OIL: From Acne Enemy to Skin Health Hero
by Annet King

In the 80 and 90s, oils were regarded as the enemy. This was mainly due to the low-fat diet fad and the discovery of “comedogenicity”, which sadly involved the slathering on of numerous chemicals and goop to a poor little rabbit’s ears to see if acne would result! A list of potential acne causing ingredients then came about for oily and acne prone skin clients to avoid. Ten years later and oils are now the new skin saviors. I think the consumer opinion may of been swayed not only with improved knowledge about the benefits of oils for health, hair skin and nails, but their fondness for that little Moroccan nut that kissed frizzy ends goodbye.

So from the recent hype of swishing your mouth with oil to pull out germs from your chops, to nightly drops to ward off crow’s feet, to finishing your make up with a smudge of shine on your cheekbones, oils have undoubtedly made a revival. But are oils the way to go? What’s good, what’s bad and what’s just trendy hype? Let’s review.

Oil Pulling: Healthy or Hype?

The hot trend and daily act “oil pulling” involves swishing an oil (like sesame or coconut) around your mouth for 15 to 20 minutes and then spitting it out to help release toxins, kill bacteria, improve gum health, bad breath, whiten teeth, and even relieve temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. Some claim skin improvements like clearing up acne, eczema and psoriasis; as well as reducing allergies. Originating from the holistic practice of Ayurveda that dates back some 5000 years ago, the majority of techniques and practices involve the use of warm oils for massage and orifice cleansing and balancing. Oil pulling, which today is recommended by some doctors, nutritionists and alternative health practitioners, is certainly a lot more doable than the “don’t try this at home kids” practice of “Netra basti” that involves the pouring of hot clarified butter into your eye! Western society has adapted the traditional Ayurveda practices of Kavala and Gandusha that were used where brushing might be contraindicated due to mouth ulcers or the nauseous types.

Does It Work and Should You Try It?

There have been a couple of studies that show that it does reduce plaque and help gingivitis. As I firmly believe that the skin and organs are linked, improving bacteria health in the gut might help with your skin especially if all else has seemed to fail. My best advice is try it for a week and see if it helps, but this is not likely to be a cure all for serious skin ailments! Following a healthy diet, having a solid daily skin regimen and using the right products directly and topically on your skin is still a must.
Oil-based Skin Products: To Be or Not To Be?

I have to start out by saying that not all oils are created equal, there’s good and there’s bad. If you have oily, acne prone skin you will want to avoid the bad ones.

BAD

Bad being what could be potentially the synthetic cheap stuff (the margarine of skincare) and petroleum derived oils. These are cheaper alternatives to natural plant oils and have little to no skin benefits. Mineral oil, a byproduct of petroleum, comes in many forms; but it can be occlusive to the skin, trapping cells and creating whiteheads, what we call milia in the trade. These little suckers are tough to get out and might need professional exfoliation, or a trip to the dermatologist office. Isopropyl Linoleate, Isostearate and Myristate is used in so called “oil free” products, but is what we call a creepy crawler as it enters your follicles just to irritate them. All these are on bad list as they are considered acnegenic or comedogenic because they cause blackheads and irritate follicles – bad for oily / acne prone types.

Tip: Stop removing your eye makeup with baby oil. If you are breakout or acne prone, avoid these ingredients in your skin and makeup products.

GOOD

Botanically derived from seeds, nuts, kernels and the flesh of plants, these types of oils have numerous skin benefits and can range from light to heavier in texture. Predominantly they are all moisturizing and good at restoring lost barrier lipids that get stripped away by overzealous washing, air travel and harsh environments. They are also jam-packed with antioxidants, polyphenols and vitamins so help to protect your skin from environmental stress. In fact, when used for cleansing they help to dissolve waxy, fatty deposits (sebum) in the follicle – not clog it! Oil dissolves oil, so it’s an excellent cleansing aid for dirty, congested acne prone skin.

Tip: For oily skin, try a cleansing oil prior to your foaming treatment cleanser. For dry skin, add a few drops of an oil-based concentrate or serum to your moisturizer. And for aging skin, use an overnight oil serum that also has peptides and essential oils. Look for these skin friendly oils in your cleansers, serums and moisturizers: Olive, Kukui Nut, Apricot Kernel, Grape Seed, Argan, Rosehip Seed and Evening Primrose.

AWESOME

Essential oils wildly used for their aromatherapeutic qualities are extracted by various methods – from steaming to squeezing from plants, roots or flowers. Aromatherapy oils are costly for the real thing and are actually not really oils at all, they are pure plant alcohols and are more watery in texture than oily. They can even burn your skin if used undiluted or not blended into a base carrier oil, they are highly volatile which makes them great for infusing or vaporizing at home; but will evaporate in as snap so don’t
leave the lid off your favorite grapefruit oil. They treat a multitude of skin issues while also being able to help with bodily functions, stress, sleep, PMS, appetite and mood.

**Tip:** From calming, purifying, regenerating skin to fighting bacteria, their use in skin care is bountiful. They are wonderful ingredients in skin, hair and body care; and as their aromatherapy properties impart natural aromas, there’s no need for you to buy or use products with artificial fragrance ever again.