

Olfactory Training

Massachusetts Eye and Ear Sinus Center

243 Charles Street

Boston, MA 02114

Phone: 617-573-3209

Although advances in research have contributed information on how the sense of smell works, we still do not know exactly why we lose our sense of smell in many circumstances. For this reason, besides sinus inflammation and polyps, we do not have dependable medications that provide a cure for smell loss.

However, an exercise has been developed that has shown ability to improve the sense of smell in patients who have experienced a decline in ability to smell. This technique of olfactory training is based on the idea that the nerves responsible for providing our sense of smell are healthier when activated with odors. In addition, there is a likely benefit of refocusing our brain to detect and identify odors that may have lost the strength patients were once accustomed to due to damage of various types. Olfactory training may allow patients to strengthen the nerve connections from the nose to the brain and to refocus on the more limited information getting to the deeper parts of the brain where smell processing occurs.

Olfactory training has been tested through multiple independent clinics and has consistently shown improved scores in smell testing. However, these results are averaged across multiple patients as a population. Each individual will have widely variable results to the training program where some show only minimal improvement or none at all and others may have more dramatic improvement. Overall, the progress in return of smell is slow and occurs over many months and even up to 2 years.

Technique:

- A. The training consists of smelling four different odors: **rose**, **eucalyptus**, **lemon**, and **clove**, twice a day and every day for three months.
 1. Choose one odor and smell it for approximately 15 seconds while trying to remember what it once smelled like.
 2. Rest for about 10 seconds.
 3. Smell the next odor for approximately 15 seconds.
 4. Repeat until all 4 odors have been sampled.
- B. After **3 months** switch to a new set of odors: **menthol**, **thyme**, **tangerine**, and **jasmine** and train with them as described above.
- C. After **3 months** switch to another new set of odors: **green tea**, **bergamot**, **rosemary**, and **gardenia** and train with them again as described above.

The actual substance is not required to produce an effect. Most people purchase essential oils containing the odors listed above. The advantage is ease of use and ability to cap the bottles to prevent gradual decreasing strength of the odor. These can be purchased through multiple on-line vendors, some holistic medicine shops, and stores.