

Ayurveda and Aromatherapy, The Use Of Essential Oils

Introduction

Ayurveda is the world's oldest recorded healing system that has been practiced in India for more than 6,000 years. Ayurveda is all about achieving health through harmony and balance by following the cycles of Mother Nature and by listening to the body's intelligence. It represents a holistic system of prevention and rejuvenation. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health that can be achieved through the practice of yoga, meditation, mantra, breathing techniques, diet, medicinal herbs and cleansing methods. Ayurveda uses natural tools and resources, such as heat, cold, food, herbs, minerals, sound and vibration to achieve an optimal state of wellbeing.

Aromatherapy forms a powerful component of Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of longevity. Miller and Miller argue that in today's busy world, aromatherapy with essential oils can be very important in therapeutics because they are concentrated, easy to use, have an immediate effect on the body and the mind and do not lose potency. Aromatherapy consists of the use of fragrant oils to promote the healing process of the body. It includes the use of incense and flower essences. It is a supplementary therapy used mainly for treating the restless mind and intense emotions. It helps with concentration, focus and meditation. It soothes the nerves, calms the emotions and brings a sense of peace to the mind and the sensory organs (Frawley, 1996).

The effect of fragrances

Fragrance is the sensory quality that belongs to the earth element and its corresponding sense organ, the nose. Through the appropriate use of fragrances, the mind and the emotions can be harmonized instantaneously for a short period of time. According to Dr. Frawley, aromatic substances can purify the sense organs and all the subtle senses and rebalance the doshas (the bodily humors) of Vata, Pitta and Kapha and the three vital essences of prana, tejas and ojas. They strengthen the immune system, help counter the bacteria and viruses and remove stagnant air. They assist in clearing negative emotions, thoughts and feelings. They increase positive emotions like joy, hope, peace, love and happiness. They can clear and heighten perceptions and improve concentration (Frawley, 1996).

Components of essential oils

According to Miller and Miller, essential oils are made up of the following components: alcohols, aldehydes, ketones, phenols, terpenes, sesquiterpenes, ethers and esters. Those chemicals found in essential oils of plants are used as hormones for smell to attract pollinating insects. They are also used for growth, reproduction, and as a defense mechanism to protect the plant from herbivores and insects. The chemicals in essential oils play an important part in protection against bacterial, viral or fungal invasion. Plants that have very high concentrations of essential oils are called herbs. Essential oils can be found

in all parts of the plant. The flowers produce fragrances that are of sedating, narcotic or relaxing nature. The resins, woods, and barks produce heating essential oils that help move fluids in the body. The leaves have cooling properties that are coming from the green color of chlorophyll. The roots are of earthy nature and can be very grounding. The fruits produce aromatic oils that are expanding and stimulating. All the qualities of the essential oils can be used to alter or balance the doshas and the state of mind (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Functional groups

Aldehydes are known to be anti-inflammatory, calming, sedative and anti-viral. Oils high in aldehydes have kapha-producing qualities, being cold and wet. Essential oils with this chemical have a lemon-like smell, such as lemongrass, lemon balm, citronella and eucalyptus citriodora. Ketones are wound-healing chemicals and ease the secretions of mucous. Essential oils that are high ketones are camphor, rosemary, sage, eucalyptus globulus and hyssop. They also represent qualities of Kapha dosha, being cold and wet. Alcohols kill bacteria, are energizing, vitalizing, antiviral and diuretic. Essential oils high in alcohols include rose, rosewood, peppermint, myrtle, tea tree, sandalwood, patchouli and ginger. They are wet but slightly heated. Phenols are very bactericidal. They are stimulating, invigorating, warming, but potential skin irritants and can produce slight liver toxicity if taken in high doses for an extended period of time. Examples of such oils, which are of heating quality, are clove, cinnamon, thyme, oregano and savory cumin (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Terpenes are stimulating, potential skin irritants and have anti-viral properties. Oils with high amounts of terpenes include lemon, orange, bergamot, black pepper, pine oils, nutmeg and angelica. This essential oil is hot and drying. It has the smallest molecules and has an immediate effect on the olfactory organ and evaporates very quickly. Sesquiterpenes are anti-inflammatory, sedative, anti-viral, anti-carcinogenic, bacteriostatic and immune stimulants. They are long lasting in the smell and include blue chamomile, tansy, yarrow and immortelle. Esters are anti-fungal, sedative, calming, antispasmodic, fungicidal and anti-inflammatory. Essential oils that contain high amounts of esters include Roman chamomile, lavender, clary sage, petitgrain and bergamot. Lactones are the most anti-inflammatory compounds and include the essential oil arnica. Ethers are harmonizing to the nervous system. They are antiseptic, stimulant, expectorant, spasmolytic and diuretic. This group includes such oils as cinnamon, clove, anise, basil, tarragon, parsley and sassafras. They are sweet and can be applied to all doshas (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Production methods

Steam distillation, cold press and carbon dioxide hyperbaric extraction are some of the methods to obtain essential oils. Distillation uses steam or pressure to derive the aromatic oils from the plants. The herb is placed on screens over boiling water. As the steam passes through the plant, the volatile components are evaporated and condensed in a cooling coil, forming a combination of distilled water and volatile components. That mixture is collected in a Florentine vase. The distilled water is heavier and sinks to the bottom, while the essential oils rise to the top and are captured in a glass bottle.

Steam-distilled essential oils are rich in smell and some of them have unlimited shelf life. Cold pressing is most useful in the processing of citrus rinds such as lemon, orange, grapefruit, tangerine, bergamot and mandarin. The rinds are chopped or ground and pressed to extract the essential oil components found in the skin of the fruit. Cold pressing produces a combination of essential oils and watery components. This process produces essential oils, which are not pure, tend to oxidize or lose potency if not refrigerated. The carbon dioxide hyperbaric extraction method utilizes 22 atmospheres of pressure in the presence of pure carbon dioxide gas. At such high pressure the carbon dioxide is liquefied and has the ability to extract the essential oils components from the plant. This method is useful where the flowers have light and gentle aromatic qualities. This production is costly and essential oils are more expensive (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Essential oils are light and sensitive and therefore should be stored in an amber or colored bottles away from extreme heat and cold. They should be labeled with the botanical name of the extracted plant and with the information about the production method being used. Their prices vary according to the type of production. It can take up to 2,000 pounds of rose petals to produce one pound of rose essential oil through distillation. For lavender flowers the ration is 50 to 1. And for citrus, it takes 25 pounds of rind to produce one pound of its essential oil. Therefore, rose oil can sell for \$400 or more for one ounce and the price for citrus oil can be only \$3 for one ounce (Miller and Miller, 1995).

The energetics, the doshas and chart location

Unlike western aromatherapy, Ayurveda makes the distinction in the energetics of each herb and essential oils, such as warming or cooling, drying or moisturizing. According to Ayurvedic principles, for a Pitta (fire) person who needs an herbal remedy for indigestion, a cooling herb such as coriander would be recommended. Oregano, which is an herb for indigestion as well, is warming and would aggravate a Pitta individual. Ayurveda recognizes which essential oils would be suitable for each dosha. Best for Vata are warm, stimulating essential oils like camphor, wintergreen, cinnamon, musk, galangal or cypress. Pitta types enjoy fragrant flowers as most flowers have cooling and calming properties. Suitable flowery oils for Pitta include gardenia, jasmine, rose, honeysuckle, violet, iris and lotus. The best essential oil for Pitta is sandalwood, especially when applied regularly to the third eye. Kapha does best with essential oils that are warm, light, stimulating and expectorant. Such oils include sage, cedar, pine, myrrh, camphor, musk, patchouli and cinnamon (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Essential oils can be arranged in a vertical line. The coolest oils are at the top, essential oils with their neutral quality are in the middle and the oils that are warming are at the bottom. Here is an example: blue chamomile is cooling, lavender is neutral and thyme is warming. Cooling oils are appropriate for Pitta individuals as they make a fiery Pitta person cool down. Neutral oils, such as lavender, balance all doshas as they bring a person back to his or her neutral, normal function. Thyme and clove essential oils are good for Vata and Kapha types because they are warming. Water loving or wet (hydrophilic) essential oils have high polarity and mix well with water. Examples of wet essential oils that are good for Vata are geranium and rose. They have a high content of alcohol. Lipophilic or fat loving

essential oils with low polarity are citrus and pine. Neutral oils include lavender, clary sage, Roman chamomile, basil, anise and tarragon (Miller and Miller, 1995).

Application

Essential oils when applied on the body or inhaled penetrate the epithelial tissues through their pathways. Skin, nasal passages, bronchioles, lungs and gastro-intestinal tract are all part of the epithelial tissues. Essential oils enter into the circulation through the lymphatic system and the blood system. They can be carried directly to the liver or into the bloodstream. During the circulation process, body tissues and organs can absorb the healing properties of the essential oils and metabolize them. Nothing stays in the body for a long time, including the food that a person consumes on a daily basis. Essential oils leave the body within 48 hours due to their volatile nature (Miller and Miller, 1995).

According to Frawley, aromatic oils are mostly applied externally as they are potent. Essential oils can be placed on special sites on the skin, such as in-between eyebrows, the top of the head, the temples (for headaches) and the root of the nose (for sinus problems) or behind the ears or on the neck. One can also put a drop of the oil on the back of one's hand or wrist and smell it when needed. Other important points are the heart, the center of the chest (for lung disorders) or in-between shoulder blades (for Pitta imbalances). Solar plexus is another very important point that is below the heart chakra (the middle of the chest). Aromatic oils applied at the area of the solar plexus are for digestive disorders or to strengthen one's will. For sexual debility essential oils are applied at the area around the navel (Frawley, 1996).

For internal use, essential oils can be made into alcohol tinctures and taken with warm water. Aromatic herbs can be taken as powders but their shelf life is usually very short. Taken in a proper medium, essential oils stimulate the mind and nervous system through the tongue and sense of taste. It is best to taste the herbs and hold them in the mouth for a minute before swallowing. In this way aromatic herbs can work directly on the Prana, the life force, in the head area. One should never take the pure essential oils internally. A teaspoon of any essential oil is enough to burn a hole in the stomach and can be fatal. Essential oils are volatile, irritating and destructive of the mucous membranes and the eyes (Frawley, 1996).

Two types of aromatic oils

Aromatic oils are of two basic types: flower fragrances and spicy oils. Flower fragrances like rose and jasmine are sweet in taste and cooling in energy. Jasmine and chrysanthemum are sweet and bitter. Flower fragrances decrease Pitta and Vata but increase Kapha. They stimulate the heart chakra and calm the emotions. Jasmine and gardenia strengthen the immune system and have natural antibiotic properties. Spicy oils are pungent in taste and are warming in energy. They decrease Kapha and Vata but can increase Pitta. They clear the head, sinuses and lungs, stimulate the mind and increase the power of clear perception. They improve nerve function and can be analgesic such as camphor and mint. They also activate the circulatory and digestive systems. Cinnamon,

ginger and cardamom are pungent and sweet and are suitable for Vata. Sage and camphor are purely pungent and are best for Kapha. Bitter spicy oils like wormwood and vetiver are appropriate for Pitta (Frawley, 1996).

Self-care: bath, inhalation and compress

Bathing with essential oils is one of the methods of personal care. It aids in detoxification, relaxation, rejuvenation and connection with the body and prana, the life force. When feeling spacey and disconnected, Vata can be balanced by the use of rosewood, jatamansi and yarrow. During the hot summer, Pitta can be balanced by the use of the following essential oils: lavender, sandalwood and champa. Kapha nature can be balanced by the use of cypress, juniper berry and orange. It is more effective when the bath is combined with meditation or with the sound of relaxing music. Inhalation of essential oils is another way to bring change, transformation and healing to the body and mind. It stimulates the limbic system and brings out the immediate release of hormones and neurotransmitters to instill emotional balance. When there is too much stress in a person's life, hot compress with essential oils can transform erratic and shallow breathing into deep inhalation and exhalation to restore peace of mind. Compresses help open the pores and allow the volatile oils to penetrate the skin and go into the tissue. Miller and Miller argue that essential oils penetrate the skin two hundred times faster than water.

Conclusion

Ayurveda is the ancient Indian science of life and longevity that has been practiced in the East for over 6,000 years. Ayurveda is the Vedic science of healing for both body and mind using the vata-pitta-kapha principle. It emphasizes the importance of balance and harmony in one's life that leads to perfect health and wellbeing. Ayurveda uses natural resources, such as cold, heat, minerals, food, herbs and sound therapy as well as yogic methods to restore the body and mind. Aromatherapy forms a powerful supplementary component of Ayurveda used mainly to treat the restless mind and unbalanced emotions. Aromas have a great power to stimulate, calm and heal. They can quickly change people's immediate environment and help eliminate negative thoughts and feelings. Aromatherapy consists of the use of fragrant oils, flower essences and incense to promote the healing process of the mind and the body. It assists in immediate relief in stressful situations, aids in concentration and meditation, calms the emotions, soothes the nerves and balances the three doshas, Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Best essential oils for Vata are warm and stimulating like camphor, wintergreen, cinnamon, musk or cypress. Pitta types enjoy fragrant flowers because they have cooling and calming properties. They include gardenia, jasmine, rose, honeysuckle, iris and lotus. Kapha does best with essential oils that are warm, light, stimulating and expectorant. Good oils include sage, cedar, pine, myrrh, camphor, musk, patchouli and cinnamon.

Works Cited

Frawley, David. *Ayurvedic and the Mind*. Wisconsin: Lotus Press, 1996

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