

Poison Prevention Press

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Essential Oil Safety Tips

Use products containing essential oils ONLY for their intended purpose.

- Do not swallow a product unless the label says to do so.
- Do not use a product on the skin unless the label says to do so.
- Do not use a product as a pesticide unless the label says to do so.
- Do not use a product as a pesticide unless the label says to do so.
- Use ONLY the amount stated on the label. Follow label directions exactly.
- Use and store household products where children (and pets) cannot see or reach them.
- Never use near an open flame because they are flammable.

Did you know that...

- In 2016, the MPC managed over 300 cases involving an essential oil or a product containing an essential oil.
- In 2016, manufacturers of essential oils earned just under \$6 billion.

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Aromatherapy and Essential Oils

Essential oils are concentrated liquids that are removed from plants. They contain the fragrance (scent) of the plant. You will find essential oils most commonly in soaps, perfumes, air fresheners, and cleaning products. They are used as flavorings in food and drinks. Because essential oils come from plants, you may think they are harmless. As with most things, essential oils can be poisonous if they are used in the wrong way or in the wrong amount.

Currently aromatherapy uses essential oils as an alternative to regular medicine. In these situations, essential oils are most often used by inhaling them or by rubbing them on the skin after mixing them with a plain oil or lotion. They can also be added to bath water. Applying the concentrated oil directly to the skin can cause rashes, allergic reactions or burns. You should be extra careful when applying the oil to sensitive areas like around the eyes and nose. Essential oils are rarely taken by mouth. They should only be swallowed if you are directed to do so by a trained and qualified specialist.

Below you will see information about a few essential oils.

Peppermint is used for stomach discomfort. It's important to choose the correct species of mint, as some types are poisonous; for example, pennyroyal oil is very poisonous to the liver.

Wintergreen is used as a food flavoring and in some over-the-counter skin preparations to relieve pain. It creates a feeling of warmth because it causes blood vessels to enlarge. But oil of wintergreen can be deadly if it is swallowed directly from the bottle. This is like swallowing a large number of adult aspirin.

Tea tree oil (also called melaleuca oil) is used for acne, fungal infections of the skin and nails, insect bites, lice and burns. If a child swallows as little as a mouthful, it can cause vomiting, diarrhea and/or confusion. It can also cause them to be unsteady on their feet.

Nutmeg is safely used in food. If it is misused or abused, it can cause hallucinations and coma.

Eucalyptus is used for its soothing effects when inhaled during a cold or cough. If swallowed, eucalyptus oil can cause seizures.

Sage oil has been used as a scent, seasoning, and remedy. Swallowing more than a very small amount has caused seizures in children.

Camphor is used as a moth repellent, in vaporizers, and as an ingredient in mouth and skin products. Even a small amount of camphor is dangerous if swallowed. Seizures can begin within only a few minutes. Poisoning can also happen when you apply skin products containing camphor to children more often than the label recommends or cover the area with extra clothing or blankets.

Safely using and storing essential oils is very important. They MUST be locked up, out of sight and reach of small children and pets at all times. If you have essential oils that you are no longer using, discard them as you would other medicines.

If someone swallows an essential oil, or a product containing essential oils, call the poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222. Our nurses and pharmacists will help you figure out if this could be dangerous and tell you exactly what to do.

