Let's Talk About...

Essential oils for clinical aromatherapy

What is clinical aromatherapy?

Clinical aromatherapy (or "therapeutic use of essential oils") is when essential oils are used to improve physical, emotional, or spiritual health and well-being.

What is an essential oil?

Essential oils are the fragrant or scented part of different plants (flowers, trees, and herbs) processed in natural ways. They come straight from the plant with no added ingredients. Artificial fragrances and products do not have the same effect as pure essential oils from plants. There are many essential oils used in aromatherapy. Each oil has a different chemical structure that determines what it can be used for and how the body uses it.

Essential oils have been used for healing for thousands of years and in many cultures.

What is clinical aromatherapy used for?

Essential oils provide relief from symptoms and promote well-being. They do not treat or cure diseases. Aromatherapy is often combined with standard medical treatments. Aromatherapy is also used with complementary treatments such as massage and acupuncture.

When complementary and standard treatments are used together, this is called **Integrative Medicine.**

How do essential oils work?

Essential oils can help relieve pain, anxiety, and nausea. They can also help improve mood, aid relaxation, and help increase a person's sense of well-being. Clinical aromatherapy treatment is different for each person and his or her needs. Not everyone responds the same to a particular essential oil.

Essential oils are usually breathed in or placed on the skin. The essential oil's smell enters the body through sensitive nerve cells in the nose. The nose sends signals to the brain. The brain takes these signals and changes how the person experiences pain, nausea, anxiety, and other symptoms. Before applying essential oils to the skin, the oil should be mixed with a bland "carrier" oil or lotion. The exact mixture depends on the child and the reason for using the essential oil.

Are essential oils safe to use?

Essential oils are very concentrated natural substances that should only be used by people trained in clinical aromatherapy. Some essential oils are poisonous if swallowed. Some may cause skin reactions (for example, a rash). Others may make symptoms worse instead of better. Here are some general safety tips:

- Keep essential oils away from children and pets.
- Do not swallow or eat essential oils as many are toxic or dangerous when swallowed.
- Use caution in young children especially if they are younger than two years old.
- Before using any essential oil, talk to your primary care provider or a medical professional because some essential oils can interact with your child's other medicines.
- Never apply undiluted essential oils to the skin.
- Your child's skin may be more sensitive to the sun when using essential oils.
- Be considerate of how the oil's smell affects other people.

How do I prepare my child to use clinical aromatherapy?

If the essential oil is used on the skin, be sure your child has no broken cuts or irritated skin. If your

child has asthma or allergies, check with her doctor before using essential oils.

Explain to your child that essential oils are another way to help our bodies heal and feel better. If possible, demonstrate first on yourself or a doll, so your child can see what will happen. Encourage your child to tell you if the essential oils are helping or not.

What do other parents and children say about essential oils and aromatherapy in the hospital?

Parents and children who have used essential oils before are happy to continue a healing method that is familiar to them. There may be adjustments in when the essential oil is given or changes in strength that fit best with your child's medical problems. For patients and families who have never used essential oils, this as an opportunity to see how essential oils can work with other treatments.

How do I learn more about using essential oils?

Ask to speak to a member of the Integrative Medicine team at Primary Children's Hospital. You can discuss aromatherapy and essential oils with a physician or nurse trained and experienced in essential oil use in children.

There are many books and websites about using essential oils to promote health. Not all contain accurate information, so make sure you choose one with reputable sources of information. The medical librarians at Primary Children's Hospital can help you find good information.

Here are some helpful references:

- The Holistic Pediatrician
  by Kathi J Kemper, MD, MPH
- Treatment Alternatives for Children
  by Lawrence Rosen, MD and Jeff Cohen

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