

Clearing the brain fog. A herbal self-care approach to cognitive problems in the menopause transition

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Sixty percent of women report problems with memory during menopausal transition, and these subjective complaints correlate with objective measures of cognitive performance. Although memory performance appears to return to baseline levels during the postmenopausal period, the average four year transition period means that women are likely to experience protracted memory problems. This study aimed to assess a three-month programme of self-administered extracts of rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) on cognitive function in menopausal women reporting cognitive problems. A mixed factorial design was employed comparing rosemary aroma, rosemary water and control at baseline, intervention months 1, 2 and 3, and one month post intervention. All cognitive data were collected online using proprietary software.

127 working peri- and post-menopausal women aged 45-60 in the UK. All were going through a natural menopause and reported experiencing consistently problematic concentration and memory problems in the previous 4 weeks or longer. Participants were randomly allocated to one of three groups: rosemary aroma (daily inhalation of the aroma of rosemary essential oil for 20 minutes each day for 3 months, n=43), rosemary water (daily consumption of 100ml rosemary extract water each day for 3 months, n=43) or a control group

(no intervention, n=44).

The assessment software assesses attention, vigilance, working-, spatial- and secondary memory, and executive function. Measures of accuracy and reaction time for each task were recorded.

A number of significant effects of the interventions were found for reaction time and accuracy on aspects of memory and attention. Small to medium effect sizes being observed for both interventions compared to the control condition, and a number of these were sustained into the post intervention period.

Biography

Mark gained his Psychology degree with first class honours in 1995, winning the British Psychological Society undergraduate project prize. He was awarded a PhD in 1999 based his work investigating the impact of breathing pure oxygen on human cognition. Moving into herbs and essential oils in 2003 Mark has published studies investigating Lavender, Sage and Peppermint among others. His focus however, has always returned to Rosemary. Mark is the Head of the Department of Psychology at Northumbria University in the UK, where he leads a team of 90 academic staff delivering high quality research and education to over 2000 students.

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Received Date: November 30, 2022; **Accepted Date:** December 2, 2022; **Published Date:** January 31, 2023