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Aromatic Wisdom Podcast Episode #021 **Depression Relief With Aromatherapy**

This is the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast, Episode 21. In today's show I'm going to be talking about depression. I'll share some wonderful essential oils and methods of use that can really help ease the symptoms of depression, and finally, I'm going to share a little bit about my own personal struggle with the "black dog".

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 discovering ways to grow your own Aromatherapy business, this is the podcast for you.

For more information and show notes, visit the website at www.AromaticWisdomInstitute.com. Now sit back. Relax. Take a deep breath and enjoy as Liz shares a dose of Aromatic Wisdom.

Hello, everyone! Today is February 4th 2016 and I am so happy to be here. I love doing this podcast. My name is Liz Fulcher and I'm a clinical aromatherapist and a twenty-five year veteran of aromatherapy and the use of essential oils. I am your humble host for this podcast. I have a school called www.AromaticWisdomInstitute.com. I offer live classes and pretty soon I will be offering a number of on-line classes. For those of you who have been asking, hang in there—it's coming!

Before I get in to today's topic of depression, I wanted to give you an update to last week's podcast where I interviewed Angela Ehmke and Kristina Bauer about their movie. These are two executive producers for an upcoming aromatherapy documentary called *Uncommon Scents*. Kristina and Angie have been running this crowd funding campaign in an effort to raise funds so that the film can manifest. It's going pretty well, although I would like to see it go a little faster because they are working with a deadline—they have until the end of February to raise \$60,000. The current number is \$26,274, raised by 314 people in 17 days. So it's about 45% funded. The goal is \$60,000. Without \$60,000 the film can't fly at all. They just can't do the film. It's the minimum they need for all of the



expenses. There are 15 days left. If you haven't yet contributed, if you have any interest at all in essential oils and aromatherapy being elevated to a new level of professionalism, I invite you to go to the page, <http://www.uncommonscentismovie.com>, and give \$5 or whatever you can. The link is: <http://bit.ly/uncommonscentismovie>. I'll put all that in the show notes. Don't forget, there are great perks! You can buy a lot of aromatherapy courses and products and wonderful things at a big discount and every penny that you spend will go toward production costs for the film. Let's really put our money where our mouth is. We want people to take us seriously as aromatherapists—let's put out a serious film.

Let's talk about depression. Please bear in mind, as you listen to today's podcast that I am not a physician; I am not a psychiatrist, and I'm not offering any medical suggestions. Also please understand that essential oils and aromatherapy cannot cure clinical depression. What aromatherapy can do is offer a lot of comfort, a lot of emotional support, and help address and lessen some of the uncomfortable sensations we get in our bodies from depression.

A good place to start is to give a definition of depression. What do I mean when I am talking about depression in this podcast? First of all, I'm not talking about "it's the last season of Downton Abbey, I'm depressed!" You may be really sad about that, but that's not what I'm talking about. When people say, "I'm so depressed," usually they are not. They are feeling bad, they are having a bad day or they are feeling disappointed, but they are not really depressed.

True depression is an illness and it's an illness that affects the brain. There are a lot of factors that can contribute to the onset of depression and there is still a lot of debate about what causes depression, but a lot of the factors that can contribute to the onset of depression are genetics, changes in hormone levels because hormones are chemicals in the brain; we're talking about a disruption or a poorly functioning brain chemistry; certain medical illnesses, stress, grief, substance abuse. Continued stress is a big one and I think that's a common reason why a lot of people are depressed in this day and age, because of the chronic stress that does start to affect your brain. In a nutshell, you've got two triggers that can bring on depression: chemical and hormone imbalances and situational triggers. A situational trigger would be something like you lose your job, divorce, or death of a loved one. For some people depression is temporary. They have an episode and it's over. For other people it is a constant struggle. It's important for us as aromatherapists to really understand the symptoms of depression, because that is really what we are going to be addressing with our essential oils and our holistic modalities.



Depression usually affects your thoughts, your emotions, your behaviors and your overall physical health. Here are some of the most common symptoms:

- Feelings—feeling sad, feeling hopelessness, guilt, moodiness, angry outbursts; and,
- Interest—a general loss of interest in anything that was previously interesting to you; loss of interest in friends, family, a loss of interest in sex, a loss of interest in your hobbies, your favorite activities, loss of interest in your work;
- Concentration—very often people have a hard time concentrating, making decisions, and even remembering things when they are in the depths of a depression;
- Withdrawal—there is a tendency to withdraw. Withdrawing is very common; missing work, missing school commitments;
- Physical—tiredness, lack of energy, wanting to sleep all the time, unexplained aches and pains, changes in your appetite. Some people can't stop eating so they gain a lot of weight. Some people don't want to eat, lose their appetite and they have weight loss. Changes in sleep, sleeping too much or too little.

Those are the common symptoms of depression.

We've talked about what it is and some of the symptoms. I am going to share with you now about my depressive episode that I had in 2015. AND, I'm going to share with you how I got better. All the ways and all the things that I incorporated into my life: exercise, nutrition, supplements, and so forth to get better. And then I'm going to share with you the essential oils I used, the protocol that I used and how I was really able to lift myself up, out of a very dark place.

My depressive episode began, actually, in the winter of 2014 going into 2015. There had been a couple of experiences in my life that led up to what eventually became a depression. That was three huge losses in my life in a short period of time. I lost my mother, and then a year later I lost my only sister who had Lou Gehrig's Disease. Interestingly enough she was diagnosed with colon cancer and six days later was gone. It was a total shock to the family. Three months later my only brother was killed in a car accident. Within a year and a half, I lost my entire family of origin. We lost my Dad to cancer in 1981. This had all happened in 2012-2013.

Fast forward to September 2014 and my husband has decided to go away for a year to do something marvelous. I totally supported him; I was behind him all the way. He was one of the founders of a project called "Ways of the Earth Living Museum". We talked for a long time about it. He said you know, if I go it means I'm going to be gone for a year, but



it's my life's dream and so forth, but I was behind him 100%. To put the shoe on the other foot, if I had an opportunity to live in Corsica for a year working with the Helichrysum flowers and distilling, there is no way he would say no to that. We really support each other's dreams. He quit his job and he went out to Indiana to work on this living museum where he would be putting together a village where people could come and see how people would live in a primitive way. In September of 2014, James headed out to Indiana for his adventure. Our son Gianluca moved to London to do his studies for his master's degree. I had just, the month before, lost my pug, Sassy, after 13 ½ years. Those of you who have been my students or have gone back to my old Facebook, know that Sassy was pretty precious to me. She was my sidekick for 13 ½ years and was with me 24/7 in the classroom, in the massage room. Please understand that I am not trying to portray a poor-pitiful-Paulie here. I am pretty good with dealing with this, with each one of these losses. I did pretty well, but I think it was the accumulation, the sheer number of things I had to deal with in a short period of time that took its toll.

Anyway, initially in the Fall it was great. I was busy, I had my certification program that I teach in the Fall and I had my grandson and I had a lot to do. Both my husband and my son did come home for Christmas. They were both here for about two weeks at Christmastime, which was terrific but it was so awful when they left. One of the things about depression is that it can be subtle and insidious and sneaky. I started to shut down and the thing is, I didn't feel depressed. I didn't even feel sad. I just felt no motivation. I started to sleep a lot. Then in April 2015 I was on a Skype call with my son who was living in London and when the call was over I walked to the kitchen to get a cup of tea or something and like a bolt of lightning I had a panic attack. If you've ever had a panic attack, you know it's one of the most terrifying things that can happen. It's like someone turns on a switch that cannot be turned off. The amygdala in your brain gets triggered and causes your body to want to pump out a whole lot of adrenalin because it's the flight-or-fight response. You are totally in flight mode. The thing is there is nowhere to go; there is no imminent danger, it's just all of this fear for no apparent reason. It does eventually pass and you are left absolutely exhausted and drained from the experience.

There was a shift for me after that experience. I started to lose my appetite, and I love to eat! This was a big red flag for me personally. I thought if I can't eat there is something going on. The second big sign for me that something was off was that I did not want to face the day in the morning. I have always been a perpetually optimistic, upbeat person. My parents used to call me Pollyanna. Everything is good, the glass is half full and it's probably full of wonderful lemonade! I'm just that way; I've always been very exuberant and full of life. I would wake up in the morning and dread the day. I just thought, how am I



ever going to get through this day? At that point, James and I were in touch and he was ready to come back and I was ready for him to come back. That was awesome. He came home at the end of May and yet, this depression persisted and I've since understood why. Part of it was my chemistry was out of whack. The other thing is that we have neural pathways in our brain and the more you focus on something and think about something, the deeper the groove it makes in your brain.

Now I want to tell you how I got better. First and foremost, I want to stress that I wanted to get better. I knew that this is not who I really am and that I needed to bring healthy Liz back out and coax her and nurture her out into the world. I ended up, slowly but surely, creating a wellness protocol for myself—I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time, but that's really what happened.

The first thing I did was changed my diet. I'm not a junk-food eater, I don't eat a lot of processed food, but I stopped eating anything with sugar, stopped eating anything with wheat-gluten, and I stopped drinking caffeine—stopped all caffeinated beverages. That may sound horrific—ah coffee!—but I was too afraid of having another panic attack and I didn't want any stimulants.

The second thing I did was I started to exercise. I am not someone who is a big exercise but I began to make it my religion to go to the gym every day for an hour. I actually started walking outside because the weather was nice—it was spring and summer. I started walking a mile a day, two miles a day; when I walked three miles a day and I came home, I felt amazing. I knew the serotonin had been raised in my brain and the feel-good endorphins were being released, and exercise was something that I could not avoid. I also joined a gym and, funnily enough, I am now training for a 5K in the spring!

The next thing I did was I started doing research on supplements that help to nourish and support a depressed brain. I was taking, and still am, 1000 mgs a day of a high quality fish oil, 50,000 iu (+/-) of vitamin D every week, along with a multi-vitamin, glucosamine/chondroitin for my joints; good supplements like that. I also became really good friends with magnesium citrate in a soft gel tab. I take two of those every night before bed and I sleep really well and very deeply. Luckily sleep did not affect me during all of this. I've always been a good, little sleeper, but I did find that when I was in the depths of it I couldn't stay asleep very well. Magnesium citrate really helped with that.

Then I started seeing a therapist who specializes in mindfulness. She taught me cognitive behavior therapy and a lot of mindfulness techniques. That has probably been the single



biggest tool, except for maybe the exercise, in my recovery and my being completely healthy now. She taught me about mindfulness and she gave me a lot of books to read. The one book that was really helpful in helping me what was happening in my brain. I have to dig, I have to know—it's not enough to experience it, I have to know why. When I first started studying the chemistry of essential oils it was because I had to know why these things work. So I also had to know why? Why am I feeling this? What is happening in my brain? I read a book called *Buddha's Brain* by Rick Hanson, and I'll put the link in the show notes. That was tremendous in helping me understand physically what was happening in my brain and how I could also shift it so that something else was happening in my brain. I began regularly meditating and doing specific mindfulness exercises when I would feel the darkness coming in and I would start to feel anxious. Tremendously helpful. I think I'm saying tremendously a lot today, but maybe it's because I can't tell you how much all this stuff has been helpful to me.

Finally, the last non-aromatherapy thing that I did—these are all things that I did that had nothing to do with essential oils or aromatherapy, but trust me, they were there all along the way, and I'm going to get to that here in a minute about all the ways in which I used aromatics and the essential oils I used—the last component of what I incorporated into my life that was missing was community. Anyone who works by themselves—what I call a solo-preneur, who works alone, at home, really has to be careful not to cut themselves off from people. My awareness of how much I had isolated myself from community activities and from my friends when a couple of very dear friends came around to support me when I was in the darkest of depths and dragged me out of the house to get a bite to eat, to go for a walk; I was in tears with gratitude that they hadn't abandoned me and that I understood how much we all need each other.

So, apart from the community that I have with my aromatherapy school and my students, which is a tremendous blessing—there is that word tremendous again—I also have started doing things that are not work related. I go to a water color class once a week for two hours, which is hilarious because I'm terrible, but it's so much fun! Every Sunday I go to the Unitarian Universalist Church and I am very involved now with volunteering and doing service activities that I strongly believe in and nourishes my soul.

There's the story of my depressive episode and my therapist kept telling me, "this is just an episode, it will pass," and it did. Thank you for allowing me to be transparent and to share this story with you. I am 300% better and I feel as though I have returned to myself, and feel as though I have returned to myself better than when I started out. Not only is my



brain back on track but I have adopted so many good, healthy habits that I am now doing them all the time.

Anyway, let's talk now about aromatherapy and essential oils and depression. I'm going to share with you the essential oils that I used and how I used them. Then, I'm also going to give some other suggestions because there are a lot of essential oils that are very helpful and effective at reducing some of the uncomfortable symptoms of depression. Remember that the use of essential oils and aromatherapy is a complementary healing modality. It's not a cure for depression. I'll explain to you how I chose the oils that I used. I have three methods, generally, for choosing any essential oil that I use.

The first is by chemical family. I did a podcast, I think it was podcast 008—aromaticwisdominstitute.com/008—where I talk about the chemistry of essential oils and I talked about the ten chemical families. The ten chemical families tell a lot about the therapeutic properties of the oils. Often I will look first: what is the chemical family? What effect do I want from the oil? I know by looking at the chemical family that I will get that.

The second that I use, and not necessarily in this order, is a look at what energetic properties do I want from the essential oils. The energetic and emotional properties and they often go together. I teach a course on the energetics of essential oils so I have a whole lot of information about that and so will go with what will work energetically with me.

I will also go with it intuitively and often what I already know works for me and what I know I like, or my gut feeling and go ahead and use that oil. Remember, I've been using oils for 25 years, so I have a deep relationship with many oils and I can often just put my hand on the one I need right away.

There were five essential oils that I pretty much stuck to during my episode of depression that really helped me get through it. There were some others that I pulled off the shelf, but I kind of stuck to these five.

The first was Melissa. This is a very costly oil, but I'll tell you that when you need a big gun, you're willing to pay for it. It doesn't matter. Melissa, Neroli, Rose, Jasmine, Helichrysum, all those precious expensive oils; they come with a price but they really do the job and sometimes what you need is a precious oil to get the job done and I knew Melissa was the one for me. Melissa is in the aldehyde family. The essential oils in this family tend to be



sedative, calming, cooling, and relaxing. Melissa is known clinically to reduce anxiety, open the mind, and it also calms and cools an agitated state. Although, I wasn't always agitated, but would definitely use Melissa when I would start to feel my anxiety rise, so that was a great one to help me calm down, help me sleep, I love the smell of it. I diffuse Melissa almost every day. It was part of my morning ritual. I'd make a smoothie, take my vitamins, put Melissa in the diffuser and take a couple of deep breaths, and then have it running for most of the morning. Then I would do it again, always in the evening. I have a chair I sit in while I watch TV or read and I would have it diffusing near my chair. It's interesting that Melissa's not one that I often reached for, but I was drawn to Melissa from my experience as a clinical aromatherapist and because I knew the chemistry, I knew it was appropriate for anxiety, depression and restlessness. Melissa was really a big one for me. I also used Melissa because it's high in citral. Citral is a chemical component that has relaxing and antidepressant properties.

The next chemical family that I looked at was the Esters. Esters are very sedative. They are also antispasmodic although that wasn't my issue. Esters are anti-inflammatory and depression can also be from an inflammation in the brain. The essential oils in the Ester family smell amazing, and the one that I chose particularly from the Ester family was Bergamot, which many people pronounce Bergamot (with a t). I say Bergam(oh) because that's the way I learned to pronounce it when I was in Europe. It's *Citrus bergamia*, and it is a citrus and it is so uplifting. All of the citruses are appropriate for depression: Bergamot, Lemon, Orange, Mandarin, they are all cheering, uplifting, and great in a diffuser. If you use them on the body be mindful that some of them can be phototoxic and increase your chances of having a reaction with the sun. Bergamot though is one, of all the citruses, that works well on anxiety. I would say it is very powerful for depression. I would use Bergamot a lot in an inhaler (one of the tube inhalers). I would also sometimes put it in a diffuser, but most likely I would use it in my inhaler and take it around with me during the day and just breathe it in as I needed it. Whenever I would start to feel the little butterflies of either anxiety or if I would start feeling grey, I would whip out the inhaler with the Bergamot and take a lot of deep breaths, do my mindfulness techniques, and say my positive affirmations. Bergamot is very powerful and it has great action on the sympathetic nervous system. Oils high in Esters can be really emotionally uplifting.

The other essential oil from the Ester family that I used a lot was Lavender. Good old Lavender. Is there anything that Lavender cannot do? Lavender is also very high in the Esters. It is just like Bergamot: it is sedative, and so forth. It doesn't have as much of the uplifting properties as Bergamot. Lavender is more calming, more sedative and that's a great one for the evening.



You know what I did with Lavender? I'm weird. I did this once and it was effective so it became a ritual. I do it every night. I shower before bed and when my hair is wet, I would put a couple of drops of Lavender in my hands and run the Lavender through my hair. Then I would cup my hands over my nose and breath in the Lavender deeply. I relaxed really well before bed. Of course, when something works, you repeat it, so I did that most nights before I went to sleep. Other oils that are high in Esters that you may want to try: Clary Sage, another one I turn to quite frequently; Geranium, Jasmine, Siberian Fir, Roman Chamomile and Ylang Ylang. They are all very effective for depression and anxiety. They have a great re-balancing action on the sympathetic nervous system and they are usually quite safe as well.

The other essential oil that I came to rely on a lot for comfort was Vetiver. Vetiver is a from the Sesquiterpenol family. It is a root and it grows in Haiti and is traditionally very calming; it is well known for being a calming, grounding, and earthy essential oil. It also corresponds beautifully with the Base Chakra. Often when people are in a deep funk they have Base Chakra issues. It's the first energy center to be formed in your body when you are born and is your connection to your tribe, to your family of origin. I knew this was a key oil for me personally having had a lot of issues around family, and tribe, and my personal community. It's also deeply relaxing. The way I used Vetiver, I simply added it to some carrier oil and rubbing it into my feet before bed. Another way I would use it was to add it to an inhaler and breathe it before bed.

So, let's see. I talked about Melissa, Bergamot, Lavender and Vetiver. The other one I used was Orange. I personally love Sweet Orange and I use it a lot in the diffuser. It's one of those that I would add to my Vetiver or put it in my diffuser with Melissa. I just tend to throw it in with other blends that I'm making because I love it so much. It is uplifting, it is cheering, and it is always great for depressed mood. All of the citruses are uplifting like that. All of the citruses are also great immune boosters because they are high in d-limonene. So Orange was the fifth essential oil that I used quite a bit on my quest for better health.

I'm going to wrap up this segment of the podcast and just give you a running list of essential oils that are good for depression and anxiety, but primarily for depression:

I mentioned Bergamot.



Basil essential is uplifting and it is also quite refreshing and can help against depression and fatigue. If you have high anxiety it may be stimulating, but great if you are really feeling down.

- I mentioned Clary Sage that is in the Ester family that can also help with insomnia. That's a good one for anxiety and depression.
- Frankincense is great because it can slow down your breathing and it can reduce feelings of fear, stress and anxiety.
- Jasmine is a relaxing flowery scent. Most of the flowery essential oils like Lavender, Jasmine, Neroli or Rose, although they are costly, they are really good for anxiety, depression and nervousness.
- All the citruses: Mandarin, Lemon, Bergamot, Grapefruit, Sweet Orange—they are all uplifting and cheering.
- Don't forget Lavender!
- Marjoram is one that I like; it tends to make me sleepy. If you are having trouble sleeping with depression, put Marjoram in your diffuser at night, maybe with a little Lavender and that should help make you drowsy.
- Roman Chamomile is great also for anxiety. It is great for calming the mind and the body. It's another big insomnia oil.
- Sandalwood is very comforting. Very helpful for stress, very grounding, and also helps with the Base Chakra.
- Patchouli is another great one for the Base Chakra if you are feeling energetically depleted of life.
- Cedarwood is another great wood oil.
- And finally, Ylang Ylang, which is very relaxing. Women respond beautifully to the Ylang Ylang flower, especially if there is anger and rage.

There are several oils. One thing I want to mention is that it is important to use the oils that you like. Aromas and scents are very personal and you don't want to use something just because Liz said it in her podcast or because you read it somewhere. Use something that resonates with you energetically, emotionally, and physically. Use something that you like, that is a pleasure for you to use especially if you are going through a dark time.

If you are going through a depression or you know someone who is, this is a really important time to pull out all the stops on "self love". Bring out the Rose Absolute essential oil, don't save your oils, don't hoard them—they are our friends. Many of them do not get better with age, so go ahead and use them and honor them and allow them to do their job; to nurture your soul, your health and your brain back to vibrancy. That is your natural state of being.



Let's move into the segment of the podcast I like to call **Smell My Life**. If you are new to the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast, **Smell My Life** is a segment where I share some way that I have used essential oils or hydrosols or something aromatic in my life in the past week.

This entire episode has been about ways that I have been using essential oils in one segment of my life. But I always have else I can share, and very often it has to do with cleaning because I'm big into green cleaning. I don't buy any commercial cleaners. I make and use my own cleaning products and in fact, I have an on-line course, *Green Cleaning With Essential Oils*, which I will put a link to in the show notes.

This week I cleaned out my silverware drawer. I pulled the drawer out and dumped the silverware out, washed them all and cleaned the inside where the little sections are for the fork, the knife, and the spoon. What I did was spray the whole thing with Siberian Fir, Peppermint and water. I shook it up and sprayed the inside of it. It's made of plastic so it's nothing I would let sit in there forever because it [the oil] would eat away at the plastic. Basically I sprayed it with my Siberian Fir, Peppermint and water and wiped it out. I also wiped the inside of the drawer with this same rag and then put everything back in. Now when I open the drawer it smells awesome. That's another use for essential oils. You can always use them in cleaning, just be careful about using essential oils on wood products or things with varnish.

That's it for today's episode of the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast, episode #21 on depression. If you enjoyed the podcast, I would love it if you would go to iTunes and leave me a nice review. You can go to www.aromaticwisdominstitute.com/iTunes and it will take you to iTunes. If you leave a nice review that would just make my heart swell with joy and happiness.

Next week's show, episode #22 is going to be all about the Heart Chakra and essential oils that nourish the Heart Chakra.

Until next time, be well. Be happy.

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