

Conscious Beauty

ESSENTIAL OILS FOR SKIN HEALTH
AND PEACE OF MIND

The age of conscious beauty has arrived. We are more careful than ever about what we put on our skin. With growing concern about skincare products and how they affect body-mind health, the spotlight is on natural ingredients. Essential oils come tried and tested: for more than a thousand years, observation and experience has proven their complex chemical nature gives them active affects on the body. They are effective; they are safe; they make us feel great. *Welcome to conscious beauty.*

You'd be forgiven for thinking essential oils are just aromatic "smell good, feel good" token ingredients, although their aroma plays a large part in why people love them so much. "Before they even touch our skin we benefit from their delightful aromas, which can positively affect our mood and emotions," says Carolyn Stubbin, aromatherapist and co-founder of Perfect Potion. They penetrate the blood-brain barrier and enter the bloodstream via the nasal mucosa only seconds after inhalation, beginning their effects on the body and mind, even before direct application to the skin.

Once applied to the skin, they move into the circulatory system through the stratum corneum, the layer of skin responsible for protection, and through hair follicles and sweat glands. So does everything else we put on our skin.

If what we put on our skin has a systemic effect on our body, it makes sense for skincare to be as pure as possible. Powerful and versatile, each essential oil comes with its own set of therapeutic properties and a distinctive aroma. They have an added benefit: specific effects on the human body that heal and soothe both body and mind.

MIND-BODY HEALTH

The ability of essential oils to positively influence mind-body health has been well documented since the art of distillation was refined in Persia in the eleventh century. The process was perfected in order to produce rose water, which was prescribed as a cure for digestive tract complaints. It became very popular and was exported to China, Europe and India to be used for culinary and medicinal purposes.

Fast forward a millennium and we're still using the waters (also known as hydrosols), essential oils and carrier oils extracted from three hundred species of flora for physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. With ongoing debate about the safety of synthetic chemicals, people are becoming more discerning about what they put on their skin. This is driving interest and excitement in natural skincare. "Each person is different in their desire for knowledge and education, but the more you educate yourself, the better choices you are able to make," says Carolyn; then adds, "it's important to differentiate education from marketing."

TRANSITIONING TO ESSENTIAL OILS

How do you start using essential oils? Treating yourself to a regular aromatherapy facial is a great way to introduce essential oils into your skincare routine. "An aromatherapy facial is based on essential oils that support and balance the functions of the skin. Two vital steps are the compress and massage which increase absorption of essential oils via the skin," says Carolyn. Once you've experienced the transformative effects, you might like to start including essential oils into your skincare routine on a daily basis. They provide a variety of therapeutic benefits for maintaining the health of your skin, as well as for the treatment of specific skin conditions.

SOFT, SUPPLE AND BALANCED

Essential oils can help maintain perfect skin health, whatever your skin type. Essential oils of geranium, palmarosa, sandalwood and lavender help balance, protect and nourish – whether your skin is normal, oily, dry or combination. They regulate the production of sebum and control any renegade bacteria that can cause infection and lead to acne.

Dry skin also benefits from the nurturing and healing properties of rose, while adding an astringent oil like cypress to oily skincare products can help contract and tighten large pores. Delicate, sensitive skin needs the extra special care of German or Roman chamomile, everlasting, Indian rosewood or neroli to soothe and protect it.

ANTISEPTIC AND ANTI-INFLAMMATORY

Essential oils are particularly good at reinforcing the skin's protective functions, as well as preventing and treating a variety of skin conditions such as acne. Their anti-inflammatory properties can help soothe and heal eczema, psoriasis, and even rosacea.

"We have a lot of people who are getting rosacea these days," says Farida Irani, Ayurveda aromatherapist and founder of Subtle Energies. Ayurveda aromatherapy involves applying essential oils from India that are considered to have the opposite attributes to the condition. "Rosacea is a condition where there is redness and inflammation, so we use cooling oils," she says. "Using a combination of *Jasminum sambac* (a specific variety of jasmine), *gul heena* (an oil extracted from the flower of the heena plant), sandalwood, rose and wild turmeric in the cooling base of brahmi (a common carrier oil used in Ayurveda aromatherapy), I've seen rosacea just disappear," she says.



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Acne is best treated with a combination of antiseptic and anti-inflammatory oils like lavender, lemon and tea tree. These oils are good at tackling bacteria that can cause infection. Farida also recommends wild turmeric. In India, wild turmeric is mixed in with Indian lentil flour together with saffron and sandalwood powder, and applied as a paste all over the body. "My grandmother used to make me use that as a teenager and I had no problems with acne or any skin disorders," she recalls.

DETOXIFY AND ELIMINATE WASTE

If the organs of elimination (skin, lungs, kidneys and bowels) are not performing optimally, it can give rise to congested skin. Acne, boils and rashes can result. Lemon and juniper are some of the most effective oils to improve circulation and ease congestion, even on the face. As with rosacea, congestion can benefit from cooling oils when detoxification is needed. Palmarosa, wild turmeric, Indian spikenard and North Indian vetiver can be effective.

"Congestion is not necessarily (caused by) heat," Farida adds. "Cold can also constrict (the skin). It constricts the finer capillaries, so the skin can appear cold, clammy and congested. In this case, we would use warming oils. The skin is the best diagnostic tool even in Ayurveda. We look at the colour, whether it is pale and grey, if there is any dryness, if it is inflamed or reddish and can tell whether it is out of balance," she says. This diagnostic depth can add a whole new dimension to the use of essential oils.

HEALING AND ANTI-AGEING

Essential oils promote a healthy and youthful complexion through their healing and anti-ageing properties. Some encourage the growth of skin cells and promote the formation of scar tissue. These are beneficial for preventing stretchmarks, reducing the appearance of wrinkles and minimising scarring.

"Stretchmarks are better prevented through the use of rich emollient carrier oils such as avocado and wheatgerm, which help keep the skin supple as it stretches," says Carolyn. Applying them

daily is the best way to maintain elastic skin that can endure any stretching. During the second and third trimesters of pregnancy essential oils can be added to further enhance the ability of the skin to stretch without tearing. "They actually repair and that's how you can see stretchmarks eventually fading away," says Farida. Essential oils of neroli, tangerine, lavender, frankincense, geranium and patchouli are excellent for pregnancy stretchmarks. Minimising sun exposure is the best way to prevent wrinkles, however essential oils can be used to reduce their appearance. "Rose, frankincense and patchouli are recommended where the skin is damaged," says Carolyn. For scars, Farida recommends wild turmeric, gul heena, neem and Kashmiri lavender.

ALLEVIATE STRESS SYMPTOMS

Many skin conditions are triggered by stress. Using certain essential oils as part of your daily skincare regime can help maintain a calm and relaxed state of mind, removing the "trigger" for certain conditions like eczema and psoriasis.

"We have been seeing amazing results – even with children – for anxiety and depression. The doctors see the results and reduce whatever medication they have given them, but we don't get involved in that. We complement conventional medicine," says Farida. She recommends *Jasminum sambac*, gul heena, palmarosa and Indian rosewood for anxiety and depression.

For eczema & dermatitis, "using essential oils like roman chamomile, cedarwood, lavender, geranium, sandalwood and

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ylang ylang will play an important role in reducing the level of stress," says Salvatore Battaglia in his book *The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy*.

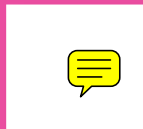
HOLISTIC APPROACH

Whether you buy ready-made products that contain essential oils, make your own blends at home, or consult a registered aromatherapist, regular use of essential oils in your daily skincare can help you achieve and maintain healthy skin. Remember, though, that aromatherapy is not a magic bullet. "It's important to look at conditions from a holistic perspective and to ensure that dietary and other lifestyle factors are given equal attention," says Carolyn.

Although skincare is only one factor that can affect our skin over a lifetime, using essential oils can contribute to optimal skin health. They can also help enhance mind-body health. "We recognise that aromatics play a very important role in very quickly bringing about mental, physical and emotional equilibrium," says Farida. This is the essence of conscious beauty. ☺

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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www.iaama.org.au



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