

## Essential Oils: A Quick Guide

**Joni Orazio, MD, DFAPA**

Plants have been a part of medicine since at least 2500 BC. Plants have medicinal properties and toxic properties. Essential oils have seen a recent surge in popularity. There are many benefits to essential oils, however a lack of understanding of safe use can be dangerous.

Essential oils are distilled from plant parts including seeds, bark, flowers, stems etc. Essential oils diffuse across our cell membranes and enter our bodies in a systemic manner. This is why it is essential to use quality oils.

Although some oils may say they are “therapeutic grade” this term is misleading as there is no government agency certifying essential oils. When using essential oils, research the product first. Simply because a company states they sell “therapeutic grade” oils does not mean they are a high-quality product.

Here are a few tips for finding quality essential oils:

- Avoid oils that say fragrance, nature identical or perfume
- Do not be impressed by the term therapeutic or pure
- Quality oil is usually in a 4 ounce or smaller dark colored glass, be leery of plastic or clear glass
- Seek vendors that provide detailed information about their oils
- Reliable vendors usually sell different oils at different prices as some oils simply cost more to produce
- Avoid buying in stores unless you can verify recent purchase and proper storage
- Look for companies that give botanical names, country of origin and method of extraction.
- Be careful buying from vendors that promise too much from their product
- Consider purchasing organic oil
- Lower prices can mean lower quality
- Educate yourself about essential oils on the FDA website or the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy
- Take extreme caution ingesting essential oils as they are significantly more powerful than the parent plant. For example, cinnamon oil is not equivalent to cinnamon spice. Seek a qualified practitioner to guide ingestion. Essential oils are highly

antimicrobial and our digestive system requires healthy bacteria, therefore, expert guidance is imperative

- Research the adverse effects of essential oils specific to children prior to use
- Strongly consider diluting an essential oil in a carrier oil such as olive, almond or coconut before applying to be sure you will not have an adverse reaction