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## Debunking Medical Myths: Lavender Oil: Flower Power

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# Lavender Oil: Flower Power

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## What is lavender oil?

Lavender oil is an essential oil derived from the *Lavendula* genus. There is clinical evidence to support its function as an antibacterial and antifungal agent, smooth muscle relaxant, anxiolytic, and sedative.

## What does it do?

In a study that evaluated the pharmacological mechanisms of lavender on the central nervous system, it was discovered that *Lavandula angustifolia* showed selectivity for certain receptors in the CNS. The results showed that lavender antagonized the glutamate NMDA-receptor and inhibited the serotonin transporter (SERT). Inhibition of the serotonin transporter is analogous to the mechanism of blocking serotonin reuptake seen in common pharmaceuticals prescribed for anxiety and depression. While the strength and overall efficacy of lavender as an antidepressant or anxiolytic is variable, there are indications that lavender can have relaxing effects on the central nervous system and therefore improve sleep.

## How does lavender oil impact sleep?

Some components of lavender oil such as linalyl acetate, linalool, and camphor have effects on the brain and central nervous system that lower agitation and restlessness. There is also evidence that suggests lavender oil can maintain or improve melatonin levels to promote better sleep at night. In general, improved sleep with lavender oil is mainly due to its relaxing effect on the central nervous system.

## How should I use lavender oil?

To achieve the therapeutic effects of lavender oil, it must be absorbed by the body. It can be taken in three ways: by the olfactory and respiratory systems via vapor inhalation; orally via the ingestion of the essential oil; transdermally via compresses or lotions. Nasal administration allows extraneural and intraneural access to the CNS.

## Any other health benefits?

- Relief of anxiety, pain, depression, and emotional stress for up to 8 weeks after treatment in cancer patients
- Improved mood in people diagnosed with anxiety or depression
- Reduction in pain and inflammation
- Improved severity of menstrual pain
- Reduced blood pressure and heart rate

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