

Aromatherapy May Reduce Anxiety In People Recovering From Heart Attack

WHAT IS AROMATHERAPY?

Aromatherapy is a holistic practice which involves using plant oils in carefully blended combinations to support physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The essential oils may be evaporated in an oil burner, added to bath water, or diluted in a carrier oil and massaged onto the skin.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to be a global facilitator of health and wellness through access, education and advancement of Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T&CM). The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that lifestyle-related diseases (or non-communicable diseases) are responsible for more than 70% of deaths worldwide each year.

Knowledge represents empowerment. By sharing this evidence-based, peer-reviewed research, we aim to support everyday people to take ownership of their wellness, by making informed decisions and choices in conjunction with their health professional.

How This Study Could Help Your Heart

According to the National Heart Foundation, 20 Australians die of heart attack every day. This study explores how aromatherapy may reduce anxiety in people hospitalised after a heart attack. It is titled:

EFFECTS OF AROMATHERAPY ON ANXIETY AND VITAL SIGNS OF MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION PATIENTS IN INTENSIVE CARE UNITS.

You can read the full study here: https://bit.ly/2UJYvtc



Why Is This Study Important?

Myocardial infarction is the medical term for a heart attack, which happens when part of the heart muscle does not receive enough oxygen, resulting in damage to the heart. Anxiety is a problem understandably affecting many people hospitalised for heart attack - according to statistics quoted in this study, it is experienced by about 70-80% of patients.

The stress response associated with anxiety increases heart rate and blood pressure, putting a greater demand for oxygen supply on an already damaged heart. According to previous research quoted in this study, this makes the risk of ischaemia (reduced supply of blood to the heart) 2.5 times higher. This is why decreasing anxiety is an important aspect of care for people who have suffered a heart attack.

Finding evidence for complementary modalities that may reduce anxiety levels and blood pressure offers therapeutic benefits for critically ill patients without the additional burden of possible side effects associated with pharmaceutical medication.

The authors of this study also reported that anxiety experienced by patients while in hospital may develop into long-term psychological consequences. These may include depression and lack of motivation to comply with medical advice, increasing the risk that the patient's wellness will deteriorate. For this reason, reducing anxiety may have long-term consequences for patients' wellness.

What Does This Mean For My Wellness?

Although this was not a focus of this study, the authors noted that the participants' age and hospitalisation history were related to the severity of their anxiety. This suggests older patients, especially those who have been hospitalised previously, may obtain the greatest benefit from aromatherapy.

Aromatherapy is a simple and inexpensive treatment that is not associated with the side effects that pharmaceutical medications may cause. The evidence that it may reduce not only symptoms of anxiety but also blood pressure means it can significantly support the recovery of people hospitalised after a heart attack. The treatment is easy to offer patients while they are in hospital, and no special training is required for them to continue using it after they return home.

The researchers noted that participants in the study were taking alprazolam (a calming medication), which may have interacted with the aromatherapy treatment. However, all participants in both groups were prescribed the same dosage of alprazolam, and there was still an increase in anxiety levels of the patients who were not receiving aromatherapy.

The increasing anxiety of the control group underlines the importance of diagnosing and treating this problem. If left unchecked, growing anxiety may have a negative impact on a patient's recovery, potentially increasing the risk of complications after the initial heart attack.

How Does This Relate to Aromatherapy?

The molecules that give aromatherapy oils their characteristic fragrance may have physical, mental and emotional wellbeing effects. Previous research suggests these aromatic molecules stimulate the limbic system - the part of the brain which governs emotions and behaviour, particularly survival mechanisms such as the fight-or-flight response. It is reported that aromatherapy may promote the release of enkephalin, serotonin and endorphins. All three of these are molecules created in the body, associated with good feelings and pain reduction.

In 2016, researchers affiliated with the Sabzevar University of Medical Science in Iran published the results of a study exploring how aromatherapy might support the recovery of people hospitalised for heart attack. This randomised clinical trial included 60 patients who had suffered a heart attack, half of whom were randomly assigned to a treatment group receiving aromatherapy, while the remainder were assigned to a control group.

The treatment involved attaching a handkerchief with drops of pure lavender extract to the participants' clothing, and having the participants breath normally for 20 to 30 minutes. This intervention was performed three times a day, for three days. The control group were given a handkerchief with sterile drops of water.

The researchers used the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, an industry-standard questionnaire used to diagnose anxiety, to evaluate the participants' anxiety levels before and after treatment. They also measured the participants' heart rate, blood pressure, temperature and breathing rate before and after the treatment.

SoulAdvisor™ Foundation

Key Findings About Aromatherapy for Supporting Recovery After Heart Attack

- While the average levels of anxiety in both groups were similar before the intervention, the participants undergoing aromatherapy experienced a statistically significant decrease in anxiety symptoms after three days of treatment. By comparison, the average anxiety levels of the control group increased significantly during the same period.

- Anxiety can be a result of psychological reactions to situations, or due to personality traits. The researchers found that aromatherapy was effective in reducing participants' anxiety levels, regardless of the type of the anxiety.

- The researchers noted that the average blood pressure of patients in the treatment group decreased significantly by the end of the treatment, while there was no significant change in the control group's blood pressure.

- The authors also reported that some of the patients whose anxiety was more severe prior to the treatment experienced a relatively greater degree of reduction in their anxiety symptoms after the aromatherapy.

- The authors discussed six other studies which assessed the effects of aromatherapy on anxiety levels. The results of some studies supported the findings in this study.

Disclaimer: The above does not constitute medical advice, and as with any exercise or wellness program, please consult your medical professional before commencing aromatherapy treatment.

IIUM Medical Journal Malaysia is the official journal of the [Faculty] of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia. It serves primarily as a forum for education and intellectual discourse for health professionals namely in clinical medicine but covers diverse issues ... Manuscript decisions are based on a double-blinded peer review process.

Quoted from journal description

References

Acts of love cut short | National Heart Foundation of Australia
Effects of Aromatherapy on Anxiety and Vital Signs of Myocardial Infarction Patients in Intensive Care Units | IIUM Medical Journal Malaysia
What is a heart attack? | National Heart Foundation of Australia
Ischaemic heart disease | sciencedaily.com
Aromatherapy | souladvisor.com
Aromatherapy | betterhealth.vic.gov.au
The limbic system | Queensland Brain Institute
The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) | American Psychological Association
About | IIUM Medical Journal Malaysia