

# Fighting Back

**Herbs &  
Aromatherapy  
for Pain**

By Jeanne Rose

**P**ain is an unpleasant reality for many people. From the healthiest to the unhealthiest, we all find ourselves in pain's grip at one time or another.

Whether your pain is self-inflicted from exuberant weekend warrior syndrome, brought on by the stresses of today's world, or a symptom of serious disease or physical states, there are several ways to find relief from this unpleasant, often unbearable, fact of life.

What is pain? It is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage. According to the *Merck Manual of Medical Information* (Pocket Books, 1997), "pain is an unpleasant sensation signaling that the body is damaged or threatened with an injury."

There are several different kinds of pain, including somatic pain, which is caused by the activation of pain receptors in either the cutaneous (body surface) or deep tissues (musculoskeletal tissues). When it occurs in the musculoskeletal tissues, it is called deep somatic pain. Deep somatic pain is usually described as dull or aching, but localized. Surface somatic pain is usually sharper and may have a burning or pricking quality.

When we exercise, pain can be part of the process. No doubt good for us, a regular exercise program can also make us familiar with muscles we haven't used in a long time, usually in the form of aches, pains, and stiffness. For relief from exercise-related muscle distress, many people choose over-the-counter (OTC) muscle rubs, which can be quite stinky or medicinal. Others opt for aspirin and other popular OTC pain relievers. These remedies can be costly, not to mention the potential for unpleasant side effects. But these are not the only options.

Herbs, and their volatile aromatic oils called essential oils, can be quite useful in relieving the aches and pains associated with exercise. Aromatic/herbal remedies are simple to make, effective, typically free from side effects when used properly, and less costly than OTC remedies.

As with most holistic therapies, the goal is well-being and prevention of pain, rather than an attempt to restore health once the body has been damaged. Aroma/herbal treatments can be part of a daily routine to maintain a healthy body and prevent post-workout cramps, as well as relieve other aches and pains when they occur.

Anti-inflammatory and analgesic herbal teas for ingestion and essential oils for topical application are useful as preventatives, as well as after a muscle becomes sore. Herbs and essential oils can be especially effective when used synergistically in baths, massage oils, and compresses both before and after exercise.



## Aromatic Herbal Treatments for Pain

**A** variety of herbs and essential oils can be used for pain and inflammation associated with sports and exercise, as well pain and inflammation associated with rheumatism, arthritis, surgery, or other medical conditions.

**Massage Treatments**—To make an aromatic/herbal massage treatment, start with a base oil, such as almond oil, sunflower oil, calendula oil, or any other vegetable oil. Add 10 drops essential oil to each ounce of vegetable oil. For massage oil that uses herbs and essential oils synergistically, simmer 1–4 ounces of mixed herbs in 1 quart vegetable oil for 10–20 minutes. Cool and strain. When needed, pour 1 ounce of the herbal oil into a container and add 10 drops of your choice of essential oils from the list given on [page xx](#).

If you prefer a less oily substance, use an unscented lotion such as aloe-comfrey in place of the oil, or dilute the essential oils in alcohol for an alcohol rub. The formula is 10 drops of essential oil to each ounce of base substance. Make only 1 ounce at a time.

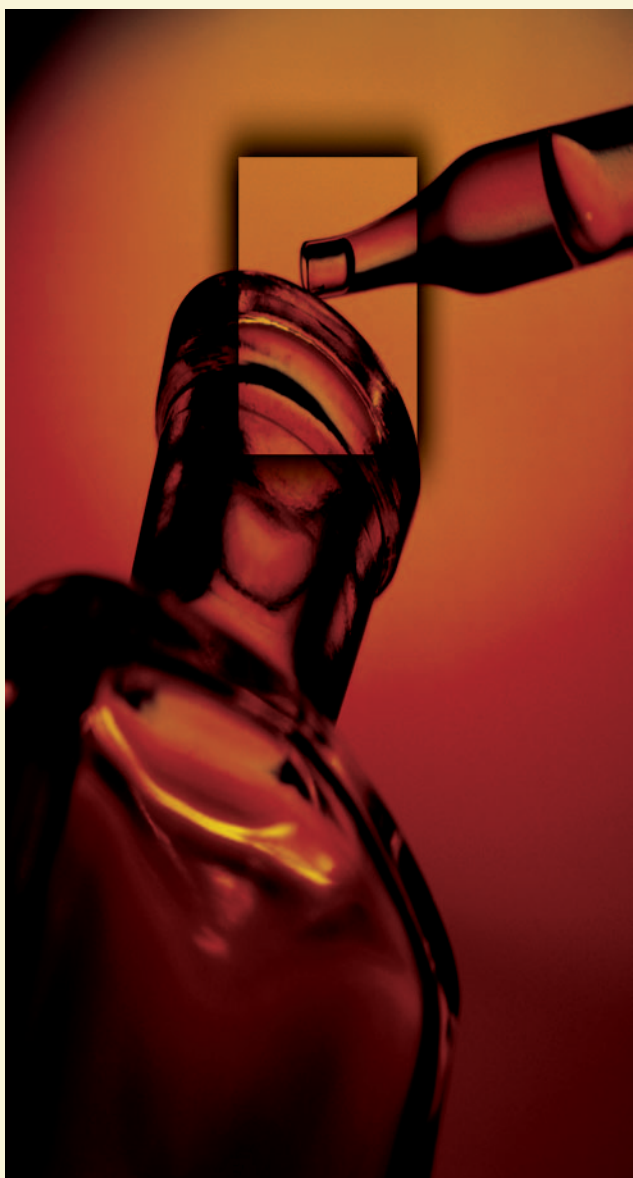
## Formulas to Relieve Pain

I developed these formulas to gently relieve pain in the body related to heart failure. There are three different formulas depending on the area of the body.

■ **Localized pain—shoulders and back.** To 1 ounce of carrier oil add 3 drops each of the following: basil linalool (*Ocimum basilicum CT linalool*) or sweet basil (a gentle chemotype of basil oil that is not as “hot”), juniper berry (*Juniperus communis*), and sage (*Salvia officinalis*).

■ **Heart or chest pain.** To 1 ounce of infused calendula oil add 5 drops of rose (*Rosa damascena*) and cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*). When you massage the chest area, use a gentle touch and effleurage.

■ **General all-over massage oil for pain.** To 1 ounce of carrier oil, add 3–4 drops each of rose geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*), juniper berry (*Juniperus communis*), and lemon (*Citrus limon*).



## Essential Oils and Their Properties

**Basil**—Used by inhalation as a mental stimulant. Externally it is used as an analgesic in massage oil formulas to ease tension in the muscles and tendons.

**Basil linalool**—This type of basil (*Ocimum basilicum CT linalool*, with a linalool content of 15–50 percent) has a softer and sweeter scent than the usual fiery hot basil. It is more sedating, less stimulating, and more acceptable in skin care formulas or in analgesic blends for those with compromised constitutions, such as the sick and elderly. It is gently stimulating and the scent works well with many different oils.

**Cypress**—*Cupressus sempervirens*, is extraordinary when used with a quality rose for serious heart pain. Massage must be gentle, with more effleurage and less Swedish work. Cypress is analgesic for sore, aching muscles. It is also slightly diuretic, reduces overactive sweat and oil glands, and is helpful for the respiratory system as it can be soothing and uplifting.

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**Juniper Berry**—*Juniperus communis* has a clean antiseptic odor that is also useful with cypress and lemon as an air cleaner. As an application in massage, it is used in cellulite formulas to reduce edema. It also works well as a diuretic and an analgesic.

**Lemon**—*Citrus limon* is pressed from the peel of the lemon. The essential oil is antibacterial and antiseptic when applied to surfaces. It is astringent in skin care, used with juniper and cypress for cellulite massage, and has a fresh, cleansing smell that is acceptable in all massage formulas.

**Rose**—Many *Rosa* species are distilled and processed for the essence. Rose is an all-purpose pain reliever and a specific remedy for the heart, whether the pain is psychological or truly physical. This is a must-have essence in any therapist’s repertoire.

**Rose Geranium**—*Pelargonium graveolens* is very useful for emotional pain as an antidepressant, with lemon and rose to care for the skin, or with juniper for all-over pain in the body.

**Sage**—*Salvia officinalis* is calming and restorative when inhaled during a massage, acting as a tonic on the nervous system. It is antiseptic and an all-around analgesic, particularly for sports injuries such as football knees or golfer’s elbow.





## My Aching Head

**H**eadache pain can range from a dull all-over pain to a nagging vice-grip throb of the temples to the incapacitating agony of a migraine. Practically everyone is familiar with some sort of headache pain, but a lot of us are not familiar with all the natural options to relieve this pain.

What too few know is that long-term use of OTC painkillers may in itself cause headaches or even lead to liver and kidney damage. Essential oils and herbs offer a much safer and more uplifting alternative.

Headaches can be treated by a range of different oils and herbs, depending on the specific origin of the headache. While many headaches are related to stress, their cause can sometimes be more precisely identified as connected to liver disorder (as is often the case with migraines), sluggish digestion, insomnia, cold and flu, upper respiratory allergies, caffeine withdrawal, eye strain, or menstruation, among others. For the most effective headache treatment, it is best to determine the headache origin first, as the recommended oils and herbs work according to different mechanisms.

Widely popular peppermint oil (*Mentha x piperita*) is one of the more traditional aromatherapy remedies. Apply it as a compress or straight, one or two drops to the back of the neck. Researchers at the neurological clinic of Universitat Christian Albrechts in Kiel, Germany, determined its effectiveness in a double-blind, placebo-controlled randomized crossover trial involving thirty-two healthy subjects. A significant reduction in pain was noticed, as well as positive mood alteration and cognitive performance improvement. The study confirms peppermint's reputation for being analgesic, uplifting and mentally clearing.

For a more sensual approach, the honey-rich aroma of jasmine flower oil (*Jasminum officinale*) can be used to quickly coax away the headache blues and leave one feeling relaxed and soothed. For application straight to the temples, apply a drop to one thumb, press both thumbs together, then place thumbs on your temples for a 10-second pressure point massage. Finish by massaging your temple and forehead with your fingers. You can also dilute jasmine in a massage oil; it works well blended with rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) hydrosol.

A lesser-known remedy for headaches is an herbal infusion of yerba santa leaves (*Eriodictyon californicum*) used by the Pomo Indians native. Also called holy herb or mountain balm, this herb as long been a popular remedy for colds and asthma.

Here are a few other herbal headache remedies that combine several herbs or oils together, and work through the synergistic combinations of the plants.

■ **Headache pillow**—Stuff a pillow with 2 ounces each of lavender flowers, marjoram leaves, betony leaves, rose petals, and a half ounce of cloves. Inhale for relief from many types of headaches. Put a little in a small leather bag and carry it with you for on-the-spot relief.

■ **Headache Inhaler**—In a small vial, put 10 drops lavender oil, 10 drops marjoram oil, 5 drops clove oil, 10 drops peppermint oil, and 10 drops rose oil. Carry with you when traveling; it seems especially effective against “smog headaches.” Inhale whenever necessary.

■ **Migraines**—For relief of the more severe pain of migraine headaches, several essential oils derived from familiar culinary oils are effective through inhalation. Anise seed oil (*Pimpinella anisum*), coriander oil (*Coriandrum sativum*), ginger oil (*Zingiber officinale*), or marjoram oil (*Origanum majorana*) are good choices. Another more traditional treatment is the ingestion of several fresh leaves of feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*), or the infusion of 3–4 fresh leaves removed from the top of the plant. Feverfew herb can also be used as a tincture. **MAB**

**Resources**

Badger, Diana, and Rose, Jeanne, “Herbs and Aromatherapy for Headaches,” for The National Association for Herbs & Aromatherapy. September 1996. [www.jeannerose.net/articles/headaches\\_herbs\\_aromatherapy.html](http://www.jeannerose.net/articles/headaches_herbs_aromatherapy.html) (accessed April 10, 2006).

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## Author's Note:

Essential oils should always be diluted in a carrier substance (lotion, oil, alcohol) before use. Never use essential oils near the eyes.