SCENTED RELIEF

Four randomized, double-blind studies suggest that a scented geranium (Pelargonium sidoides) reduces bronchitis. In a trial with 217 people at several medical centers, there was marked improvement of hoarseness, headache, labored breathing, fever, and muscle pain in those who took the extract for a week (30 drops/3 times a day). It was especially helpful in reducing coughing and fatigue. They were confined to their bed for less time, able to go back to work sooner, and had no side effects. In traditional South African Zulu medicine, the roots are chewed or mixed in food to treat diarrhea and respiratory ailments. Agbabiaka TB, et al. 2008. Ps for acute bronchitis: systematic review and meta-analysis. Phytotherapy 15(5):378-85; & Matthys H & P Funk. 2008. EPs 7630 improves acute bronchitic symptoms and shortens time to remission. Planta Med. 74(6):686-92.

CHAMOMILE ANTIDEPRESSANT

Taking German chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla) reduced inattention, hyperactivity, and immature reactions of 3 teenage, young men being treated for attention-deficit disorder (ADHD) at the Regional Hospital Bozen in Bolzano in Italy. Improvement was rated by their parents. German chamomile has been shown to inhibit the re-uptake of two of the brain's neurotransmitters: serotonin and noradrenalin and is an antidepressant. Drugs with the same action have effectively treated some people who have ADHD. Niederhofer H. 2009. Mc. may improve some symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Phytomed 6(4):284-6.

ENHANCE NATURE

The US Department of Agriculture found that all the essential oils they tested slowed the decay of fruits. Most of the oils also improved the antioxidant action in the fruit. For example, quercetin and a major anthocyanin (malvidin 3-galactoside) were enhanced by most of the oils (except linalool and p-cymene). The chlorogenic acid in blueberries (Vaccinium corymbosum), a major phenolic compound, was also increased by all oils. Some essential oil compounds (carvacrol, anethole, and perillaldehyde) increased levels of fructose, glucose, and citric acid in the fruit. (That is, unless first treated with either linalool or p-cymene.) Other compounds effectively retarded mold (p-cymene, followed by linalool, carvacrol, anethole, and perillaldehyde, with cinnamic acid and cinnamaldehyde to a lesser extent). Wang CY, et al. 2008. Increasing antioxidant activity and reducing decay of blueberries by essential oils. J Agric Food Chem. 56(10):3587-92.

SWEET SUCCESS

Thomas Henle, of Dresden Technical University, analyzed some 40 honeys from around the world and found high amounts (up to 760 mg/kg) of an antibacterial compound (methylglyoxal) in New Zealand manuka honey—more than 70 times that of other honey, with 1000-fold more antibacterial activity. [Ed. Note: The highest concentrations in food is found in cocoa and in coffee, which is 100 mg/kg, the minimum needed to produce effective antibacterial activity.]

Peter Molan, Director of Honey Research at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, found it kills tough bacteria even when diluted 10 times and recommends it for people with weak immune systems. He says, "It's been used on wounds where nothing else will work." Honey's antiseptic activity is produced by hydrogen peroxide bees make when they add an enzyme to it. Manuka honey has additional antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal, and antiinflammatory properties derived from flower nectar. Manuka reduces odors from infection for up to a week, making it convenient for clinics. A honey handwash to reduce MRSA, a drug-resistant staph infection, and to moisturize and soothe dry, damaged skin is being developed.

In a clinical trial, six of 11 cases of leg ulcerations due to varicose veins completely healed within one month, and all 11 were healed after six weeks, even though the typical healing time is three months. The ulcers had previously failed to heal from treatments like compression, antimicrobial dressings, and oxygen. Studies show 40% complete remission in mouth and throat cancer patients after they ate manuka honey, with partial remission in another 40%. Dr. Robert Frykberg, chief of podiatry at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona, found that Medihoney works well on about half of his diabetic patients with foot ulcers. Robson, V, et al. 2009. Standardized antibacterial Medihoney with standard therapy in wound care. J Adv Nursing 65(3):565-75; & The Can Report, May 27, 2009. Researchers from Germany and New Zealand have reviewed Medihoney.
LAVENDER DE-STRESSING
Osaka University in Japan tested lavender (Lavandula spp.) against stress. Thirty students did 10 minutes of difficult arithmetic problems, then rested for 10 minutes. The math elevated levels of chromograninin, a stress indicator found in saliva, in everyone at the end of the task. However, levels went down in those who inhaled lavender that was dispersed in the air around them, but remained high in the others. There was no much change in cortisol levels — another stress detector.

Aromatherapy decreased pain and depression in 20 hospice patients who were being hospitalized with terminal cancer at Keimyung University’s medical school in Korea. Each patient’s hand was massaged with aromatherapy oil for five minutes a day during a week long experiment. The oil combined equal amounts of lavender, frankincense (Boswellia caritii), and bergamot (Citrus bergamia), diluted (1.5%) in almond oil. The 38 people in the control group who received hand massage with just almond oil showed no change.

BUG OFF
Aroma plays a role in insect behavior. Researchers at the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia found more than 30 essential oils are excellent bug repellents. Many essential oil compounds (such as monoterpenoids) are potent repellents. Some of the strongest mosquito repellents are lemon grass (Cymbopogon nardus), cinnamon (Cinnamonum spp.) litsea (Litsea Elyptica), and cajeput (Melaleuca Cajuputi). Other good repellents are geranium (Pelargonium citrosum), sandalwood (Aquilaria malaccensis), and basil (Ocimum spp.), and especially citrus. Dr Nor Azah Mohamad Ali, of the medicinal plants program, prefers the use of essential oils since chemically-based insecticides and repellents can deplete ozone and cause mosquitoes, as well as related bacteria and fungi, to become resistant.

MEDICINAL INCENSE
Inhaling smoke from burning fragrant, medicinal herbs (havan sámagri) is a practice seen all over India. A study at India’s National Botanical Research Institute shows incense smoke completely destroys an assortment of bacteria that are harmful to both humans and plants. The reduction of airborne bacteria was more than 94% when the smoke was contained within a closed room for one hour. That room remained disinfected for up to one full day and bacteria was still low even after the room had been open for a month. Bacteria eliminated included Staph, skin infections (Enterobacter aerogenes and Kupuria rosea), and a urinary tract infection (Corynebacterium urealyticum).

BEYOND INCENSE
In the first study to test the psychoactivity of incense, Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been investigating frankincense’s (Boswellia caritii) ability to relieve anxiety and depression. They report that the active ingredient, boswellic acid, lights up specific brain receptors that help the mind perceive warmth on the skin and possibly regulate emotions. The researchers think this “may provide a biological basis for deeply rooted cultural and religious traditions.” Knowing how the compound (incensole acetate) in frankincense works on brain targets can help in understanding nervous system diseases. Some work has been with rats, leaving researchers skeptical. However, Raphael Mechoulam, who helped identify THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) as marijuana’s active substance in the 1960s, defends his results. “Valium will do exactly the same,” said Arieh Moussaieff, at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, who cites from the Talmud, “the prisoner condemned to death was given Boswellia in a cup of wine so as to benumb the senses.”

The main component in frankincense essential oil (Boswellia carii), boswellic acid, suppresses cancer cells but not normal cells in the bladder. The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center found it destroys cancer without fragmenting DNA, as usually occurs, and appears to activate genes that stop their cycle and growth.

An extract of Indian frankincense (Boswellia serrata) reduced osteoarthritis symptoms in just one week during a randomized, double-blind trial with 70 people who had moderate to mild cases. The proprietary product, developed by Laila Nutraceuticals, contains 30% boswellic acid, thought to be the most active ingredient. It may prove a useful alternative to arthritis medications, which have many adverse affects.
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