People with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia often experience states of agitation that are clearly unpleasant for them, distressing to relatives, and challenging for professional caregivers. Strong tranquilizing medications can suppress such moments of agitation, but in consequence often reduce the dementia sufferer to near or full unconsciousness.

Preliminary controlled trials suggest, surprisingly, that a far milder treatment might help some cases. The use of scented oils, a method known as aromatherapy, has shown promise for calming people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

In one interestingly designed, but very small, study published in 2002, a hospital ward was suffused with either lavender oil or water for two hours. An investigator who was unaware of the study’s design and who wore a device to block inhalation of odors entered the ward and evaluated the behavior of the 15 residents, all of whom had dementia. The results indicated that use of lavender oil aromatherapy modestly decreased agitated behavior.

A Chinese study published in 2007 supports these findings. In this trial, 70 people with severe dementia and a tendency toward agitation were given either lavender or a sunflower oil placebo to inhale for three weeks. At that point, the two groups were crossed over to the opposite treatment for an additional three weeks. The results indicated that use of lavender oil significantly decreased agitated behavior as compared to placebo.

REFERENCES:
