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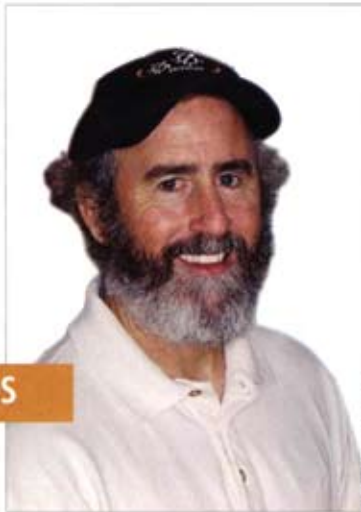
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RESEARCH: DABBING SKIN DRY DURING ICE MASSAGE INCREASES RATE OF COOLING

The massage profession's experts answer your questions about technique, business, self-care and research.

What are some of the clinical applications of essential oils in a massage practice?

TIM BLAKLEY RESPONDS



COURTESY OF TIM BLAKLEY

Essential oils can be used for both beauty and health benefits. Europe has long been the leader in using them for their medicinal benefits, but today most professional aromatherapy conferences in North America focus predominately on the therapeutic and clinical applications of essential oils.

There are five basic ways to use essential oils: 1) inhaling them for their scent or to impact your respiratory system; 2) applying them directly to skin; 3) applying them vaginally or rectally via a suppository; 4) gargling with them; and 5) ingesting them into the gastrointestinal tract. When adding essential oils to your massage practice, you will deal only with the first two applications: inhalation and topical application.

Oils are commonly used for their scent, and this can impact the body in a variety of ways. For example, some oils stimulate, while others relax. In a clinical setting, oils can easily be used to relax clients, and the soothing

benefits of these oils can greatly enhance a massage session. To achieve such effects, therapists can either use a diffuser to scent the entire space, which will also affect the practitioner, or put a small diluted amount of oil under a client's nose or chin. My favorite oils for this include rose otto or rose absolute, lavender, patchouli, sandalwood and jasmine. Precious oils, such as rose and jasmine, are also available preblended in jojoba oil.

In addition to their pleasing scents, essential oils can also be used topically. Most oils are applied to skin after being diluted with a carrier oil. There are a few applications where you might apply a very small amount of oil directly to skin, but the majority of time you will dilute them. I almost exclusively use jojoba oil for this purpose. It never goes rancid, is an excellent emollient on the skin and causes no bacterial buildup on the skin, like some other carrier oils. Jojoba's one fault is its poor glide

ability. Therefore, when used for massage, it's best to mix jojoba with other carrier oils that glide better.

When you apply oils to skin, they will be absorbed into the blood system and circulated throughout the body for up to several hours. Because of this, essential oils can easily be used for systemic conditions. Where you apply the oil is critical, and areas where you have blood vessels near the surface of the skin are best.

Additionally, you absorb oils much better when your skin is warm and moist, which makes the underarm an ideal place to apply an essential oil for maximum absorption.

When diluting oils, remember this simple formula: Eight drops of essential oil per ounce of carrier oil is a 1-percent dilution. The percentage to use on a client will vary greatly depending on the essential oil you choose and the therapeutic application. If I'm treating sciatica and the client is having a severe episode, I might use a 25-percent blend, depending on the oils I'm using. Remember, these percentages refer to the total percentage of essential oil in the blend, not each individual oil.

One common affliction in our society is athlete's foot, and it's estimated that approximately 15 percent of all adults suffer from this condition. But athlete's foot is easily treated with essential oils. The easiest, and perhaps most effective, oil for this is sandalwood. I find it to be much more effective than tea tree oil, easier to apply and much nicer smelling. Sandalwood is also one of the safest oils to use. On occasion I have applied it directly to skin, though my normal

practice is to use it diluted between 7 and 25 percent. When practicing massage, it's easy to keep a sandalwood blend available to use on clients' feet.

Essential oils are also very

Many oils have powerful antibacterial properties and can be used to prevent and fight a variety of infections.

effective for treating a variety of musculoskeletal conditions, and they offer great versatility. Some oils are capable of improving blood flow, while others can reduce blood flow; some are anti-inflammatory and others have a local anesthetic action. For arthritis, bursitis, tendonitis and other similar conditions, I use a blend of wintergreen, clove bud, lavender and German chamomile precious oil. I use a 10-percent to 25-percent blend, using the German chamomile precious oil as the base.

For sciatica, I use a blend of peppermint, lavender and German chamomile precious oil. The peppermint takes blood from the

area, instantly 'cooling' down the sciatica. The lavender and German chamomile are both anti-inflammatory. If there are spasms involved, I'll add Roman chamomile precious oil. I fly

several hundred thousand miles every year, and I've used peppermint numerous times on myself, when my sciatica flares up.

Many oils have powerful

antibacterial properties and can be used to prevent and fight a variety of infections. My favorite antibacterials are white thyme, oregano, sandalwood, peppermint, clove bud and tea tree. These oils can be used to prevent and treat all kinds of infections, including gum disease, tooth infections, skin infections and respiratory infections.

For antibacterial use on the skin, I like a blend of sandalwood, white thyme and tea tree blended in a carrier. Thyme is very irritating to the skin, and I never use it at more than 10 percent; likewise with oregano oil. For respiratory infections, I like to use eucalyptus,

tea tree and peppermint. If using them in a hot-water facial steam, you only need two or three drops total. However, always make sure your clients close their eyes when using facial steams to inhale oils. When someone has congested sinuses, apply a diluted blend of eucalyptus or peppermint oil under the nose to ease breathing.

Essential oils are very easy to use, and they're becoming more popular due to their many diverse benefits. When used correctly and safely, they can be an effective way to augment the clinical benefits of your massage practice.

Tim Blakley has been an aromatherapist and herbalist for 30 years. He teaches at conferences around the world, with a focus on the therapeutic uses of essential oils, their sourcing, conservation, quality and safety. He's currently traveling the world sourcing oils and working as an aromatherapist educator for Aura Cacia. A few of his recent sourcing trips have taken him to Eastern and Western Europe, Ukraine, India, Nepal, Australia, New Zealand and throughout North America. He lives on a 21-acre homestead in Hawaii.



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