

Research

BOOST MOOD + MENTAL HEALTH

Smells can affect you physically, making you feel hungry or nauseous. But they can also impact your mood and emotional state. Citrus oils like bergamot or lemon tend to be uplifting and promote happiness," Dr. Ko says. "If you're experiencing anxiety, try lavender." Inhaling lavender or diffusing it in your space may temporarily relieve feelings of stress and anxiety.

ENHANCE MEMORY + COGNITION

Adults between ages 60 and 85, who were not cognitively impaired, diffused essential oils for two hours each night. After six months, those participants saw more than 200% improvement in some aspects of cognitive and neural functioning.

IMPROVE SLEEP QUALITY

Lavender essential oil may help if you are having trouble sleeping. It's known to quiet the mind and nervous system. "Lavender is the most studied essential oil," Dr. Ko says. "Several studies show that lavender oil may increase your time in deep sleep." A notable study showed that elderly hospitalized patients exposed to lavender aromatherapy experienced considerable reductions in both perceived stress and sleep disturbances.

REDUCE PAIN LEVEL

When you breathe in essential oils, they can trigger a chain reaction that ultimately results in the release of feel-good hormones. (1.)

"Essential oils are potent plant oils that, when inhaled, can immediately affect how we feel," says Elizabeth Ko, MD, medical director of the UCLA Health Integrative Medicine Collaborative. Aromatherapy — the act of inhaling an essential oil — can be an effective complementary treatment for anyone. But older adults may find aromatherapy especially helpful if they have chronic pain, trouble sleeping or are worried about cognitive decline.(1)

**Approximately
one in four adults ages 65
and older (24%) reported
experiencing anxiety or
depression.**

**40% to 70% of individuals aged
65 and older report persistent
sleep problems, while the
prevalence of sleep difficulties
increases significantly with age
and in certain settings.**

**Approximately 21% of adults in
the USA experience chronic pain
(50-60 million people annually)
that affect mood + daily life .**



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A Non-Pharmacological Approach to Dementia Care

Effectiveness in Managing Dementia

Aromatherapy has emerged as an effective non-pharmacological strategy for managing symptoms associated with dementia. Studies indicate that certain essential oils can alleviate agitation, restlessness, and other behavioral and psychological symptoms. For instance, lavender and rosemary oils can enhance cognitive function and promote relaxation, potentially easing anxiety and improving mood in seniors.

Those who have been diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's might experience occasional to frequent bouts of irritability and frustration. Many dementia patients have found that using aromatherapy helps relieve some of these symptoms.

Impact on Quality of Life and Caregiver Stress

Incorporating aromatherapy into dementia care can significantly enhance quality of life for residents. It not only helps in alleviating distressing symptoms but also reduces caregiver stress. By providing a calming environment, aromatherapy can foster emotional well-being, thus improving overall satisfaction for both seniors and their caregivers. Reports suggest that caregivers have noticed positive shifts in mood and behavior during aromatherapy sessions, leading to decreased feelings of frustration and burnout. (2)

Approximately 10% of U.S. adults ages 65 and older have dementia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other studies. This percentage has been declining slightly, but the total number of people with dementia is increasing due to the aging of the population. The prevalence increases significantly with age, with nearly 35% of those 85 and older estimated to have dementia.

An estimated 7.2 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's in 2025



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What are the benefits of aromatherapy for dementia symptoms?

Increase Cognitive Function

A 2013 study states that people with dementia still have the ability to learn and retain skills and information. To help stimulate your loved one's brain, try using certain essential oils like lemon and rosemary—proven to “activate the sympathetic nervous system, improving concentration and memory” according to a 2020 study. A 2012 study reaffirms the validity of that study, finding that rosemary can “influence cognitive performance and mood” and that, through the olfactory organ, rosemary oil stimulates locomotor activity. Try rosemary and lemon to give your loved one's brain a boost.

Ease Anxiety

People with dementia can become easily anxious due to the deterioration in the part of the brain that regulates emotions, confusion from loss of memory, boredom, and fear and fatigue from trying to make sense of overwhelming stimuli. Multiple studies published found that rosemary and lavender reduce cortisol, the body's response to stress.

Stimulate Appetite

People living with dementia often have reduced appetite, causing unhealthy weight loss. Many caregivers turn to appetite stimulant drugs, but a study from Barbra Bauer of Sharp Coronado Hospital found that using scents caused “early patients to improve to the point where they no longer need appetitestimulants and their sleep medications are decreased.”

Ease Aches + Pains

Muscle atrophy and weakness may result from a person's decline in exercise and brain function and normal aging, which reduces the ability to lead a full, vibrant life. Multiple studies attempting to quantify aromatherapy's effectiveness in pain management found “a significant positive effect of aromatherapy in reducing pain.”

Stimulate Memories

Aromatherapy can stimulate memories, since implicit memories, the last ones to leave, are often connected to our sense of smell. Essential oils stimulate the hippocampus, the part of your brain that governs memory. A study from Northumbria University found that rosemary essential oil may enhance the ability to remember events and complete tasks at certain times.

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