

Keeping In Touch

Volume 1, Issue 4

November 1, 2008

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Aromatherapy's Effect on Moods and Minds

Researchers have shown that lavender and rosemary administered through aromatherapy positively affect psychological and physiological functioning. In a study conducted by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami Medical School, first published in the *International Journal of Neuroscience*, researchers assessed the effect of lavender and rosemary on alertness, mood and the brain's electrical activity, and on subjects' ability to perform math computations.

In the study, 40 adult faculty and staff members of the University of Miami Medical School were randomly placed into one of two groups, and were asked to inhale the scent of either lavender or rosemary essential oil for three minutes. Those in the lavender group were expected to show an increase in alpha and beta band activity, suggesting relaxation. Those in the rosemary group were expected to have a decrease in alpha and beta band activity, suggesting greater alertness.

Results showed that study expectations were correct: Participants in the lavender group experienced an increase in beta band activity, suggesting drowsiness; an improvement in mood; a feeling of greater relaxation; and better performance on math computations. The rosemary group showed a decrease group showed a decrease in alpha and beta power, suggesting alertness and lower levels of anxiety; and were faster but not more accurate at performing math computations. Subjects first took three

assessment tests: an anxiety-inventory questionnaire, a profile-of-mood-states questionnaire and a series of timed math computations. While seated in a massage chair, each subject was then given a vial containing a dental swab soaked in a grapeseed-oil base with three drops of either lavender or rosemary essential oil. The subjects were instructed to sit quietly and breathe normally through the nose with their eyes closed. After three minutes of aromatherapy, the subjects again took the two self-report tests and did the math computations. For three minutes before, during and after the aromatherapy, EEG readings were taken through a cap worn on participant's heads to measure the electrical activity of their brains.

Results of the self-assessment test data indicated that both the lavender and rosemary groups experienced lower levels of anxiety and felt more relaxed after the aromatherapy. Only the lavender group reported a significantly better mood. The rosemary group reported feeling more alert.

Math test results showed that the lavender group experienced an increase in drowsiness, while the rosemary group showed EEG patterns that reflected a greater state of alertness.

- Source: Touch Research Institute

STRETCHES FOR THE NECK AND SHOULDERS

These feel great anytime, but are especially helpful if you work at a computer.

Note: If you feel any of these movements are difficult because of tension, let your massage therapist know you would like to work on releasing that area at your next session. If you have pain with any of these stretches, discontinue until you discuss it with your physician.

1. Sit straight with your shoulders relaxed. Inhale and squeeze your shoulders up toward your ears. Hold tightly for several seconds and relax as you exhale. Repeat several times.
2. Still sitting straight, exhale and let your neck drop forward. Relax for about 2 seconds, then lift your head to the center. Then let your head drop to one side, relax, and return to center. Repeat to the other side.

Do the whole sequence 5 to 10 times, the more often the better.

3. Stretch your spine. Sit straight in your chair. With your hands clasped behind your head, exhale and turn slowly to the right. Look behind you, twisting as far as is comfortable. Don't strain. Hold for several seconds, and inhale as you return to the starting position. Repeat on the other side. Repeat 10-20 times, up to 3 times a day.




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SELF-CARE FOR A HEADACHE IN PROGRESS

For a headache in progress, try the following. You may find the earlier you stop whatever you're doing and try one of these techniques, the more likely you will find relief. Note: If you ever experience a sudden severe headache unlike anything you've experienced before, seek medical attention immediately.

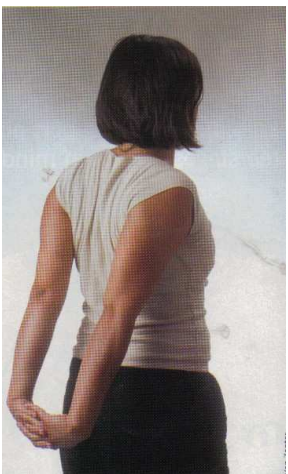
1. Cold or hot packs. Put ice (or a bag of frozen peas) in a cloth and press it against the painful spot, or against the back of your neck. If you don't get relief, switch to a heating pad, hot water bottle, a microwavable hot pack, or a hot, wet towel, covered with plastic wrap and a dry towel or fleece to hold in the heat. Try each for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
2. Brush your hair. Brush from the temple, moving gradually to the base of the skull. Do one side a time. Then work down the center of your head.
3. Massage your head.
 - Use your fingers to make small circles on your forehead, temples, and scalp. Massage for up to 30 seconds in each spot. Use a comfortable amount of pressure.
 - Try this acupressure technique. With your thumb and first finger, squeeze a point near the base of your thumb on your other hand in the webbing between your thumb and first finger. Hold until the discomfort subsides. Repeat up to five times.
4. Also try neck massage. Reach around and cup the base of your neck with your palm. Using a comfortable amount of pressure, knead the muscle slowly from bottom to top.
5. Consider increasing the frequency of your massage sessions, even if you must reduce the length of each session. The benefits of massage are cumulative and may act to prevent the development of tension that can lead to headaches.

RESOURCES

Headache Help: A Complete Guide to Understanding Headaches and the Medicines that Relieve Them. Lawrence Robbins, MD and Susan Long. An Alternative Medicine Definitive Guide to Headaches. Robert Milne, MD and Blake Moore with Burton Goldberg.

Front-of-shoulder stretch

Lace your fingers together behind your back, palms facing up. Slowly turn your elbows inward while straightening your arms and slightly arching your back. Breathe deeply and hold for 10-15 seconds.



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Catch Some More ZZZs

1. Give yourself permission to go to bed. As hard as it may be to put away your to-do list, make sleep a priority. You'll thank yourself in the morning.
2. Unwind early in the evening. Try to deal with worries and distractions several hours before bedtime.
3. Develop a sleep ritual. Doing the same things each night just before bed signals your body to settle down for the night.
4. Keep regular hours. Keep your biological clock in check by going to bed around the same time each night and waking up close to the same time each morning—even on weekends.
5. Create a restful place to sleep. Sleep in a cool, quiet, dark room.
6. Sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress.
7. Exercise regularly. Regular exercise can help relieve daily tension and stress—but don't exercise too close to bedtime or you may have trouble falling asleep.
8. Cut down on stimulants. Consuming stimulants, such as caffeine, in the evening can make it more difficult to fall asleep.
9. Don't smoke. Smokers take longer to fall asleep and wake up more often during the night.
10. Reduce alcohol intake. Drinking alcohol shortly before bedtime interrupts and fragments sleep.

