



Common Sense Cautions for Essential Oil Use

Essential oils are concentrated raw materials and appropriate dosages should be respected for safe and effective use. When we look at the potential toxicity of essential oils, we find that most essential oils are what are known as “non-specific” toxins. In short, this means that many common essential oils, such as True Lavender and Ylang Ylang would have to be drunk in **large** amounts – 100mL and more in adults – to cause serious problems. Certainly not recommended!

On the other hand, a few compounds found in some essential oils, such as 1,8 cineole in many Eucalyptus oils, camphor in Rosemary CT 1, thujone in Sage and methyl salicylate in Wintergreen can be toxic in much smaller doses. Ingestion of large dosages of compounds such as these has caused the vast majority of cases of poisoning and even fatalities, especially in young children.

If one uses the most common forms of Aromatherapy applications - using diluted essential oils for massage and in topical products, in therapeutic baths, inhalations and the like, the dosages of essential oils used and absorbed are **very small**. If the dosage is respected, **any** common essential oil can be used with complete safety from toxicity. If we speak about other forms of application, including ingestion, then one must be **very** clear about what appropriate dosages are. Best left to those trained in such uses.

With the common forms of application, there are three “common sense cautions” that should be taken into account:

Irritation

If too high of a concentration of essential oils are used, especially those with skin irritant properties, such as Cinnamon Bark and Red Thyme, skin irritation can develop. Think of the well-known product, “Tiger Balm”. It contains high amounts of Cinnamon and Clove essential oils. It is designed for application in small amounts to local areas of the body – not for use as a facial cream! Should any irritation occur from using essential oils, remove the oil from the skin, apply any bland vegetable oil, remove and repeat a few times. This will quickly relieve irritation reactions.

Sensitisation

Most common essential oils have a low potential for causing any allergic reactions on the skin. Some essential oils, such as Geranium and Palmarosa (containing geraniol), Benzoin and Cinnamon Bark have a somewhat higher potential. For the vast majority of people, all these essential oils can be used on the skin with no allergic problems at all. However, people with a history of allergies, especially eczema and asthma, are more likely to possibly react to some essential oils. If there is any doubt about a person’s sensitivity, perform a “patch test” first. You can either use the product you intend to use, or use a 10% concentration of the essential oil in a vegetable oil. Apply to a small area, such as on the inner arm. Cover with a ‘band aid’. If there is no reaction after 24 to 48 hours (reddening of the skin and itching), the essential oils are safe



ESSENTIAL THERAPEUTICS

to use. Often, sensitisation reactions develop over time. If a sensitisation reaction ever occurs, discontinue using the product. The reaction may disappear over time, but you will always need to check.

Photosensitisation

A few essential oils contain photosensitising compounds, such as bergapten. When applied to the skin, these compounds absorb UV radiation from sunlight and release it at a higher frequency – giving you a sunburn more quickly than normal. The essential oils that have photosensitising properties are listed in the catalogue. These effects last up to 12 hours after application. These essential oils are **fine for general use** – but not right before going to the beach on a hot summers day.

Following is a list of photo-sensitising essential oils. The percentage listed means that using a concentration below that amount will cause no problem even on a sunny day.

Angelica Root 0.78% * Bergamot 0.4% Grapefruit * 4.0% * Lemon 2.0% * Lime 0.7%
Bitter Orange 1.4% * Tagetes 0.5% * Lemon Verbena Variable, moderately photosensitising

Many common Aromatherapy books describe other potential problems that essential oils may cause. If we are speaking about the common Aromatherapy applications as mentioned above – not drinking glasses of essential oils – these potential problems are in fact **not true**.

As a simple summary, when using essential oils at **low dosages** in common Aromatherapy applications:

Essential oils are **safe** to use during pregnancy and while breast feeding.

No essential oil will negatively affect high blood pressure conditions; damage the kidneys, liver or central nervous system.

Essential oils such as Rosemary CT 1 and Spike Lavender will not cause seizures in epileptics when used in low dosages.

An excellent book on the topic is *Essential Oil Safety – a Guide for Health Care Professionals*, by Robert Tisserand & Tony Balacs (Churchill Livingstone, publisher). You may also contact us directly for more information, including seminars on this and other topics.