Frankincense: The “King” of essential oils

By Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

Frankincense oil has been prized since ancient times. Just the mention of it, likely brings to mind the Christmas story – frankincense was among the gifts offered to the newborn Jesus by the wise men. Its value in ancient times surpassed that of gold, and frankincense was often traded and used by those in North Africa, the Middle East and Egypt. In fact, there are records citing frankincense as a valuable trade commodity as far back as 3,000 BC.

But can this ancient oil still benefit us today?

Frankincense oil is derived from the dried sap, or resin, or the Boswellia tree. The resin is then steam distilled to create a potent – and pricey -- essential oil. Frankincense is one of the few essential oils to contain sesquiterpenes, enabling it to go beyond the blood brain barrier and help stimulate the limbic system in your brain. The oil has a woody, earthy, spicy and slightly fruity aroma that is calming and relaxing.

Frankincense has analgesic, anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties. The use of frankincense can be traced back to Hippocrates, a Greek physician credited with being the “father of medicine.” Hippocrates used frankincense oil for numerous conditions including toothaches, leprosy, indigestion, chronic coughs, hemorrhoids and the healing of wounds and sores. Other ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians, used frankincense for perfumes, embalming fluid and even facial treatments.

Today, frankincense is still effective in reducing pain and inflammation. In 2009, a study published in *Phytotherapy Research,* found boswellia extracts inhibited pro-inflammatory molecules involved in joint cartilage degradation. Another study published in PubMed in 2012 found frankincense oil was found to have antinociceptive (pain sensation-blocking) properties in animals. Researched published in BioMed Central’s open access journal for arthritis showed significant improvement in osteoarthritis symptoms in as little as seven days after using frankincense.

Frankincense has also been shown to improve immune function, help fight infections and cleanse and detoxify the body. According to a study published in the Journal of Oncology, frankincense was able to shrink tumors and kill cancer cells. Other studies have shown frankincense may help in the treatment of Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, asthma and anxiety.

Frankincense helps healthy cell regeneration and keeps existing cells and tissues healthy. This oil may help with aging by rejuvenating the skin, reducing the appearance of blemishes, razor bumps, scars and stretch marks. I add a couple of drops to my face moisturizer every morning!

Frankincense oil can be used topically or diffused through the air. Both methods are very effective since the molecules of the oils are so small that they easily pass through the skin or the olfactory system into the blood stream, where they can begin to protect and heal the body. After entering the blood stream, essential oils are circulated to the tissues and organs in the body, and then into the lymphatic system. The oils will typically last anywhere from 12-24 hours and will eventually be eliminated through normal body functions. When essential oils are combined with massage they can have a longer lasting effect, up to several days.

Like many essential oils, frankincense should be combined with a carrier oil prior to applying it directly to the skin. Frankincense is generally safe, however it is always advised to do a spot test first to check if you have any sensitivity to the oil. Applying 3-6 drops of frankincense oil to the bottom of your feet (along with a carrier oil) can balance your mood and promote feelings of relaxation, peace, and overall wellness. The oil is also quickly absorbed when applied behind the ears and on the wrists. For infants and small children, the oil should be diluted with a fractionated coconut oil (about 1-3 tablespoons of fractionated oil to 1-3 drops of essential oil for infants and one teaspoon of carrier oil to 1-3 drops of essential oil for children ages 2-5.)

Frankincense oil and clove oil can be diffused together to boost your immune system, protect you from getting colds, or to help you recover more quickly if you do catch a cold.

Frankincense is just one of hundreds of essential oils that can be used to heal the body and promote overall health. If you are interested in learning more about essential oils, call the Pathways to Healing office at 706-454-2040 for information on our next Education and Insight Class on how to safely use essential oils. If you would like to know what brands we trust, please email us at pathwaysth@gmail.com.