

Peppermint Herb & Oil

By Lori Kelsey DOM

Peppermint has a whimsical, and simple aroma that is acceptable to nearly everyone. It can be used liberally when we need its effervescence, and sparingly when we need its subtlety. Its many medicinal properties are based on dose and circumstance.

Peppermint tea is commonly used for gastrointestinal complaints. It is a GI smooth muscle relaxant, while improving GI motility. There is good evidence of its efficacy for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and its cooling anti-inflammatory nature also benefits irritable bowel diseases (IBD, e.g. Chron's). Peppermint lowers esophageal sphincter tone, which relaxes spasm but this may also exacerbate gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and hiatal hernia.

Peppermint benefits respiratory complaints by stimulating cold receptors and modifying pain receptors in the upper airways. Wild Field Mint, the species used in Chinese medicine, is indicated for respiratory "heat" symptoms such as fever, headache, red eyes, and sorethroat. This species has very high menthol content, to which certain flu viruses are susceptible.

Peppermint essential oil (EO) is Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) by the FDA. Meaning it is used by the flavoring industry, and is safe for those 8 years old and older to ingest in doses up to 270mg (approximately 4 drops). Over-the-counter (OTC) enteric-coated peppermint EO capsules are sold at pharmacies, and prescribed for IBS and IBD.

Peppermint EO neutralizes lactic acid after muscle strain. It is considered such a potent carrier of other EO into tissues, that it is indispensable in topical musculoskeletal blends. For these reasons it is in many OTC pain ointments and patches (usually in the form of menthol).

Peppermint is either stimulating or relaxing depending on the dose, parts offered, or the body's need. If suffering from nervous insomnia due to over exhaustion, just a tiny whiff of the EO is an aromatic lullaby. In Chinese medicine, small doses of peppermint twig (not the leaf) are indicated for *stress-related complaints*.

Naturopaths and clinical aromatherapists have utilized high doses of peppermint EO to decongest the hormonal link between the liver, spleen, and pancreas during severe toxic illness or after taking allopathic drugs. Said to drain congested livers, and regenerate liver cells in synergy with other EO such as carrot, lemon, dill and rosemary verbenone etc.

Higher doses of peppermint EO are not prescribed without caution. It is so vasoconstrictive, warming, and noxious at high doses that it may exacerbate hypertension; or cause tissue and kidney irritation if undiluted, warmed and/or covered on the skin. Low quality peppermint EO is potentially adulterated with synthetic menthol, which is less therapeutic, and is poorly metabolized. This can actually cause GI discomfort.

Lastly, peppermint herbals are not widely recommended for children less than 3 to 5 yrs old for various reasons. There are many alternative herbal choices for children.

Sources

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