

Aromatherapy and Muscular Pain

by Aileen Halvorson

In today's technological society we find ourselves sitting at computers in stationary positions for long periods of time. As we have become a more sedentary society, we are experiencing more muscular pain and a decrease of circulation throughout our bodies. In the days of my grandfather and father, life was more of a strenuous affair. Chopping wood, working in the garden and everyday chores such as getting water from the well, created greater circulation and muscle movement throughout the day. Lack of movement has created tightened and loose muscles throughout our bodies.

Many of us incorporate exercise into our lives to counteract our sedentary jobs. Jogging, running, yoga and a good workout at the gym are integrated into our lives to try and counteract sitting all day. Yet, one hour of exercise 3 to 4 times per week does not make up for the damage we are doing to our muscles. We find sprains and strains happening more readily because our bodies are tight and overworked in ways that are not natural to our makeup. Working in the medical field as I do, I encounter many complaints of muscle spasms, tendonitis, (from repetitive movement), cramping of muscles and upper and lower back pain. I see so many patients be put on pain pills and muscle relaxants, which temporarily gets them through the crisis, only to occur a few months later, starting the whole process over.

We have over 600 muscles within our human body system. Muscles, whether attached to bones or to internal organs or blood vessels are responsible for movement. Most muscular complaints are related to exaggerated use and overuse of weakened muscles. There are many types of muscular complaints. Sprains, strains, cramps, low and upper back pain and in today's society we are faced with other syndromes and diseases such as Fibromyalgia, Muscular Dystrophy, and Polymyositis are just a few of the many ailments that attack the muscular system as well as the fascia, the fibrous tissue that connects the muscles to the bones. The fascia contains the muscles blood, lymph, and nerve supply. There are many alternative medicine therapies that can help to alleviate muscular tension and pain, including massage therapy, yoga and stretching, acupuncture and aromatherapy. My focus is on the healing powers of essential oils and the applications available for treatment.

One of the questions to ask yourself when working with muscular pain is whether this is an acute injury, such as a sprain or strain, or chronic muscular pain from work environment or disease. When working with an acute injury, immediate attention is required. Is there inflammation involved? The first action would be to elevate the muscular area and apply a cold compress with a concentration of essential oils. There are many essential oils that have healing properties to reduce inflammation, increase circulation and relax muscular tension.

Chamomile is excellent for releasing tension and swelling to injuries, as well as a stimulant to the lymphatic system and reducer of aches and pains. Chamomile works well on a cold or hot compress applied directly to the injury. Starting out with a cold compress is best for acute injuries. Black Pepper oil is another essential oil that increases circulation, decreases aches and pains, bruising, sprains and stiffness. Black Pepper should be used in moderation and in low dilution. Other oils that are suited well for sprains are Basil, Marjoram, Lavender, Fir, Eucalyptus, Myrtle, Lemon, Orange, Peppermint, Benzoin, Bergamot, Rosemary, Ginger, Grapefruit, Rose, Clove, Geranium just to name a few. Oils such as Ginger and Clove have a warming affect on the muscles allowing them to release tension. A preventative treatment, prior to exercise is an massage blend of 10 drops Rosemary, 10 drops of Pine, with 5 drops each of Grapefruit and Black Pepper into 2 fluid ounces of carrier oil of 60% Almond and 20% Safflower oil, 10% Arnica and 10% Calendula oil ¹. Apply this blend all over body, focusing on muscular areas of high use during to exercise. A hot bath soaking with Lavender oil not only reduces stress and tension but reduces inflammation, and pain of muscles and connective tissue. If a shower is more appropriate for an individual, a salt scrub can be made of Dead Sea Salts and a combination of essential oils such as Eucalyptus, Rosemary and Ginger along with a carrier oil². Apply during shower in an upward motion towards the heart. This will increase circulation in the muscles.

In my personal work experience, I spend many hours each day sitting at a computer and talking on the phone. This decreases circulation and causes some muscles to tighten throughout the day and others to become loose from improper posture. Since working with essential oils I have created a routine throughout the day, of making sure that I stand up and stretch or walk around the office several times and just prior to my standing and stretching I apply a blend of 5 drops Tea Tree, 4 drops of Lavender and 3 drops of Ginger with carrier oils of 60% Almond Oil, 20% Arnica, 10% Calendula and 10% Jojoba³. Ginger essential oil has a warming effect upon the muscles as it is massaged into the skin. Apply to legs, arms, shoulders and chest as often as 3 or 4 times per day just prior to a break from your work. The essential oils will enter in through the skin and quickly into the blood stream, increasing circulation, waking up your muscles, and combating muscular pain and stress. As mentioned above the Ginger used as a base oil creates warmth. The Lavender oil as a middle note acts as flow between the other two oils and also relieves stress and has a relaxing effect. The Tea Tree as a top note works on the aches and pains and also creates mental clarity and stability under stress. There should always be a skin test prior to use and should never be used before exposure to sunlight as well as tanning beds and sunlamps.

Today we also encounter a new onset of Syndromes creeping into our society. One of these chronic conditions is that of Fibromyalgia. The word Fibromyalgia means: Fibro- meaning fibrous tissues, myo- meaning muscles and algia- meaning pain. We come up with muscular and

fibrous tissue pain. I recently was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia and this helped me to understand the constant discomfort that I felt throughout my body. I started searching for alternative treatment for the condition. Aromatherapy has been a blessing.

I often find myself experiencing upper and lower back pain, shoulder, arm, thigh and hand pain. Other symptoms are fatigue, from sleep disturbance due to pain and restlessness, and emotional distresses. Through the study and personal work with aromatherapy, I have found relief. I often use many different essential oils during fibromyalgia disturbances. Making a salt scrub to use during the shower helps to increase circulation to the muscles and tissues that are being affected. A salt scrub is easy to make and highly effective. My favorite mixture for a salt scrub to help reduce inflammation and increase blood flow is ½ cup of Dead Sea salts, 2 to 3 tablespoons of carrier oils and 3 to 10 drops of essential oils. I use a combination of carrier oils to release tension, increase circulation and decrease pain and inflammation. Borage oil is a good essential oil to help reduce inflammation, Arnica works well on pain and strained muscles and swelling and Calendula helps to decrease circulatory congestion and increase toning in the tissues in the lower limbs. The essential oils I add to the scrub are 3 drops Helichrysum, 4 drops spike Lavender and 5 drops Thyme⁴. Mix ingredients together and apply in an upward motion towards the heart on legs, arms, abdomen, shoulders and upper and lower back regions. After the shower a blend of Helichrysum, Thyme, Spike Lavender, Peppermint and St. Johns Wort can be applied on same areas and allowed to seep into the areas of need. Applying this blend two to three times per day has decreased my symptoms to a great degree.

For relief of pain that has centralized into one or two areas, I like to use a hot or cold compress as stated previously or use a liniment. A liniment is a combination of alcohol, (either rubbing, vodka or pure grain), that is blended with essential oils to create a heating and at the same time a cooling effect upon the muscles allowing them to relax and increase circulation. Essential oils such as Cinnamon, Peppermint, Ginger and Clove give the liniment its heating actions. All heating preparations contain either Peppermint or Camphor which stimulates both hot and cold reactions in the skin. According to Kathy Keville in her article Aromatherapy Joint Pain Relief, "The brain registers these sensations at the same time and the contrast between the two messages makes the liniment seem much hotter than it is. The most effective liniments contain muscle relaxing and inflammation reducing essential oils such as rosemary, lavender and marjoram as they penetrate into the skin and work directly on the muscles. A recipe for a wonderful liniment is: 8 drops eucalyptus, 8 drops peppermint, 8 drops of rosemary, 4 drops cinnamon, 4 drops juniper and 4 drops of marjoram with 2 ounces of alcohol. Mix together and shake gently several times daily for 3 days⁵. This blend is stronger than a massage blend so it should not be used all over body but should be used only in localized areas of pain".

Aromatherapy is a great, great alternative medicine to be used in treating muscular pain and tension. I have experienced a positive outcome of relief and sense of calm that has surfaced in my life since incorporating aromatherapy treatments. Aromatherapy is not only inexpensive but works quickly and effectively. Creating your own blends and treatments can create a sense of beauty, health and control over areas in your life that had previously felt out of control and never ending. Aromatherapy has been used throughout the ages to relieve pain, stress and create a greater sense of well being and is of great benefit to our technological world of today.

Precautions for Blends Listed

#1: A preventative treatment, prior to exercise is an massage blend of 10 drops Rosemary, 10 drops of Pine, with 5 drops each of Grapefruit and Black Pepper into 2 fluid ounces of carrier oil of 60% Almond and 20% Safflower oil, 10% Arnica and 10% Calendula oil ¹. Apply this blend all over body, focusing on muscular areas of high use during to exercise.

Precautions: Do not use during pregnancy. Do not use with high blood pressure. Do not use with Epilepsy. Do not use with Homeopathic Remedies. Phototoxic- Avoid sunlight, sunlamps and tanning booths. Do not use in bath. Use in moderation. May be skin irritant. Do patch test.

#2: A hot bath soaking with Lavender oil not only reduces stress and tension but reduces inflammation, and pain of muscles and connective tissue. If a shower is more appropriate for an individual, a salt scrub can be made of Dead Sea Salts and a combination of essential oils such as Eucalyptus, Rosemary and Ginger along with a carrier oil².

Precautions: Avoid during pregnancy. Avoid with children under 5. Avoid with Epilepsy or Neurological Imbalance. May be skin irritant in bath. Avoid with high blood pressure. Avoid using with Homeopathic Remedies. Do not take internally. Avoid exposure to sunlight, tanning beds and sunlamps. May be skin irritant.

#3 To increase circulation and combat muscular pain use a blend of 5 drops Tea Tree, 4 drops of Lavender and 3 drops of Ginger with carrier oils of 60% Almond Oil, 20% Arnica, 10% Calendula and 10% Jojoba³.

Precautions: Do not use with low blood pressure. Avoid exposure to sun and tanning booths and sunlamps. May be skin irritant.

#4 For increasing circulation, reducing inflammation and combating muscular pain and tension, the essential oils I add to the scrub are: 3 drops Helichrysum, 4 drops spike Lavender and 5 drops Thyme⁴.

Precautions: Should not be used on children under 12. Do not use with low blood pressure. Use in moderation and low dilution. Avoid during pregnancy. Avoid with high blood pressure. May cause skin irritation.

#5 A recipe for a wonderful liniment is: 8 drops eucalyptus, 8 drops peppermint, 8 drops of rosemary, 4 drops cinnamon, 4 drops juniper and 4 drops of marjoram with 2 ounces of alcohol.

Precautions: Do not use with high blood pressure. Avoid during pregnancy. Avoid with children under 5. Avoid with Epilepsy or neurological imbalance. May be skin irritant. Do not use in bath. Avoid with homeopathic remedies. Do not take internally. Do not use if you have kidney problems.

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