

How Aromatherapy works

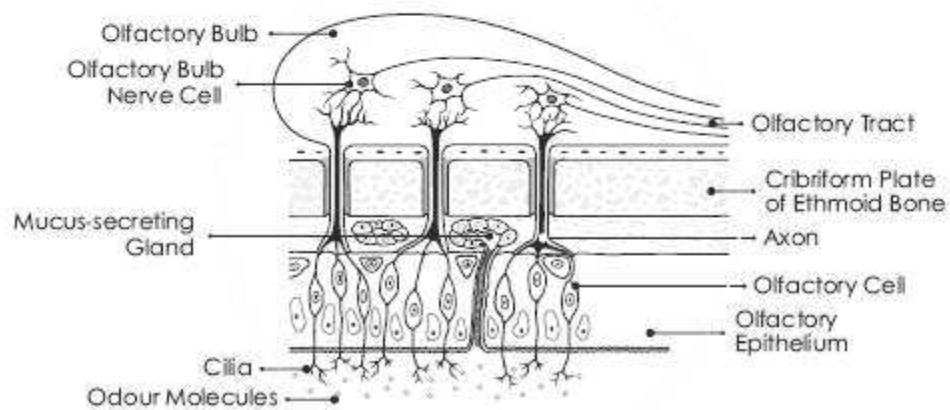
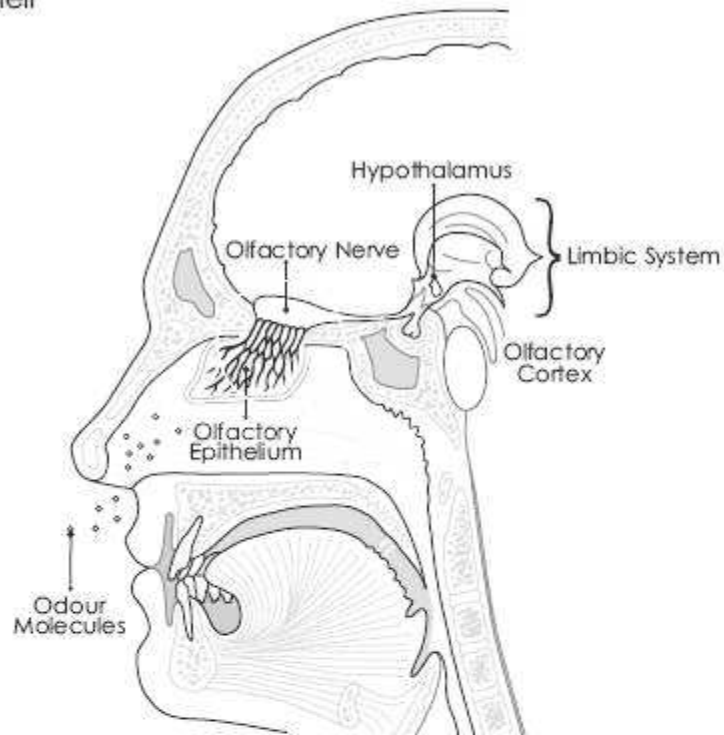
As essential oils have such a wide range of effects, aromatherapy products will work partly through physical routes such as skin absorption or inhalation and partly via the sense of smell.

The Sense of Smell

- The sense of smell is the most primitive of all our senses, and it is linked to some of the oldest and deepest parts of the brain.
- The physical structures of smell found in the nose and brain are together called the Olfactory System.
- The sense of smell is a dynamic sense; its effect is not constant but immediate, and then it fades.
- Aromas can trigger emotional and even physical responses, and allow vivid memory recall of people and places.
- Aromatic molecules are volatile, meaning that they become gases and spread quickly. We can then inhale them with the air we breathe, which is the first step to detecting an aroma.
- Once we have breathed in aromatic molecules they reach the top of the nose and the Olfactory Epithelium, where they come into contact with specialised nerve cells called Olfactory Cells.
- Olfactory Cells have tiny hair-like Cilia hanging from them, and aromatic molecules connect with these Cilia using a 'lock and key' process. This means each cilium will only recognise a specific aroma.
- When the molecules connect with the Cilia, the Olfactory Cell produces a nerve impulse, which will travel towards the brain. The molecules will then break down and be washed away, leaving the Cilia free to detect any new aromas.
- The nerve impulse is carried from the Olfactory Cells to the next group of cells, which make up the Olfactory Nerve. This nerve carries the message into the brain itself.
- The nerve impulse now reaches the Limbic System, one of the most primitive parts of the brain concerned with survival, instincts and emotions. Scientists think the activity of the nerve signals passing through this region could cause mood change by altering brain chemistry. This could be how aromas cause emotional responses.

- Memory is also linked with the Limbic System, and we know that smells can trigger the most powerful emotional memories, both negative and positive.
- In the Limbic System is the Hypothalamus, the control centre for the body's two communication pathways - the Autonomic Nervous System and the Endocrine System. Messages from the sense of smell could activate these pathways, causing physical and possibly hormonal responses to certain aromas.
- The nerve impulse eventually passes beyond the Limbic System to the Olfactory Cortex, located towards the back of the brain. Here, the aroma will finally be recognised but by this time the brain and body will already have responded to it.

The Sense of Smell



Absorption

- Although some essential oils can contain hundreds of individual chemical constituents, their molecular size is still small enough to allow them to penetrate through the skin.
- The skin absorbs oil soluble substances more easily than water soluble ones. Essential oils are lipophilic - oil soluble - but most are too concentrated for direct application on the

skin. They are usually diluted into a carrier medium such as a vegetable oil, or a plant hydrolat.

- The essential oil molecules travel through the epidermis, mainly via the hair follicle into the dermis and eventually reach the blood and lymphatic vessels of the skin.
- Once they enter the circulation they can be carried to all areas of the body. They will reach body areas with a good circulation quickly e.g. the liver, kidneys and some muscle groups.
- All essential oils seem to have non-pathogenic, anti-bacterial properties; some are antiviral, antifungal and anti-inflammatory. Essential oils also contain antioxidants, which help to prevent cell damage caused by oxidation and protect against the build up of toxic waste in skin cells, thereby helping to reduce the signs of ageing.
- Most essential oils leave the body within hours, mainly through the kidneys, although their effects can last much longer within the tissues.
- As essential oils are absorbed mainly through hair follicles, absorption in hair free areas such as the palms of the hands is minimal, so therapists will not absorb significant amounts of essential oils while giving treatments.

Inhalation

- Essential oils work very effectively within the respiratory system. Their anti-bacterial and antiviral properties make them ideal for maintaining health within the sinuses, throat and chest, and also for symptomatic relief of infections and allergies.
- When they are inhaled, they are absorbed through the mucous membranes lining the respiratory structures and pass directly into the bloodstream, and so they can travel throughout the body as described above.

Precautions

De-stress Massage Oil

Not recommended during pregnancy.

If suffering from a medical condition seek advice from a doctor before use