

Aromatherapy and children

Extensive research has shown that the regular, long-term use of small quantities of good quality essential oils can be highly beneficial, so why not include aromatherapy in your family's daily life? Here are some simple ways to do so.

How to use essential oils for children

Oil burners and vaporisers are great but should be placed completely out of reach of children. An electric burner or vaporiser is safest but even a bowl of steaming water can be used to disperse oils. Use four to six drops in total of whatever oil you choose. Baths are another lovely way of using oils for children. Full-fat milk, an emulsion of fats and water, provides a suitable medium for dispersing oils in water, avoiding drops of oil floating in the water and potentially causing skin irritation. Mix three to five drops of oil with a tablespoon of full-fat milk then add to the bath. Preferably avoid soap and shampoo, which wash away the oils. If you want to apply oils to the skin, for example for massage, a teaspoon of olive oil makes an excellent base for a couple of drops of essential oil.

Which oils to use and when?

When friends come to play, try burning one or a combination of Geranium, Palmarosa and Mandarin for a harmonious atmosphere or, to help create calm during the early evening before bedtime, Mandarin, Lavender or Roman Chamomile in a burner or bath will be helpful. These may also be useful at mealtimes! At night, two drops of Vetiver in an oil burner placed out of reach in the child's bedroom half hour before bedtime will help children stay asleep or resettle if they habitually wake. If they are waking in the night, the burner can be topped up with more water and oil when you go to bed.

For tummy upsets, the gently calming, muscle relaxing oils Mandarin and Lavender, mixed with olive oil, as described above, may be massaged over the child's tummy and lower back in a clockwise direction. When flying, one drop of Eucalyptus on a tissue which can then be inhaled, may help with ear pressure pain during take-off and landing.

When infections appear, the magic trio for children comprises Rosalina, Narrow-leaf Eucalyptus and Myrtle. Rosalina is very similar to and as effective as Tea Tree, but with a softer aroma and gentler chemical composition, it is antiseptic, sedative, calming and a good expectorant. Use it for any upper respiratory infection such as sinusitis, colds or flu.

Narrow-leaf Eucalyptus (*eucalyptus radiata*) has a gentler aroma than the more common eucalyptus. Subtle, yet powerful, it is antiviral, expectorant and stimulates the immune system. Myrtle, its soft aroma reminiscent of the eucalyptus family, is a gentle, effective decongestant which is great for catarrhal coughs and colds, flu, sinusitis, laryngitis, tonsillitis and earache and is also a sedative. Vaporising Rosalina, or the highly antiviral Ravensara, will help cleanse the air when there are bugs around. If your child is having problems breathing and sleeping due to congestion, vaporise one or more of myrtle, Rosalina or Eucalyptus in their bedroom. Experiment to find the most effective combination for your child. Alternatively, at the first sign of infection, use these oils diluted in milk in a warm bath; inhaling the water vapour may also help ease congestion. Lavender in baths and vaporisers may help if children are fretful or wakeful and is also antiviral and anti-inflammatory.

Expert help

A clinical aromatherapist will usually be able to help with highly effective oil mixes for a variety of childhood problems. In my personal practice two examples of conditions regularly treated with great success are, chicken pox using a formulation which has been tried and tested over many years and *molluscum contagiosum* where oils are used to both combat the virus and support the regeneration of the affected skin.

Storing your oils

Finally, do store and use essential oils with care to preserve their therapeutic qualities. When exposed to light, heat and/or air oils deteriorate. Oil from an old, half-used bottle sitting on a bathroom windowsill will be damaged and potentially harmful. Buy small quantities, preferably 5mls of good oil, keep bottles in a cool dark place and use the oil before it has a chance to go off. Enjoy!

