Aromatherapy and Parkinson’s Disease
by Penny Keay

Aromatherapy is a Complementary health modality that may be able to give relief to several of the complaints and ailments oftentimes associated with Parkinson’s and other long term diseases that involve joints, muscles, nerves and a full gamut of emotions.

Although there is no protocol used specifically for Parkinson’s disease, as aroma therapists we are here to make suggestions of essential oils you might be able to use to relieve any number of your symptoms.

We do suggest that you consult with your physician and let them know you are thinking about and would like to implement essential oils and aroma therapy into your health care regimen. Most of them are very open to this.

The symptoms most Parkinson disease patients like to get help with include but are not limited to:

- Relaxing
- Stimulation - energizing
- Anxiousness
- Depression
- Muscle Spasms and pains
- Sleep and insomnia.
- Restless legs
- Appetite stimulation

Upon doing aromatherapy research for Parkinson’s disease it was written in the Journal of American Medical association article #790792, that is it not uncommon for Parkinson’s patients to have loss of their sense of smell.

The good news is that the way essential oils work within the body doesn’t make it necessary to be able to completely smell them. It is GREAT if your sense of smell has not been affected as you may enjoy many of these oils when you actually can smell them.

What is Therapeutic Aromatherapy? It is the use of plant essences that have been extracted from various parts of plants usually by steam distillation or cold pressing of the various plants parts. These highly volatile, aromatic liquids are known as essential oils.

Essential oils are made up of hundreds of chemical constituents that can affect the body at the cellular level.

They all have anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal properties in varying degrees when it comes to fighting germs. They can also be used to help the body assist itself for repair of the skin, nerves and other tissues. In the emotional aspect they can be stimulating, uplifting, relaxing, calming and can also enhance memory, focusing and so many more properties to contribute to your well-being.

As we explore the use of essential oils for the various symptoms listed above realize that these are merely suggested starting points. Everyone has individual needs and various imbalances. A selection of essential oils that may work for one won’t necessarily be the same for someone else. There might be commonly used essential oils with additional ones added to help someone more specifically.

When we begin, we try to give you several suggestions on essential oils to start. Taking a little whiff of the essential oil may set off a reaction that says – oooo – I like that smell, it makes me feel good. Or no, that is not really one of my favorites.

What this may tell us is that there are certain ‘constituents’ in the essential oils you like the smell of and that your body is in need of those ‘parts’ at the moment to help balance you at the cellular level.

One of the most popular and favorite essential oil of many, and the one we usually suggest to start with is: Lavender Essential oil. The one we prefer for therapeutic applications is Super Lavender from Bulgaria. It is grown at a high altitude and has a bright floral scent.

Lavender is known in the aromatherapy world as the “Mother” of essential oils – because as you know Mothers can do ‘just about everything’. Therefore, we like to start with this oil.

Lavender has antibacterial, anti-viral and anti-fungal properties to a good degree. It can help with minor cuts and abrasions, burns and other skin ailments to help them heal quickly. Emotionally, Lavender can help with all sorts of situations, it is known for its calming and relaxation property to help settle you inside when you are a little anxious, restless and need to fall asleep. This oil, alone, may help many of you with several of the symptoms you are experiencing.
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Relaxation; Anxiousness, Restlessness:
There are several essential oils that may help you with Relaxation and Anxiousness.

Lavender is of course your starting point. Diffusing this into the air often times may help you within a few minutes to become less anxious and begin to calm inside. This may help with other symptoms too such as restlessness involving your muscles. Lavender will not necessarily put you to sleep, but help you to feel a special calmness within.

Although if you have trouble falling asleep at night; you want to start with Lavender in your bedroom. You can diffuse it by any number of methods. We suggest a terra cotta disc placed by your head board with a couple drops on it. Do this about 20-30 minutes before retiring. This gives the molecules a chance to permeate the air.

You can also use a ‘fan style’ diffuser – they produce a ‘white noise’ that is most acceptable.

There are other essential oils that will also help to relax and calm you. Often times they are better utilized in a blend of essential oils – we call this a Synergy Blend- this is where several oils work together to produce a ‘better’ result than using essential oils individually.

Popular essential oils for calming include: Lavender, Roman Chamomile, Neroli, Rose, Frankincense, Cedarwood, Sandalwood, Mandarin & Orange.

For Relaxation, Anxiousness, Restlessness – try any of several of our premade blends – Calming is very popular, but we also have Relaxing, Anxiety Stop, Take Five, Meditation and more.

Depression, Stimulating, Energizing:
To help with depression, any essential oil or blend you ‘love’ and crave’ the smell of – is telling you, you need some of those constituents.

Choose several different essential oils and vary them from day to day.

Many folks like the energizing and stimulating essential oils such as the Citrus oils. Lemon, Lime, Orange, Tangerine are bright and fresh. Others like the camphorous scented oils Eucalyptus, Rosemary and Cajeput. And we must not forget the mints – Peppermint and Spearmint are also brightening and energizing.

Mainly – find essential oils that you like the smell of and diffuse them throughout the day. Apply a drop to an Aromatherapy Lapel dot or wear a drop on a piece of aromatherapy jewelry.

Muscle spasms and muscular or Joint Pain:
Again, essential oils that help you to relax may also help muscular spasms and pain. Start by inhaling them to see if that will help you relax.

Of course, massage is a comfort to many folks. Especially if you catch yourself rubbing any arm or leg. This is a type of self massage. You might be able to make yourself feel more comfortable by adding a few drops of essential oil to your lotion or make your own massage oil. We have many recipes and pre-mixed massage blends that may help.

Essential oils known to help reduce pain in muscles and joints are Eucalyptus, Rosemary and Peppermint. There are other essential oils that reduce inflammation too such as Helichrysum and German Chamomile. Some folks like the heating and penetrating essential oils like Black Pepper, Ginger, Juniper berry and Marjoram added to their massage blends.

For those that don’t like the strong smells of Eucalyptus and Peppermint we do have a special blend - Muscle Relief blend that was created for folks with muscular issues such as fibromyalgia, rheumatism, arthritis and chronic fatigue.

When using essential oils for massage they must be properly diluted in a 1-3% dilution into a carrier – such as a vegetable oil like sunflower, Grapeseed or our favorite MCT oil. Or they can also be mixed into an unscented lotion.

Appetite stimulation:
The most common essential oils to help with appetite stimulation are Ginger and Peppermint. Simply inhale a few whiffs of one or both of these about 20-30 minutes prior to eating. They may help with the stomach upset and nausea often caused from taking medications.

Sleep & Insomnia:
As everyone knows sleep is so very important. While we sleep our body is busy repairing and healing itself. So getting enough and getting proper sleep is so needed not only for Parkinson’s patients but all of mankind.
Most of us barely get by, with many folks not getting close to the minimum needed each day.

We have a hard time falling asleep, only to wake up a few hours later due to any number of reasons and then have a hard time going back to sleep.
There are other things you can do and should do to help you fall asleep.

Set up a bedtime routine. This tells your body that it will soon be time for the night rest period. Don’t eat a large meal for a couple hours prior to bed time, but if you enjoy a bit of herbal teas you might want to give that a try.

Read a book, listen to quiet music and take a warm bath for 20 or so minutes. Not too hot, as if you get over heated your heart will race to help cool you down and a fast beating heart may give you energy and not let you drift off to the land of Nod!

Before I forget, for you to get a good night’s sleep you have to have some daily sunshine. Yep, real daylight! Many of us spend the day in artificial lighting. In the northern half of the USA in the winter months (like here in Minnesota) we have days where we get up in the dark, keep the curtains drawn to keep in the heat or return home in the dark. Some folks, possibly, never see the sun for several days to weeks. And do they have problems falling asleep? Ya you betcha! (My Scandinavian coming out in me – he, he!)

There is something very special about direct sunlight especially in the early part of the day, before 7:00 AM. It will help your body make some special hormones (melatonin) needed to help you sleep at night. You need the sun light to trigger the chemical reaction. If this doesn’t happen in the morning hours or not at all, your body has a difficult time knowing when it needs to shut down for sleep.

The Sunlight in the morning helps your body know that 14-16 hours later it needs to go to sleep. The bright sunlight has coloring in the ‘blue spectrum’ and this is what helps us wake up and get ready for the day. Watching television in the evening produces a blue spectrum light that can also interfere with falling asleep since it stimulates the same chemical reactions that are only supposed to happen early in the morning. Try to avoid too much TV in the evening if you are having sleep issues. Do not watch any show that is stimulating or irritating – avoid watching the news and weather before you are heading off to bed!

So, if you are one of those folks that have a hard time falling to sleep and winding down each night, it is very important for you to get a minimum of 30 minutes a day of walking around (you can sit too) outdoors with your glasses and sun glasses off. Now you don’t need to be looking at the sun or anything like that, but you need to be in the bright light from the sun just for 30 minutes. This will help trigger the making of the hormones you will need later (melatonin) to help you sleep. If you can get the 30 minutes shortly after rising in the morning, which is best, then before noon is better than in the late afternoon. Remember the trigger of the hormone – well it needs several hours to develop too, so if you don’t see the sun until late afternoon – when do you think the hormone for sleep will be ready for you to sleep? Late, late at night – of course!

Now, back to sleeping and the use of essential oils, certainly for some, you may have many different types of stress. Refer back to the essential oils for relaxation and anxiety. They will help too to prepare you for sleep.

Our usual suggestions for essential oils to help with sleep are in the following order:
Lavender, Roman Chamomile, Bergamot, Ylang Ylang, Any of the Calming and Relaxing Blends previously mentioned;

We have a couple of blends specially developed for sleeping issues: Bedtime Bliss and Sweet Dreams. These particular blends have our small amount of the essential oil – Valerian – which is the last resort for sleep problems. It is a very strong sedative but not a pleasant smelling essential oil. It will usually work when none of the others will. But I warn you – it stinks! That is why we created the two special blends to help ‘hide’ the smell of the valerian.

In conclusion:
You will need to experiment with a variety of essential oils to find the ones that will work for you.
Start with one or two essential oils and see how you feel.
Keep a journal – you need to know what essential oils work best or worse for you.
Once you find ones that you enjoy and work you’ll always have a go to reference.
Start with Lavender and expand from there.

We offer e-mail consultations to help you further, should you need or want more help.