

## Peppermint: Scent of a Winner?

By [Salynn Boyles](#) WebMD Medical News Reviewed by [Gary D. Vogin, MD](#) [www.WEBMD.com](http://www.WEBMD.com)

July 20, 2001 -- In the pursuit of a competitive edge, many athletes today turn to a dizzying array of nutritional supplements, fortified sports drinks, and even banned pills and potions. But new research suggests the answer to better performance may be right under their nose.

The **smell of peppermint**, researchers say, boosts mood and motivation during physical exertion and improves athletic performance. They suggest that sniffing the scent during games and workout sessions may give competitive athletes and weekend warriors alike the extra push they need to excel.

"When you put people in a better mood, they are going to go that extra mile," study author Bryan Raudenbush, PhD, tells WebMD. "Most of the effect that we saw was probably psychological, but it resulted in a measurable improvement in performance."

Raudenbush and colleagues at West Virginia's Wheeling Jesuit University found that a group of competitive athletes were able to run faster, do more push-ups, and squeeze a hand grip harder when they had peppermint-infused adhesive strips under their noses. There was no performance improvement, however, when the athletes shot basketball free throws.

"Shooting baskets is more skill-related, rather than something you can psyche yourself up for," Raudenbush says. "If an athlete does not have the requisite skills to make a free throw, increasing the level of motivation merely results in a more motivated athlete who still does not have the skill to make a free throw."

The researcher says his ultimate goal is to develop a nonpharmacological aid to help improve athletic performance.

Could peppermint-based aromatherapy represent the next big trend in performance enhancement? Ergogenic aids -- substances used to improve athletic performance -- are all the rage among athletes. The vast majority, says ergogenics expert Gary Wadler, MD, offer little more than slick marketing and hype. He called the peppermint study intriguing but not definitive, and he applauded the researchers for conducting real scientific investigation to back up their hypothesis. . . .

Medically reviewed October 2001 by Gary D. Vogin, MD.