

# Aromatherapy Times

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Aromatherapy To Enhance Your Memory  
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Plants, Aromatics, Minerals and Astrology  
Sea Buckthorn Oil (Fruit)  
Sophrology

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## Discover a New Technique: Sophrology by Florence Parot

Have you dreamt of being able to relax in one minute? Of being able to meditate even if you do not have time? Of dealing with life with the mind of a champion? This could be the answer!

Sophrology means “the science of the consciousness in harmony”, it is a life-balancing technique made of very practical physical and mental exercises aiming at an alert mind in a relaxed body. It is simple and does not require complicated postures or large amounts of time each day. It was created in 1960 in Spain by a neuropsychiatrist, Professor Alfonso Caycedo who described it as both a philosophy and a way of life as well as a therapy and a personal development technique.

Sophrology is still very new to the UK but is extremely popular in the rest of Europe, ever since it helped the Swiss ski team win Olympic medals in the Grenoble Olympic Games of 1968! Professional sports mental preparation now nearly automatically includes it on the continent but it is also good for stress and sleep management, anxiety and to prepare for public speaking or the stage. It is also used in European hospitals for insomnia and pain relief, to help patients with cancer, terminal diseases, Alzheimer, addictions, depression, IBS, ME... It is also used by midwives for pre and post natal preparation, in schools to help children concentrate, in the corporate world for stress and fatigue, self-development and confidence as well as prevention of repetitive strain injuries.

It is now possible to train in the UK and a small but expanding number of therapists are currently practising sophrology here as interest is growing in the benefits it can offer to our health and wellbeing.

Sophrology is inspired by Yoga Nidra, Buddhist meditation, Japanese Zen and classical relaxation techniques. It stands at the crossroads between Eastern meditation and Western relaxation. It has structured sets of exercises that can be done either sitting down, lying down or standing up. It is not a hands-on therapy. You are guided by the voice of the sophrologist, you close your eyes and you follow simple instructions to learn how to relax, experiment with different breathing techniques, use specific movements (called dynamic relaxation),

imagine situations or colours, etc. By relaxing the body, you calm the mind also. And by calming the mind, you relax the body. It works both ways! You learn to quieten the “little voice” in your head, to “switch off” at the end of the day. The exercises used are simple and easy to use in an everyday life environment. You do not need to spend a long time each time doing the exercises; they fit into your life as it is. You learn the techniques that are best suited to you and are able to re-use them on your own.



Sophrology is practised both in group sessions and one-to-ones. People are taught the basic methods and are able to start using some of the techniques on their own.

The idea of sophrology is to be able to stay both calm and alert in the middle of our modern fast-paced very full life without having to spend a long time doing postures or meditating while sitting down cross-legged. It is ideal for people who feel they do not have the time to do it. Sophrology is often thought of as being a relaxation technique but in fact, relaxation is only one of the tools we use. Other sophrology tools can help regain energy for instance. So the best word to describe sophrology would probably be « balance ». Sophrology can very aptly be described as a technique restoring balance in our body, mind and spirit.

Sophrology can be used just as well by the super-busy business person or by someone lying in bed in hospital. The whole idea is that it is simple and easy, anybody can do it and you do not need to have plenty of time on your hands for that. It fits into your busy modern life as it is. You learn from the Sophrologist exercises you will be able to repeat by yourself on your own: thinking about breathing while you walk or wait for your computer to start, closing your eyes for a few seconds several times a day to regain energy, doing a little “shaking” movement with your shoulders every morning for a couple of minutes to help manage your stress...

### Case Study

Laurent, a 43-year-old sales executive, had not been sleeping properly for about eight months. He would sleep until 3 am and then remain fitful for the rest of the night. He was feeling stressed and was working long hours. We first examined his sleeping pattern and environment (use of technology at night etc.) and talked about what he could do when he woke up apart from tossing and turning. We then started a tailor-made programme to address his sleep problem. Laurent first learnt how to relax his body from head to toe and to listen to his breathing. We then went on to visualising a place where felt peaceful. In the second and third session we continued to work on breathing and relaxing exercises. In between these sessions, Laurent practiced the exercises he found most useful to help him sleep and developed the habit of closing his eyes and breathing out deeply for a few seconds several times a day. Because Laurent had only been having problems with his sleep for a relatively short time and because he was conscientious about practicing his exercises, he was able to return to normal sleeping patterns after only three sessions.

### Try these few simple Sophrology exercises at home

**To lower anxiety:** Breathe in and gently contract the muscles in your whole body, sensing any tension or discomfort. Breathe out loudly, let go and completely relax the muscles, letting the tensions flow away. Do this three times and listen to how you are feeling inside. You can do this exercise sitting down, lying down or standing up.

**To sleep better:** Count up to three in your mind as you breathe in, count up to four as you breathe out and count up to three while you gently hold your breath, your lungs empty and then start all over again. Do this at your own pace and change the counts if this is better for you, but keep the exercise as regular as you can until you feel that you are calming down.

**To better manage your stress:** Several times a day, for a few seconds, close your eyes, unclench your jaw, relax your shoulders (let them drop to the floor) and breathe out loudly.

*To find a Sophrologist near you or to train to become a Sophrologist, go to [www.sophroacademy.co.uk](http://www.sophroacademy.co.uk), email [contact@sophroacademy.co.uk](mailto:contact@sophroacademy.co.uk) or call 01227 455 855.*