Essential Oils Aren’t Just a Fad: Find Out How They May Help Reduce Your Back Pain

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Essential Oils for Back Pain

If you have any type of social media profile, you’ve undoubtedly noticed a friend hawking essential oils. According to said friend, they can do it all! Freshen a room, improve focus, reduce pain, cure a cold, promote world peace!

Ok, maybe not world peace — but maybe your friend is on to something.

As it turns out, essential oils aren’t just a fad (though they are having a moment) — they have been around for centuries. Various oils have been used in ancient medicine to treat various maladies.

Oils are derived from various parts of the plant, such as the petals, roots and stems. They are removed through a process called steam distillation.

The Research

Until recently, there has been very little research that proved the efficacy of essential oils; they were just used and anecdotal evidence was passed on from one generation to the next.

According to the University of Minnesota, there is research that indicates “…positive effects for a variety of health concerns including infections, pain, anxiety, depression, tumors, premenstrual syndrome, nausea, and many others.”

However, the research may be flawed. Here are some issues with these research studies:

- Essential oils are not standardized. This means that an oil that is purchased by a company in January, then purchased again in May, could be slightly different. Why? The plants that the oils are derived from are affected by the weather and geography, along with various other factors — thus, the oil may be different. This makes it impossible to standardize unless the oil is altered, which means it is no longer genuine or natural.
- Blinded studies are difficult with aromatic substances. Because people associate scents with certain experiences and memories, it makes it difficult to account for how the essential oil affects people.
- It is difficult to get funding for studies that involve essential oils. According to the University of Minnesota, “Many conventional drug studies are funded by the pharmaceutical industry. There is little motivation for these companies to fund research on natural plant substances because they cannot easily be patented, limiting the potential for profit.”
- It is difficult to detect what caused the outcome. When an oil is applied topically, it is often applied using rubbing or massage. Was the response due to the oil or the massage?

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If you're looking into trying out essential oils for back pain because the research you've read is compelling, you're sick of trying pills, you've just had enough and perhaps you're trying to appease your friend on Facebook — here are a few oils that you could try!

- **Peppermint oil** — known for its powerful scent, peppermint oil is a powerful natural analgesic as it can contain upwards of 44% pure menthol.
- **Wintergreen oil** — similar to peppermint oil, wintergreen oil is a natural analgesic. It contains methyl salicylate, which is similar to aspirin. Wintergreen oil should be used cautiously in those who take blood thinners as it can increase the risk of bleeding.
- **Lemongrass oil** — this oil is often used for its antifungal properties. However, there are also studies that indicate it has anti-inflammatory properties. When back pain is related to inflammation, lemongrass oil may be effective.
- **Ginger oil** — not just for cooking, ginger oil is also known for its anti-inflammatory properties!
- **Lavender oil** — this oil is one of the most widely used essential oils, and for good reason! Lavender oil has many uses, such as treating headaches and muscle pain.

How to Use Essential Oils

Essential oils are potent and as such, must be used carefully. There are various ways to use them to treat back pain.

To apply essential oils topically, generally a carrier oil should be used. A carrier oil, such as jojoba oil or olive oil, helps to dilute the oil. Mix six drops of the chosen essential oil into six teaspoons of a carrier oil then apply to the back liberally. Ensure that your hands are washed after application.

Take a bath with essential oils. A warm or hot bath can relieve inflammation — and adding an essential oil known for its pain-relieving qualities can up the ante. In order to reap the benefits, add 10 drops of an essential oil to the bath, then relax. Ahhhh. Make sure to rinse the tub well as the oils can make the surfaces slippery.

To inhale the oils, place several drops into a diffuser with water as directed. The diffuser will allow the scent to diffuse into the air.

The Bottom Line…

Essential oils have been used to treat back pain for hundreds of years; though research is not conclusive, it is still in its infancy. If you want to use essential oils to treat back pain, there are several options — more than what is listed in this article. Make sure to speak with your physician about using essential oils for back pain.