



Herbs 101: Peppermint



Powerfully minty-fresh with a cool distinctive fragrance, peppermint oil is quickly becoming one of the most versatile essential oils in the world. The rapidly growing perennial plant native to Europe and Asia supports a wide range of health benefits due to the nutrient-rich compounds present in peppermint leaves. Not only does it have a calming effect on the body when applied topically but peppermint oil also contains antimicrobial properties that can freshen breath, soothe a wide range of digestive issues, and act as a decongestant when applied orally. According to records from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, peppermint has been used as a natural remedy for thousands of years. Today, we have the scientific studies to back up these ancient remedies. The following ten health benefits are possible with the help of peppermint oil:

1. **Relieves Digestion:** Peppermint oil has been studied to effectively alleviate irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and other digestive problems (1). The compounds found in the plant stimulate an anti-pain channel in the colon.
2. **Boosts Memory:** According to a 2008 study from the *International Journal of Neuroscience*

, peppermint oil enhanced the memory of 144 randomly assigned volunteers whereas ylang-ylang impaired it, and lengthened processing speed. In terms of mood, peppermint increased alertness and ylang-ylang decreased it. As such, the essential oil is now used by Alzheimer's patients to decrease symptoms caused by the neurodegenerative disease.

3. **Relieves Headaches:** Tension headaches and migraines are often the result of muscles tightening up. However, applying some peppermint oil to the temples and forehead can improve circulation and relax tense muscles and help headaches (2).
4. **Cancer Preventive:** According to research, peppermint oil contains a phytonutrient called monoterpene which has been proven to stop the growth of cancerous tumors in the pancreas, liver, and mammary glands, therefore protecting against lung, colon, and skin cancers (3). The active ingredient, menthol, also inhibits prostate cancer growth.
5. **Acts as a Decongestant:** Inhaling peppermint oil diffused in a hot steam or otherwise has been shown to unclog sinuses. It works by acting as an expectorant; menthol properties thin mucus and loosen phlegm, thereby providing relief for dry coughs, colds, sinusitis, asthma, and bronchitis (4).
6. **Muscle Pain Relief:** According to a 2007 study (5), peppermint oil has been shown to offer pain relief for individuals suffering from fibromyalgia, a disorder characterized by widespread muscle pain. The study found that when peppermint oil was applied topically, eucalyptus, menthol, capsaicin, and other herbal preparations offer great muscle pain relief due its menthol compounds that provide cooling effects on the body.
7. **Supports Athletic Performance:** According to a 2013 study (6), the effectiveness of peppermint as an essential oil effectively supported the exercise performance, gas analysis, spirometry parameters, blood pressure, and respiratory rate in the young male students. The relaxation of their bronchial smooth muscles increased in the ventilation and brain oxygen concentration which then decreased in the blood lactate levels for maximum performance.
8. **Clears Skin:** Not surprisingly, peppermint oil's natural cooling effect on the skin helps reduce inflammation (7). For best results try mixing essential peppermint oil in a body lotion or lip balm.
9. **Supports Oral Care:** There's a reason why peppermint is often an active ingredient in toothpaste. For over 1,000 years peppermint has been used to naturally freshen breath. One study (8) has shown that peppermint oil has a therapeutic effect on the oral cavity, whether it's used topically or orally via oil pulling, an ancient Ayurvedic dental technique that involves swishing a tablespoon of oil in your mouth on an empty stomach for around 20 minutes in order to draw out toxins.
10. **Natural Bug Repellent:** Mosquitos aren't the only type of insects that avoid peppermint oil. In fact, ants, spiders, cockroaches, lice and even mice are repelled by this minty fragrance. According to research, peppermint oil is considered to be a natural volatile substance with bioactive compounds; that is a complex mixture of volatile, lipophilic, liquid, and odoriferous substances that play a key role in the survival of the peppermint plant within its ecosystem. These volatile compounds are made up of microorganisms that prevent plant eating insects and other fertilizing agents from destroying the plant. (9), (10), (11)

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