

Aromatherapy massage confers health benefits

Massage that includes the application of fragrant essential oils reduces anxiety and stress and is beneficial to the immune system, according to recent research.

“Immunological and Psychological Benefits of Aromatherapy Massage” was conducted by staff at the Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine.

The study group comprised eleven volunteers who were healthy and did not take any daily medication. Baselines were established using psychological assessments, blood and saliva samples, and palmar Galvanic skin response (GSR), finger skin temperature and finger plethysmogram amplitude using a biofeedback system.

Subjects were then placed in reclining seats and allowed to rest. Then they performed a serial subtraction task, and rested again while experimenters monitored their physiological response.

After that, the subjects took a footbath with one drop of tea tree oil and received an aromatherapy massage or control massage. Psychological and physiological conditions were then measured again.

All subjects received both an aromatherapy massage and a carrier oil control massage at an interval of at least 2 weeks. The first five subjects received the aromatherapy massage before the carrier oil massage. The other six subjects received the carrier oil massage first.

Each subject received the same massage with or without essential oils by the same skilled therapist. For the aromatherapy massage, sweet almond, lavender, sweet marjoram and cypress oils were used. For the control massage, only sweet almond oil was used.

Psychological responses to treatment were assessed in State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS) results. State anxiety scores from the STAI were significantly reduced after both aromatherapy massage and control massage compared with the baseline. Though both STAI and SDS showed a significant reduction after treatment with aromatherapy and carrier massage, no difference between the aromatherapy and control massage was observed for STAI and SDS.

Peripheral blood cell counts were compared.

Aromatherapy, in contrast to control massage, did not significantly reduce red blood cell count or hematocrit. However, aromatherapy massage showed a significant increase in peripheral blood lymphocytes.

The study’s authors state, “These results suggest that aromatherapy massage is a valuable relaxation technique for reducing anxiety and stress, and beneficial to the immune system.”

— Source: Department of Microbiology, Department of Psychiatry and Department of Epidemiology for Community Health and Medicine, Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine Japan; Graduate School of Science for Human Services, Ritsumeikan University Japan; and Department of Research and Development, Hyper Plants Co., Ltd Japan. Originally published in Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2005 Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 179–184.