Top 5 Essential Oils for Asthma Management

by ANGLEA FINLAY

Essential Oils for Asthma

Essential oils are extracted from the flowers, leaves and roots of certain plants, which means they are about as close to a natural remedy as you can get. That has a big appeal for many asthmatics who have had to rely on pharmaceutical relief for their symptoms, a method of treatment that can be as expensive as it is unnerving. In this article, we will be looking at the best essential oils for asthma and how to properly use them.

However, even plants can be problematic, especially when dealing with a sensitive health condition that reacts to environmental changes. Before loading up your medicine cabinet with your favorite scented oils for asthma relief, consider how best to use them, what to avoid and how to make sure they don't interfere with a healthy asthma management plan.

How the Right Aromas Can Ease Your Airways

Asthma can manifest differently in people, but there is a predictable set of asthma symptoms that plague most sufferers: mucus build-up, chest constriction, wheezing, and coughing. Certain herbal remedies are known to tackle one or more of these symptoms. They can leave you breathing easier in a matter of minutes.

1. Lavender

It has long been used as a relaxation agent in creams, candles and all sorts of household products, but lavender might bring some deeper therapeutic benefits as well.

One study reports that lavender may have anti-inflammatory effects on the airways, based on the effects on mice. Researchers found that mice who were given doses of lavender to breathe in had fewer inflammation markers and less mucus in the lungs and airways.

2. Chamomile

A mild sedative with pleasantly relaxing effects, chamomile in all its forms will help calm the body and mind. Roman chamomile seems to be particularly good at calming bronchial spasms, while German chamomile might be able to prevent the release of irritating histamines with a compound called chamazulene. Like lavender, chamomile can work well in a chest rub or even a steam.

3. Tea Tree

This oil is famous for clearing away oils and dirt in the skin, but it may also help clear out your lungs. Advocates insist that tea tree oil can function as an expectorant, helping to expel built-up mucus in the airways and clear the way for better breathing. Dab a bit on a warm, damp washcloth and hold it to your face as you breathe in.

4. Eucalyptus

You might have noticed eucalyptus in the ingredient list of cough drops and cold meds, since Eucalyptol (the active compound in the plant) can help to break up phlegm and expand constricted airways.

Dropping a bit of oil into a steaming tub of water is a tried-and-true home remedy for stuffed-up airways and might help you tame your asthma.

5. Peppermint

This pungent mint is known for its energetic properties, but peppermint can also work as a decongestant and antihistamine. Vapors can clear a stuffy nose and perhaps even relieve airway spasms.

Do beware of its powerful effect, as even a few drops on the skin can be uncomfortably strong. Try a drop or two on a cotton pad, and hold it near your face as you inhale the scent for a few minutes.

The Do's and Don’ts of Therapeutic Oils for Asthma

It’s easy to get wrapped up in the big health claims of natural medicine, especially when there seem to be few side effects. However, it is rare that any treatment is completely free of complications.

Essential oils can be a non-invasive complement to your regular asthma management, but they can also be more powerful than you might imagine.

Don't Rely Solely on Oils

Remember, studies on essential oils for asthma are limited and many have not been well-controlled. Any optimistic results should be taken with a grain of salt, rather than as a promising new cure.

If you do choose to use oils, use them in conjunction with your doctor-prescribed inhalers, control medication and smart lifestyle changes.

Dilute the Oils

Essential oils are highly concentrated, and can be more powerful than you imagine when taken directly from the bottle. It’s best to dilute any therapeutic oil in another base oil, water or a lotion if you plan to apply it anywhere on your body, especially if you have never used it before. A chest rub, diffuser or steam can bring relief without danger or discomfort. Diluted oils are great for an asthma massage or for use on acupressure points for asthma.

Don’t Skimp on Quality

Any vitamin, mineral or alternative medicine comes in a range of brands, and those brands can differ considerably in quality.

If you are using essential oils as therapy, only use therapeutic-grade essential oils that are designed for skin contact and safe for inhalation. Other types can include irritating compounds for your airways.

Use Restraint

Essential oils are intense — they are the pure chemical compounds of a plant, after all. You might be tempted to add an extra spoonful for extra benefits, but the therapy doesn’t work like that.

Be sure to follow guidelines closely, using only a drop or two at a time and never in applications or concoctions that aren’t recommended by the manufacturer or your doctor.

Don't Use Oils to Stop an Attack

The safest time to use most essential oils for asthma is when you are not suffering from an asthma attack, but some may be called on to help you get through an acute asthmatic episode. However, you should never use oils in place of your rescue inhaler, which will not only fail to open your airways, but could actually make the situation a lot worse.

Beware of Triggers

Asthma triggers come in all shapes and sizes, and for some people the wrong essential oil could be as bad as a lungful of second-hand smoke.

If you are sensitive to fragrance, proceed with caution. If you are thinking of treating a severe case of asthma (especially asthma in a child) with essential oil, stop right there. Doctors warn that asthma can absolutely be triggered by volatile organic compounds, a broad term that includes essential oils and other fragrances. Not all essential oils are useless, but some might be more dangerous than they seem, so it is crucial that you work with your doctor to determine a smart course of action, instead replacing their prescriptions with a little glass vial.