



Information sheet: Aromatherapy

What is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of aromatic plant essential oils, extracted from flowers, berries, grasses, roots, seeds, bark, fruits and herbs.

Each essential oil has a unique chemical composition, containing molecules that can have a stimulating, balancing or relaxing effect on the body and mind. These molecules are absorbed into the bloodstream through the lungs, when inhaled, or the skin, if applied as part of a massage blend or other product.

Once in the bloodstream, the molecules are carried around the whole body, where they then interact with cells and other molecules. If inhaled, they can also stimulate areas of the brain that are linked to emotion, memory and learning, as well as heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, stress and hormone balance.

What does the therapy do?

Aromatherapy can be used to support people with a wide range of health and wellbeing needs. The therapy is regularly used in hospitals, hospices, care homes and other healthcare settings to help reduce stress and anxiety, and improve sleep, symptom management and quality of life.

What are the training standards?

Aromatherapy sits on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) in England as a Level 3 Diploma and on the Welsh framework (CQFW) as a Level 5 Diploma. It can be learnt as a stand alone therapy or as part of a Level 3 Diploma in Complementary Therapies. This is a minimum practitioner level requirement, but extended learning up to degree level is possible.

Is there regulation?

Aromatherapists are not regulated by law, but they can volunteer to be listed on an Accredited Register that has been independently approved by the Professional Standards Authority ([PSA](#)). The [CNHC](#) is an accredited register.

How do I find an aromatherapist?

It is important to find a therapist who is appropriately qualified and insured.

The [CNHC](#) has a register that can be searched online to find a teacher who is on a register accredited by the [PSA](#).

The Federation of Holistic Therapists ([FHT](#)) also has a 'find a therapist' search function on their website, where therapist are listed.

Are there any safety concerns?

No, if carried out by a professional aromatherapist. Complementary therapies such as aromatherapy should always be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Never ingest essential oils or apply to the skin neat. Other cautions and considerations also apply, which your aromatherapist will discuss with you before treatment.

Is there an evidence base?

Research into the health benefits of aromatherapy is not as readily available as it for more conventional medical treatments. However, there are a growing number of studies and clinical trials that suggest different essential oils can help to improve sleep and mood, reduce stress and anxiety, aid wound healing, and reduce the perception of pain in various population groups, including those with acute or long-term conditions. For research abstracts on aromatherapy visit: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/>