



TBH Focus

Spirit | *Keep Emotional Balance*

- When emotions run high—or low—mental function, as well as long-term brain health, can suffer.
- Stress can be distracting, making it tough to focus and remember. Also, some studies suggest that chronic stress may cause the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in learning and memory, to shrink.
- Activities that require mindfulness, such as meditation, can help realign our attention and relieve emotional distress. In fact, according to some research, meditation may actually help to improve brain health and even slow the progression Alzheimer's disease.

The TBH Science

Aromatherapy, using scents for healing purposes, may conjure images of hippies and horoscopes, but it's nothing to sniff at: Research has found that we're often able to follow our noses to happiness, thanks to the impact olfactory memories have on health and well-being. That's because smell takes a direct route through the brain to the hippocampus, where long-term memories are stored (other sensory information is processed in different parts of the brain before reaching the hippocampus, so memories of those experiences can wind up distorted.) The herb-infused aroma of roasting turkey is comforting because it reminds us of holidays with loved ones. The coconut-y scent of sunscreen brings back happy memories of beach vacations. Marcel Proust captured the power of scent in his famous passage about madeleines in *Remembrance of Things Past*: "... after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time..."

The direct connection between nose and brain may have evolutionary roots: Our early ancestors often relied on smell to determine if a food was poisonous. While a pre-meal sniff test isn't necessary for survival in modern times, our olfactory savvy has advantages, which brings us back to the usefulness of aromatherapy. For example, lavender is known for its relaxing properties. Spicy scents like vanilla and cinnamon have mood-lifting potential, as do citrus-y ones: In separate studies, lemon, grapefruit, and orange have put the squeeze on mood-killers like anxiety, stress, and depression. Citrus has also been found to enhance memory and improve cognition, and preliminary research has found that folks exposed to the scent of rosemary do better on certain mental tasks.

You Will Need

- "Get the Scent" worksheets (see Resources)
- A variety of different scents in the form of essential oils (see Resources)
- Cotton balls or cotton pads



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to explain the impact that certain scents can have on emotional well-being and cognitive function.
 - Talk about ways scent can be used to boost mood, relieve stress, and improve mental ability in daily life—i.e., tucking a lavender sachet under a pillow to help with sleep, applying citrus-scented oil to wrist.
 - Have group try two or three oils, one at a time: Put a few drops of oil on cotton balls or pads to pass to each participant. After everyone has had a chance to sniff a particular scent, invite folks to share how it made them feel.
-



- Introduce the activity. Use the TBH Focus and the TBH Science to explain the impact that certain scents can have on emotional well-being and cognitive function.
 - Have group try two or three oils, one at a time: Put a few drops of oil on cotton balls or pads to pass to each participant. After everyone has had a chance to sniff a particular scent, invite folks to share how it made them feel.
-



Soothe yourself with lavender. This scent has been shown to be so calming that it's sometimes used as a natural sleep aid. You can find high-grade essential lavender oil at health food stores or online. Start with a gentle whiff to see how your body reacts. If you notice an upward tick in your mood, try putting a few drops of lavender oil on your wrists anytime you need to relax, or before bed to help you drift off to Dreamland.



Resources

See the Resources section of your online Toolkit for all worksheets, links, and additional materials for this activity.