶ Pregnancy