

Aromatherapy in LTC Communities

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[Inner Rhythms Activity Program](#)

In 1994, I attended an aromatherapy class at a local health food store. As I was listening to the presentation I began to think how aromatherapy could serve elders living in long-term care communities. As I sat in class, I began developing my Aromatherapy and Activities program and that's how it all started fourteen years ago. Personally, I think every long-term care community should use aromatherapy. The benefits are incredible. Did you know that aromatherapy can reduce infections? In fact, European countries use aromatherapy in their hospitals to fight infections. Studies have also proven that aromatherapy can boost the immune system for overall well-being. Aromatherapy can balance the central nervous system and harmonize moods and emotions. And at the very least aromatherapy can promote relaxation. That's a lot of bang for one activity. So where did aromatherapy come from?

It may surprise you to know that aromatherapy is an ancient healing tradition dating back thousands and thousands of years. India and China were probably the first cultures to use aromatherapy but it was Egypt that brought aromatherapy to the Mediterranean world. From there aromatherapy was introduced to the Romans as they occupied the Mediterranean world. Eventually though, Rome fell and that meant the decline of knowledge and the beginning of the Dark Ages. During this period, as with so many holistic healing traditions, aromatherapy was only practiced by very few healers. In the 1920's aromatherapy experienced a comeback and during World War II aromatherapy was used by Army surgeons. Today, aromatherapy is almost common place. It can be found in shampoo, make-up, perfume and healing teas. Most people have heard of aromatherapy, but what exactly is aromatherapy?

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils. The essential oils are made from flowers, plants, herbs and shrubs. Essential oils can be used individually or they can be combined into a blend. To obtain the benefits of essential oils they need to be diffused in the air or massaged into the skin. There are thousands of essential oils, but when starting an aromatherapy program, I suggest the use of one essential oil, lavender. When used properly, lavender has a calming effect and can reduce tension and irritability. So, how can you use lavender essential oil with your elder population?

Lavender is a universal essential oil. It is best used for palliative care, elders in pain, elders suffering from Alzheimer's and for any elder who needs to relax. When working with elders I prefer to use lavender massage oil. I like this method for two reasons. The first is that I am applying the essential oil directly to the intended elder. Yes, the smell of the lavender will travel within the room but not necessarily all the way down the hall. The second reason is that human touch is very important and our elders (like all of us) need human touch. To make the massage oil I mix eight drops of lavender essential oil and five oz. of almond oil in a glass

bottle. I tend to use different massage techniques depending on the elder. For palliative care elders, elders in pain and elders who want to relax I will gently massage their hands, arms and feet. For the Alzheimer elder I will gently massage the oil into their feet. Most of these elders are on their feet all day and the lavender massage oil soothes away aches and pains.

For in-room visits I may offer a massage or leave a lavender reed diffuser in the room. A reed diffuser is simple to make. Take a small "juice glass" and place wooden craft sticks in the glass. Then add a mixture of four drops of lavender and two oz. of water to the glass. The wooden sticks will "suck up" the essential oil and water and distribute the aromatherapy throughout the room. This type of diffusion is not appropriate for any elder who might drink from the glass.

Hopefully, I have given you a couple of aromatherapy ideas. There are hundreds of ways to use aromatherapy in long-term care communities. If you would like to learn more about aromatherapy and activities please visit me at www.irapinfo.com.