

Could Aromatherapy and Massage Help Survivors and Workers Recover from September 11?

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First published by: The journal Aromatic sage

People who do not know much about aromatherapy will think that it may be a nice relaxing massage with a nice smell, but that's about it. However, that alone give tremendous relief from physical and psychological stresses. Yet, in skilled hands, the use of massage and essential oils - separately or combined - can have many real medical benefits.

There are number of health problems associated with the Sept. 11 incidents and I will briefly discuss what aromatherapy and massage can do to relieve some of them.

Firstly massage: A magnificent operation was undertaken by the CERMT team of volunteers without substantial funding. They worked with fire service personnel and at the landfill site. They provided respite massages and gave out samples of oil blends.

Massage alone is excellent for relieving the physical strains on the body caused by heavy work in difficult surroundings. This will reduce the chances of those workers ending up with back strains and such like.

Massage given by a caring therapist can also have tremendous psychological benefits. It can allow someone who has been 'bottling-up' their emotions to release them in an environment where support is available. It can revive the spirit and give people a new zest for doing what they have to do. In the case of these workers the emotional benefits will carry over to their families and partners. This is because if the individual is de-stressed, their close friends and family will be less likely to suffer as the result.

There are many other beneficial effects of massage that I am unable for lack of space to cover in this article.

The use of essential oils: The obvious system to suffer as the result of being around Ground zero area is the respiratory tract. This is mainly from the volume of inhaled dust particles, but possibly also the inhalation of a variety of noxious chemicals. A noxious chemical might cause some lung damage, but generally the body will soon wash the chemical away and the lungs will repair themselves. That is unless it has carcinogenic potential which may or may not cause problems later in life. Long term damage may occur to the lungs if large volumes of a chemical are inhaled, but I do not think that the case with this incident. Some metal dusts can also cause problems in particular mercury and lead, but I doubt significant volumes of that are in the rubble. However, **the big problem is mineral dust inhalation.** If the dust consists of mixtures of insoluble minerals then the body has difficulty removing it. Some will be coughed up, but a lot will remain in the lungs for the rest of people's lives.

We all know how bad the inhalation of asbestos is and that mineral must be the greatest cause for concern in this incident. As soon as I saw what had happened, I sent a message to US aromatherapy contacts about the one essential oil proven to help expel mucus from the lungs - that oil was **Fennel**. There are several others that will help such as: Aniseed, pennyroyal and hyssop, but there is scant scientific data supporting their use whereas there is with Fennel oil. *Boyd E. et al 1971. Pharmacology 6,65-80.* A few drops of Fennel or Aniseed oil should be inhaled from hot water - not boiling - for a few minutes, and done as soon as possible after the dust inhalation. This will trigger coughing and help remove some of the dust. If heavy chest massage can be performed - as is done for cystic fibrosis sufferers - that is also to be encouraged.

Once the dust has become encapsulated within the lung tissues there is probably nothing that can be done to remove it. In that case essential oils can be used to reduce the secondary effects such as irritation and soreness. There are many oils useful for this, but I would highly recommend this formula: 3 drops of Roman chamomile, 1 drop of German chamomile and 3 drops of lavender inhaled from hot water (not boiling).

If severe coughing occurs after dust inhalation, this should not be suppressed, as this is the body's way of eliminating a noxious substance. However, if the coughing continues (through the night for example) and starts causing chest soreness then this should be treated.

For a spasmodic cough good oils to use are: Basil, Cajuput, Chamomile German, Cypress, Fennel, Frankincense, Neroli, Rose, Rosemary and Spearmint. You can mix up to 4 of these oils, but do not use more than 6 drops in total on the hot water for inhalation. It is a good idea to use an electric diffuser with some of these oils in a bedroom for half an hour before going to bed. Shut the windows and warm the room all night. A chest rub with some of these oils **diluted appropriately** can be a good way to calm a night cough.

Essential oils are perfect for treating minor physical traumas such as those demolition workers may suffer. Cuts and grazes can be treated using lavender, tea tree and German chamomile oils ideally dissolved in some Aloe Vera gel.

Another problem of working in hot humid environments is foot rot. I would suspect that workers at Ground zero are suffering from this because of the hot ground. Depending on what organism is becoming established between the toes, certain essential oils can knock them out.

Tea tree is the oil of choice for Candida (athletes foot) but it is a good idea to also add some healing oils such as lavender or German chamomile to help protect the tissues while the tea tree hits the bugs. It is difficult to generalize on this treatment because it will vary a lot depending on the severity of the condition. All I can add here is do not use any essential oils undiluted for such a problem or the irritation will be severe.

Psychological stress and the power of essential oils to relieve it:

Women suffering from severe emotional stress can stop menstruating. This proves how powerful emotions are in their ability to interfere with bodily functions. I expect this will have happened with some of the female partners of those lost on Sept. 11th and with some survivors. Emotional support is of course desirable, but is not always welcomed when people are grieving. Certain essential oils have long been used to kick-start the female reproductive system in such circumstances. There is more about that on my web site in the articles section-see pennyroyal.

The effects of fragrance on the brain have been demonstrated in hundreds of scientific trials. The effects are not always clear cut, but definite effects on brain waves following the inhalation of many essential oils have been demonstrated.

The effects of essential oils to relieve emotional trauma are far from being well-researched despite us knowing they do effect the brain. However, anyone who has had a massage with beautiful smelling oils will confirm this effect. We are self-healing organisms, and the key to healing lies with inhibiting the brains capacity to adversely interfere with bodily functions. With many ailments, including severe physical trauma to the body, you fix the brain and that in turn fixes the body.

Long term health care:

I find it frustrating, that little thought seems to be being given to the long term health problems that will be suffered by the heroic rescue workers.

As I am from the UK, I am used to a health care system that supports people from cradle to grave, no matter what their income. Okay, it is shaky at times but at least it is in place. In the USA you do

not have such a co-ordinated health care system.

My fears are that in 20 years time, the fire and rescue service workers, truck drivers, dumper drivers, etc., suffering from long term health problems and needing expensive health care will be long forgotten by Joe Public. The media won't be interested and the funds in the charities will have been applied to purposes you did not give the money for.

So readers, I urge you to consider this and to demand that the charities sitting on the funds that you donated, do some long term health care planning. You should be able to take care of those that have given so much, in their time of greatest need.

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