



# How Pine Can Benefit Your Respiratory Health

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The distinctive smell of a pine tree, or even better a pine forest, is always a breath of fresh air, in more ways than one actually. Pine trees have shown remarkable health benefits for all sorts of symptoms and ailments including [cardiovascular health](#) and [female health](#) issues including menopause, but especially for [respiratory health](#). Pretty much all of the pine tree from the needles to the bark to the oils and the nuts, have shown to elicit some amazing health boosting benefits.

Just being in the presence of pine trees and breathing in the [phytoncides](#) (wood essential oils) has shown to be very beneficial for health and our respiratory systems. This is one of the reasons why [forest bathing](#) is such a health boosting activity, as it allows us to be exposed to these powerful phytoncides, which, amongst other things, have shown to boost [immunity](#). Specific phytoncides produced by the pine tree include  $\alpha$ -pinene and  $\alpha$ -phellandrene, both have which have shown to have anti-inflammatory properties and anti-cancer properties when inhaled and d-limonene and p-cymene

phytoncides, which have shown to specifically act against allergic lung inflammation too. All of that benefit by just inhaling the pine tree aroma!

Pine essential oil, which is closely related to Eucalyptus oil in terms of the health benefits, is beneficial to inhale if you are suffering with [respiratory infections](#) as it can help ease respiratory congestion, reduce coughing and ease breathing.

For sinusitis or rhinitis symptoms, pine oil inhalation not only helps relieve congestion but also eases headaches, which can worsen due to the congestion. 4-5 drops of pine oil can be put in a bowl of almost boiling water and then inhaled deeply for several minutes. Alternatively you can add pine oil to a bath and inhale it whilst submerged in its woody aromas. This has an added [mental health](#) benefit too as pine oil has shown to uplift mood and also be helpful in many skin symptoms such as eczema, acne and athlete's foot.

The bark of the pine tree has also shown pharmacological properties including being a strong antioxidant and powerful anti-inflammatory. Due to these properties pine bark has been studied for its potential therapeutic treatment for inflammatory airway conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) with some positive effects. Due to its anti-inflammatory action researchers are beginning to investigate pine bark as a potential therapeutic agent to help with the inflammation associated with Covid 19, but a lot more research is needed there before a conclusion is made.

The pine needles themselves have been used for centuries in traditional medicine and are often consumed as a tea. In fact research shows one of the best ways to reap the antioxidant

benefits of pine needles is by consuming as a tea. Be warned though that there are about twenty pine species that should not be used in this way as they are considered toxic, so if you decide to forage pine needles yourself, make sure you have identified exactly what you are picking and that it is safe. Four of the best varieties to make tea from are eastern white pine, Scots pine, Douglas fir and noble fir (the latter two still belong to the pine family despite the word fir!).

Pine tea has shown to be very helpful for respiratory health as it can act as an expectorant ((helps loosen catarrh & mucus so you can cough it up more easily) and can help to relieve congestion in the chest. The needles are also a high source of vitamin A and C and have been used throughout history to help fight off scurvy. Pine needles also contain shikimic acid, which is actually an ingredient that when processed helps reduce the flu virus from reproducing. In fact shikimic acid is actually used in the drug Tamiflu, although the shikimic acid in this comes from the Chinese star anise tree and not pine. So if you can be sure you have identified a safe pine species, then get out your foraging basket and pick the fresh needles. Needles can be foraged most of the year, but are freshest and tastiest when collected in the spring months when the new tips are just appearing and are bright green and flexible, as these are when they are highest in vitamin C. These can be either used straight away to make pine needle tea or dried out and used at a later date during the winter months when respiratory tract infections are more common. Simply chop up the needles, bring some water to the boil, then add in your needles and simmer on a lower heat for about 5 minutes, before drinking what can only be described as a 'taste of Christmas'.

## Resources & Further Reading:

3-Carene, a Phytoncide from Pine Tree Has a Sleep-enhancing Effect by Targeting the GABAA-benzodiazepine Receptors. *Experimental Neurobiology*, 2019.

Antioxidant activity and analysis of proanthocyanidins from pine (*Pinus densiflora*) needles, 2011. *Nutr Res Pract*.

Appraisal on the wound healing and anti-inflammatory activities of the essential oils obtained from the cones and needles of *Pinus* species by in vivo and in vitro experimental models, 2012 *Journal of Ethnopharmacol*.

The genus *Pinus* : a comparative study on the needle essential oil composition of 46 pine species, 2014 *Phytochem Rev*.

A systematic review of the potential uses of pine bark in food industry and health care, 2019. *Trends in Food Science and technology*

Anti-Inflammatory Principles from the Needles of *Pinus* and In Silico Studies of Their Potential Anti-Aging Effects, 2013. *Antioxidants*

Antioxidants Essential oils in the treatment of respiratory tract diseases highlighting their role in bacterial infections and their anti-inflammatory action: a review, 2015. *Flavour & Fragrance Journal*

A standardized bark extract of *Pinus pinaster* Aiton (Pycnogenol®) attenuated chronic obstructive pulmonary disease via Erk-sp1 signaling pathway, 2016. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*

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