Aromatherapy Can Help PTSD

Alternative medicinal treatments.

by Kate Harmon

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after experiencing a traumatic event. Typically, this event threatens serious physical danger or involves physical violence. Following this experience, it would not be out of the ordinary for someone to feel scared, confused or angry. However, if these feelings continue long-term and become disruptive to your daily activities, you may be suffering from PTSD.

In a given year, about 7.7 million American adults suffer from PTSD. Although it was first brought to public attention in relation to war veterans, PTSD can result from common events, such as a car accident, natural disaster, or personal assault.

It is estimated that among veterans, the rate of PTSD is somewhere between 14 percent and 33 percent.

Not every person who experiences a traumatic event will experience PTSD, and not every Soldier will either, but being aware of possible symptoms and stressors could help with treatment and prevention.

In the past, PTSD has commonly been treated with pharmaceuticals or some type of mood management therapy. Today, information about alternative treatments is becoming more widespread and research has substantiated the historical use of aromatherapy for depression. Why not for PTSD?

Aromatherapy means: the use of aromas for their healing properties. The documented use of essential oils goes back to Egyptian times, where herbs were burnt in public squares to purify the air. Today we know that lemon essential oil, for example, can be used to lift mild depression. We also know that aromatherapy is a natural, less invasive treatment for chronic afflictions. And compared to most pharmaceuticals, aromatherapy is typically less expensive and more accessible.

Many people with PTSD get better over time, but about 1 out of 3 experience PTSD as a recurring challenge. Use of aromatherapy has many advantages in these cases. If used correctly, they have minimal to no adverse effects when used over time. Aromatherapy is also a healthy alternative for those opposed to long-term use of prescription drugs, and essential oils, when diluted and applied to the skin (or inhaled), can be absorbed into the bloodstream for almost immediate results.

Essential oils are distilled directly from plants. The term "essential" is applied to these oils because they contain the fragrant part of the plant. Essential oils are powerful and concentrated. Many should not be applied to the skin in their undiluted form. Rather, essential oils should be diluted with almond or apricot oil, which lend additional nutrient and antioxidant health benefits.

Aromatherapy expert, Dorene Petersen, President of the Australasian College of Health Sciences, said her college store carries organic certified essential oils because “it’s important to have pure and uncontaminated oil.” Drains, trashcans, and pillowcases.

Before using aromatherapy as a PTSD protocol, consult with a Registered Aromatherapist, which can be located through the Aromatherapy Registration Council Web site: www.aromatherapycouncil.org.

The Australasian College of Health Sciences is the only DETC-accredited, fully online college offering continuing education, certificate, diploma, and degree programs in complementary alternative medicine with aromatherapy and holistic health majors. For more information about aromatherapy and the college, visit www.achs.edu.

Symptoms associated with PTSD include:
• Irritability
• Trouble sleeping
• Hopelessness
• Trouble concentrating

For active duty service members or veterans, the symptoms can be more severe:
• Anger
• Avoidance
• Bad dreams
• Flashbacks

To complement a healthy diet, here are some suggestions for using essential oils at home. First, undiluted essential oils can quickly be diffused into the air on a room-by-room basis. Second, you can drop essential oils directly into a relaxing bath or foot soak. (Some oils are more potent than others; until you know how the oil will react with your system, less is more.) Or, try replacing commercial cleaners and air fresheners with essential oils and sprinkling a few drops in and around drains, trashcans, and pillowcases.

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