

At the start of the 21st century, American perception of the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries was somewhat favorable. We went to a doctor who listened to our health concerns and suggested ways to help reduce stress levels, lower blood pressure, cholesterol and excess weight. Believe it or not, pills weren't the first line of defense offered by doctors 20 years ago. Doctors were more open to discussing and even suggesting alternative methods to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

But something happened. Big Pharma companies began producing drugs at unprecedented rates and raking in truly obscene profits. According to the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) (JAMA), between 2000 and 2018, 35 well-known drug manufacturers shared a combined revenue of \$20.1 trillion. Meanwhile, [life expectancy among Americans began declining](#), while the side effects of many drugs manufactured by pharmaceutical companies continued growing, ranging from moderate to serious and even fatal.

Obesity and serious health issues such as cancer, Alzheimer's, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and gallbladder [disease are on the rise](#). The result of this vast discrepancy? People's faith in Big Pharma companies has sunk to an all-time low. In fact, a 2019 Gallup poll revealed that [Big Pharma ranked dead last in Americans' views of U.S. business industry sectors](#). Patients no longer believe that the "take these pills and call me in six months" approach to addressing health issues works.

With this waning trust in Western medicine and Big Pharma in particular, our eyes are open and we're embracing safer and more sustainable ways to keep ourselves healthy. Rather than load up on pills and injections to lose weight, and to lower everything from diabetes, hypertension and cholesterol, patients are taking a new look at centuries-old methods like [intermittent fasting](#). Although we've become accustomed to treating pain, allergies, cold and flu with a drug that has ingredients we can't pronounce, more and more people are turning to natural remedies like cannabis and essential oils (EOs).

In fact, we spend [\\$70 billion on alternative medicines](#) annually to either complement or replace the expensive pills we've been accustomed to taking. People's trust in essential oils continues to rise year after year, and it's only expected to grow. If the trend continues in this direction, it's estimated that by the year 2024, Americans will be spending as much as \$9 billion annually on essential oils.

Are Essential Oils the Answer to What Ails You?

Between 2014 and present day, Americans have spent approximately [\\$5.17 billion on essential oils](#). Their hope is for the compounds and [terpenes](#) extracted from plants to do more for them than the myriad pills synthesized in labs. Hardly a new fad, three ancient cultures were early adopters of essential oils for health and for use in their spiritual practices. Egyptians began using

essential oils in 3,500 B.C., as did China and India. In India, essential oils were vital in the practice of Ayurvedic medicine.

More than simply a fragrant oil, essential oils are used to help with myriad issues that have plagued humans for centuries, among them:

- **Eucalyptus** as an alternate method to treating allergies and congestion
- **Lavender**, well-known for calming anxiety and combating insomnia
- **Lemon** for its disinfectant and cleaning properties, as used in dish soaps
- **Peppermint** to calm an upset stomach and help prevent cold and flu
- **Rosemary** and **oregano** to clear up fungus under nails quickly and safely
- **Bergamot** to help heal broken skin, and like lavender, help to reduce anxiety

If you get frequent headaches, **lavender, rosemary, peppermint, eucalyptus, geranium** and **chamomile** are natural pain relievers and have anti-inflammatory properties.

These are just some of the reasons people reach for essential oils over a pill. If you're new to essential oils, you may be wondering how to choose one that's safe and effective. (In future articles, we'll talk about specific healing properties of each oil.)

How to Differentiate High-Quality Essential Oils from Low-Quality Essential Oils

Most of us don't have a developed enough sense of smell to discern subtle differences between a high-quality EO from a low-quality one, so we have to rely on the industry and regulatory agencies to guide us.

When the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) first came into [being in 1906](#), its purpose was to regulate foods and drugs that people consume. Then and now, the FDA's involvement in plant extracts as potential alternatives to lab-created drugs has been low on their list of priorities. For the moment, the FDA views essential oils as cosmetics, which is obviously incorrect. Given this lack of attention paid to essential oils, despite their huge popularity, it's incumbent upon you, the consumer, to determine safety and effectiveness. Despite this pressure, you are not powerless.

Although there are [two governing bodies](#) that determine the [safety and efficacy of essential oils](#) sold in other countries, if you live in the United States, this won't help you because the U.S. government doesn't have a standard to test quality ... *yet*.

The [University of Minnesota](#) has some tips that will help guide you in your quest for high-quality essential oils. As with everything, the absence of information should be a red flag, as should boisterous claims. As you read the label of an essential oil bottle, you shouldn't need a degree in chemistry to understand it.

A reputable company that sells essential oils will be upfront about where their plants are sourced, how the EOs are extracted from the plants, how they're packaged and handled in the manufacturing process and how they're stored. A reputable company will also use the Latin name of the plant used to extract the essential oil. This is critical because there are many types of a particular genus, and you as the consumer should be able to tell where yours was sourced. A reputable company will tell you where the plant was grown.

Cost is a huge determining factor. Something with lots of fillers and artificial fragrances and colors will cost a lot less than real essential oil. If you see a price discrepancy between one brand and another, rest assured the lower-cost one has mostly inert but possibly unsafe ingredients.

Essential oils have a centuries-old history of providing many [medicinal benefits](#). When [used correctly](#) and when the oils are sourced from quality plants, you'll get the most out of your experience. Whether you're using EO to promote a happier and healthier body in general or you're attacking a specific issue [such as pain, anxiety or insomnia](#), it's important you find a company that's [reputable and transparent](#). And if you're buying your essential oils over the Internet, look at their testimonials. People are honest about their [buying experiences](#), and a reputable company is proud to let you know how their customers feel about their products.

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