



Heard about oil pulling? Read more about it in **Oil-Swishing Craze**, one of the top articles on the Oral Care channel.

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## YOUR SMILE

# Shell Out?

SHOULD YOU TRY OIL PULLING? WE EXPLORE THE ANCIENT TECHNIQUE TO SEE IF IT'S ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE

By Colleen Oakley

Maybe you've seen something about it on the Internet, or a friend of a friend swears by it—but you're not sure exactly what it is. Oil pulling is a growing trend but it's not exactly new. "This oral therapy is a type of Ayurvedic medicine [a traditional Indian system] that dates back 3,000 years," says Jessica T. Emery, DMD, owner of Sugar Fix Dental Loft in Chicago. "It involves swishing approximately one



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tablespoon of oil—typically coconut, sesame, or sunflower oil—in your mouth for about 20 minutes and then spitting it out."

And unlike some so-called natural home remedies, it's not a practice that's based on pseudo-science. Recent studies show that oil pulling reduces gingivitis, plaque, and microorganisms that cause bad breath. How? "Most microorganisms inhabiting the mouth consist of a single cell," Emery says. "Cells are covered with a lipid, or fatty, membrane, which is the cell's skin. When these cells come into contact

with oil, a fat, they naturally adhere to each other."

Want to give it a try? Follow these tips.

**Use coconut oil.** While you can get the same bacteria-reducing benefits with sesame or sunflower oil, coconut oil has the added benefit of lauric acid, which is well known for its anti-microbial agents, Emery says, making it more effective. Also, a recent study found that coconut oil may help prevent tooth decay.

**Start with just five minutes a day.** Twenty minutes of swishing is a long time, and while the longer you pull, the more bacteria you'll remove, five or 10 minutes will still offer some benefit. Also, if your jaw starts aching a few minutes in, slow down. "Don't work too hard," Emery says. "A gentle swishing, pushing, and sucking the oil through the teeth is all that's required."

**Don't swallow.** "If you find it hard not to, you likely

have too much oil in your mouth," Emery says. "Spit it out and try again with a smaller amount." Also, don't spit it down the sink, as the oil could clog your pipes. Just discard the used oil into the nearest trash can.

**Don't skip brushing and flossing.** "Oil pulling should never replace routine dental visits and traditional home oral care," Emery says. "It doesn't reverse the effects of tooth decay, but it's a great supplemental therapy."

### EXPERT TIP



"Coconut and sunflower oil aren't the only oils with dental health benefits. For irritated, inflamed gums, rub a little vitamin E oil directly on the surface. It's rich in antioxidants, easily absorbed, and helps regenerate healthy gum tissue."—*Jessica Emery, DMD*

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