

# General Essential Oil Safety Precautions

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Essential oils are very powerful and highly concentrated and should only be used in small amounts.

If you or a member of your family becomes ill do not diagnose or treat yourself, get proper medical treatment from a qualified health care provider. Then, you may proceed with complimentary aromatherapy to help you or your family member to feel better. Remember, aromatherapy is not to be used to replace proper medical care.

Do not attempt to replace your or someone else's existing medications unless under the guidance of a medical practitioner.

If you are undecided as to which essential oil to use, consult a qualified aromatherapist who will help guide you in the right direction.

Keep your essential oil away from children, with the cap securely tightened. Do not expose to heat, light or the air. Replacing the caps as soon as you have finished with the bottle will help to extend the life of your oils. Exposure to the air unnecessarily will cause the oils to oxidize and spoil.

Do not use Peppermint essential oil on children under 30 months of age. The menthol can, in rare cases, cause a breathing spasm and cut off the air supply. (Also not recommended for those who are suffering from atrial fibrillation for the same reason.)

**Caution:** Peppermint stays on your fingers long after you have washed your hands and you could rub it into your eyes. Always apply essential oil with the little finger as it is least likely to get into your eye.

Keep essential oils out of your eyes. When using essential oils with children and the very elderly, use caution when applying oils to the hands as they may rub them in their eyes. Should any essential oil get into the eyes, rinse out with whole milk or vegetable oil to dilute before seeking medical advice.

Never take essential oil by mouth unless under the guidance of a suitably qualified practitioner, working in cooperation with your own doctor.

Do not use diffusers that have a naked flame in the form of a candle around children and pets, as they may accidentally knock them over starting a fire.

If you are taking homeopathic remedies, the essential oil treatments must be given at least an hour apart to prevent them interfering with the homeopathic treatment, especially when using Peppermint, which should be two to three hours apart.

Stick to the recommended doses only. Do not attempt to go above the recommended amounts unless under the guidance of a qualified aromatherapist.

Always use high quality essential oils identified by the botanical name and given the chemical variety (ct chemo-type) of the oil where appropriate. For example, *Thymus vulgaris* is the botanical name for Thyme. There are two different chemo-types of Thyme commonly offered for sale. Thyme ct. thymol contains phenols, and is an irritant to the skin and liver toxic over time which makes it not appropriate for children, the elderly or those who have liver diseases. The other is Thyme ct. linalool which is non-toxic and non-irritating and is very useful for children, the elderly and those with liver diseases.

Make sure that every mixture you make up has a label that tells you exactly what is in it, what you are using it for and the date the mixture was made. This prevents confusion when treating different family members and ailments.

Make sure you buy your essential oils from a reputable source with a qualified person who can answer your questions.

### **Poisoning**

Even a 5 ml bottle can contain enough essential oil for a lethal dose of poisoning in children if they were to be accidentally drunk by a child. Always keep them out of reach of children with the orifice reducer in place and the lid tightly closed. Remember, when plants are distilled the resulting oil is 50 to 100 times more concentrated than the plant material.

### **Nasal Application**

The mucus membranes of the nasal passages are known to absorb readily whatever is placed inside, such as the nasal sprays used to administer doses of drugs for various conditions. Care must be taken when using this method of application. As reported by Penny Price, serious though non-fatal toxicity in children has been reported when applying or injecting Peppermint and/or *Eucalyptus globulus* inside the nose. Due to the seriousness of these cases many professional aromatherapists recommend that essential oils should not be instilled into the noses of children under age six.

### **Dermal Irritation**

Avoid essential oils known to cause skin irritation or phototoxicity on children under six years of age. At all times any essential oil should be diluted when used on a small child with the exception of Lavender, Tea Tree, and Ravensara on the soles of the feet.

### **Epilepsy**

Usually no risk unless large quantities are taken such as when essential oils are taken internally (oral, rectal or large doses inhaled using a nebulizing diffuser).

## **Essential Oils and Pregnancy**

The issue of safe use of essential oils during pregnancy is an important one and part of the knowledge necessary for the practice of aromatherapy. Even though there have not been any documented cases of fetal or infant death or birth defects related to the use of essential oils, there are concerns that need to be addressed. We must keep in mind that when using essential oils with a pregnant woman that we are, in fact, treating two people, the mother and the developing infant.

The placenta acts as a protective barrier between the world of the mother and the baby. It is known that the placenta is effective with both neutral and positive charged molecules, but those that are negatively charged can cross this barrier quite easily. It has also been found that very small molecules with a molecular weight of less than 1000 are able to pass through the placenta. Knowing that many essential oils have a negative charge and an average molecular weight that is extremely low between 100 to 200, we can correctly assume they will have no trouble crossing the placental barrier. The same applies to penetration of the blood-brain barrier. In pregnancy, we must respect this knowledge and plan our essential oil use with pregnant women accordingly.