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Distillers derive Ravensara essential oil from Ravensara aromatica, an evergreen laurel species that has limited cultivation in several regions around the world. The major essential oil properties include being antiseptic, antibacterial and antiviral. Not surprisingly, the use of ravensara oil for cold sores, shingles, and herpes-related outbreaks is very useful for self-treatment by those who are looking for alternatives to prescription or over-the-counter medications that may have unpleasant smells and side effects [1]. Ravensara aromatica is one of about ten evergreen layer species endemic to the island of Madagascar, which means that they do not grow anywhere else in the world [2]. The genus was first described and placed in the family Lauraceae by Sonnerat in 1782. Ravensara is a large tree that can grow up to 30 m (98 feet) in height, with wide shiny green leaves emanating from a kamhoraceous smell similar to eucalyptus leaves [1]. The ethnic Malagasy people of Madagascar call ravensara hazomanitra, or trees that smell, because of its penetrating aroma! Before talking about the benefits of Ravensara essential oil for herpes and other conditions, it is important to distinguish it from ravintsara, an essential oil with a similar name but different uses in aromatherapy. Ravintsara oil is a type of essential oil distilled from the camphor tree Cinnamomum camphor. While it is in the same family as ravensara, it is definitely not the same oil! Although both ravintsara and camphor oil come from the same species, they are labeled and sold as different oils because they are different chemotypes—meaning they differ in types and ratios of chemical compounds present in their essential oils. Ravintsara is highest in 1.8-cineole, the same main active compound in eucalyptus oil [3]. To add to the confusion, ravintsara oil is also grown in Madagascar as an introduced species grown for its essential oil. Thus, when buying ravensara oil, you should always check the label on your supplier's website for genus-species names to make sure you get true Ravensara aromatica oil. Ravensara essential oil is used an antiseptic, mourning, antibacterial, and antiviral in folk medicine. Its best known use is to fight intractable viral infections such as shingles, cold sores and herpes [4]. Herpes is known as a viral infection as there is said to be no real cure. Skin lesions provide a visible reminder of the condition, and for some they occur more often than others. Of course, when an outbreak occurs, it is painful and also quite ugly. Adding insult to injury, these outbreaks usually happen when someone is stressed, which is perfectly understandable given the effects of stress in our daily lives. Ravensara oil offers up-to-date relief while managing the viruses [4]. Some people can use the oil nicely undiluted as a point treatment in smaller areas, such as for a cold sore; however, it is often mixed with a carrier oil or another non-sensitizing oil as a basis. Either way, it can greatly reduce the amount of visible skin damage and shorten the duration of any outbreak. Of course, using ravensara oil for cold sores, shingles, and herpes-related outbreaks can introduce the substance to very sensitive skin areas, so a patch test is recommended before extensive use. Although unlikely, pay attention to the potential for a possible skin irritation. Since the application of the essential oil is often very close to mucous membranes, there is a chance that overmixing of etheric ravensara oil can result in too strong a substance that can lead to skin irritations. Experiment with different concentrations until you find the one that works just right for you. Other essential oils with similar antibacterial and antiviral properties that you might consider trying, especially for skin conditions, include tea tree oil and lavender oil. REFERENCES 1. Ravensara aromatica Wikipedia. Last modified may 16, 2013. . 2. Ravensara. Wikipedia. Last modified March 21, 2013. . 3. Ravintsara vs. Ravensara: What's the difference? East-West School of Herbal and Aromatic Studies. Accessed July 7, 2014. s-the-difference. 4. Battaglia, Salvatore. 2003. The complete guide to aromatherapy. International Centre for Holistic Aromatherapy. I am often asked which essential oils are best for reducing nerve pain, itching, and PHN caused by shingles and thought it would be helpful to share what I have learned for those of you suffering from this debilitating virus. A Little More on Shingles Shingles, aka Herpes zoster, is an acute infection of the sensory nerve roots that is closely related to the chickenpox virus. It usually affects middle-aged or older individuals. The shingles virus affects sensory nerves before entering the spinal cord, causing blisters to erupt on the skin area where these nerves are affected. Pain is usually felt before the blisters appear and can persist for several weeks before they disappear. Symptoms may include numbness, depression, tingling, shooting pains, fever, and headaches. The face and midsection of the body are most often affected. If the trigeminal nerve (the nerve responsible for sensation on the face) is affected, outbreaks can occur on the cornea of the eye that can cause blindness if not treated quickly. Pain that lingers after the blisters have healed is called postherpetic neuralgia. Stages of Shingles Virus 1. A weakened immune system caused by stress, disease, immune system deficiencies, etc. resuscitate the virus 2. Shingles Often preceded by 3-4 days of chills, fever, and aches 3. Burning pain and sensitive skin begin to develop 4. A rash develops on the skin followed by blisters filled with pus similar to chickenpox. The affected area becomes excruciatingly painful and sensitive to touch 5. The blisters burst, crust over, and begin to heal. Skin becomes very itchy 6. If the nerves are damaged, postherpetic neuralgia may occur and may last several months Therapeutic approach to the treatment of shingles 1. Treat the lesions with anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and analgesic (pain-relieving) essential oils 2. Tonify the immune system by using nourishing foods, herbs, and other immune-boosting supplements like L-lysine 3. Reduce stress and get plenty of rest Essential oils are a must to reduce the duration and severity of shingles. They can calm away nerve pain, calm redness, reduce itching, and accelerate healing of the skin. In this article, I will share the best suited essential oils for treating shingles naturally, as well as some recipes you can make at home that will speed up your recovery and offer some comfort while the virus runs its course. The key is the consistency of the application while staying nourished, using relaxing downwines, and reducing stress throughout the treatment. Following these guidelines can heal shingles faster and with less severe symptoms. Also keep in mind that if the person being treated takes a lot of medications, reduce the essential amount of oil in half. Good luck! Best essential oils for the treatment of Herpes Zoster Virus For the most convenient application, essential oils for shingles should be added to a spritzer bottle of either witch hazel, thin aloe vera juice (you can strain and dilute it with witch hazel or filtered water), herbal hydrosols, or a thin carrier oil like fractional coconut oil. The spray should be about a 10% dilution ratio or 60 drops of essential oil in 1oz of liquid/carrier oil. You can pick and choose from the oils below based on your needs and formulate a simple shingles spray. Bergamot Bergamot Bergamot is one of the most effective essential oils that inhibits herpes virus and will aid in drying blisters and give you long-lasting pain relief. It is a powerful antiviral and analgesic essential oil that will also support you emotionally throughout your healing journey. Be sure to use bergapten-free bergamot essential oil or be sure to fully cover any areas of current application with clothing about going outside. Bergamot is an extremely phototoxic essential oil which means that it reacts negatively when exposed to sunlight. Tea Tree Tea tree essential oil will help soothe redness and irritation on and around the blisters skin. Its anesthetic and anti-inflammatory properties make it a perfect match for the treatment of shingles and reduce pain. If you are using you can prevent scarring and Infection. Lavender Lavender essential oil relieves pain associated with shingles and will reduce redness and inflammation of blister lesions. Lavender will also help relax you if you have trouble sleeping due to pain. Lavender can also treat pain that occurs long after the blisters have disappeared. Ravensara Ravensara essential oil has known properties that are effective against the herpes virus, specifically for the treatment of active shingles. It has an affinity for clearing skin diseases and infections and helps reduce pain and inflammation. Many find it useful to dilute this oil with tamanu oil when applying it to active shingles lesions. Ravensara is one of the best essential oils for shingles. Manuka Manuka essential oil has been shown to inhibit herpes simplex virus and may help shorten the duration of shingles. It also has anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties. Melissa Melissa essential oil (aka lemon balm EO) is an excellent oil to prevent the spread of shingles due to its polyphenol content and has shown a significant reduction in the duration and severity of shingles. It speeds up healing and relieves itching and redness. Melissa is also an amazing remedy for cold sores and can reduce duration, severity, and recurrence. This essential oil is best used as soon as a shingles outbreak occurs. General Shingles Recipes to Use in Case of Outbreak Mix the recipes below with an equal amount of carrier oil and apply to affected areas with a clean cotton swab 3-5 times a day. Many recipes require neat application, but I think this is too strong. Using the essential below oils in a 50/50 ratio will help ward off the virus, however, try a patch test first as this is still a very strong dilution to use. You can of course add more carrier oil to dilute the recipes further to suit your needs. Shingles Outbreak Recipe #1 • 10 drops Melissa essential oil • 10 drops ravensara essential oil Shingles Outbreak Recipe #2 • 7 drops lavender essential oil • 7 drops of tea tree essential oil • 7 drops bergapten-free bergamot essential oil Shingles Outbreak Recipe #3 • 5 drops of tea tree essential oil drops of manuka essential oil • 5 drops essential tea tree essential oil • 5 drops helichrysum essential oil • 5 drops Melissa essential oil Essential oils that relieve itch Caused by Shingles The essential oils below are excellent soothing oils for dry, itchy, and inflamed skin. They penetrate deeply and help relieve symptoms within minutes. If you still have a lot of pain, you can use 60 drops of essential oil in 2oz of water (I recommend starting with 30 drops first to see how it feels like it's a very strong dilution), witch hazel, or thin carrier oil and use like a spray, or you can follow the recipes I have listed below mixed in an equal amount of carrier oil. Adjust the dilution again to fit your Holy/Roman chamomile Both German and Roman chamomile essential oil is incredibly anti-inflammatory and soothing to the skin and is probably the best oils to use for the treatment of itchy shingles. These essential oils are also analgesic and will reduce pain, soothe discomfort, and relieve irritating itching. Helichrysum Helichrysum is one of the best oils to use to heal the skin, reduce pain, and relieve inflammation that causes allergic and itchy reactions. Helichrysum will also repair damaged nerves caused by shingles. Lavender Lavender is such a versatile and useful oil and using it for itchy healing skin is no exception. Its anti-inflammatory and soothing properties make it perfect for healing skin, reducing redness, and preventing scarring caused by shingles when it reaches its final stage. Palmarosa Palmarosa essential oil is known for its ability to relieve dry, irritated, and itchy skin. This oil also has antiseptic and cell rejuvenating properties that aid in the regeneration of the skin. Peppermint The cooling properties of peppermint will soothe inflammation and relieve itching as shingles lesions begin to heal and dry. If peppermint can nix itching caused by poison oak and Poison Ivy, it can certainly relieve itchy skin caused by shingles! Recipes for Itchy skin caused by shingles Some essential oils have an affinity to relieve itchy skin and soothing inflammation. Combine the essential oils below with an equal amount of conveyor oil and apply evenly with a clean cotton swab 3-5 times a day. Using oils in a 50/50 ratio will help ward off the virus, however, try a patch test first as this is a very strong dilution to use. You can of course add more carrier oil to dilute the recipes further to suit your needs. Shingles Recipe for Itchy Skin #1 • 7 drops of palmarosa essential oil • 7 drops Roman chamomile essential oil • 7 drops sandalwood essential oil Shingles Recipe for itchy Skin #2 • 10 drops of lavender essential oil • 5 drops geranium essential oil (geranium encourages the growth of new skin cells and accelerates healing) • 5 drops peppermint essential oil Shingles Recipe for itchy Skin #3 • 10 drops juniper essential oil • 8 drops rosemary essential oil • 3 drops peppermint essential oil Shingles Recipe for itchy Skin #4 • 10 drops tea tree essential oil • 10 drops myrrh essential oil • 2 drops helichrysum essential oil oil