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Balancing Your *dosha* with Essential Oils

Good Scents, by Christie Matheson, *Yoga Journal*, November 2003

Feeling unbalanced? A few drops of these essential oils can bring you back to center.

Never underestimate the power of the sense of smell. Beyond detecting odors, it provides "the quickest and easiest pathway to the brain," says Debra Riordan, clinical Ayurvedic specialist and part-time faculty member at the California College of Ayurveda. That's why many Ayurvedic practitioners believe that inhaling certain aromas can balance one's *dosha*, reduce stress, and promote overall healing. Here are the scents that are right for your dosha.

Vata. *Vatas* tend to be emotional and excitable. When out of balance, they can experience stress, anxiety, and fear, so they should choose scents that are calming and sweet with a hint of sour, says Riordan. Flower scents, such as rose and geranium, are calming and also may help with insomnia, a common problem for *vatas*. A sweet citrus scent like orange may also help balance energy. Add 10 to 12 drops of essential oil (fewer if you have sensitive skin) directly into a bath, making sure the water temperature is warm enough for the oil to become fully immersed and for a steam with aromatic vapors to be produced. You can also apply the essential oil, mixed with a carrier oil, to your skin as part of a self-massage. (Essential oils can be harsh when used directly on the skin.) Riordan recommends sesame oil as a carrier for *vatas*; add approximately 12 drops of essential oil to one fluid ounce of carrier oil.

Pitta. Associated with the element of fire, *pittas* are passionate and intense, and subject to anger, jealousy, and hotheadedness when out of balance. "There's often a need to cool, clarify, and ease the mind," Riordan says. The ideal scents are sweet, bitter, or astringent; try chamomile, lily, honeysuckle, iris, or jasmine. A good way to deliver these scents? "Pittas are very visual, so it's great to have the actual flowers nearby," she says. Keep them on your desk or bedside table, or burn a candle scented naturally with these aromas. If you opt for a self-massage, use coconut, jojoba, or almond as the carrier oil.

Kapha. The heavy, solid, moist nature of earth characterizes *kaphas*. When *kaphas* get out of whack, they tend to be sluggish and more susceptible to depression. "Kaphas benefit from pungent, stimulating scents," Riordan says, like eucalyptus, cedar, pine, and sage. Also, peppermint is "a stimulating odorant that increases motivation to perform physically," says Bryan Raudenbush, assistant professor of psychology at Wheeling Jesuit University in West Virginia. Because *kaphas* tend to be

moist and oily, they have trouble absorbing large amounts of additional oil—so add just a drop or two of essential oil to a bath or to a carrier of olive oil. Massage may be an especially good method for kaphas, as it helps the oil penetrate the skin.

Some scents offer aromatherapy benefits for every dosha. For instance, rosemary opens the mind and enhances memory (vatas should use it sparingly), while ginger oil is considered a universal treatment for soothing the effects of jet lag and other travel-related sicknesses. Sandalwood can clear nasal passages and help relieve cold and allergy symptoms.