

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Clinical Research: AROMATHERAPY MAY CALM RESIDENTS WITH DEMENTIA

The aroma of lemon balm may be just what the doctor ordered for agitated residents with dementia.

A recent British study showed that aromatherapy containing an essential oil from lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) not only helped calm people with dementia but also made nursing home residents isolate less and participate more in constructive activities. The research findings are reported in the July issue of the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*. In the controlled study, researchers at **Newcastle General Hospital** in

Newcastle upon Tyne rubbed lemon balm lotion on patients' faces and arms twice a day for four weeks. Sixty percent of those in the treatment group showed a 30 percent reduction in agitation, compared to only 15 percent of patients who received an inert placebo lotion.

Aromatherapy Requires Safety Precautions Some nursing facilities provide aromatherapy for their residents. Aromatic essential oils used to promote relaxation include lavender and rose geranium. Yet even this innocuous-seeming therapy can have its side effects, cautions **Trudy Welker**, a Northbrook, IL-based consultant who helps nursing homes use aromatherapy techniques.

"For example, lemon balm can provoke an allergic sensitization response when used in dermal applications, especially with the fragile elderly," Welker tells **Eli**.

"Essential oils used in nursing homes should be accompanied by material safety data sheets in compliance with existing regulations," Welker cautions.