

The Absorption of Essential Oils in to the body

Essential oils are absorbed via the Olfactory system - the sensory system in the body that detects and interprets different smells alerting us to such things as danger, pleasure, food and drink.

The Olfactory System

When essential oils are inhaled the volatile molecules travel to the top of the nose where the receptor cells of the olfactory system are situated.

The molecules are dissolved in the nasal mucous of the olfactory epithelium. Hair cells called cilia in the epithelium are receptors that respond to the chemical molecules in aromas and they send messages to the olfactory bulb and from there to the brain.

The messages are conveyed to different parts of the brain including the; hippocampus, hypothalamus, thalamus, pituitary gland and raphe nucleus.

E.g.

The more euphoric oils such as clary sage and jasmine tend to stimulate the thalamus which then secretes neurochemicals called encephalins which induce feelings of well being and euphoria to uplift the mood.

Oils such as ylang ylang and patchouli stimulate the pituitary gland to produce endorphins the 'feel good' hormones and natural pain killers.

Chamomile, lavender and orange blossom stimulate the raphe nucleus which releases serotonin a neurochemical that has sedative effects, ideal when relaxation is the key objective.

The aromatic molecules when inhaled also travel to the lungs where they pass into the bloodstream.

The Skin

There is much debate about essential oils being absorbed through the skin into the bloodstream during aromatherapy massage. Many eminent therapists state that the essential oils pass through the sweat glands and hair follicles and then diffuse into the bloodstream. However many scientific studies have argued that because essential oils are volatile and they are inhaled during the massage they will be absorbed via the olfactory system and lungs anyway.