**SCENT SENSE**

It’s becoming increasingly obvious that stress reduction in the workplace is valuable to help employees not only relax, but be more productive. This was illustrated in a year long study with 86 nurses working in a stressful emergency-room setting. Their high levels of anxiety fell dramatically when they received a 15-minute aromatherapy massage while listening to relaxing, new-age music. An aromatherapy mist was sprayed above their heads and then massaged into their shoulders, mid-back, neck, scalp, forehead, and temples. Their anxiety, measured at 54% in summer and 65% in winter, fell to just 8% regardless of the season after a series of 16 massages over a two-day work period. The women were able to choose rose, lavender, or lime, or a combination of lavender (Lavandula officinalis), ylang ylang (Cananga odorata), bergamot (Citrus bergamia), and patchouli (Pogostemon cablin). Head researcher Dr. Marie Cooke of the Griffith University in Queensland, Australia said, “…providing aromatherapy massage had an immediate and dramatic effect on staff who traditionally suffer high anxiety levels because of the nature of their work.”


**STRESS LESS**

A Korean study also suggests that inhaling essential oils is a good way to reduce stress in patients. The 52 volunteers with high blood pressure were divided into three groups. The group that inhaled a blend of lavender, ylang ylang, and bergamot essential oils once a day for a month saw their emotional stress levels drop, along with their blood pressure and cortisol levels, which are further indications of reduced stress.


**WORTH A MINT**

Researchers at the University of Northumbria, UK say that their study provides further evidence of how aroma impacts a person’s brain activity and mood. When some of the 144 volunteers sniffed the aroma of peppermint (Mentha piperita), it improved their memory and alertness. There were no changes in the rest of the group who had no aroma for comparison. On the other hand, ylang ylang had the opposite effect, lengthening the time it took the brain to process information and significantly increasing a sense of calmness. A study from Thailand with 40 volunteers found ylang ylang caused much more relaxation and a sense of calmness than was seen in a control group when it was absorbed through the skin and inhaled. The researchers see this as a potential way to help relieve depression and stress.


**HEARTY FENNEL**

In a study on 24 essential oils, fennel seed (Foeniculum vulgare) was the best one to prevent blood clots. It also lowered blood pressure. Its main component, anethole, appears to be equally effective. University di Parma, Italy researchers described them both as “safe antithrombotics that are effective due to their broad antiplatelet activity, clot destabilizing effect, and vasorelaxant action.”


**PEACEFUL SANDALWOOD**

In Ayurvedic medicine, sandalwood is used to treat both physical and emotional problems. It is also said to enhance meditation and contemplation. The University of Vienna in Austria found that the fragrance elevated pulse rate, skin conductance level, and systolic blood pressure more than an odorless placebo. Its main compound, alpha-santalol increased attentiveness and mood more than the oil itself.


**RADICAL ROSEMARY**

Both rosemary and lavender can enhance free radical scavenging activity and decrease the stress hormone, cortisol, which further helps to protect the body from oxidative and emotional stress, according to a study with 22 volunteers who sniffed the scents for 5 minutes. A previous Western Oregon University study found that rosemary reduced tension, anxiety, confusion, bewilderment, and even slowed vigorous activity when 73 nonsmoking participants performed tasks that were designed to provoke anxiety. Both rosemary and lavender reduced fatigue compared to those who just sniffed plain water. There were no changes in their temperature or heart rate.
