

The myths reviewed

PEPPERMINT OIL

There are vast numbers of posts on social media sites as well as many errors in training courses about what ailments peppermint oil can deal with. Therefore I thought it worth creating a new article on these errors. Don't think I am saying that peppermint oil is of little use, it can be very useful, but just not for a lot of the ailments it is claimed that it can treat.

This review is intended to help people understand why so many urban myths have grown in aromatherapy, and perhaps where that information may have originated.

Brown text are the claims from various sources.

Black text are my responses.

Untrue claims on peppermint oil

"... I love to teach classes on weight loss where we talk about how to lose weight naturally. I let people know something like peppermint oil helps curb your appetite..." Peppermint oil is a well known indigestion remedy helping to calm the stomach and improve digestion of the food. That is not an appetite suppressing action.

".....just two drops of peppermint in your water three times a day will really just curb your appetite." You cannot disperse essential oils in water. The oil forms minute droplets that can irritate the mucus membranes of the lips, gums, mouth and throat.

"Peppermint is an excellent digestive aid, great for the respiratory system and circulation along with being an anti-inflammatory and antiseptic..." The cooling effects are a temporary numbing of the skins sensory nerves, but when that wears off you can get rebound heating and inflammation. It most definitely is not an anti-inflammatory, indeed the exact reverse.

"Peppermint kind of gives that hot ice effect where it gets hot and then it gets cold. But it also can increase circulation, oxygenation to the muscles. Peppermint itself has about 12 different active compounds. The largest compound is menthol. So it actually works as an analgesic. That menthol is really good at kind of numbing the area, but also increasing circulation". As explained previously, this common error about peppermint oil being a coolant is wrong. The effect is a temporary numbing of the skins sensory nerve cells, but after a time the effect can reverse. That is when increased blood flow happens and can result in skin irritation. Excessive use can cause chemical burns to the skin.

"Peppermint itself has about 12 different active compounds". That is an indication of an individual who has been trained by someone who knows nothing about essential oils. All genuine essential oils contain hundreds of natural chemicals not 12.

"Essential oils for dogs".

To suggest that peppermint oil on the paws of a dog can "fix heart problems" is so way out that I cannot figure out where such a crazy idea originated. So the dog licks its paw and gets peppermint oil in its eye. **This is animal cruelty!!**

"Cool It – Peppermint is effective at cooling the body from fevers, hot flashes, over-exertion, or hot weather. Apply a few drops to forehead, back of neck, lower spine and/or bottom of feet". Peppermint oil does **not** cool fevers. Suggesting adding the oil to the lower spine indicates someone who has learnt from Young Living or one of their distributors. **It is total nonsense.** The idea of using it for fevers is a corruption of the use of the herbal tea.

"A bath to bring down fever"

"Use bergamot (Citrus bergamia) and/or peppermint (Mentha piperita) as both oils can help to bring down fever". There is no evidence to back this claim, particularly as bergamot oil is not an anti viral agent. It is a corruption of the traditional use of **herb teas** to help reduce a fever.

"I've had times where I've accidentally got the oils in my eye. And I go like this for about 5 minutes. And then it's all over". **This is an extremely dangerous statement** because peppermint oil will burn the membrane covering the eye.

"Seasonal Allergies".

"lemon, lavender and peppermint oils". Seasonal allergies cause inflammation of the eyes, nose and throat. Therefore, you do not want oils that can cause irritation. Lemon and peppermint oils are irritants.

"Peppermint oil is anti-viral." I do not know of any such research in humans, but I do know of research with peppermint **tea** which shows antiviral activity, as do several other plants in the same family. Yet again someone who does not understand the fundamental differences between the oil and the herb; probably does not care as long as he pulls in the sales and new devotees.

"Uses: Ulcers". **Dangerous advice** and is nonsense anyway.

"if you look at peppermint oil, there are studies on patients with irritable bowel syndrome, IBS. And they found just tremendous, tremendous benefits". Yes, but only if enteric coated capsules are used. There is no evidence that taking undiluted peppermint oil by mouth can have a similar effect. Years of research were needed to produce peppermint oil capsules that could produce an effective therapeutic action.

"we start using essential oils that can help support in reducing intestinal inflammation. And ginger is a great one for that, as well. I would say ginger and peppermint together" Both of these oils are well acknowledged as mucus membrane irritants. You can't have an antiinflammatory action if the substance is also an irritant.

Peppermint oil 'soothes and strengthens the nerves'. What on earth does "strengthen the nerves" mean?

Misleading claims in books

In many of the older books you will find the following. Included here are only the ailments that peppermint oil cannot help because they are mainly from the traditional uses of the herb tea. Red are particularly dangerous:

"anti-inflammatory, astringent, fever, cholagogenic, stimulates the liver, food poisoning, problems with the liver, gallbladder problems, diarrhea, bile stones, stomach ulcers, polyps in the large intestine, worms, paralysis, tuberculosis, flushing, regulates menstruation, nerves (regeneration and support), varicose veins, autism, brain injury, herpes simplex, breastfeeding (reduction of milk production), multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, palsy, swollen eyes, typhoid,".

1. The earliest aromatherapy book that I can find making numerous claims for peppermint is *'The Practice of Aromatherapy'* by Jean Valnet published in 1980. What most subsequent aromatherapy authors failed to realize (when they copied his work) was his book is mainly a herbal, rather than a reliable book on essential oils.

With the 'Properties' he fails to distinguish between the use of the herb or its oil.

In the 'methods of use' he gives the different methods of using peppermint but fails to distinguish which conditions the different extracts are best suited to. As the herb tea and essential oil have significantly different chemical compositions the uses are not interchangeable. For example, the tea contains substances such as tannins that have antiviral activity but those substances do not occur in the essential oil.

2. The next book making misleading claims for peppermint is *'Aromatherapy A-Z by Patricia Davies'* 1988. In the list of conditions that peppermint can treat, like Valnet she fails to define if she means the herb or oil against each condition. The use of peppermint tea is mentioned in paragraph 3. However, in the next paragraph, colds and flu are mentioned and she is recommending the essential oil when in reality the tea is the best option. In paragraph 5 she states *"Peppermint also induces sweating which reduces fever in a natural way"*. That is the herbal use of hot peppermint tea, **not** the essential oil.

3. The next book is *'Aromatherapy'* by Daniel Ryman. 1991 (one of only a couple of early aromatherapy authors that I have any respect for). She differentiates between the use of peppermint tea and the oil and does not give great lists of ailments - unlike later authors. She even understands the fundamental issue that most other authors miss which is that essential oils and water do not mix. She recommends first dissolving them in alcohol.

4. The next book is *'Medical aromatherapy'* by Kurt Schnaubelt. 1998. On page 196 he says "It can...."help eye problems originating from the liver". So how come so many people get eye problems and yet the main use of peppermint oil is in common foods? On page 237 under the entry for peppermint it states "regenerates the liver". Wow no more liver transplants, no reference of course! Yet this book is promoted by many aromatherapy courses and even courses for nurses.

Summary

When reading claims of what peppermint oil can do, beware of those such as 'antiinflammatory and astringent'. Peppermint oil temporarily deadens the nerve endings in the skin, **it does not astringe them.** Any astringent action is in the herb tea due to chemicals that are not found in the oil.

Beware of claims that peppermint oil can reduce fevers, it cannot.

Ignore claims that it can increase sweating, that is the traditional use of the hot tea.

Beware of claims that the oil consumed can cure IBS and other intestinal problems. It cannot do that unless it is in properly formulated enteric coated capsules.

Ignore claims that it can regenerate the liver; that is dishonest hype.

Ignore claims that peppermint oil can help loose weight, this is just hype.

Peppermint oil cannot cure flu. Only the tea has an antiviral action.

Never use it near the eyes as it can cause severe pain and can damage the eye if it is not quickly removed.

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