



Exploring the Allure of Aromatherapy

By Trudie Mitschang

WHEN YOU LIVE with primary immunodeficiency (PI), medication regimens and treatment plans are typically deeply rooted in traditional medical science. This is why being offered an alternative treatment like aromatherapy tends to be dismissed at first glance as unhelpful or even silly. But, not so fast. The truth is aromatherapy and essential oils have been used effectively in conjunction with illness and disease for centuries, including during the deadly plague of the Black Death. As the story goes, a small band of marauding thieves seemed immune to the outbreak, and when the King demanded to know their secret, he learned the essential oils they rubbed on their bodies worked medicinally and prophylactically to ward off disease. Fast forward to 2018, when the benefits of essential oils continue to be used for their therapeutic properties, particularly when it comes to common immune disease symptoms and side effects.

What Is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy, or essential oil therapy, refers to a range of traditional, alternative or complementary therapies that use essential oils and other aromatic plant compounds. The National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy (NAHA) defines aromatherapy as “the therapeutic application or the medicinal use of aromatic substances (essential oils) for holistic healing.”

A range of essential oils have various degrees of antimicrobial properties, with many offering antiviral, nematocidal, antifungal, insecticidal and antioxidant benefits. These essential oils can be used topically and via inhalation, depending on the symptoms being treated. Keep in mind that aromatherapy is considered a complementary therapy, meaning it is used in conjunction with traditional treatments since it is not a “cure” for disease. Still, there are a number of PI-specific symptoms that may be improved through the use of essential oils and aromatherapy. Here is a list of common concerns and recommended aromatherapy options.

Fatigue. PI patients often lack energy and struggle with symptoms of chronic fatigue. Lemon oil, basil oil and eucalyptus oil can all be used to combat fatigue. Diffuse and inhale or mix with a carrier oil such as jojoba oil and apply to the forehead, heart and chest area. Ratio for mixture is approximately 10 drops of essential oil to one tablespoon of carrier oil.

Headache. Headaches and migraines seem to go hand-in-hand with intravenous immune globulin (IVIG) treatment, and some aromatherapy options can help alleviate headache pain.

Peppermint oil has the ability to inhibit muscle contractions and helps stimulate blood flow in the forehead when applied topically. To improve blood circulation, reduce pain and relieve tension, dilute two to three drops of peppermint oil with coconut oil, and rub it into the shoulders, forehead and back of neck. Lavender essential oil induces relaxation and relieves tension and stress. There is also growing evidence that it serves as an effective treatment of neurological conditions. Lavender oil also regulates serotonin levels, which helps minimize pain in the nervous system that can lead to migraine attacks. To use, diffuse five drops of lavender oil and inhale the aroma, or apply lavender oil mixed with a carrier like coconut oil to the back of neck, temples and wrists to relieve tension headaches.

Muscle pain and inflammation. Muscle spasms and pain are common side effects of IVIG treatment. Thyme and rosemary essential oils are very effective for chronic muscle pain. Juniper and wintergreen essential oils are other proven remedies. Blend a few drops with one to two teaspoons of carrier oil, and apply to the affected area followed by a hot compress or heating pad for 30 minutes. Chamomile essential oil contains flavonoids that act as natural relief for joint and muscle pain. Make an anti-inflammatory essential oils blend by combining two drops each of frankincense and chamomile essential oil with two tablespoons of a carrier oil such as jojoba, coconut or almond. Gently apply the mixture to the affected area, and massage until fully absorbed. Essential oils can also be added to bathwater; add one cup of Epsom salts to a full tub with three to five drops of anti-inflammatory oils.

Nausea. Feeling nauseous is another common side effect associated with IVIG. To quell queasiness, try ginger, which is famous for its ability to calm an upset stomach, diarrhea, nausea, motion sickness and more. To use, place several drops of oil in a nebulizing diffuser, and inhale the steam until symptoms subside.

Living with PI can be greatly improved with regular IVIG treatment, but side effects of the treatment and chronic illness can still make life challenging. Aromatherapy is one of many complementary therapies that can safely and effectively improve symptoms and quality of life. However, patients should check with their physician prior to embarking on any alternative therapy or treatment plan. ■

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The Pure Essences stainless steel oil diffuser pendant necklace is made from hypo-allergenic, surgical-grade stainless steel for sensitive skin. To use, simply put three to four drops of essential oil on the

provided felt pad for therapeutic benefits throughout the day. \$16.99; amazon.com



Portable Relief

The innovative Aromacube diffuser can be used at home or when traveling. Simply add 10 to 20 drops of essential or aroma oil blend and enjoy. Oils are not included. \$29.99; aromatech.com



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Vapor Action

The classic black Ultrasonic Nebulizer Diffuser provides a continuous gentle mist of essential oil and water blends. It comes with five timer settings and three mist settings. It can be used with any essential oil. \$64.99; puritan.com



Educational Essential

Modern Essentials: The Complete Guide to the Therapeutic Use of Essential Oils offers practical advice for anyone wanting to learn about essential oils and their everyday uses. The easy-to-use format outlines which essential oils to use for hundreds of health conditions, how to safely and effectively apply them, and ways to incorporate oils into daily living. \$27.95; aromatools.com

Colorful Therapy

This essential oil diffuser by Radha Beauty comes with seven changing colored LED lights to create a restful ambiance in any room. The diffuser uses ultrasonic waves to vaporize water and oil and create a gentle fragrant mist. \$17.95; amazon.com



Energizing Elixirs

This essential oil kit from NOW Foods Solutions includes four 1/3 fluid ounce (10mL) bottles of energizing oils: lemon, orange, grapefruit and citrus/herb blend. Add to a diffuser, or create a room mister by adding 30 drops to 1 ounce of water in a spray bottle. \$16.09; vitacost.com