

Essential Oils to Help You Get Some Rest

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Inhaling specific essential oils before bed helps calm your nervous system, lower stress hormones, and prepare your brain for sleep, without medication
- › Lavender, jasmine, clary sage, and cedarwood have been shown in clinical studies to improve sleep quality, ease anxiety, and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep
- › Your sense of smell is directly wired to your brain's emotional center, which is why the right scent shifts you out of fight-or-flight mode and into deep rest
- › Layering the same oil across multiple methods, like diffusing, bathing, and topical use, strengthens the relaxation signal and helps your body respond more consistently
- › Some oils, like peppermint and rosemary, are stimulating and should be avoided at night; safety also matters, so always dilute oils properly and avoid synthetic products

Sleep is the foundation of your metabolic health, brain function, and immune resilience. Yet millions lie awake each night with a body that feels exhausted and a brain that refuses to power down. For many, the problem isn't a lack of effort — it's a nervous system that's stuck in overdrive.

Your body is wired to respond to signals of safety before it rests. And one of the most powerful ways to send those signals is through scent. The moment you inhale the right aroma, it travels through the olfactory nerve directly to your brain's emotional command center — the amygdala. This bypasses logic and cuts straight to your biology, shifting you out of fight-or-flight mode and into rest-and-digest.

This isn't about burning candles or masking bad smells. It's about using precise plant-based compounds that actively change your body's stress response. Ancient cultures knew this instinctively, using sacred oils like frankincense and chamomile to support deep rest and healing.

Today, researchers are identifying exactly how those oils affect your sleep hormones, blood pressure, and brain wave patterns, validating what traditional healers practiced for centuries. If you've been looking for a natural way to fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer, understanding how specific essential oils work, and how to use them properly, could change everything.

Some Oils Help Your Body Sleep Deeper Without Drugs

An article published by The Hearty Soul walks through nine different essential oils that have been shown to calm your nervous system and support deep, uninterrupted rest.¹ The oils included range from familiar scents like lavender and chamomile to deeper, earthy oils like cedarwood and valerian.

Each one has specific sleep-supporting effects, usage methods, and real-world applications. For example, someone with **emotional overwhelm** could benefit from frankincense, while someone with hormonal imbalances could respond better to clary sage.

- **Lavender stands out for its consistent sleep-promoting effects** — Lavender oil is the most researched essential oil for sleep, with multiple studies showing it helps you fall asleep faster and improves sleep quality over time.² It works by lowering heart rate and blood pressure, which tells your nervous system it's safe to relax. Lavender is especially effective when mixed with a carrier oil and applied topically to your chest or wrists, used in a diffuser, or added to a warm bath before bed.
- **Chamomile and cedarwood bring emotional comfort and hormonal support** — Roman chamomile offers a warm, gentle scent that helps calm irritability, reduce restlessness, and settle your thoughts — especially useful if stress or emotional

overload keeps you awake. Cedarwood, on the other hand, helps regulate melatonin release. [Melatonin](#) is the sleep hormone your body needs to maintain a healthy circadian rhythm.

- **Clary sage and marjoram are helpful for stubborn sleep issues** — Clary sage supports hormone balance and provides a sedative effect without making you feel groggy the next morning. Marjoram eases muscle tension and is helpful if physical discomfort keeps you up at night. This makes it an excellent oil to apply with a carrier oil for a gentle shoulder or neck massage. Both are especially useful when sleep problems are linked to physical or emotional stress.

These Lesser-Known Oils Work When Lavender Doesn't

If you're not a fan of lavender, there are many other essential oils for sleep to count on, including several highlighted in an article published by Neal's Yard Remedies.³ The goal was to help people who are sensitive to lavender's scent or who don't experience benefits from it.

It also appeals to those looking for new options to enhance their bedtime routine. Each oil was selected for its calming, restorative, or sedative effect, and all are used in aromatherapy traditions across cultures. Scent layering, or combining multiple oils, creates an even more personalized, soothing experience.

- **Vetiver works like nature's sedative for people who feel overwhelmed** — Known for its deep, earthy scent, vetiver is described as smelling like "forest soil" and is one of the most grounding oils available. It's ideal for people who feel emotionally exhausted, physically drained, or [mentally overactive](#). This oil helps create emotional stillness before bed — like shutting off the mental background noise.
- **Neroli provides emotional uplift for nights when your mind won't settle** — Neroli is a citrus-floral oil distilled from the flowers of the [bitter orange](#) tree. It's often referred to as a "rescue remedy" because of its calming, spirit-lifting effects. This oil helps

you let go of agitation and restore inner peace before sleep — perfect if stress or grief is keeping you up.

- **Mandarin oil is one of the safest options for children and adults with sensory sensitivity** — Its scent is milder than orange oil, making it less likely to overstimulate. Mandarin has long been used to ease restlessness and help children and adults switch off at night. It's uplifting without being energizing, which makes it useful if your sleep issues are tied to emotional heaviness.

Your Nose Has a Shortcut to Your Brain's Sleep Center

An article published by Sleep.com draws from expert interviews and research to explain how specific essential oils help ease anxiety, slow brain activity, and prepare your body for sleep.⁴ The piece features commentary from Rubin Naiman, a sleep and dream psychologist at the University of Arizona Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine. Rather than listing oils arbitrarily, it ties each one to how it acts on your brain and why that matters when you're trying to fall asleep naturally.

- **Jasmine oil showed stronger sleep effects than Valium in one clinical comparison** — Researchers compared the effects of jasmine aroma to diazepam (Valium) and found that jasmine produced greater improvements in sleep onset and depth.⁵
- **Sandalwood lowered blood pressure and helped the body relax more deeply** — Inhaling sandalwood oil triggered a noticeable drop in heart rate and blood pressure in multiple studies.^{6,7} That's significant for people who go to bed with a racing mind or tight chest. When your blood pressure drops, your body shifts into parasympathetic mode — the part of the nervous system responsible for relaxation and digestion.
- **Personal scent memories change how effective an oil is for you** — According to sleep coach Kelly Murray, your past experiences shape how your body responds to a scent. "If your happy place was baking with your grandmother, opt for sweet vanilla-

based scents,” she explained.⁸ This is why it helps to test one oil at a time for at least a week, track your sleep response, and choose oils that your body associates with safety and comfort. It’s not just chemistry — it’s deeply personal.

Some Oils Work Better When Applied Than Inhaled

An article published by Verywell Health explains that how the oils are used — whether inhaled, applied to your skin, or added to a bath — matters.⁹ Inhaling oils directly or using a diffuser creates faster onset of relaxation, while applying diluted oil to your body has longer-lasting effects. Baths enhance absorption through your skin and also help regulate body temperature, a known factor in sleep induction. Combining delivery methods, such as bath followed by diffuser, offers the most consistent results.

- **Cedarwood and bergamot show unique sleep benefits in specific groups** — One trial in a hospital setting used cedarwood and cypress oils around pillows and found patients stayed asleep longer and woke up less frequently.¹⁰ Bergamot was included in a personal aromatherapy device that helped 64% of users report better sleep quality.¹¹
- **Some oils actually wake you up, so choosing the right ones matters** — While many oils promote sleep, others do the opposite. Rosemary, [peppermint](#), and black pepper were flagged as energizing scents that increase alertness, not rest. Personal reaction also plays a role — what relaxes one person might stimulate another, so it's important to test each oil individually.

How to Use Essential Oils for Better Sleep

If you're struggling to fall asleep or stay asleep, address the root issue by using these [50 tips to improve sleep](#). However, if your nervous system is stuck in fight-or-flight mode, essential oils often help, as they influence your body’s chemistry. The key is using the

right oils, in the right way, at the right time. Think of them as tools to retrain your brain and body to feel safe enough to rest. Here's how to use essential oils for a good night's sleep:

- 1. Pick the right oil based on what's keeping you up** — If your brain won't stop racing, go for jasmine, vetiver, or frankincense. If you're dealing with emotional stress or hormonal shifts, try clary sage or neroli. For physical tension, marjoram or cedarwood works better. Don't use energizing oils like peppermint or rosemary — they trigger alertness. If you're not sure what's behind your sleep issues, start with lavender or bergamot and adjust based on your response.
- 2. Choose one method and stick with it for at least a week** — Don't rotate oils every night. Your body responds best to routine. Use one scent at a time for five to seven nights. Whether you choose to diffuse it, massage it into your skin with a carrier oil, or add it to a warm bath, consistency is what turns scent into a sleep signal.
- 3. Layer your sleep routine with one scent across multiple methods** — For stronger results, combine delivery methods. You could add a few drops to your bath, diffuse the same oil in your bedroom while you get ready for bed, and apply a small amount diluted on your chest or neck. That way, your brain starts linking the scent with relaxation from multiple angles.
- 4. Use scent timing to match your natural wind-down** — Turn your diffuser on an hour before bed. That gives your nervous system time to shift from alert to calm. If you use a spray or pillow mist, spray it before brushing your teeth. That way, by the time you lie down, the scent is already working and doesn't overwhelm your senses.
- 5. Be smart and safe about how you apply essential oils** — Avoid applying essential oils directly to your skin without diluting them first. Use a carrier oil like coconut to prevent irritation, especially on sensitive areas.

Always do a small patch test on your inner arm before full use to make sure you don't have an allergic reaction. And don't fall for misleading labels like "therapeutic grade" — those terms aren't regulated. Stick with high-quality, pure oils from trusted

companies and avoid synthetic “fragrance oil.”

FAQs About Essential Oils for Sleep

Q: What essential oils are best for falling asleep faster?

A: Lavender, jasmine, and vetiver are top choices for falling asleep quickly. Lavender is the most studied and helps calm heart rate and blood pressure. Jasmine has been shown to outperform pharmaceutical sedatives in clinical studies,¹² while vetiver helps ground you emotionally when your mind won't settle.

Q: What if lavender doesn't work for me or I don't like the smell?

A: There are many alternatives with proven sleep benefits. Neroli lifts emotional heaviness, clary sage balances hormones, and mandarin is gentle enough for children or those with sensory sensitivity.¹³ Oils like marjoram and cedarwood also offer unique support for muscle tension and sleep disruptions.

Q: What's the best way to use essential oils for sleep?

A: Stick with one oil and one method — like diffusing, bath, or skin application — for five to seven nights. For stronger effects, layer your approach by using the same oil across multiple methods, such as bath, diffuser, and diluted skin application. Timing matters too — turn your diffuser on 30 to 60 minutes before bed to help your nervous system shift gears.

Q: Are there any safety concerns with using essential oils?

A: Yes. Always dilute essential oils with a carrier oil before applying to your skin, and don't apply undiluted oils directly. Do a patch test on your arm to check for allergies, avoid synthetic products, and skip vague marketing claims like "therapeutic grade," which aren't regulated.¹⁴

Q: How do essential oils actually help you sleep?

A: Scent travels directly to the brain's emotional center through the olfactory nerve, bypassing conscious thought. This helps shift your body out of stress mode and into rest-and-digest. Certain oils also influence hormones like melatonin, lower blood pressure, and slow brain activity, making it easier to relax and stay asleep.

Sources and References

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