



This week...

Follow your nose - to improving brain function!

You may already be a fan, always wanted to try it, or may be skeptical of it. If you fall in the latter two categories, this week's ReFresh might *stimulate* you to try it. What are we talking about? Using essential oils!

Essential oils are often used in **aromatherapy**, a form of alternative medicine that employs plant extracts to support health and well-being. Essential oils capture the plant's scent and flavour, or *essence*. Essential oils are obtained through distillation using steam and/or water, or mechanical methods, such as cold pressing. The way the oils are made is important. Essential oils obtained through chemical processes are not considered to be true essential oils and may not provide the same health benefits.

Essential oils are promoted to support different health needs, including pain, digestion, immunity, and sleep. For our purposes, we'll focus on the early research that indicates essential oils can reduce brain fog, ease stress, and promote mental clarity.

How does a smell help our brain function? Certain oils are actually able to stimulate the brain almost immediately, resulting in better focus and — sometimes — a little mood boost. But *how does this all really work?*

You know how certain smells bring up strong memories? Perhaps an old flame's perfume (or aftershave) or the scent inside an old car? Well, the emotional hub in our brain is directly linked to the olfactory epithelium in our noses, and this tissue communicates the effects of fragrance to our minds. Interestingly, the **limbic system** is heavily involved in forming memories. This can partly explain why familiar smells trigger memories or emotions. The limbic system also plays a role in controlling several

unconscious physiological functions, such as breathing, heart rate, and blood pressure. Some people claim that essential oils can also have a physical effect on the body.

Here are some of the essential oils that studies have found to enhance your energy, improve thinking power, and calm anxiety:

For enhancing your energy

Essential Oil	Ideas for use
Peppermint - Improves focus and stimulates the mind, improving concentration, memory and mental clarity - Reportedly less mental fatigue from cognitively demanding tasks	Peppermint is not as effective when ingested as tea. Your best bet is to apply the essential oil topically or take the inhalation approach.
Lemon, Grapefruit and Wild Orange - Sharpens your focus - Lemon increases attention levels and promotes physical energy and purification when inhaled - Grapefruit stimulates a natural energy boost - Uplifting to the mind and body - Natural stress reliever when these citrus oils are inhaled	Spritz hard surfaces (such as your desk) with an <u>aromatic lemon-vinegar cleaner</u> made from equal parts water and vinegar and several drops of lemon essential oil. Not only can the spray help boost your mood, but it'll also keep your space germ-free, as lemon essential oil has been shown to have antibacterial properties.

For improving thinking power

Essential Oil	Ideas for use
Rosemary - Boosts your memory (<i>by up to 75%, according to some studies!</i>) - Improves cognitive performance	Two approaches you can take: 1) inhalation (e.g. via a diffuser) 2) topical application (be sure to dilute the essential oil with carrier oil, water, or unscented lotion)
Basil	Sprinkle two drops of basil essential oil onto a

• Boosts mental clarity by improving focus and recall • Stress buster to mitigate the impact of chronic stress on cognition • Effective for concentration, as it contains linalool - an organic compound shown to reduce memory loss and stress	handkerchief and inhale deeply to help you retain your focus.
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For calming anxiety

Essential Oil	Ideas for use
Lavender • Prized for its <u>calming and relaxing properties</u> • Can help put your nervous system in a rest-and-digest state, versus the fight-or-flight one many of us resort to when stressed	Mix lavender essential oil with a carrier oil — jojoba, olive, or grapeseed — then massage the oil blend into your temples or wrists or dab it right under your nose. Inhale a few drops after a busy day to calm down and promote a clear mind.
Frankincense • Improves your focus • Regulates your mood • Memory-boosting • Supports healthy bodily function	For focus and concentration, try simmering water on your stove. Add a few drops of frankincense essential oil to the water, and it'll soon fill your space with a fragrance that's earthy, sweet, and spicy — just be sure the water stays below boiling point.
Ylang-Ylang • Sweet and floral smelling • Effective for concentration and optimal focus	Fill a large bowl with boiling water, then add 3 – 7 drops of ylang-ylang essential oil. Drape a towel over your head, then position your face no closer than six inches to the bowl. Stay in position for about 15 minutes to fully reap the aromatherapeutic benefits of the steam.

Sage

- Long-standing reputation as a catalyst for mental clarity
- Scientifically linked to alertness, calmness, and contentment

Combine sage essential oil with a carrier oil of your choice, then massage the oil blend all over your feet, from your heel to your toes. In reflexology, the top segment of the toe is believed to be connected to the brain, so massaging your toes can help promote mental clarity.

Remember: when choosing essential oils, do your research and make sure you're getting therapeutic-grade oils that are made using the purest ingredients. When you've chosen your oils, it is simple and quick to use: add 3 to 6 drops in a diffuser in your home; inhale directly from the bottle; or place a couple of drops on your wrists or temples. You can also add a few drops to an Epsom salt bath for a relaxing, home spa.

Caution: some oils may be harmful to your pets! Tips on safe usage for both you and your furry family members.

Learn more about other essential oils and their benefits

See Health Canada's listing of essential oils and their safe usage

*Share with us: **What are some of your favourite essential oils?***

Let us know what you would like to see in the **ReFresh** series, or if you have a refreshing tip to contribute. We would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

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