

Well being through fragrances



Health and well being through fragrant herbs and essential oils: That's the promise of aromatherapy. This method of utilizing natural fragrance materials to heal illnesses enjoys high popularity: This can be seen both from the numerous publications on this subject as well as from the growing number of practicing aromatherapists.

Long tradition

This rediscovered branch of naturopathy can look back on a long tradition. Virtually all of the ancient civilizations used aromatic plant materials for healing. They smoked dried plants, grasses, resins, fruits and barks for purification, sacrificed



them to the gods or used them to treat illnesses.

However the term "aromatherapy" did not officially appear until the late 1920s, when it was coined by French biochemist and perfumer René Maurice Gattefossé, who dealt intensively with plant essences and their therapeutic effects. In the late 1930s, he used this term as the title of his book. Since then, Gattefossé has influenced numerous scientists and physicians in this field.

Essential oils play the leading role

Essential oils are the volatile oils of fragrant plants that occur as droplets in or on the plant tissue. The most customary method of



obtaining them is steam distillation: Heating dissolves the plant's fragrant oil from its cells and entrains it in the steam. When the steam is subsequently cooled, the water and oil return to their liquid state and separate, as they do not mix. The only exception consists of citrus oils: Instead of distillation,

mechanical processes ("expression") are used to squeeze them from the peels of the fruit.

Some of the ways in which essential oils are used in aromatherapy include fragrant baths, inhalations and fragrant lamps, or as massage or body oils; they are also taken internally in highly diluted form. Oils from bergamot, patchouli, cedar, lemon, lavender and tea bushes are employed for this purpose.

Therapists employ essential oils primarily to treat psychosomatic ailments such as sleep disorders, nervousness or stress. They can also be employed to support healing in connection with colds or nervous gastrointestinal disorders.

Fragrances aid in consciously experiencing

In addition to the employment of essential oils, the patient's intensive conversations with the therapist, conscious experiencing of fragrances, as well as calm and regular breathing are essential elements in aromatherapy. The fragrances that are used for this purpose are intended to evoke recollections of positive, relaxing situations, like a walk along the sea or through a meadow in bloom. The important aspect is for the patient to intensively and consciously commit to the treatment, as this is the only way for the therapy to be successful.



Controversy in medical circles

In spite of its numerous positive aspects, aromatherapy is also the subject of criticism. Many physicians and scientists, for example, point to the fact that there is no strictly objective, scientific evidence for the efficacy of essential oils – a major prerequisite for the employment of medications in orthodox medicine. A further point of criticism: An active pharmaceutical ingredient has to have a similarly strong effect in all people and under all conditions, its effect has to be specific, and this effect has to be greater when taken in higher doses than when taken in

lower doses. And there is, in fact, virtually no unambiguous documentation that would support the claims made by aromatherapists. Yet it would be wrong to dismiss aromatherapy as “humbug.” That’s because the treatment does not consist of merely prescribing and administering medicines, on the one hand, while on the other essential oils are not pharmaceuticals in the narrow sense.

Anyone who might be interested in aromatherapy and the effect of essential oils should definitely bear in mind the fact that this is no substitute for seeing a physician. And just as with every medicine, essential oils can cause side effects if not used in the appropriate dosage or if the dosage does not precisely reflect the patient’s individual condition.

