Possible health and safety problems in the use of novel plant essential oils and extracts in aromatherapy.

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Aromatherapy is a branch of complementary or alternative therapy which is increasing in popularity, yet has scant scientific credibility. Aromatherapy should be defined as treatment using odours and practised as such. However, essential oils are usually used in conjunction with massage and often combined with counselling of some kind. The use of most commonly-used essential oils in massage is seldom dangerous, as they have low systemic toxicity, especially when used at 2% dilution (provided they are not adulterated); however their safety during pregnancy, childbirth and babies has not been clearly demonstrated. Sensitisation, however, is a growing concern. Some aromatherapists are now introducing novel plant essential oils, extracts and phytols into their massage routine many of which have no odour and are potentially toxic. The possible dangers of these plant products are therefore discussed using specific example.

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