

Aromatherapy – Is it All in Your Head?

According to Harold Bloomfield author of *Healing Anxiety Naturally* (1998), aromatherapy is all in your head, or at least it has been demonstrated that scents, such as those used in aromatherapy, illicit changes in brain waves that in turn can change our behavior.

Controlled brain wave studies by researchers at Toho University in Japan have provided insightful data about how specific scents tend to stimulate or relax individuals (Bloomfield, 1998, p. 130). Smelling jasmine has been linked to alertness and performance and has been shown to increase beta waves in the cortex. The scent of lavender has been shown to induce relaxation and is associated with increased alpha waves in the back of the head. When paired with breathing techniques, lavender oil can create a cue-controlled response. Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (1998), report that cue-controlled relaxation reduced the time needed to experience a deeper level of relaxation generally within two to three minutes (p.64). Try the following 3 minute breathing/aromatherapy exercise to see if this may be a helpful resource to manage stress and anxiety.

Breathing/Aromatherapy Technique Using Lavender Oil:

(You will need 100% pure Lavender oil and a clock with a second hand)

1. Find a quiet spot and sit in a relaxed position. Note: keep your eyes closed as much as possible throughout this exercise.
2. Obtain a baseline breathing rate by breathing at your normal pace for one minute, while counting each inhale/exhale as “1.”. Make note of your total breaths (each inhale/exhale counting as one). This number equals your “baseline,” which you will use in comparison to your breath count t the end of this exercise.
3. Apply one drop of 100% pure lavender oil to your fingertip and gently massage into skin under your nose/upper lip.
4. Close your eyes and take one cleansing breath **in** through your **nose** and **out** through your **mouth**.
5. Begin your breathing exercise by slowly breathing in through your nose to the count of four (in your mind), and gently breathe out trough your mouth to the count of four (in your mind). Maintain an even, gentle flow of your breath between transitioning from inhales to exhales. Continue to count to yourself as noted above to increase mindfulness.
6. Continue breathing *gently* and *slowly* as described above, being mindful of the slowness and calmness of your breath as you inhale and exhale. You may choose at this time to replace the “counting” with words to increase the depth of your experience. As an example, upon inhale, breathe in the word **relaxation** and feel each breath filling you with a feeling of calmness, relaxation, and well-being. Upon exhale, use a visual of **tension** draining any remaining tightness or pain from your body. Allow your body to feel loose and light.
7. Continue this exercise for either a one, or tow minute period of time or until you begin to feel relaxed and refreshed.
8. For your final minute of this breathing/aromatherapy exercise, return to timing your breath for one minute to determine your breathing rate upon completion of this 3-4 minute exercise.
9. Enjoy!

Note: You may experience a release in anxiety and tension in your first attempt, however, if not, continue to practice this technique until you master the benefits of breathing techniques paired with aromatherapy.

Resource:

H. Bloomfield, (1998). *Healing Anxiety Naturally*. HaperCollins Publishers. NY, NY.

M. Davis, E. Eshelman, M. McKay (1998). *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook*. Fifth Edition. New Harbinger Publications, Inc. USA.