



ESSENTIAL OILS: AROMATHERAPY SAFETY



What is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the use of plant-derived, inhaled essential oils to promote physical and psychological well being and assist with symptoms such as pain, headache, stress, hiccups, nausea and anxiety.

What safety measures need to be taken?

Essential oils are volatile compounds, meaning they can very easily change from liquid to a gas. Although most are safe and free of adverse side effects when **used properly**, it is important to follow safety recommendations.

- 1. Quality:** To reduce the risk of adverse effects always use pure essential oils rather than those that have additives. There are different ways to extract pure oils from their source. Some processes leave chemical by-products behind. You can usually get information about how the oil is produced from the package containing the oil. Always read the ingredients list and directions on the product to understand how the manufacturers produce and derive their essential oils. You may want to research several brands to determine the one best for you.
- 2. Chemical composition:** Essential oils rich in aldehydes (such as citronellal, citral) and phenols (such as cinnamic aldehyde, eugenol) may cause skin reactions. Essential oils rich in these chemicals should always be diluted before you apply them to your skin.¹
- 3. Method of application:**
 - a. Inhalation:** This application has a very low level of risk to most people and should be done in a well-ventilated space. People with asthma, shortness of breath, wheezing, or an allergy to any component of the oil should not inhale essential oils.
 - b. Dermal: NEVER** apply essential oils to your eyes or place directly onto your skin because irritation and reactions to UV light can occur. To apply essential oils on your skin, **dilute** them to a safe level using a carrier oil. Common carrier oils include almond oil and jojoba oil. Mix the essential oil you are using with one of these carriers before applying the oil to your skin.



- c. **Internal: NEVER** take an essential oil internally unless you have consulted with your health care provider and have been advised by an aromatherapist trained in the safety issues of taking the oil internally. The safety of using essential oils internally is still being investigated.²
3. **Dilution:** Dilution of essential oils with a carrier oil between 1 and 5 percent does not typically represent a safety concern. As you increase the dilution %, the potential for skin reactions increases. Example for dilution: 1%= 1 drop essential oil in 1 teaspoon of a carrier oil, 5% dilution=5 drops essential oil in 1 teaspoon of carrier oil.³
4. **Skin integrity:** Any damaged, diseased, or inflamed skin may be more likely to have skin reactions to oils and absorb oils more easily, so it is best not to use oil on these areas of your skin.²
5. **Age:** Infants and young children are more sensitive to essential oils, so you need to be careful when applying them, using less essential oil. There are some essential oils that **should not be used** with young children including Birch, Wintergreen and Peppermint. If you have not done so, you may want to talk with your child's health care provider before using essential oils on your child's skin.
6. **Information:** Be an informed and smart consumer. Essential oils have little regulation and oversight so it can be difficult to know what products are safe to use and what information is reliable and true. Think about the source of the information you are receiving, and the education and motive of the person providing information. Talk with your care provider about what is available and most likely to be safe.
7. **What to look for when purchasing Essential Oils:**
- Country of Origin
 - Latin name of parent plant
 - Method of extraction
 - 100 percent pure essential oil in ingredients list with no other added ingredients
 - USDA certified organic label
 - Warning and directions on label
 - Stored in dark blue or amber bottle with a stopper
 - Safety data information provided by the company to include gas chromatography if requested

References:

¹ Schnaubelt, K. (2004). Aromatherapy Lifestyle. San Rafael, CA: Terra Linda Scent.

² Tisserand, R., and Balacs, T. (1995). Essential Oil Safety. New York: Churchill Livingstone.

³ National Association of Holistic Aromatherapists - NAHA.org/explore-aromatherapy/safety/