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## Why Smelling Salts Are the Cure for Election Day Anxiety

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Photographed by Irving Penn, *Vogue*, October 2000



Even Transcendental Meditators and Tai Chi masters are on edge today: Just hours from now, the United States will, barring a 2000-style ballot snafu, elect its next president. Will reason prevail or will a cloud-coiffed megalomaniac thwart decades' worth of social progress? It's enough to make any levelheaded adult wish for a fainting couch and smelling salts.

In all seriousness, though, smelling salts would be a good thing to have on hand right about now. Commonly associated with the Victorian era, when they were known as "lady revivers" for their ability to awaken women faint from frayed nerves or too-tight corsets, their use dates back to Roman times. Traditional versions have utilized noxious ammonia gas—which irritates the mucous membranes, stimulating the body's fight-or-flight response and activating breathing and heart rate. Lately, however, as with so many traditional healing methods, the concept is being retooled by a new generation of wellness experts—who are focusing their efforts on aromatherapy rather than aromatic assault.

One is [Kelsey Barrett \(http://heavynettle.com/\)](http://heavynettle.com/), a Mill Valley, California-based herbalist, whose enthusiasm for sniffing is such that she almost always sports an antique pendant filled with rose oil and mineral salts around her neck. As she explains, inhaling the highly fragrant air around crystals splashed with essential oils—as with any form of aromatherapy—can calm the nervous system and even alter brain function. “During inhalation, odor molecules travel through the nose and affect the brain through a variety of receptor sites, one of which is the limbic system, which is commonly referred to as the ‘emotional brain,’” she explains. “The limbic system is directly connected to those parts of the brain that control heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, memory, stress levels, and hormone balance.” Essential oils, she continues, “are time-saving de-stressors that can even generate new neural pathways.”

Modern-day smelling salts, then, are a simple way to make use of aromatherapy’s benefits—more portable than a diffuser or spray, less likely to leak than perfume oil. And though chic options are currently hard to come by ([Fig + Yarrow](http://www.vogue.com/?us_site=y) (<https://figandyarrow.com/products/smelling-salts>) makes one prettily packaged version), the beauty of smelling salts is that they’re almost as quick to make as they are to inhale. All you’ll need is a small bottle or vial and a few supplies you can pick up at any health-food store.

Here, Barrett shares three ways to make your nervous system great again.

### Smelling Salts

Blend 20 drops total of essential oils as directed, and pour them onto one tablespoon of coarse mineral salt, such as Epsom salt. Transfer into a small vial and sniff as needed.

#### Anxiety Relief Formula

- 9 drops chamomile essential oil
- 6 drops sandalwood essential oil
- 3 drops balsam essential oil

Barrett recommends keeping a bottle of this everyday blend in your jacket pocket—and taking a whiff just as you cast your ballot in the booth. Linking the activity with the scent “will help to create a new neural pathway that says, ‘When I vote, I’m relaxed,’” she explains.

#### Fear Relief Formula

- 10 drops rose essential oil
- 6 drops Melissa essential oil
- 4 drops neroli essential oil

No matter the terrifying threat—a big job interview, a turbulent flight, a chance encounter with an angry mob of alt-right demonstrators—this blend, Barrett says, will “calm your mind and uplift your heart.”

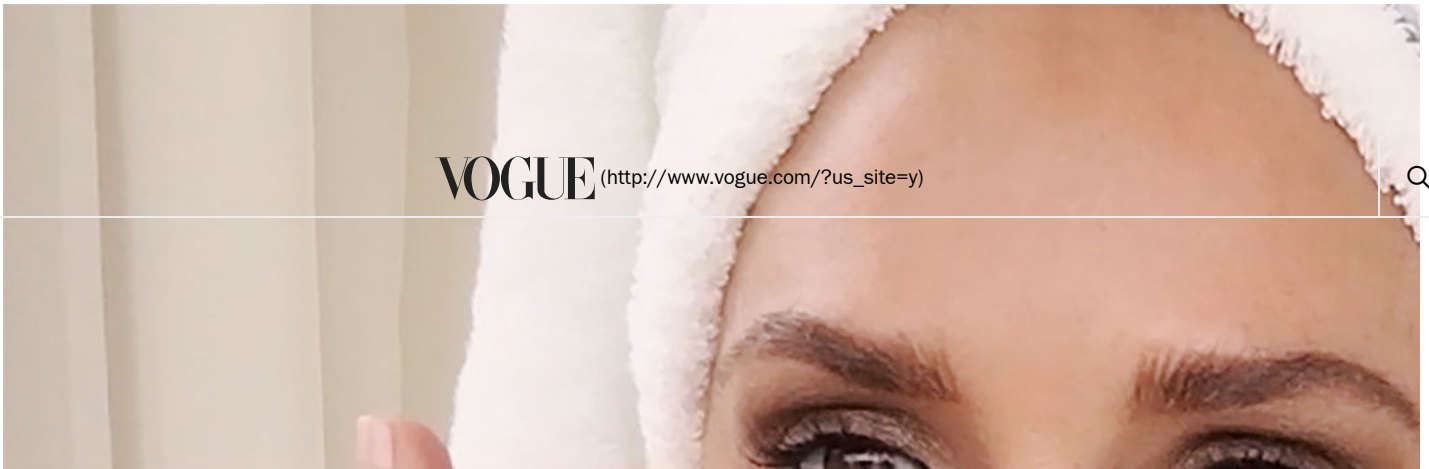
#### Panic Relief Formula

- 13 drops lavender essential oil
- 5 drops bergamot essential oil
- 2 drops valerian essential oil

When all else fails and you’re frozen, this blend promotes “deep relaxation,” according to Barrett. Here’s hoping tonight’s results will render it unnecessary in the short term.



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