The Benefits of Oil Pulling

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Many Americans reach for mouthwash as part of their daily morning routine, but over the last few years, more and more people have been swapping that dental hygiene mainstay for something a little more unconventional: oil. The ancient practice of oil pulling has been steadily growing in popularity as people seek to reap its many associated dental health benefits.

Rooted in Ayurvedic medicine, a holistic healing system developed thousands of years ago in India, oil pulling was first used to boost oral health before the advent of the toothbrush. Oil pulling is the act of swishing oil (usually coconut or sesame) in the mouth for up to 20 minutes. Advocates say oil pulling can help loosen and remove plaque, while also helping to extract toxins and harmful bacteria from the mouth. As such, it helps balance the microorganisms in the mouth, which can help prevent cavities, and promote healthy teeth and gums. Specifically, oil pulling can help:

* Prevent bad breath
* Prevent tooth decay
* Reduce plaque-related gingivitis
* Improve bleeding gums
* Whiten teeth
* Reduce inflammation
* Heal cracked lips
* Boost the immune system
* Strengthen gums
* Reduce plaque
* Decrease tooth sensitivity

To date, there are only seven studies on the health benefits of oil pulling. One source calls oil pulling a “powerful detoxifying technique” with “the ability to purify the entire system” because each section of the tongue is connected to different organ systems such as the kidney, lungs, liver, heart, small intestine, stomach, colon, and spine, similarly to reflexology. According to research from the Department of Pediatric Dentistry, oil pulling reduces *Streptococcus mutans* bacteria, which is found in saliva and is a significant contributor to tooth decay. There have been no reports showing that oil pulling has any negative or ill effects on dental fillings.

Most people recommend using a tablespoon of oil and swishing for 20 minutes upon waking in the morning. You do not have to oil pull in the morning, but the best time is before eating.

I prefer coconut oil because I enjoy the taste, and it has many natural antibacterial healing benefits. (You’ll get the most health benefit from organic virgin coconut oil, so it is best to avoid any coconut oil that has been processed or refined.)

Initially, it may be difficult to swish for a full 20 minutes. If you find that to be the case, begin gradually -- use a teaspoon of oil and swish for 5 minutes to start. You can increase the amount of oil and length of time as you get accustomed to the process. You can also melt the coconut oil before putting it in your mouth. Many people find it is easiest to oil pull in the shower, since they do not have to talk to anyone or do anything else.

Adding essential oils can help improve the taste and increase healing. Make sure that any oil you use is safe to use internally. For everyday use you can add a few drops of lemon, peppermint or wild orange. When battling an infection or sickness, you can mix cinnamon, tea tree, and clove as a homeopathic remedy.

After you gently swish the amount of oil you can handle in your mouth, be sure to spit the oil in the trash (not the sink or drain because it will solidify and clog the plumbing). It is critically important that you **do not swallow the oil** because, as you swish it around in your mouth, it draws toxins out of your teeth and gums that you do not want to ingest. After spitting out the oil, you can rinse with warm water and use sea salt for added antimicrobial properties. Then, brush and floss as normal. For best results, you can oil pull 3 to 4 times a week. You should notice a difference with your breath, teeth and mouth within a week.

Oil pulling can be an effective tool to help maintain, and even improve, your oral health. I encourage you to try it, as it is one of the best ways to remove bacteria and promote healthy teeth and gums.