Absorption

Glandular

Essential oils probably exert their most powerful and direct pharmacological effects systemically via the blood supply to the brain. They also have an indirect effect via the olfactory nerve pathways into the brain. Essential oil fragrances are absorbed through blood circulation and nerve pathways from the sinuses into the central glands of the brain, which control emotional, neurological, and immunological functions.

Skin

Essential oils are absorbed in minute quantities through the skin, depending on the oil, dilution, and application (carrier oil, compress, etc). Many of the indications for specific oils include various skin conditions.

Respiratory

Essential oils are inhaled during treatment, which have a direct effect of the sinuses, throat, and lungs. Many essential oils are specific medicines for respiratory conditions.

Circulation

Many essential oils have beneficial effects on circulatory problems, both through dermal and respiratory absorption. These oils enhance the circulation stimulating effects of massage.

Diffusers

Candle diffusers

Usually a heat resistant vessel for water and essential oils, and a heat resistant platform that holds the vessel over a small candle.
Advantages: very simple to use; provides light background fragrancing
Disadvantages: does not produce strong concentration for therapeutic benefits.

Electric heat diffusers

Small absorbent pads are placed inside of a heating chamber with ventilation that allows the aromatic compounds to evaporate into the surrounding air.

Advantages: easy to use; minimal maintenance; can diffuse thicker oils.
Disadvantages: heat damages some aromatic compounds.

Nebulizing diffusers

A system that uses air pressure generated by a compressing unit to vaporize the essential oils. A glass nebulizing bulb serves as a condenser, allowing only the finest particles of the essential oil to escape into the air.

Advantages: strong diffusion maximizes therapeutic benefits in respiratory conditions.

Disadvantages: diffusers need to be cleaned regularly, and tend to clog. More viscous oils cannot be diffused (such as sandalwood or ylang ylang).

Ionizing diffusers

A system that uses water as a base with oils put on the water, which is then ionized with ultrasonic vibration.

Advantages: easy to maintain and clean, don't clog; most oils can be used. Effective for general background fragrancing up to mild therapeutic levels.

Disadvantages: don't produce strong concentrations of oils in atmosphere as nebulizers do.

Timers

Most higher quality diffusers have timers for intermittent operation; this reduces the amount of oil consumed, and prevents over-saturation in a room.