

Aromatherapy for winter ailments

Extensive scientific research into essential oils over many years has shown them to be highly therapeutic, so in winter, usually the most bug-laden part of the year, how can aromatherapy help? It has been shown that the regular, long-term use of small quantities of essential oils can be highly beneficial to the immune system so including good quality oils in your family's daily life will be a great start. But no matter how prepared you are, children - and the whole family - inevitably pick up bugs...

Oils for children

Rosalina, Myrtle and Narrow Leaf Eucalyptus make up the magic trio and are also great for grown-ups, especially pregnant women.

- Rosalina is very similar to, and as effective as, Tea Tree but with a softer aroma and gentler chemical composition - a perfect children's oil. It is antiseptic, sedative, calming and a good expectorant. Use it for upper respiratory infections including sinusitis, colds and flu.
- Narrow Leaf Eucalyptus (*eucalyptus radiata*) is a lovely Eucalyptus for children (and adults) with a gentler aroma than the more commonly used 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 great for catarrhal coughs and colds, flu, sinusitis, laryngitis, tonsillitis and earache. As a sedative, it may also help induce sleep.
- Lavender is the great all rounder; in this context, it is antiviral, anti-inflammatory, calming and relaxing.

Using oils

For children, oil burners and vaporisers are a wonderful way of using oils but do ensure oil burners are out of the potential reach of any child; use an electric one for safety and never leave a child alone with an oil burner that uses a nightlight. A bowl of steaming water with oils added to it can be

a good substitute for a vaporiser, but again, must be placed completely out of reach of children. Use 4-6 drops of oil in total in a burner. Vaporising Rosalina or Ravintsara will help cleanse the air when there are bugs around. If your child is having problems breathing and sleeping due to congestion, vaporise Myrtle, Rosalina and/or Eucalyptus in their bedroom - experiment to find the most effective combination for your child.

Baths are another excellent way of using oils for children. Put the drops of oil into a tablespoon of full fat milk then add to the bath. Full fat milk, an emulsion of fats and water, provides a suitable medium for dispersing essential oils in water, avoiding drops of oil floating in the water and potentially causing skin irritation. Always use this method when using oils in children's baths and avoid soap/shampoo etc as these wash away the oils. At the first signs of infection a warm bath with a total of 3-5 drops (depending on age, body weight etc of child) of Rosalina, Myrtle and Eucalyptus oils diluted in milk will be very helpful; inhaling the water vapour can also help ease congestion. Lavender in baths or vaporisers may help if children are fretful or wakeful.

Additional oils for adults

- Ravintsara is a fantastic immune system stimulant and highly antiviral; use it whenever there are viruses around.
- Pine, a very useful winter oil, is powerfully decongestant for sinusitis, chest infections, coughs or any respiratory congestion. Use in steam inhalations for catarrh.
- Ginger is warming and comforting; also antibacterial, expectorant and stimulating to the immune system.
- Laurel supports and clears the lymphatic system which carries infection out of the body.

Use for adults only, and no more than a couple of drops should be used at any one time.

For adults as with children, use oils in vaporisers and baths. At the first signs of infection a hot, aromatic bath can be very helpful using Ravintsara in combination with Eucalyptus, Pine, Ginger and/or Laurel to ease congestion and stimulate the body's immune system. Lavender will promote relaxation and a good night's sleep. For a bath, add a total of 10 drops of essential oils, or a

maximum of 5 drops in pregnancy, using full fat milk as described above.

The old fashioned remedy of inhalations, with a bowl of steaming water on a table and a towel over the head to create a 'tent', has been proven to ease nasal congestion, sinusitis, chest and upper respiratory problems after 10 minutes in this steamy environment. The benefits can be instantaneous and may be repeated 3 times daily. 2 - 4 drops in total of Pine, Eucalyptus or Lavender can be added to the water. Breathe steam in through the nose and out through the mouth for sinus and head congestion; for throat and chest complaints breathe in through the mouth and out through the nose. It is extremely effective and safe in pregnancy. Take care with the water, NEVER use this for children and consult your doctor before using this method if asthmatic.

A qualified aromatherapist may tailor-make remedies for you and your family, including older babies and children. Depending on the practitioner, you may be offered chest rubs, creams, ointments or gels to ease congestion and coughing, bath or body oils for your specific symptoms, a cough mix or inhalers like the commercially available ones, but formulated to treat your specific symptoms. The quality of the oils and their precise use should produce a more effective inhaler than those commercially available. Size and portability make them very useful and popular.

Finally, should the winter blues hit, a few drops of Bergamot, an oil full of sunshine, and/or Geranium, a wonderful all round balancer, in an oil burner or a bath should help remind you of summer days to come!

Storing essential oils

Please store and use essential oils with care to preserve their therapeutic qualities. When exposed to light, heat and/or air oils deteriorate, so oil from an old, half used bottle which has been sitting on a bathroom windowsill will be damaged and could be harmful. Buy small quantities of good quality oil (5mls) keep the bottles in a cool dark place and use the oil before it has a chance to go off.

