

Peppermint Oil: A Potent Oil With the Power of Menthol

✓ Fact Checked

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Peppermint oil is often used in aromatherapy or the use of essential oils to support health. Studies show that peppermint oil may help improve memory and raise alertness, and alleviate pain and nausea
- › Peppermint oil has antiviral, antimicrobial, antifungal, analgesic, radioprotective, anti-edema and antioxidant capabilities
- › Talk to your doctor before using peppermint oil or making your own oil infusion because it may trigger allergic reactions, dizziness, mouth ulcers or sores, slow heartbeat or eye irritation

This article was previously published January 10, 2019, and has been updated with new information.

History shows a wide range of uses for peppermint essential oil, which has been used as far back in time as ancient Rome and Egypt.¹ Various cultures have used this oil not only for its minty fragrance, but for its therapeutic benefits as well. In addition, peppermint oil is known to symbolize hospitality.²

What Is Peppermint Oil?

Peppermint oil is derived from the leaves of the peppermint plant (*Mentha piperita*), a hybrid of the water mint and spearmint plants, and *M. arvensis* var. *piperascens*, a plant from the Labiatae family.³ It is often used as a home remedy for stomach problems, muscle pain and headaches. Peppermint oil can also be utilized in capsules or supplements.⁴

9 Uses and Benefits of Peppermint Oil

Peppermint oil is used in aromatherapy, the practice of using essential oils to support health,⁵ where it is found to be effective in relieving pain and neuralgia,⁶ as well as nausea,⁷ and in improving memory and raising alertness.⁸ According to published research, peppermint oil exhibits antiviral, antimicrobial, antifungal, antioxidant, analgesic, radioprotective and anti-edema properties,⁹ and may be useful for:

Providing relief for stomach problems — Peppermint oil is a safe and effective alternative to medications in reducing colonic spasms.¹⁰ It may help ease pelvic pain¹¹ and provide relief for indigestion and upset stomach.¹²

Research has also shown that peppermint oil is effective in improving symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).¹³ Another study reveals similar findings.¹⁴ Peppermint contains large concentrations of menthol¹⁵ that may assist in decreasing smooth muscle spasms and blocking calcium channels in the gut.¹⁶

Easing respiratory problems — Peppermint oil can be used as an expectorant and decongestant.¹⁷ It can help clear up phlegm in your respiratory tract¹⁸ when used as a chest rub or inhaled through a vaporizer.¹⁹

The essential oil may also benefit individuals with tuberculosis. Researchers found that when inhaled, the oil can help decrease tuberculosis-induced inflammation and minimize the risk of the disease from worsening or recurring.²⁰ Peppermint oil can also relieve asthma because it contains rosmarinic acid, an

anti-inflammatory compound.^{21,22}

Relieving pain – Peppermint oil may help relieve sore muscles when added to a massage oil blend or to bathwater. Dabbing a few drops on your wrist or inhaling the aroma can ease headaches. You can also massaged the oil onto your temples.

Promoting positive effects on cancer-related treatments – Peppermint oil may help address chemotherapy-induced nausea. It may also help treat hot flashes in women receiving treatment for breast cancer.²³

Helping ease herpes infections – Peppermint oil was found to have a beneficial effect against drug-resistant herpes simplex virus. Because of its lipophilic nature, peppermint oil can pass through the skin, making it potentially useful against recurrent herpes infection.²⁴

Enhancing hair and skin health – Mixing peppermint oil into massage oils,²⁵ shampoos and lotions may give these products antiseptic²⁶ and antimicrobial properties. The oil can also help cool skin and eliminate dandruff²⁷ or lice from your scalp,²⁸ or contribute to hair growth.²⁹

Improving dental health – Peppermint oil extract may be more effective than the mouthwash chemical chlorhexidine in preventing development of biofilm that may lead to cavities³⁰ and bad breath.

Providing comfort for stress and nervous system problems – Due to its energizing effects, peppermint oil is used to help manage stress and treat nervous disorders and mental fatigue. Studies suggest that the essential oil may have an effect similar to psychostimulants, as shown in an animal study.³¹

Acting as an itch reliever – Applied topically when mixed with a carrier oil, the cooling sensation it provides may help relieve itching by blocking the irritating

Composition of Peppermint Oil

The two major components of peppermint essential oil are menthol and menthone,³³ which are why it's widely used as an ingredient in lozenges, toothpastes and rubs.³⁴ Other constituents found in peppermint oil are menthyl acetate,³⁵ 1,8-cineole, limonene, beta-pinene and beta-caryophyllene.³⁶

How to Make Infused Peppermint Oil

There are several ways to make your own peppermint oil infusion at home. Here is one recipe from eHow.com you can try:³⁷

Ingredients

- Fresh peppermint leaves available in supermarkets or health food stores (You can also grow your own peppermint leaves, as the plant is easy to grow and you avoid ingesting possible chemical additives)
- Carrier oil
- Colander
- Clean dish towel
- Mallet or mortar and pestle
- Cheesecloth or fine mesh strainer
- Glass bottle or container with a lid

Procedure

1. Place leaves inside the colander. Gently spray them with cool water, and spread on a clean kitchen towel to air-dry.
2. Using a mallet or mortar and pestle, gently crush the leaves and ensure they have a strong peppermint smell and are slightly bruised. Refrain from overgrinding or over-pounding. If you'll be using a mallet, place leaves on a cutting board or counter first, then gently tap the leaves with it. If you'll be using a mortar and pestle, use the pestle to gently press the leaves.
3. Fill the glass bottle with peppermint leaves. Pour carrier oil into it until the leaves are thoroughly submerged. Tightly close the jar and shake lightly so the oil covers the leaves.
4. Place the sealed jar away from direct sunlight for around 24 to 48 hours so the peppermint leaves may steep in the oil.
5. Carefully pour the steeped oil through a cheesecloth or fine-mesh strainer into a new glass jar. Discard used leaves and store finished oil in a cool, dark area. Use within four to six months.

How Does Peppermint Oil Work?

While it is tempting to buy products containing peppermint oil, using it in its whole state without additional ingredients may yield more positive results. However, it should never be utilized undiluted because it can cause irritation, especially to those with sensitive skin. It must be diluted in carrier oils like sweet almond, jojoba, coconut and olive, and used under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.

Peppermint oil is sensitive to heat, and should be stored in a cool place in tightly sealed bottles. Avoid using peppermint oil alongside other supplements and drugs, since it may trigger negative effects. For instance, peppermint oil can disrupt the rate at which your body processes cyclosporine, causing more of the medication to stay in

your bloodstream.³⁸

Peppermint oil is also known to interact with other drugs like felodipine (Plendil), simvastatin (Zocor), antacids, calcium channel blockers and blood pressure-lowering medicines.³⁹

Is Peppermint Oil Safe?

Peppermint oil is safe in low amounts in most adults, but it can trigger side effects in people with sensitivities. It is important for the following individuals to either avoid using this essential oil or to use it carefully only with the help of a health care professional:^{40,41}

Pregnant and nursing women – Peppermint oil or other similar products may have emmenagogue and abortifacient effects, so it would be wise not to use peppermint oil without your physician's approval.⁴²

Children – Peppermint oil must not be used undiluted because there isn't enough information regarding its safety for children; do not use it at all for children under 30 months of age. On older children, always try a patch test first to test for allergic reactions.^{43,44}

Diabetics – Using peppermint oil may raise your risk of low blood sugar levels or hypoglycemia.⁴⁵

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and hiatal hernia patients – Peppermint can relax the sphincter between the stomach and the esophagus, and cause acid to move up to the esophagus.⁴⁶

People with gallbladder problems – Peppermint oil may cause gallbladder inflammation; those diagnosed with gallstones should consult a physician before

using peppermint oil.⁴⁷

People taking antacids – These drugs can cause peppermint oil capsules to break down easily, increasing the risk of heartburn.⁴⁸

Side Effects of Peppermint Oil

Take utmost care when using peppermint oil or other related products, since you may experience the following side effects:^{49,50}

Allergic reactions like skin rashes	Slow heartbeat ⁵¹	Abdominal pain and diarrhea
Mouth ulcers or sores	Eye irritation	Headaches
Vomiting and nausea ⁵²	Heartburn	Dizziness
Muscle weakness	Brain damage	Seizures

If you are experiencing insomnia or other sleep disorders, avoid using peppermint oil because it can interfere with sleep.⁵³ While it can offer profound benefits, I recommend speaking to a health care provider before using it for therapeutic applications.