



Liz Fulcher
Clinical Aromatherapist
Aromatherapy Educator
Aromatic Wisdom Institute

Aromatic Wisdom Podcast Episode #004 Aromatic Remedies to Beat the Winter Blues

This is the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast episode 4. Today's topic is the winter blues. I'll be showing you some ways that you can keep yourself even more emotionally in balance this winter by using the essential oils.

[You're listening to the aromatic wisdom PODCAST with your host, Liz Fulcher. If you're interested in learning about essential oils, hearing interviews with industry experts and discover ways to grow your own aromatherapy business, this is the podcast for you. For more information and show notes, visit the website at aromaticinstitute.com. Now, sit back, relax, take a deep breath and enjoy as Liz shares a dose of aromatic wisdom.]

Hello everyone! Thank you so much for showing up today and spending time with me. My name is Liz Fulcher and I am your host, and wow! It's December 4th already - I can't believe it. Seems I was just mowing the lawn and now we're shoveling snow. In just a couple weeks, 17 days to be exact, on December 21, will celebrate the winter solstice and it's the shortest, darkest day of the year. Even though the days start getting longer from the 22nd, January and February seemed endless, don't they? I like parts you like one long game of thrones where winter just lasts for two or three years. By the time we get to March, I'm so ready for spring.

Well, in those long, cold and dark months over sort of December, January, February some people experience some kind of depression called seasonal affective disorder. Also known as SAD. Sometimes it's called the winter blues. There are a lot of biological factors involved in causing this emotional diving winter, but the two main reasons are less sunlight and longer nights. Now, not everyone is affected and many people just feel 'bleah' in the winter, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they are depressed. When we have less sunlight, longer nights, our circadian rhythm gets completely goofed up.



The circadian rhythm is our internal biological clock; that is your sense of waking up and going to sleep, waking up and going to sleep - that's why they always say keep regular hours to keep your circadian rhythm regular. Well, this rhythm, this internal biological clock starts shifting into hibernation mode when we have more darkness. Our body says "Okay - time to slow down, time to hibernate, time to sleep". Secondly, the decreasing sunlight has a big effect on that rock star, feel-good hormones in our brain called serotonin. We love serotonin. Serotonin is responsible for giving us a sense of well-being. It's the reason why people take antidepressants, SSRIs stands for selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor and, in a nutshell, help keep more serotonin your brain so you have a better sense of well-being.

So what does the winter blues look like? What are some of the symptoms that people experience or manifest when they're actually having seasonal affective disorder? So you could simply feel less energetic. That's really one of the classics instanced that people complain about, that they just don't have enough energy. People generally want you having the winter, taking naps, going to bed early, not wanting to get up - I mean, once to get up when it's dark out?

You might feel irritable, have less interest in hobbies, might have less interest in just being around other people and I call it cocooning, when you just kind of want to stay home, sit on the couch and watched some TV and cover up with a blanket. And you just want to kind of hunker down and not go out.

Another sign of the winter blues or the seasonal affective disorder is the craving for carbohydrates becomes really real. You just want to start eating cookies and having popcorn and bowls of cereal and chips and pretzels, craving for carbohydrates is classic in the winter. You know, your winter body is not the same as your summer body. In the summer, in the sunlight and warmth we just naturally want to be out, we want to be moving and doing and producing. In winter, we naturally move slower, we turn inward - it's a normal response to a natural rhythm.

I actually like to look at the four seasons as a metaphor for 24 hour day, so looking at one day as a metaphor for four seasons, morning is spring, summer is daytime, fall is evening and winter is night. So we move about during the day, but come evening our bodies start to produce hormones to make us sleepy so we rest and restore our body and



our mind so we can get up and do it all again tomorrow. This is a rest cycle that happens every day. This is the circadian cycle.

So, winter as a season would be considered the evening of the year. In the same way we need our evenings in our nights slow down and restore after the day, we need winter to slow down and restore after the other 3 seasons. Winter is the season of stillness – it's the time to rest and restore; do not beat yourself up because you want to slow down. Listen to your body's innate wisdom. Look at nature: animals hibernate. Plants – most plants and it depends where – but most plants don't produce leaves or buds because they're resting and, in fact, the process of new growth and regeneration for the spring has already started. It's already begun internally in the plants.

To everything, there is a season and we have to honor where we are in each season. It's okay to cocoon and slow down a little in the winter months. Unfortunately, society has trained us to go against our natural rhythms. With the advent of electric light and now technology, we're completely out of synch with our innate connection to nature and its natural cycles. And of course, if you're in the city it's even worse – it's like 24 hours a day stimulation and lights, and people are working and there's noise, and it's very hard to listen to your own rhythm.

You know, we force ourselves to perform at the same level, 12 months a year. It's impossible! It's not sustainable to continue at the same pace, month after month, year after year, without having an episode of some kind of major imbalance – a meltdown, depression, exhaustion. It's no wonder that we get depressed in the winter, because we don't slow the heck down. Okay, I'll get off my soap box now and get back to aromatherapy and essential oils, the reason we're here.

Even the most vigilant and healthy of us can be prone to winter blues. Even if you're balanced and healthy and you allow yourself the rest, it's still easy to have the drop in serotonin and to feel blue. So I'm going to share now the essential oils that I have had the best results with in addressing the winter blues, both with myself and with my clients and students. Then, after I've shared the essential oils and suggested methods of application, I'm also going to give you a list of other, really helpful tips to get you through the winter with your sanity intact.



Here's a suggestion – after you've heard this podcast and hear about the oils and so forth, you might want to make a winter blues kit. When the times comes, you're ready, because what happens is inertia sets in, you don't feel great, but you don't feel like doing anything about it either, so look ahead now for yourself, if there's someone in your home or in your life that you think 'Oh, every year – they get so down in the winter; this year I'm gonna have my little kit waiting for them'.

Okay – let's move on to the essential oils that I've chosen for the winter blues busters. I'm going to share two groups of essential oils with you, to make it easy to remember, also because I think I like to enumerate. I noticed that I tend to enumerate and list, and give bullet points a lot in this podcast; I'm guessing that's the teacher in me and I think it's easy to get lost listening to a podcast, so I try to keep things in order by numbering and listing.

The winter blues group no.1 are the citrus oils which I'm sure comes to no surprise to any of you who are familiar with essential oils, specifically lemon, lime, sweet orange, grapefruit, mandarin and bergamot. And I do pronounce it bergamot – that was the way I learned to pronounce it when I first started this modality in Italy in 1991. And it stuck – that's sort of a hallmark of my students – you know they're my students when they pronounce it that way. If you say bergamot that's fine; I think both pronunciations are just fine.

So the citrus oils are always my first choice for addressing the darkness of winter; especially depression and that horrible 'I don't wanna' 'I don't wanna get up off the couch, I don't wanna go out' – that lethargy that kind of can sink in at wintertime. The aroma of these citrus oils is so clean, refreshing, uplifting – they smell like sunshine. They're really the most cheerful little group of oils that you can own. One thing I really love about these citrus group of essential oils is that they're uplifting without being stimulating, so you can even use them at bedtime. Think for a minute about the citrus essential oils and how they grow: orange and lemon and grapefruit – they're at the tops of the trees, just soaking up the sunshine and I feel that energetically; that really comes through with those essential oils. SO whatever blends you decide to make to address winter blues, I always include one of the citrus oils.

There is another reason that I favor the citrus oils in the winter. Not only are they



uplifting and cheering, but they will give you a tremendous boost to your immune system. If you've ever heard the term 'psychoneuroimmunology' – that's a good one. First of all, when you say it, you're gonna sound really smart. Secondly, it's the science of the mind-body connection. This is really important. When we're stressed, or depressed or exhausted, our immunity drops, making it easier to get sick. If you're chronically sad or depressed, chances are you're chronically unwell. In the show notes, I'm going to share a link on the pub med website. It's an abstract of a study called 'The Effects of Citrus Fragrance on Immune Function and Depressive States' and you can read how the study shows the antidepressant and immune boosting benefits of the citrus oils – it's fascinating.

I like it when I have some sort of empirical evidence that shows the efficacy of essential oils in a real clinical setting. It gives credibility to our work as aromatherapists. I think there are still plenty of people out there who feel that what we do or that we're all just wackadoos out there, playing with oils and the candles and the scents at the mall, and don't really understand the power of essential oils, the true plant medicine that it is.

So what is the science behind this immune boosting benefit of the citrus oils? In a word, it is a chemical compound called D-limonene. I've also heard this chemical component pronounced 'D-limonene' – I say D-limonene. There's a lot of evidence from research that has shown significant immune stimulant effects of D-limonene. Basically, D-limonene is a molecule, and wherever that molecule shows up, there will be immune boosting properties. It shows up a lot in the citrus oils. Most of the citruses contain high amounts – like 60% or more of D-limonene. Grapefruit and orange happen to be the highest, but the others are not far behind.

Now, in terms of the method of application of the citrus oils, my favorite way to use them is in a diffuser or a room spray, so I can fill the environment around me with their beautiful aroma, breathe it in, get the impact that way. I also really like to put them in a nasal inhaler. You'd get a blank nasal inhaler and add the citrus essential oils to the wick, put it inside the inhaler. That way, you can carry it around with you in case you need a quick sniff to brighten your mood.

You can definitely use the citrus oils on your skin. But there are some safety precautions if you're going to do this. Some of the citrus oils create a skin reaction called 'photosensitivity' – what that means is that the essential oils will react on the skin when



exposed to ultraviolet light. That includes tanning beds, and even the gentle, winter sun if you use them on your skin, say in a massage oil or added to a lotion, please be sure to dilute them well and I will put a link in the show notes to a dilution chart. You are safe with sweet orange. Sweet orange is one that does not have the photo toxic properties. You should always check out the properties of any essential oil you use on your skin, just to see what the safety features are.

So the next group of oils I recommend are rich in a different kind of molecule. The essential oils that are rich in molecules from the ester family have a significant balancing action on the sympathetic nervous system. They are emotionally uplifting and blend beautifully with our friends from our citrus group. Okay - they are 5 oils that I would recommend you start with to address depression and irritability of the winter blues. They are: lavender, clary sage, geranium, ylang-ylang and Siberian fir. There are many others and so, don't write to me and say 'But Liz, what about jasmine and what about helichrysum?' Those are also high in the ester molecules and also super for depression and irritability. But I chose oils that I thought would be first of all, affordable, easy to find and that would really blend well with the citrus oils. I will put that list in the show notes in case you can't write it down right now.

Now, as far as the methods of application for the oils in the ester family, I would say use them in any way that is enjoyable to you. If you'd like to put them in a bath, if you receive a regular massage, you can make a blend, you can give them to your massage therapist to add to her oils. You can add them to a body lotion, you can use them in a diffuser, you can use them in a nasal inhaler. You can use them in a bath. You can add them to salts and put them in a salt bath.

And finally, I have a list of other ways that you can be proactive and beat the winter blues in a natural way. The first thing I would recommend, you're not gonna like it, but here it is: get some exercise. You know, being outside in the fresh air, first of all, you'll get more light, especially if you go outside and exercise when the sun is shining. But move around the house - get a couple of, either join the gym. If that's too much, see if you can get those... what I have in my house is one of those little trampolines, mini trampolines and it has a bar on it and I will put on a podcast because, as I mentioned in episode one, I'm a podcast junkie - or a TV show, or a book on tape that's dating myself, an audiobook - and



I'll just jump. I might jump for 5 minutes or 7 minutes then stop, kind of rest and then I'll jump so more. It's a lot of fun, it's easy, it's right there in my living room. So that really does help to get the endorphins start to flow so that you'll feel better. Get some exercise, go for a walk, jump on a little trampoline – I also have a rower, so I'll sometimes row in the house. I'm not a lover of exercise, but I really hate the way I feel in the winter when my serotonin drops, so I do make it a point to exercise a little bit. So exercise is number one.

Number 2 is to get more light. You can buy a light box to help replicate natural sunlight. The box produces a light that mimics the sunshine – it mimics the outdoor light and it will help you adjust your sleep cycles. So either you can use that for a half an hour, just sit in the morning when you're reading your newspaper, you shine it indirectly toward your eyes and they're not that expensive. The Aromatic Wisdom Institute has an Amazon associate's account, so I'm going to put the links to light boxes in the show notes. If you do purchase your light box through that link, I will get a commission and it does not increase the price for you in any way. So my little disclaimer there.

The last additional item is nutrition. You know, you really are what you eat, as corny as that sounds. Garbage in, garbage out. Try to keep yourself really nourished with good, wholesome organic food. Try to cut back on sugar, refined carbohydrates and instead, fill your belly with nutritious vegetables and fruits. If you need to look at it as medicine for your mind, food will really make a difference in how you feel and how you think. So that ends the primary portion of the podcast, which leaves us with our final little segment that I like to end with, and it's called 'Smell My Life'.

So in the Smell My Life segment of the podcast, I always like to share some sort of authentic, aromatic moment from my life in the previous week. Now, this past week, my grandson was visiting. It was the weekend after Thanksgiving. We were sitting on the couch and he spilled his orange juice. So we jumped up and mopped it up. After a while, as we were sitting there, we both noticed that it did not smell good and it was weird. My grandson said 'Nana, it smells like pee'. And I don't know if it was the acid from the orange juice, but I said 'Alright – I can't sit with this'.

So I got up, I got a little bowl of warm water and I put some basil essential oil in it, because basil is a strong smell – I like the smell – and I scrubbed the corner of the couch where the orange juice/pee was coming from and voila! No more bad smell. It dried and



the smell completely disappeared.

So that is it for this week's episode of The Aromatic Wisdom Podcast. Thank you again for hanging around and spending this time with me; it means more to me than you know! I really appreciate you being here. Until next week, be well, have a great week and I'll see you next Thursday.

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