# Medical Minute

## THE NOSE KNOWS!




Some fragrant essential oils just seem to make us happy the moment we smell them. Apparently, our noses have opinions—and some of them are very enthusiastic. But a few scents do more than put a smile on our face…or, more accurately, on our nose.

Jasmine, rosemary, peppermint, and vanilla may help calm anxiety, lift your mood, and even lower blood pressure. Jasmine, in fact, may help promote sleep as effectively as some commercial sedatives, which is impressive, because I've been trying for years to get a good night's sleep with nothing but a pillow, a blanket, and a firm lecture to my brain.

Lavender is another essential oil that research says may be as effective as prescription drugs for relieving signs of anxiety in women. Not men? Apparently, men are either immune, unavailable for comment, or still refusing to admit they're anxious while gripping the steering wheel with both hands. Some research has even compared lavender oil favorably with medications such as Xanax, Valium, or Prozac. Imagine that: all this time, we thought relief came in a bottle from the pharmacy, and it may have been sitting in a little purple bottle next to the diffuser.

Cinnamon is an essential oil too, although it has to be handled carefully because it can irritate the skin and cause rashes—which is cinnamon's way of saying, "I smell delicious, but don't get too familiar." Smelling and eating cinnamon may help improve the brain's ability to grow and change in response to new information. I know that just walking past a Cinnabon store improves my mood immediately. Who am I kidding? I have never actually walked past a Cinnabon store. I have stopped dead in my tracks, inhaled like a cartoon character floating toward a pie in a windowsill, drooled discreetly—or so I tell myself—and then walked straight to the counter. So yes, cinnamon may help my brain grow. Unfortunately, the rest of me tends to grow right along with it.