

Essential Elixirs: Revealing the Curative Essence of Aromatherapy

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INTRODUCTION

As we all know this covid-19 pandemic has put our lives into threats, where many people got affected and lost their life. During this hard situation where there was no particular medicine or particular vaccine for this virus, Ministry of AYUSH has recommended people to use traditional methods of medicines like medicinal herbs and essential oils.

Essential oils are the chemical compounds of odoriferous nature, which are highly volatile, insoluble in water but soluble in organic solvents obtained from herbs, flowers, woods, seeds including spices by various methods. It contains hydrocarbons, esters, terpenes, lactones, phenols, aldehydes, acids, alcohols and ketones.

These essential oils are extracted by various traditional and modern methods. Traditional methods like distillation (Hydro, Steam and Hydro-Steam distillation), maceration/hot fat extraction, enfleurage/cold fat extraction and solvent extraction. Modern methods include, microwave assisted extraction, supercritical fluid extraction and ultra-sound assisted extraction.

Heritage of essential oils

Various essential oils were used for different purposes during ancient period. Egyptians used essential oils for offering to their Gods, they have separate room for the preparation of these oils in their temples. They believe that people undergo renunciation after their death, so they used essential oils for preserving the mummies. Greeks are the first to use essential oils as perfumes. Hippocrates used fumigation of essential oils in Athens city during the outbreak of plague. Romans used essential oils for the purpose of body massaging. A Roman king Nero, used it as a spray (present day's room fresheners) to please the guests of his kingdom. Arabs used essential oils as a remedy for various ailments. Avicenna is the first person to know the art of distillation.

In an ancient India, Gandhikas involved in the trade of essential oils, they made a various blend of oils to get unique aroma and high profit in their trade. Queens were applying some aromatic paste/powder to their body, which is made of sandalwood and other aromatic herbs, roots, woods, flowers *etc.* to feel freshness. Noorjehan was a first person to discover the oil present in rose, while bathing she observed the oil floating on her bath tub containing rose petals. By this she could be able to produce rose attar. Ayurveda is a traditional method of medicine, where Charaka and Sushruta used various essential oils during their treatment.

Area, production and productivity

In India, according to the Annual report of Department of Agriculture, cooperation and Farmer's welfare, GOI (2020-2021), medicinal and aromatic crops are grown under an area of 6,85,000 ha with the total production of 7,61,000 MT and with the productivity of 1.11 MT/ha.

Restorative qualities of essential oil

It means healing effects of essential oils, used in the treatment of various health conditions of humans and make them feel better.

Therapeutic property	Essential oil
Antibacterial	Sweet basil, Eucalyptus, Rosemary, Lavender
Antifungal	Pepper mint, Cylone citronella, Davana
Anti-inflammatory	Eucalyptus, Thyme, Tea tree
Anti lice and anti-dandruff	Tea tree, Rosemary, Lemongrass
Hormonal action	Geranium, Lavender
Anxiety	Palmarosa, Lavender, Sweet basil, Jasmine
Fatigue	Spear mint, Geranium, Rosemary, Citronella
Insomnia	Chamomile, Marjoram, Lavender, Thyme
Memory loss	Pepper mint, Rosemary
Sedative	Marjoram, Chamomile, Rosemary, Lavender

Therapeutic properties of these essential oils are mainly due to the presence of active compounds present in them. These compounds include aldehydes (citral, citronellal, benzaldehyde, cinnamaldehyde, vanillin *etc.*), alcohols (geraniol, citronellol, menthol, linalool, terpineol, borneol *etc.*), esters (benzoates, acetates, salisylates, cinnamates *etc.*), ketones (camphor, carvone,

menthone, pulegone, thujone *etc.*), oxides (cineol), phenol ether (anethol, safrol), phenols (eugenol, thymol, carvacrol *etc.*), hydrocarbons (cymene, myrcene, sabinene, storene *etc.*) terpenes (limonene, phyllandrene, pinene, camphene, cedrene *etc.*) and acids (benzoic acid, cinnamic acid, myristic acid, isovaleric acid *etc.*).

Method of application of essential oils:

Essential oils can be used through various methods in our daily life as bathing oils, perfumes, lotions, infusions, massage, inhalations and through diffusers.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is a holistic healing treatment that uses natural plant extracts from flowers, bark, stems, leaves, roots or other parts of plants to enhance psychological and physical well-being of a person. Aroma means fragrance/smell and therapy means treatment. Rene-Maurice Gattefosse gave the concept of aromatherapy and coined the term. He is known as father of aromatherapy. A practitioner who practices aromatherapy is known as aroma therapist.

Systematization of aromatherapy into five types

1. Cosmetic aromatherapy: This involves use of essential oils for skin, body, face and hair as cosmetic products. By using facial products, a person will get healthy skin and experiences revitalizing and rejuvenating effect. Commonly used oils are Lavender oil, tea tree oil, rosemary oil, rose oil *etc.*



4. Olfactory aromatherapy: It involves inhalation of essential oils. It provides, enhanced emotional wellness, calmness, relaxation or rejuvenation of the human body. Commonly used oils are rose, clove, pepper mint, eucalyptus oil *etc.*

5. Psycho aromatherapy: Here a person is made to sit in a room where diffuser is spreading fragrance. By this certain states of moods and emotions can be obtained giving the pleasure of relaxation, invigoration and a

2. Massage aromatherapy: When oil is applied on skin through massage, it travels through the bloodstream and affects various organs of the body. It provides holistic healing of whole body and helps in relieving pain, regulates sleep and strengthens immune system. Commonly used oils are Geranium oil, lavender oil, bergamot mint oil, chamomile oil *etc.*

3. Medical aromatherapy: Rene-Maurice Gatte-fosse has used essential oils to massage patients during surgery. Here essential oils helps in promoting and treating clinically diagnosed medical ailments. In Ayurveda there is a treatment called Panchakarma treatment, where they use various oils like Karpuradi taila, Ksheerabala taila, Dhanwantaram taila, Sahacharadi taila *etc.* for curing various diseases. These oils are made from various roots, flowers and herbs including *Cinnamomum camphora*, sweet flag, shilajit *etc.*

Ex: Kati basti is for curing lumber spondylitis and Janu basti is for curing knee joint pain.



pleasant memory. Commonly used oils are Chamomile, lavender, bergamot mint, lemon oil *etc.*

Manner of operation through inhalation: When essential oil is inhaled through nose, receptor cells present in nose will absorb the aroma compounds present in it. Through olfactory nerves these compounds are carried to limbic and hypothalamus parts of brain. In response to stimulus brain releases neuro messengers which are responsible for that

particular compound. By this person will feel relaxing, refreshing and will get pleasant mood.

Manner of operation through skin application: When essential oil is applied to the skin, oil is absorbed by sub-cutaneous layer of skin. The compounds present in oil are moved into the lymphatic system of our body and then, through veins it is moved into the blood circulation system. By this a person will experience a soothing effect and also it helps in pain relieving.

Privileges of aromatherapy

Aromatherapy helps in eliminating the feeling of depression, it provides relief from

insomnia and stress. It boosts immune system and digestive system and also increases circulation and energy levels in body. It helps in treating constipation, indigestion and bloating. It reduces severity and discomfort cause by psoriasis and eczema.

In the modern day life, everyone wants to adapt the modern medicines, where people are not aware of harmful side effects caused by them. Use of traditional methods like essential oils and medicinal herbs can keep us healthy and happy with no or less side effects.