

## **Fibromyalgia and Essential Oils**

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Understanding the disorder, Fibromyalgia, current efforts to help patients manage the disorder with both traditional and natural medicine, new research findings, and how essential oils may provide support to affected systems are paramount in assisting aromatherapists in helping their clients bring needed support to various body systems.

Jayne Leonard, in Medical News Today, stated Fibromyalgia is a disorder affecting “between 2 and 4 percent of people. Up to 90 percent of people with the condition are women (4).” The Mayo clinic describes Fibromyalgia as a disorder “characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain accompanied by fatigue, sleep, memory and mood issues (5).”

Researchers have agreed that pain in the four quadrants of the body, a symptom requirement for diagnosis, are related to how the brain is processing pain (5). However, often times, treatment of symptoms do not address the brain function issue, but focus on relieving localized areas or related symptoms, such as chronic muscle pain, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, numbness in the limbs, and other issues (WebMD). Currently medical professionals do not have a cure, but offer various traditional and non-traditional options for management of the disorder.

Current traditional treatment referenced by Mayo Clinic includes medications, antidepressants, and sometimes anti-seizure drugs. Medications for pain management include over the counter medications such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, or naproxen sodium and some patients may take prescription medication such as tramadol. Chronic pain, such as experienced with Fibromyalgia, may often times create anxiety or depression in a patient, so duloxetine and milnacipran is sometimes prescribed. Anti-seizure drugs designed to assist patients with epilepsy, such as gabapentin or pregabalin, may be prescribed as they also help with pain management (6).

Therapy is highly recommended to Fibromyalgia patients as there is belief that ongoing physical activity assists in the wellbeing of the patient and assists with pain management. Mayo Clinic indicates physical therapists often provide a patient with specific exercises for “strength, flexibility and stamina. Water-based exercises might be particularly helpful (6).” In addition, occupational therapists provide needed assistance in making adjustment to work areas and counseling may assist patients in building strategies for successful management of the chronic illness and issues of anxiety and depression if present (6).

Alternative medicine and therapies recommended by Mayo Clinic include meditation and yoga, acupuncture, massage, and tai chi (6).

Dr. Axe and other naturalists or food as medicine practitioners, recommend removing foods to be known allergens, food related chemicals, and hormone disruptors as well as identifying poor digestion, candidiasis, and spinal misalignments (1). Foods recommended are green vegetables, clean lean proteins, fermented foods, and cultured dairy, Omega-3 fats and antioxidants (vitamins A, C and E) (1). Foods patients are encouraged to avoid include gluten, sugar, processed foods or foods with additives, alcohol and caffeine (1). Supplements encouraged include: Magnesium, fish oil, vitamin D3, D-ribose, and Rhodiola and Ashwagandha (1). Dr. Axe's essential oil recommendations are Helichrysum and Lavender.

Leonard indicates though studies of essential oil use for “fibromyalgia, other rheumatic conditions, and pain management are limited” there are recommended essential oils that may

prove helpful in relieving symptoms (4). Leonard's recommendations include: Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), Capsicum (*Capsicum annuum*), Cedarwood (*Juniperus virginiana*), Clove *Eugenia caryophyllata*), Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) and Orange (*Citrus aurantium*), Lavender (*lavandula angustifolia*), and a blend of white camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) aloe vera (*Aloe vera* (L.) *Burm. f.*), eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus smithii/staigeriana*), lemon (*Citrus limon*), orange (*Citrus aurantium*), peppermint (*Mentha piperita*), and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*, CT 1,8 *Cineol*). Her recommendation is to use topically with a carrier oil or inhalation, directly or with use of a diffuser. (4)

New studies and research from France and University of Colorado Boulder, are indicating distinctive changes in the brain relating to blood flow in various regions that are affecting patients with Fibromyalgia. These studies, bringing us closer to identifying the cause of Fibromyalgia, have the potential of changing not only how Fibromyalgia is treated with traditional medicine as well as with natural or alternative medicine, including the use of essential oils, but also moves the medical profession closer to moving Fibromyalgia from the status of a disorder to a disease.

Edward j. Kowlowitz, MD, writes that Dr. Eric Guedj's research, in Marseille, France, concludes "women with fibromyalgia have abnormal blood flow in two areas of the brain:

- They have *too much* blood flow (called hyperperfusion) in the area of the brain that's supposed to interpret the intensity of pain.
- They have *too little* blood flow (called hypoperfusion) in the area of the brain that's involved in the emotional response to pain. (3)

In addition, this study revealed the severity of symptoms matched the severity of the blood perfusion and there was no "correlation between blood perfusion and the participants' levels of anxiety or depression (3)." Indicating anxiety or depression, which sometimes accompanies Fibromyalgia, is not the cause, but a result of patients dealing with ongoing chronic pain.

Cort Johnson, in an article in [healthrising.org](http://healthrising.org), stated a Chinese study "indicated that decreased gray matter was reliably found in four areas:

from anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) to the paracingulate cortex and medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC); from the bilateral posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) to the paracingulate cortex; from the left parahippocampal gyrus to the fusiform cortex, and from the right parahippocampal gyrus to the hippocampus (Bas 28 and 35). Increased GM was also seen in the left cerebellum. (2)"

Considering the brain research findings, aromatherapists may finely tune the essential oils they recommend in assisting clients in supporting the affected body systems. Looking at the body as a whole, a client who modifies her diet, as recommended by science, and coordinates management of her Fibromyalgia with traditional and non-traditional medicine, may also benefit by adding the layer of support with essential oils. The aromatherapist should consider any medications the client is currently taking to be sure there will not be any chemical interactions.

Because we know sesquiterpenes have "a unique ability to cross the blood-brain barrier, they can increase the oxygen level of brain tissue and stimulate the pineal and pituitary glands (Totilo, 2013)." Sesquiterpenes that may bring needed body system support to Fibromyalgia patients dealing with anxiety, depression, fatigue, and inflammation are Sandalwood (*Santalum album*), Cedarwood (*Juniperus virginiana*), Vetiver (*Vetiveria zizanoides*), Patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*), and Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). Monoterpenes "can help to rebalance

malfunction in cellular memory” as well as have the “ability to reprogram miswritten information in the cellular memory (Totilo, 2013).” Monoterpenes that may help strengthen body systems for Fibromyalgia patients include: Angelica Root (*Angelica archangelica*), Juniper Berry (*Juniperus osteosperma*), Frankincense (*Boswellia carterii*), Cistus Labdanum (*Cistus ladanifer*), and most citrus oils (Totilo, 2013). Monoterpenols are characterized with “mild yet therapeutic qualities” and are “particularly useful in skin care, due to their gentle anti-inflammatory properties (Totilo, 2013).” The Monoterpenols that may help strengthen body systems for Fibromyalgia patients include: Geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*), Juniper Berry (*Juniperus osteosperma*), Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*, *CT Linalol*), Marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*), and Palmarosa (*Cymbopogon martini*) (Totilo, 2013). Sequesterpenols are also excellent at providing the body with support with inflammation issues such as: German and Roman Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita* and *Chamaemelum nobile*), Vetiver (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), Sandalwood (*Santalum album*), Helichrysum (*Helichrysum italicum*), Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), and Patchouli (*pogostemon cablin*). Esters could also be considered for supporting the body dealing with inflammation as they are “calming to the skin and nervous system (Totilo, 2013). These include Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*) and Petitgrain (*Citrus aurantium*).

The following aromatherapy products may be beneficial to people looking to support their body systems affected by fibromyalgia and the mental and emotional effects chronic pain has on those systems:

**Diffuser Oil Blend**—Supporting the emotions and immune system: Use as needed during day or evening.

- Frankincense (*Boswellia carterii*), Sandalwood (*Santalum album*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*, *CT Linalol*), Clove (*Eugenia caryophyllata*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*), lemon (*Citrus limon*), Basil (*Ocimum Basillicum*)

(This blend provides support for *anxiety* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Sandalwood, Lavender, Peppermint, Basil, for *depression* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Sandalwood, Lavender, and Lemon, for *fatigue* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Sandalwood, Lavender, Clove, and Lemon, for the *immune system* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Sandalwood, Peppermint, Lemon, and Basil, and *fibromyalgia* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Lavender, Peppermint, Lemon and Basil, as well as *chronic pain* with essential oils of: Peppermint and Basil. Clove essential oil has been known to support sleep, promote courage, and stimulate the mind.)

**Bath Salts**—Supporting the immune system: Use in warm bath water, soak in tub before bed.

- Helichrysum (*Helichrysum italicum*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*, *CT Linalol*), Juniper Berry (*Juniperus osteosperma*)
- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*), Lemon (*Citrus limon*), Bergamot, (*Citrus bergamia*), Basil (*Ocimum basillicum*)

(This blend provides support for *depression* through the essential oils of: Helichrysum, Lavender, Clary Sage, Lemon, and Bergamot, for *anxiety* through essential oils of: Lavender, Juniper Berry, Clary Sage, Bergamot, and Basil, for *fatigue* through essential

oils of : Helichrysum, Clary Sage, Lemon and Bergamot, for *chronic pain* through essential oils of: Helichrysum and Basil, for *muscle aches* through essential oils of: Helichrysum, Lavender, Juniper Berry, Clary Sage, Lemon, and Basil, for the *immune system* through essential oils of: Helichrysum, Lavender, Juniper Berry, Clary Sage, Lemon, Bergamot, and Basil, and *fibromyalgia* through essential oils of: Helichrysum, Lavender, Lemon, and Basil.)

**Massage Oil**—Supporting the immune system: Use as needed as muscle massage.

**Carrier Oil**—Almond Oil (*Prunus dulcis*)

- Helichrysum (*Helichrysum italicum*), Ginger *Zingiber officinale*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*, CT *Linalol*), Juniper Berry (*Juniperus osteosperma*)
- Basil (*Ocimum Basillicum*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

(Almond Oil was chosen as the carrier oil for this massage blend because of its anti-inflammation properties as well as its reputation for “loosening stiff muscles and achy joints (Totilo, 2013).” This blend supports the *immune system* through the essential oils of : Helichrysum, Ginger, Lavender, Juniper Berry, Basil and Peppermint. In addition, this blend also provides support for fibromyalgia, chronic pain, muscle aches, fatigue, depression, and has anti-inflammatory properties.)

**Inhaler 1**—Supporting the emotions and immune system: Use inhaler as needed to support healthy emotions and the immune system.

- Frankincense (*Boswellia carterii*), Ginger *Zingiber officinale*), Cedarwood (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*, CT *Linalol*), Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*), Orange (Bitter) (*Citrus aurantium*), Grapefruit (*Citrus x paradise*)

(This blend provides support for *anxiety* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Cedarwood, Lavender, Roman Chamomile, Clary Sage, and Orange, for *depression* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Lavender, Roman Chamomile, Orange, and Grapefruit, for *fatigue* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Ginger, Orange, and Grapefruit, for *immune system* through the essential oils of Frankincense, Ginger, Cedarwood, Lavender, Clary Sage, Orange and Grapefruit, for *fibromyalgia* through the essential oils of: Frankincense, Lavender, and Orange, and *chronic pain* through the essential oil of Ginger.)

**Inhaler 2**—Supporting the emotions and energy: Use inhaler as needed to support healthy emotions and energy.

- Sandalwood (*Santalum album*)
- Juniper Berry (*Juniperus osteosperma*), Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*), Bergamot (*Citrus bergamia*), Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus staigeriana*)

(This blend provides support for *fatigue* through the essential oils of: Sandalwood, Bergamot, and Eucalyptus, for *anxiety* through the essential oils of: Sandalwood, Juniper Berry, Lavender, Clary Sage and Bergamot, for *depression* through essential oils of:

Sandalwood, Lavender, Clary Sage, and Bergamot, and also provides support for *muscle aches, fibromyalgia, the immune system.*)

**Leonard's Blend**—use topically as a massage oil or in a diffuser.

**Carrier:** Aloe Vera (*Aloe vera* (L.) Burm. f.)

- Rosemary (*Rosmarianus officinalis*, CT 1,8 Cinelo)
- White Camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*), Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus smithii/staigeriana*), Lemon (*Citrus limon*), Orange (*Citrus aurantium*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

(Leonard's Blend provides support for *fatigue* through the essential oils of: Rosemary, Eucalyptus, Lemon and Orange, for *inflammation* through the essential oils of: Rosemary, White Camphor, Eucalyptus, Lemon, Orange, and Peppermint, and also provides support for *anxiety, chronic pain, muscle aches, fatigue and fibromyalgia.*)

Again, in the case of a person on prescription or over the counter medication, any intended essential oils for aromatherapy products should be discussed with the pharmacist or physician prior to use to ensure there are no chemical interactions that could complicate the condition. Some suggested essential oils should not be used with clients who have epilepsy, high blood pressure or who are pregnant.

Current Fibromyalgia research findings are assisting patients, doctors of traditional and non-traditional medicine, as well as naturalist and aromatherapists in providing supports for affected body systems. Research is determining the brain is the critical body system and inhaling essential oils, directly from an inhaler or diffuser, remains the most rapid process for distributing the essential oil cellular support to the brain. Totilo states; "Of the five human senses, the sense of smell is the only one that is directly connected to the brain. The olfactory system, which is closely linked to the limbic system, has a wide influence on the body's physiology while the limbic system serves as the center for the human sex drive, memory, emotions and physical drive (7)." With what we know scientifically about the ability of the cellular structure of essential oil to be rapidly absorbed into the skin as well as cross the blood brain barrier, essential oils have the potential to bring needed body system support to the physical challenges of people with Fibromyalgia, as well as the emotional challenges brought on by chronic pain.

## References

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