

simple solutions

for vibrant health

Sniff Away What Ails You

If holiday stress has you OD'ing on sugary snacks or pouring yourself that third glass of wine at night, a new study from the Warwick Olfaction Research Group in England offers a saner solution: Simply smelling certain fragrances has a stress-reducing effect on the brain that's similar to food and even some mood-altering drugs. "Some scents can trigger your pituitary gland to release hormones specific to easing many health-related ailments," says Michael Finkelstein, MD, a holistic physician in Westchester, New York. Three to sniff this season:

Vanilla. Many people find vanilla calming because it boosts serotonin levels in the brain. "Just like comfort food, vanilla can bring us back to a place of security and peace," says Finkelstein. Great if you feel frazzled about planning or attending family gatherings.

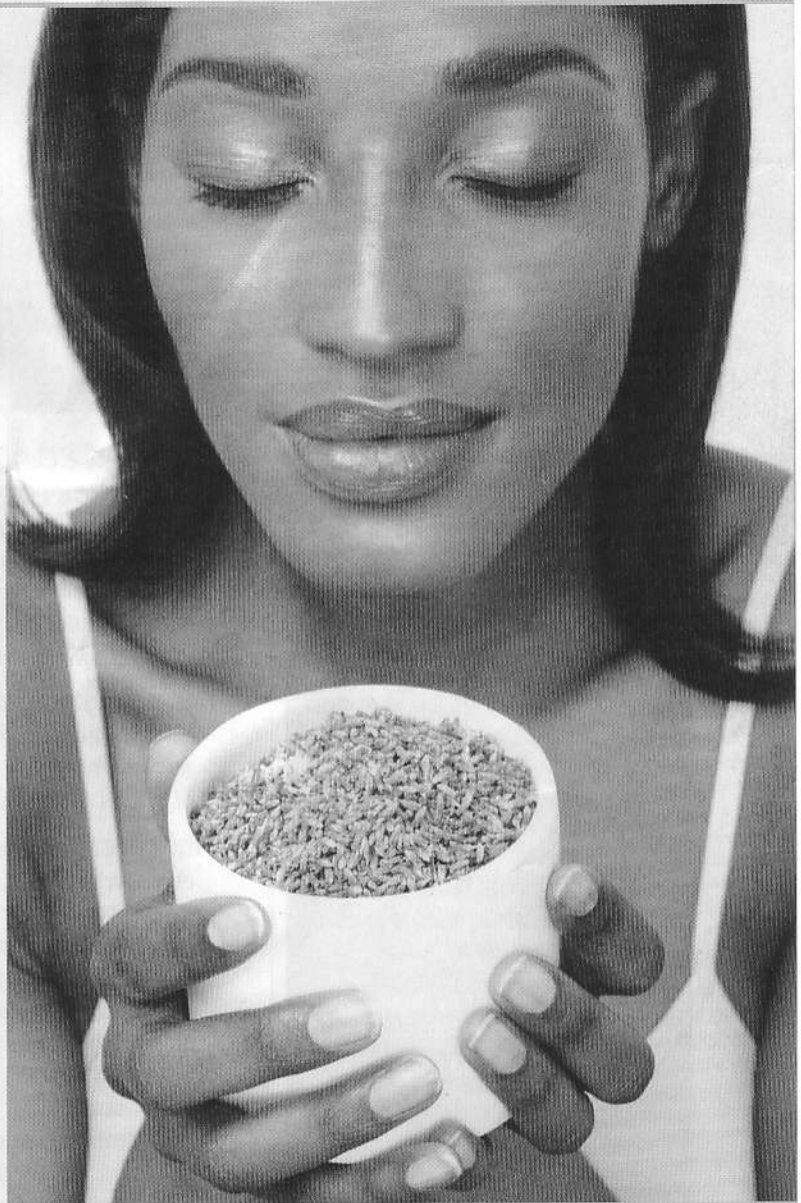
TRY IT: Burn a vanilla-scented candle, or inhale the aroma of vanilla beans.

Lavender. "Lavender contains linalool, a substance that blocks the stress response in the body and relaxes the muscles," says Ruth Knill, PhD, an herbalist specializing in Oriental medicine in Boston. Perfect if you have neck and shoulder pains after marathon shopping trips.

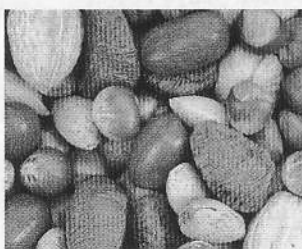
TRY IT: Add six drops of lavender oil to your moisturizing lotion.

Peppermint. Scientists at Wheeling Jesuit University in West Virginia report that peppermint oil-infused air reduces fatigue. "Inhaling peppermint causes capillaries—the body's blood pathways—to constrict and then dilate, sending a rush of blood through the body and, as a result, a rush of energizing oxygen," says Bianca Beldini, an Oriental medicine practitioner in New York City. No need to rely on caffeine to stay awake on that long drive home from Thanksgiving dinner.

TRY IT: Place a few drops of peppermint oil on a cotton ball, and attach it to an air vent in your car. —TERAH SHELTON



Go Nuts Turns out it might not be an apple a day that keeps the doc away: A new study in the *Journal of Nutrition* reports that eating a handful of nuts five or more times a week can reduce your risk of developing heart disease. Reach for almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, macadamia nuts, and walnuts, says Sari Greaves, RD, a nutritionist in Bedminster, New Jersey. These are packed with monounsaturated fatty acids that raise HDL (good cholesterol) while lowering LDL (bad cholesterol). "Like a broom, these fats help HDL sweep the cholesterol buildup to the liver for excretion," says Greaves. To reap their heart-healthy benefits, snack on these nuts or sprinkle them in salads and stir-fries. —NICOLE DUNCAN



40%

The amount your blood pressure can drop as a result of acupuncture

Source: The Susan Samuelli Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California