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What happened when... I TRIED AROMATHERAPY at home

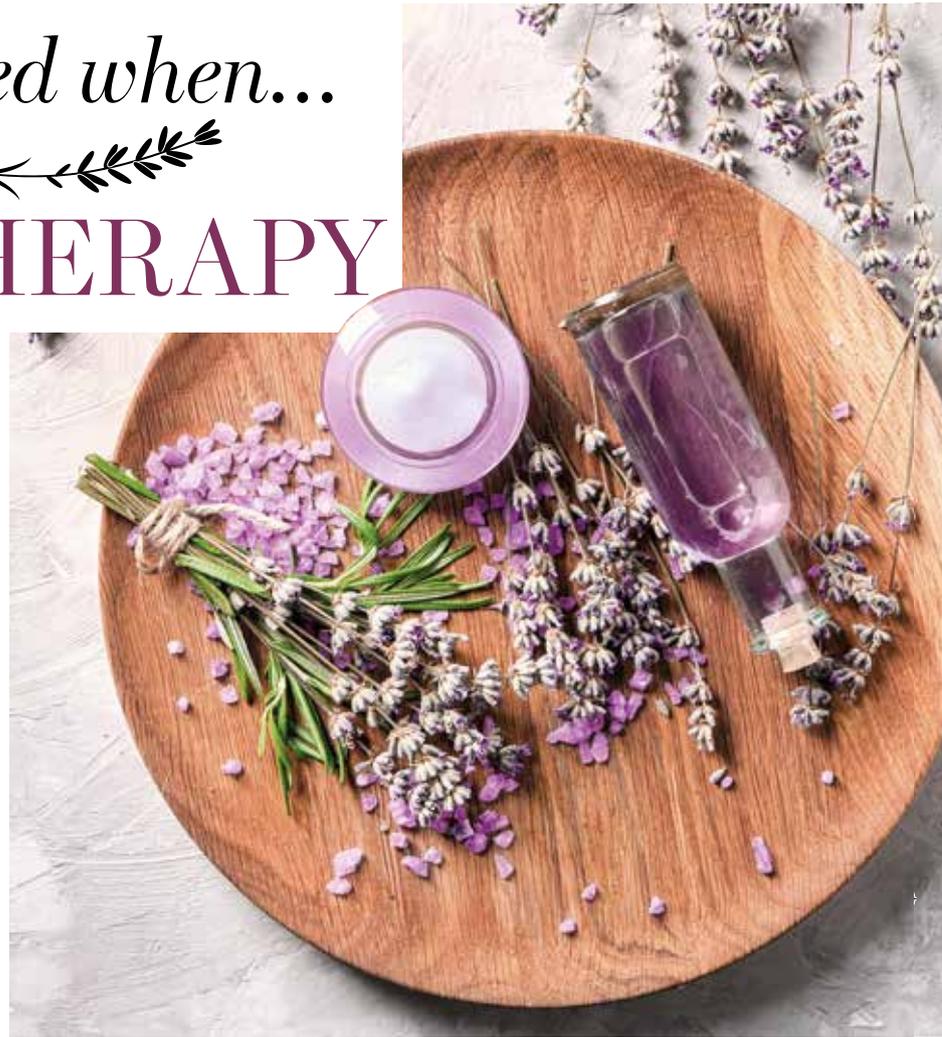
Holly Treacy delves into the world of essential oils and discovers the uplifting rewards of aromatherapy

For many of us, daily commutes and long hours meant finding sanctuary in quick fixes for those few precious moments we had spare for relaxation – a glass of wine, a half listened-to podcast whilst doing the washing up. And, whilst the wellness industry has tapped into our need for calm, when faced with an endless stretch of hours to fill, those same quick fixes no longer have the same allure. So, in the middle of week seven of lockdown – after what I have now dubbed ‘Wobble Wednesday’ due to my anxiety levels reaching their peak – I decided to give aromatherapy a go.

It might sound far fetched to think that wafting some essential oils under your nose could solve your problems or cure anxiety, but I needed a haven away from the news, the online yoga classes or the many family Zoom quizzes and I was willing to spritz, steam and diffuse my way to better days.

In the name of self-care

Eager to slip into a state of zen, I lined up all my oils in my bathroom and was excited to create my at-home spa day – the soothing smells associated with massage would be almost like the real deal, right? But, if I’m being totally honest, patience is not one of my strong suits, (I’ve also tried my hand at growing my own veg during life under lockdown, and lost interest when I hadn’t seen any results by the end of the week) so before tinkering and mixing an array of oils and homemade potions, and not 100 percent confident how aromatherapy actually works, I decided it was best to consult the experts on this one.



“Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of essential oils – pure, aromatic ‘essences’, extracted from different plants,” aromatherapist and FHT vice president, Mary Dalgliesh tells me. “Each essential oil contains tiny 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, when applied as part of a massage blend or other product. Once in the bloodstream, the molecules travel throughout the body, interacting with cells and other molecules. If inhaled, they can also stimulate areas of the brain linked to emotion, memory and learning as well as affecting heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, stress and hormones.”

And, as I wafted Absolute Aromas blend of lavender, chamomile and clary sage under my nose, I was magically transported back to my wedding day and a distinct memory of my make-up artist gently asking me to inhale some lavender oil to steady my nerves flooded



IT'S AMAZING
HOW A SIMPLE
SCENT CAN BE
COMFORTING,
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ENERGISING

to mind. I took a breath and felt instantly calm, as this familiar scent filled the room.

A moment of peace

Now, I knew enough about essential oils to know that I couldn't just casually massage them into my skin, and with no carrier oils to hand at home, I had to experiment with other ways to use them. "Essential oils are not water soluble, so will create a film on the surface if added directly to bath water," explained Mary. "Add 5-9 drops maximum to a suitable dispersant, for example Solubol or Castile soap, which you can buy online." Sounds lovely – but just one problem. I don't own a bath, and I don't think sprinkling a few drops of lavender oil around me in my shower will have the same relaxing effect. So I opted for the next best thing – steam inhalation. I added a few drops of Tisserand's lavender oil to a steaming bowl of water, closed my eyes and drew some deep breaths in. The calming scent was incredibly relaxing and I felt like the oils were working with me to holistically melt away the tensions from our new normal. Needless to say, I slept soundly that evening.

But the next day, what I really wanted to know was, was aromatherapy capable of doing more than just helping me nod off quicker than usual?

"Essential oils can be used to help address more 'everyday' challenges and complaints," Mary told me. "Different oils can be used to reduce anxiety and stress, promote relaxation and sleep, or give our energy levels a little boost. It all comes down to knowing the properties of each oil and which ones are best suited to our needs."

So, a few days later, feeling tired, groggy and sluggish, I was struggling to get my brain and body into work mode. Luckily, I had the This Works travel diffuser (£30, thisworks.com), which is so compact you can pop it anywhere around your home and it won't feel intrusive or clutter up your space. It's so simple to use and I added 5-10 drops of the Morning Expert Wake-Up Drops (a blend of mint herb and rosemary essential oils) to the refill pad and within seconds the gentle whirring of the fan and the aroma of motivating oils had me feeling wide-eyed and more ready for the day. I couldn't believe it – this was a better pick-me-up than a cup of coffee. Was I an aromatherapy convert?

Finally, after a stressful day of impending deadlines and not enough hours in the day, I was feeling my fuse running a little short. Determined to add some calm into my day,

A COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY

Today, more than ever, we want to take ownership of the state of our health. With stress and anxiety on the rise, we seek new ways of dealing with irritability, sleeplessness and burnout. Complementary approaches, including plant medicine, are proving an appealing option for supporting a healthy body and mind. Aromatherapy is not called a complementary therapy without reason – it offers a holistic approach to wellness. Unlike conventional treatments, which focus on symptoms rather than the root cause, essential oils speak to the emotional aspects of an ailment as well as the physical. This ability to soothe both body and mind is proving particularly effective in alleviating the chronic stress and sleep deprivation that comes with the fast pace of modern-day living. Used alongside conventional treatments, essential oils can provide additional support and comfort; they can enhance all stages of life, from pregnancy to menopause and from adolescence to convalescence. The versatile range of applications and benefits that you can attain from just a single oil renders aromatherapy a pleasurable and effective natural hands-on therapy suitable for home use. A word of caution: Always speak to your aromatherapist before commencing selfcare practice.

Extracted from *A Scented Life* by Pat Princi-Jones (Hardie Grant, £12.99)

I spritzed my home office with a few sprays of Tisserand Total De-stress Moodfix Mist (£10.20, tisserand.com) and took a moment to stop and breathe in the natural sweet orange, geranium and nutmeg. The mist had created a cloud of calm and swept my stress away with it.

So while my usual relaxing remedies might be off the cards for a while to come, this newly discovered world of pleasing scents has offered me a little sanctuary to retreat to, just in case another 'Wobble Wednesday' rolls around.

Mary Dalgliesh runs her own therapy practice (head2toemassage.co.uk). She is a therapy trainer and published author. To find a professional aromatherapist in your area, visit fht.org.uk

Safety notes

- Buy high-quality essential oils from a reputable supplier or stockist, to ensure these are 100 percent pure and unadulterated.
- Buy in small quantities, in dark glass bottles with a dropper at the top, and store in a cool place.
- Dispose of the oil safely, in line with the manufacturer's guidelines.
- Never ingest (swallow) essential oils or apply them neat to the skin.
- If you have allergies, sensitive skin, or are pregnant or on medication, consult a professional aromatherapist for advice.
- Aromatherapy and essential oils should only be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Consult your GP or other health professional if you have questions or concerns about any medical matters.

