

History of aromatherapy essay sample



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Recognizable it is that the term Aromatherapy is being used nowadays. It is but one of the blooming industries at present and is seemingly growing more each year. It is being offered in health spas which seem to emerge like mushrooms everywhere. It may also be done personally at home by buying bottled pieces in stores where you can purchase varying scents depending on your taste and need (“ Hot Springs”, 2000).

As available as your proverbial hotcake, the term is often being misconceived when in fact it has been in existence since ancient ages. Here, we will peek on the time line traversed by Aromatherapy and all other issues related to it including its uses until present.

What is Aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils of plants for physical, spiritual and psychological well-being (Price, 1993). Although this definition may not be exact to other practitioners, it basically boils down to the use of essential oils in any manner for well-being. The term basically was derived from two words: Aroma which means fragrance and Therapy which means healing (Crystal, 1995).

Many may classify Aromatherapy as an alternative treatment while others classify it as a subunit in holistic medicine. While, many others may consider it as a science as it is used in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases (“ Hot Springs”, 2000).

Though the term was not known to be of use until the 20th Century, the foundation of it may be traced back to some time when early men learned to use fire.

The roots of Aromatherapy may be traced back way before the birth of Christ. However, the exact date of its origin is still disputed as well as the place where it originated. The practice of burning incense from aromatic woods and herbs was used as offerings for the gods. This practice was used by Chinese, Egyptians and Greeks for glorifying their deities. It was believed that as the smoke rose up to the heavens, it carries with it their prayers and wishes on to their deities. This is the reason behind why Aromatherapy is being linked with religion and mysticism (“ History of Aroma Therapy”, 1997-2007).

Ancient Egyptians during those times use oil extracts from plants for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. It was also found to be used in embalming with the use of extracts of nutmegs and cedars. Egyptians were also said to use Aromatics in cooking. They believed that its use would improve the digestive system and promote immunity to certain diseases. After bathing, they massage their bodies with fragrant oils. Also for them, use of aromatics in rituals raise higher consciousness and promotes spiritual balance. Frankincense was offered to the sun and myrrh was offered for the moon (“ History of Aromatherapy”, 2006).

While in India, their practice of medicine (ayurveda) incorporates Aromatherapy which was deemed by experts as derived from the knowledge of Egyptians. It involves body massage with organic oils (Price, 1995).

In Greece, aromatic oils are used for its aroma, anti-inflammatory effects on skin and for wound healing. While during the 14th century, Europe was plagued by Black Death and killed millions of people. Herbal preparations

were used to eradicate the disease by aromatic fumigation. It was believed that perfumers were able to avoid the plague due to their constant contact with aromatics (Lawless, 1995).

Development of the science of Aromatherapy continued with the production of more efficient distilling device to be used for essential oils extraction, rise of the perfumery industries and development of more techniques in extracting oils (“ History of Aromatherapy”, 1996-2007).

During World War II, essential oils were used as wound antiseptic. It was also during that time that Aromatherapy became a holistic therapy and essential oils were prescribed to patients as remedies and for massage (“ History of Aromatherapy”, 1996-2007).

It was until the late 19th century when essential oils were proven to have antibacterial properties (International School of Aromatherapy, 1993).

Figures in History

The richness and vastness of Egyptian knowledge on aromatics was later on assimilated by other empires. As the Egyptian empire crumbled, Europe became the center of empirical medicine. The first man of medicine in Europe was a Greek named Asclepius. He used the combination of herbs with surgery. Upon his death, he was immortalized as god of healing in their mythology (“ History of Aroma Therapy”, 1997-2007).

Another important Greek player was Hippocrates who was considered the Father of Medicine. He was the first to employ the use of physio-therapies and massage baths with infusion of herbs or the internal use of herbs in treatment. He advised against the rash use of surgery when a defect is able to be treated with aromatics (“ History of Aroma Therapy”, 1997-2007).

It was from the Greeks that the Romans discovered aromatic baths and massage. During the crusades, the knowledge on aromatherapy spread to India, Persia and Arabia. At this time, Arabs learned to distill alcohol which lessens the need for extracting essential oils using oily bases. Oils were sought after and were used in wigs and to mask foul odors on unsanitary bodies (Crystal, 1995).

After Alexander the Great invaded Egypt, the use of aromatics became more popular. Theophrastus, a philosopher became interested and investigated plants and how plant scents affect the emotions. Another is Dioscorides, a Greek physician, who marched with the army to Germany and Spain and recorded everything he discovered. He described everything from habitats and type of growth which led to the contributing study of essential oils (“History of Aroma Therapy”, 1997-2007).

The most influential of all Greek physicians was Claudius Galen, who lived from 129-199 AD and studied medicine from the age of seventeen. He treated the wounds of gladiators with medicinal herbs. This unique experience provided him with the opportunity to study wounds of all kinds, and it is said that not a single gladiator died of battle wounds while under his care (“History of Aroma Therapy”, 1997-2007).

During the 20th Century, René-Maurice Gattefossé, a French Chemist, became interested with essential oils and its medicinal use. He was initially interested in the use of these essential oils but became more interested to its therapeutic use after a lab accident. It is while working in the laboratory that his lab coat got caught in fire. His reflex made him act out to dip his

flaming arms in the nearest liquid possible. Unintentionally, he exhausted it in a large container of lavender essential oil. His wounds healed fast without leaving any trace of scars. GattefossA(c) was the first one to use the term Aromatherapy in an article he wrote in 1928 wherein he told about the medicinal property of lavender essential oil (GattefossA(c), 1993).

Also in the same period of time, Albert Couvreur from France, published a book which tackles medicinal uses of these essential oils. In addition, Jean Valnet, a doctor from France,

experimented with essential oils. Meanwhile, Margaret Maury, a biochemist from France, dwelled on a method of the application of the essential oils to the skin intended for massage (“ Clinical Aromatherapy”, 2006).

Branches of Aromatherapy

At present there are three main branches of Aromatherapy. These are Home Aromatherapy, Aromachology and Clinical Aromatherapy (Lawless, 1995).

Home Aromatherapy involves the use of essential oils in cosmetics, perfume and self-treatment. There are many known uses of the science in household. Essential oils may be included in sprays before ironing clothes. It may be used as air freshener by mixing with water and applying heat for it to diffuse. It may also be used to deter moth by applying essential oils in cotton balls and placing it inside the cabinet. Some oils may also be used for cuts, burns and head lice treatment (Lawless, 1995).

In Clinical Aromatherapy, it is often involved in pharmacology and pharmacotherapy. It is the controlled use of essential oils for specific outcomes that are measurable. Effects of which are in both physical and

psychological levels. Choice of which essential oil to use depends on the chemistry of essential oil and in this will indicate the safest method of use (“Clinical Aromatherapy”, 2006).

Aromachology, on the other hand, is the psychology of odors and their effects on the minds. It is the scientific study of scents and how it promotes recovery of the body and the mind and support body hormone and immune function. It basically focuses on how scents induce relaxation and relieve the body of stress (“Aromachology”, 1998).

As of date, there are four known methods of administration of essential oils for personal use. These have been determined as safe portals for administering essential oils into the system. These are inhalation, absorption through the skin, absorption through the mucous membrane, and ingestion (Crystal, 1995-2007).

It is known that essential oils have wide range of therapeutic effects. But, one must know that it should not be applied undiluted to the skin.

Concentrated amounts of essential oils may be damaging or toxic. For different types of essential oils there is also different allowable concentration to be used. Dilution of essential oils is usually done with carrier oils. Carrier oils are made of vegetable oil or unsaturated fats (Lavabre, 1990).

There are three different types of inhalation administration. One is Basic inhalation procedure which requires evaporating or diffusing essential oils into air in a steamer and putting a towel tent to catch the vapors. These vapors will be made to inhale by the patient. Another is Microdiffusion which uses a nebulizer which will break the oil into millions of particles which will

be inhaled by the patient. Lastly, is through a Humidifier which, on the other hand, uses cold steam (Lavabre, 1990).

Another method of application is by absorption through the skin. This is usually done by bathing in essential oils, massages and compresses.

Essential oils may also be used hand in hand with bath salts. It is believed that essential oils are absorbed in the skin and transported into the system via the blood (Kirk-Smith, 19994).

Aromatherapy may also be administered by absorption through the mucous membranes. Essential oils may be mixed with solutions or just water and utilized as oral rinses and gargles

It may also be therapeutic via ingestion. But this method is occasionally prescribed. This is often included in cooking as flavoring and taste enhancers (Arnould-Taylor, 1997).

Benefits from Aromatherapy

Recent studies showed medical potency of some essential oils of plants. Generally there are five known beneficial effects of aromatherapy (Crystal, 1995-2007).

Essential oils are known for their antiseptic property. They can either be virucidal, bactericidal, or fungicidal depending on the chemical components of an essential oil. Virucidal refers to the ability of an essential oil to kill viral particles which are present in the host. Bactericidal is the ability of essential oils to kill bacteria. Fungicidal, on the other hand, is its ability to kill fungal organisms which may either be yeasts or molds (Kirk-Smith, 1994).

This ability of essential oil is dependent on the chemical structure of each. This is predicted by the functional group of the chemical structure which

dictates mode of action and specificity to microbial agents (Kirk-Smith, 1994).

Essential oils are also utilized for their anesthetic functions. Samples of which are menthol essential oil and camphor. These are best known for their cool, soothing effects on skin.

An effect of essential oils in Central Nervous System is vital. It has been determined to increase alpha brain waves of an individual's brain. This relaxing factor of essential oils is utilized in relieving stress of individuals. At a fast-paced living nowadays, stress has been the

major cause of illnesses and disorders. With essential oils around, it is now possible to distress even at the comfort of your own homes (Karamat et. al, 1992).

Furthermore, it has been proven that these aromatic oils affect digestion and metabolism by making it more efficient. Its endocrine effects also promote regular hormone production and regulation for optimal body functioning and emotion regulations. It is also determined to be an Immunostimulator by increasing body's level of resistance towards infection by strengthening immune response. More so, it is psychologically-stimulating allowing brain to function at its optimal when conditioned with this therapy (Karamat et. al., 1992).

Drawbacks on Use of Aromatherapy

Essential oils are extracted from source in their concentrated nature. Thus, it must not be applied on the skin in its concentrated form. This may cause allergic reactions or burning of the skin. Before application, essential oils

must be diluted in vegetable oil carriers to decrease the harshness. More so, it must also be considered that there are certain types of essential oils used in aromatherapy which increases skin sensitivity to sunlight. Thus, avoid its use when sun exposure is needed (International School of Aromatherapy, 1993).

Health advocates also point out the presence of pesticide residues in commercially-produced essential oils. Presence of pesticides is detrimental to the health of users. Thus, it should be noted that one should be wary of presence of these chemicals for even in small amounts may be deleterious to health (Cruz-Coke, 1960).

Ingestion of essential oils should also be taken into consideration. This should be done with the aid of professional licensed to prescribe such treatment. Some essential oils are very toxic when ingested by persons. Some are toxic to domesticated animals. Owners must ensure that these essential oils must be out of reach of children and of their domesticated pets.

More over, smoke from burning essential oils may contain carcinogenic substances such as aromatic hydrocarbons. These aromatic hydrocarbons are very unstable and are able to cause changes and deleting in nucleic acids (Karamat et. al, 1992).

Plants Used In Aromatherapy

Angelica (*Angelica archangelica*)- helps ease exhaustion and stress and also rejuvenates the tired mind. It stimulates appetite and also serves as urinary antiseptic. It can be used to relieve headaches, toothache, and inflammation. This can also serve as an aid for indigestion, dyspepsia and cleansing the

system of toxins. It can also be used to neutralize snake bites and increases perspiration (Metcalf, 1989).

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)- can be helpful in making the muscle relax like the smooth muscles (which those that we cannot control like the digestive system and the heart). It can also help in soothing insect bites and can help to relieve mental fatigue. In addition, basil can also sharpen and stimulate our sense of smell (Metcalf, 1989).

Chamomile, Roman (*Chamaelum nobile*)- Cosmetically used for the skin in Europe, this may help in relieving tension and even restlessness. (Metcalf, 1989).

Cinnamon Bark (*Cinnamomum verum*)- In Sri Lanka, Cinnamon Barks have been manufactured for almost 2, 000 years and is known to have a high antioxidant rating. It is popularly used to rejuvenate and revitalize mind and body (Metcalf, 1989).

Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*)- Among the known antioxidants, Clove is considered the most powerful one which serves an aid to the immune system. It is also considered as one of the most antiseptic among the essential oils. Its principal component Eugenol, is known to be used in the industry of dentistry for the numbing of the gums. It also repels ants. (Metcalf, 1989).

Coriander (cilantro) (*Coriandrum sativum*)- The research came from Cairo University and Coriander has been found to have calming and soothing

properties. It also supports certain functions of the pancreas. (Metcalf, 1989).

Eucalyptus Dives- As compared to other eucalyptus oils, Eucalyptus dives has more explicit antiseptic action. It has high concentration of phellandrene and low concentration of eucalyptol. It can also be excellent for topical application though you have to avoid inhaling it directly (Metcalf, 1989).

Eucalyptus Globulus- it contains high concentration of eucalyptol which is a vital component in most antiseptic mouth wash. Eucalyptus which has been used for the respiratory system has a strong, camphor-like smell that is usually used to drive out mucus

and to strengthen the respiratory system. It should not be used with asthmatics and with children who are under five years old as well.

Eucalyptus has also been examined in a study which was published in Phytotherapy Research entitled: “ Laboratory Evaluation of a Eucalyptus-based Repellent against Four Biting Anthropods.” (Metcalf, 1989).

Frankincense (Boswellia certeri)- For a thousand years now, Frankincense has been used in religious ceremonies especially in the Middle East where it is considered as a soothing oil. It helps in relieving stress and it also boosts the immune system. It has long been associated with “ spirituality”, it is elevating, centering, and comforting. It has high sesquiterpenes which help to erase damage in the DNA and supply oxygen to issues that is best for cancer patients (Metcalf, 1989).

Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*)- It is best for skin and helps in letting go unpleasant memories due to its aromatic influence. It also benefits to the nervous system and used for reproductive and glandular systems. The strength of Geranium lies in its capability to regenerate tissue. Skin care specialists and dermatologists use Geranium to balance oily and dry hair and skin. (Metcalf, 1989).

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)- it is used in battling vomiting, dizziness, and nausea that are all associated with motion sickness. It has also been proven to have stimulating, gentle effects (Metcalf, 1989).

Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*)- it is considered an essence than an essential oil. It is absolutely extracted from the flower Jasmine. It is known to be stimulating, relaxing, and uplifting for the skin. Jasmine helps the women who are undergoing through menopause and supports as well as the nervous system. For centuries, it has been considered an “ aphrodisiac” (Metcalf, 1989).

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)- Of all the essential oils available, Lavender is one of the most versatile one. Rene Gattefosse, a French scientist, was the one who discovered the therapeutic-grade lavender which has been highly used for the skin. During the experiment Gattefosse, burned his hands severely in a laboratory explosion. Lavender can be used in cleaning skin irritations, bruises, and cuts. Its fragrance has been proven to be balancing, relaxing, and calming to the physical and emotional being of human. Aside from its aromatic effect, Lavender can also be used as a rub for strains, sprains, and sore muscles which is excellent when mixed with

Tea Tree Oil. It can be drunk (1 to 3 drops of it mixed with a cup of water) to relieve migraines or mere headache (Metcalf, 1989).

Orange (*Citrus sinensis*)- believe it or not, it can bring happiness and peace in our minds and body. It has been proven to help a dull, oily complexion. It can be taken as a dietary supplement or flavoring. However, one should avoid applying citrus oils to the skin if it will be exposed to ultraviolet light or to direct sunlight within seventy two hours (Metcalf, 1989).

Oregano (*Origanum compactum*)- In a research conducted at Weber State University in Oden, Utah, oregano can be damaging to the wide array of viruses and found to be able to kill 99 percent of vitro colonies of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, even with only one percent of concentration. *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is known to be causing many kinds of throat and lung infections. It can be topically applied to the bottom of the feet. If it will be applied on any part of the skin, it should be mixed with Massage Oil Base. It can also be served as a flavoring or dietary supplement. Oregano, however, cannot be used with children who are under five years of age (Metcalf, 1989).

Rose (*Rosa damascena*)- It helps in achieving accord and balance. Its fragrance is also aphrodisiac and intoxicating. It has an elevating and stimulating effect to the mind which eventually leads to a better sense of well-being. It has also been recognized to be the “Queen of Oils” for it brings harmony to the body. It contributes a lot to a better blood circulation and even in skin care (Metcalf, 1989).

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)- It helps in overcoming mental fatigue and has been researched for having antiseptic characteristics. Rosemary is also helpful in caring of the skin. History revealed that Rosemary has been used for a hundred years now for the skin and hair care. It also benefits the muscular, nervous, and circulatory system. Nevertheless, Rosemary is not advisable to be used with persons who have epilepsy and high blood pressure (Metcalf, 1989).

Rosewood (*Aniba roseaodora*)- It nourishes and soothes the skin. A research conducted at the Weber State University show that Rosewood has a reticence rate against bacterial growth (Metcalf, 1989).

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)- In Europe, it has been used to address certain skin problems. It has been proven to have the ability to strengthen vital centers and to support the metabolism. It could also be helpful in coping with mental fatigue and stress (Metcalf, 1989).

Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*)- It helps in releasing emotional blocks which can cause a feeling of steadiness or balance. It also supports the nervous and respiratory systems (Metcalf, 1989).

Tangerine (*Citrus nobilis*)- it helps in relieving nervousness and apprehension. It is considered as a soothing or calming essential oil (Metcalf, 1989).

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)- It has a woody aroma which helps in improving the immune, circulatory, nervous, and skeletal system. It has also use in disinfecting and anti-microbial purposes. It has thymol which has been

known to have the ability to prevent gingivitis and plaque-causing organisms within the mouth. Also, studies show that Thyme can also help a person in coping with exhaustion and fatigue. It can also be used in massaging since it stimulates blood circulation and also help in cleansing and healing of wounds and cuts. When inhaled, it can help in asthma attacks and can be of great help to a person who is recovering from pneumonia (Metcalf, 1989).

White Fir (*Abies grandis*)- It has antiseptic properties which can also help in cleansing wounds and cuts (Metcalf, 1989).

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*)- It has methyl salicylate, an active ingredient which is known to be helpful in massaged involving muscle, joint discomfort, and bone (Metcalf, 1989).

Yarrow – volatile essential oil with a chemical called proazulenes. The dark blue essential oil is generally used as anti-inflammatory agent or for chest rubs for colds and influenza (Metcalf, 1989).

Ylang Ylang (*Cananga odorata*)- This flower, a native in the Reunion Island and Madagascar, symbolizes love and the pale yellow petals, which are also fragrant, are also thrown on a marriage bed. It brings a sense of relaxation because of its balancing and calming effect. Ylang Ylang is also beneficial in the glandular system and is best for the skin and hair as it stimulates the adrenal glands. It can also be used to fight pain and insomnia. Studies show that Ylang Ylang also display good effects for frigidity and impotence. If it is taken internally, it can reduce the problem of Pre-menstrual syndrome, lower blood pressure, and can even ease infections. Surprisingly, when the aroma is inhaled, depression can be alleviated (Metcalf, 1989).

Studies Conducted

At present, Aromatherapy is among the fastest growing field in alternative medicine. It is being used in hospitals and clinics to ease out labor pains and painful effects of chemotherapy. Currently, it has been undergoing further studies for its application in treating other disorders and illnesses (Kirk-Smith et. al., 1994).

There has been a study being conducted at the Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Trust about the effects of aromatherapy in the intensive care unit as means to alleviate anxiety and stress from patients. 122 patients were selected to participate in the study. They were selected to receive either massage, aromatherapy or bed rest. All were assessed before and after the study with stress indications and subjective indications from the patients themselves. All groups showed improvement in lowering levels of anxiety and stress. However, the group which received aromatherapy showed greater positive improvement and were found to be less anxious (Dunn, 1995).

Another study was conducted on how aromatherapy may lower raised arterial blood pressure. Twenty subjects were selected based on reading of sphygmomanometer on their blood pressure which is an average of 140/80 mmHg. Patients received 45 minutes of treatment everyday with the same physician and same methods of application. After a week of treatment, it was shown that the average blood pressure of patients dropped to 132/70 mmHg (Cruz-Coke, 1960).

Presently, experts are trying new grounds on which Aromatherapy may be used for improving human health and broaden the horizons of its application.

Criticisms on Aromatherapy

Some skeptics believe that while certain scents are able to lower anxiety and stress, there is still not enough scientific evidence for the effectiveness of aromatherapy as a form of treatment. They pointed out that evidences were mainly based on anecdotal evidences which ancient people claimed to be true. But, scientific studies were not able to provide a good control and experimental group. There weren't any efficient double-blind experimental studies on effects of aromatherapy on individual health (Arnould-Taylor, 1997).

Moreover, with its prevalence, there has been a wide range of products in the market claiming to be an aromatherapy product. This defeats the true context of aromatherapy. Not all ready-made products available in the market are pure and natural. Products containing artificial ingredients should not be considered therapeutic as these added ingredients counteract its effects. Worse, they provide no benefit. Those who are seeking for true aromatherapy products must first look at the ingredients to determine if it is pure and all natural ("Aromachology", 1998)

Aromatherapy is now a major movement in France and England. Plant materials contain large amount of organic materials and oils that may prove essential to human health. These oils are from which plants derive their aroma and distinct smell. ("Aromachology", 1998)

To achieve pure essential oil, efficient distillation is necessary to prevent extraction of impurities during the process. These impurities may counteract the effects of essential oils when used. Moreover, it is necessary to achieve good therapeutic results ("History of Aromatherapy", 1996-2007).

It is also essential to note that optimal proportion of essential oils in carrier

oils is necessary. This is because essential oils vary in strength and vary in degree of efficacy depending on the type. Some may be harsh to the user and some may be ineffective. There are also factors which should be considered by the practitioner when applying aromatherapy. Factors like the state of illness and type of disease is essential to achieve the desired therapeutic effects (Price, 1995).

As Aromatherapy undergoes further scientific studies for its efficacy, there is no harm in trying what was used for over thousand of years since the time of our ancestors. We have witnessed how the Aromatherapy has helped has in finding treatment for the sickness that has been hounding us.

It should just be noted to use it properly and not be abused and misused. Though, there have been significant researches about the effectiveness of Aromatherapy we should still be careful in “ utilizing” those.

Misusing Aromatherapy would mean putting one’s health into risk.

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