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Countless Uses for Coconut Oil – The Simple, the Strange, and the Downright Odd

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By Dr. Mercola

Coconut oil has been a dietary and beauty staple for millennia. It's a powerful destroyer of all kinds of microbes, from viruses to bacteria to protozoa, many of which can be harmful, and provides your body with high-quality fat that is critical for optimal health.

Around 50 percent of the fat in coconut oil is lauric acid, which is rarely found in nature. In fact, coconut oil contains the most lauric acid of any substance on Earth.

Your body converts lauric acid into monolaurin, a monoglyceride that can actually destroy lipid-coated viruses such as HIV and herpes, influenza, measles, gram-negative bacteria, and protozoa such as giardia lamblia.

This is undoubtedly part of what makes it so medicinally useful—both when taken internally and applied externally.

Coconut oil is comprised of medium chain fatty acids (MCFAs) that are easily digested and readily cross cell membranes. MCFAs are immediately converted by your liver into energy rather than being stored as fat. This is in part why I recommend coconut oil as an ideal replacement for non-vegetable carbohydrates.

Coconut oil is easy on your digestive system and does not produce an insulin spike in your bloodstream, so for a quick energy boost, you could simply eat a spoonful of coconut oil, or add it to your food. In the video above, I also share my recipe for a scrumptious yet *healthful* chocolate treat, courtesy of the healthy fat from coconut oil.

To get more coconut oil into your diet, you can add it to your tea or coffee, in lieu of a sweetener. It will also help improve absorption of fat-soluble vitamins, so taking a spoonful of coconut oil along with your daily vitamins may help boost their effectiveness.

Coconut oil is ideal for all sorts of cooking and baking, as it can withstand higher temperatures without being damaged like many other oils (olive oil, for example, should not be used for cooking for this reason).

Furthermore, coconut oil does not go rancid, which is a huge boon when you're making homemade concoctions. Coconut oil that has been kept at room temperature for a year has been tested for rancidity, and showed no evidence of it. Since you would expect the small percentage of unsaturated oils naturally contained in coconut oil to become rancid, it seems that the other (saturated) oils have a powerful antioxidant effect.

General Health Benefits of Coconut Oil

In all, coconut oil offers a truly impressive array of health benefits when included in your daily diet. In addition to its antimicrobial properties, coconut oil is beneficial for:

Promoting heart health	Supporting proper thyroid function
Promoting healthy brain function	Strengthening your immune system
Providing an excellent "fuel" for your body and supporting a strong metabolism that can aid in weight loss	Maintaining healthy and youthful looking skin

While coconut oil is an ideal food for fostering health and beauty from the inside out, it also has a staggering number of other uses, from topical beauty applications to first aid treatments, to general household cleaning.[1, 2] Once you're done reading through this article, you'll probably be inspired to stock up for all eventualities!

Coconut Oil Can Replace Dozens of Beauty and Personal Care Products
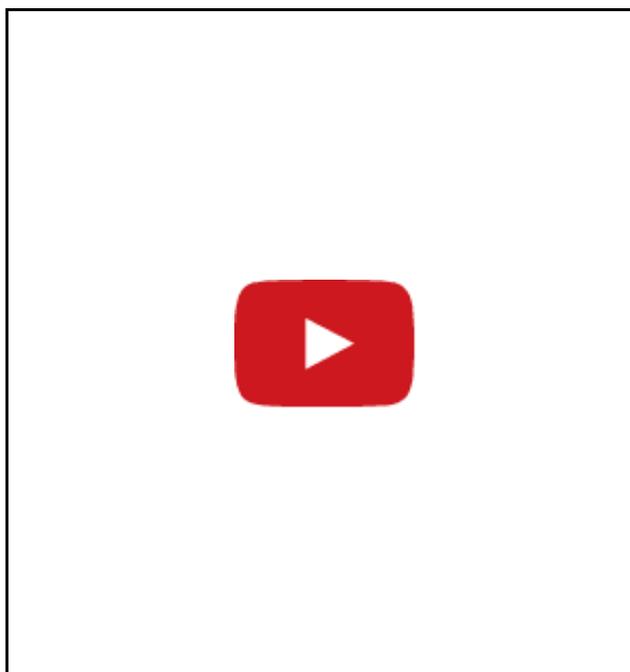
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One of the best personal care products you'll ever find may be sitting in your kitchen cupboard right now. The video above, featuring HolisticHabits[3] blogger and coconut oil aficionado Sarah, recounts many of its beauty uses. The second video includes a recipe making your own coconut oil-based deodorant. A previous article by Delicious Obsessions[4] also lists no less than 122 creative uses for this household staple, including 21 DIY coconut oil skin care recipes.[5] For example, coconut oil can be used to replace the following personal care and beauty products.

Makeup remover: Swipe on with a moist cotton ball. Wipe off with clean cotton ball or wet washcloth.
Facial cleanser: Massage a dollop of coconut oil onto face and neck. Wash off with wet washcloth and pat dry.
Body scrub: Mix equal parts coconut oil with organic cane sugar in a glass jar. Use the scrub on dry skin prior to your shower or bath.
Facial scrub: Instead of sugar, mix coconut oil with baking soda, or oatmeal with a dash of cinnamon, for a

gentle facial scrub.

Shaving lotion: Apply a thin layer of coconut oil on area to be shaved, and shave as usual. The lauric acid in the coconut oil will also serve as an antiseptic for cuts that result from shaving.

Face and body moisturizer: You can use it either by itself, or add your favorite essential oil. (Make sure you're using a high quality essential oil that is safe for topical application.) The featured article[6] also suggests whipping the coconut oil with an electric mixer to produce a fluffy moisturizer that stays soft and spreadable even in cooler temperatures.

When applied topically, coconut oil helps to reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles by helping to keep your connective tissues strong and supple, and aids in exfoliating the outer layer of dead skin cells, making your skin smoother.

Eye cream: Apply a thin layer of coconut oil around your eyes to soften wrinkles and counteract thinning, sagging skin.

Cuticle cream: Simply rub a small amount of coconut oil around your cuticles to soften dry areas.

Deodorant: Applying a small amount of coconut oil directly onto your armpits can help keep odors at bay, courtesy of the oil's antibacterial properties. If you prefer, you can add a small amount of baking soda, or make a homemade deodorant using coconut oil, baking soda and arrow root powder. For directions, see the second video above. DeliciousObsessions.com also lists additional deodorant recipes using coconut oil as the base.[7]

Bath soak: Adding coconut oil to your bath can help moisturize dry itchy skin (Make sure to scrub your tub afterward to prevent slipping!). Make sure the water is warmer than 76 degrees Fahrenheit though, otherwise the oil will turn to a solid.

Soap: Coconut oil is one of the base ingredients in many homemade soap recipes, such as this one by NourishingJoy.com[8]

Lip balm: You can either apply a small amount of coconut oil, as is, or make your own lip balm using coconut oil as one of the base ingredients. You can find all sorts of recipes online, but here's one by The Liberated Kitchen.[9]

Toothpaste: Mixed with baking soda, coconut oil can replace your regular toothpaste. The baking soda will gently cleanse while the coconut oil's antibacterial action may help keep harmful bacteria in check. For recipes using essential oils to spruce up your toothpaste, see DeliciousObsessions.com.[10]

Insect repellent: Mixing coconut oil with high-quality essential oils may help keep biting insects at bay when applied to exposed skin. Effective choices include: peppermint, lemon balm, rosemary, tea tree oil, neem, citronella (Java Citronella), geraniol, catnip oil (according to one study,[11] catnip oil is 10 times more effective than DEET), and/or clear vanilla oil

Hair's Best Friend

Coconut oil is also known for its hair benefits.[12] Most women seem to prefer using it as a pre-shampoo conditioner. Simply massage the coconut oil onto dry hair and leave on for about an hour or longer. You could even leave it on overnight. Just wear a shower cap to protect your pillow. Then, wash and style as usual.

When applied in this manner, the coconut oil inhibits the penetration of water into the hair strands, which would otherwise cause the cuticle, or surface of the hair shaft, to rise, making it prone to damage and breakage. Furthermore, when applied as a pre-wash treatment, a small amount of the coconut oil is able to penetrate deeper into the hair shaft during the wash, when the hair fiber swells slightly.

This can also explain why so many rave about the oil's ability to prevent "the frizzies" in humid weather—this is another feature of its hydrophobic activity. More porous types of hair may find coconut oil particularly beneficial, such as African and chemically treated hair, as well as those suffering with any type of scalp problems, including dandruff.

Oral Health Benefits
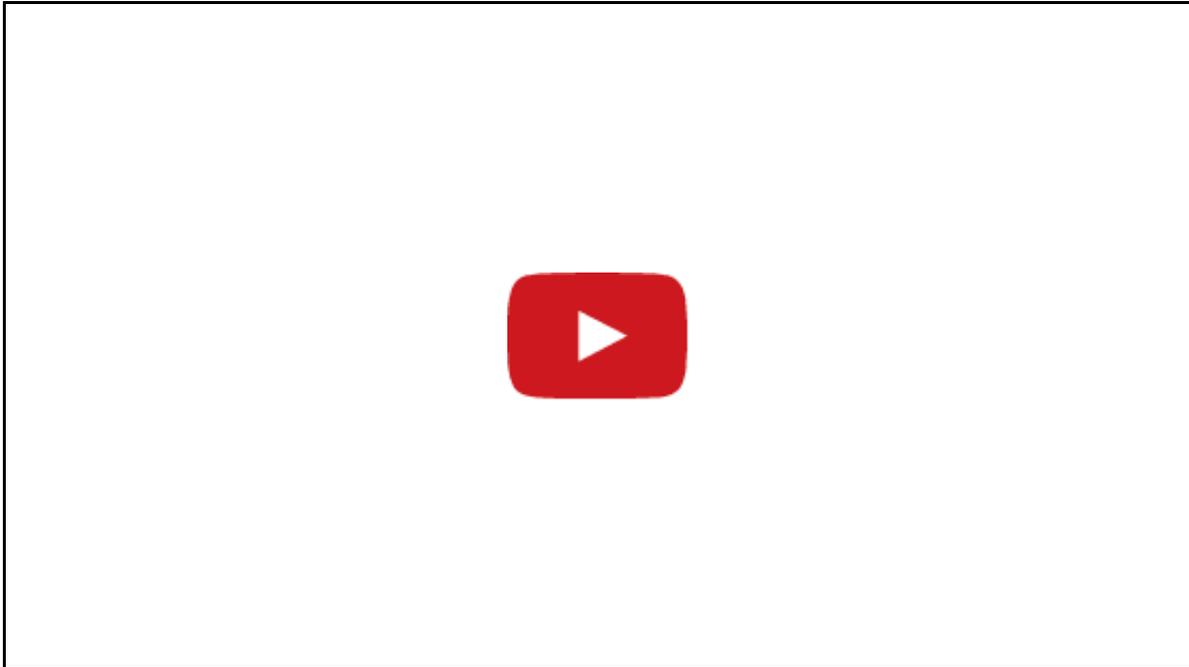
As mentioned above, coconut oil mixed with baking soda makes for very simple and inexpensive, yet effective, toothpaste. It's also a great alternative if you want a fluoride-free toothpaste but don't want to spend the extra money, since they tend to cost more than most regular, fluoridated toothpaste brands.

Another oral health technique where I believe coconut oil can be quite beneficial is oil pulling. This technique has significantly reduced my plaque buildup, allowing me to go longer between visits to the dental hygienist. (Adding fermented vegetables to my diet has been another game-changer in my oral health.)

Oil pulling is a practice dating back thousands of years, having originated with Ayurvedic medicine. When oil pulling is combined with the antimicrobial power of coconut oil, I believe it can be a very powerful health tool. Sesame oil is traditionally recommended, but it has relatively high concentration of omega-6 oils. Therefore, I believe coconut oil is far superior, and, in my mind, it tastes better. But from a mechanical and biophysical perspective, it is likely that both work.

Oil pulling involves rinsing your mouth with the oil, much like you would with a mouthwash. The oil is "worked" around your mouth by pushing, pulling, and drawing it through your teeth for a period of 15 minutes. If you are obsessive like me and want even better results, you can go for 30-45 minutes. This process allows the oil to "pull out" bacteria, viruses, fungi and other debris. The best time is in the morning before eating breakfast, but it can be done at any time. I try to do it twice a day if my schedule allows. When done, spit out the oil and rinse your mouth with water. Avoid swallowing the oil as it will be loaded with bacteria and whatever potential toxins and debris it has pulled out.

When done correctly, oil pulling has a significant cleansing, detoxifying and healing affect, not only for your mouth and sinuses but for the rest of your body as well. Candida and Streptococcus are common residents in your mouth, and these germs and their toxic waste products can contribute to plaque accumulation and tooth decay, in addition to secondary infections and chronic inflammation *throughout* your body. Oil pulling may help lessen the overall toxic burden on your immune system by preventing the spread of these organisms from your mouth to the rest of your body, by way of your bloodstream.

Coconut Oil to the Rescue

Besides its usefulness in the kitchen and bathroom, coconut oil deserves a place in your medicine cabinet as well —again courtesy of its antimicrobial and anti-viral activity. For example, coconut oil may be helpful in the treatment of:

Ear infections: Place a couple of drops into each ear canal. If the coconut oil has solidified, you can easily liquefy it by placing a small amount in a shot glass or other small container and placing it into a cup of hot water	**Skin rashes and irritations**, including chicken pox and shingles: Simply apply a small amount to the affected area
Fungal and/or yeast infections, such as athlete's foot and ringworm. For fungal infections, you can mix in a small amount of oregano oil or tea tree oil	**Bug bites and bee stings**
Cold sores: mix in a small amount of oregano oil, and apply at the first signs	**Frequent nosebleeds** may be improved by regularly applying a small amount to the inside of your nostrils
Thrush	**Hemorrhoids and piles**: You may add a small amount of lavender essential oil for added healing power
Vaginal dryness	**Perineal massage:**[13] Expectant mothers can use it to massage the perineum daily, starting about a month or so before your due date, to help reduce your chances of tearing and/or the need for an episiotomy

Coconut Oil—More Effective Than Permethrin for Head Lice

According to research published in the *European Journal of Pediatrics*,[14] a combination of coconut oil and anise was found to be nearly *twice* as effective as the commonly prescribed permethrin lotion for the treatment of head lice. According to the authors:

> *"We designed a randomized, controlled, parallel group trial involving 100 participants with active head louse infestation to investigate the activity of a coconut and anise spray and to see whether permethrin lotion is still effective, using two applications of product 9 days apart. The spray was significantly more successful (41/50, 82.0%) cures compared with permethrin (21/50, 42.0%...). Per-protocol success was 83.3% and 44.7%, respectively. Thirty-three people reported irritant reactions following alcohol contact with excoriated skin. We concluded that, although permethrin lotion is still effective for some people, **the coconut and anise spray can be a significantly more effective alternative treatment**."* [Emphasis mine]

Isn't it wonderful to see how nature provides us with so many effective solutions to so many of our ills? And does so in a way that is oftentimes *more effective* than our chemical drug concoctions! Another anecdotal Hawaiian head lice treatment[15] is to first soak your hair in vinegar and leave it in to dry (don't rinse). Next, coat your hair with coconut oil over night. I'd recommend sleeping with a shower cap to protect your bedding. The following day, the nits reportedly comb out easily.

14 Surprising Uses for Coconut Oil Around the House

Last but not least, coconut oil can be used for a number of household tasks otherwise relegated to more costly, and potentially toxic, alternatives. Following are 14 creative yet practical uses for this fantastic oil:

1. Clean, condition and sanitize your wooden cutting board. Use whenever the wood starts to

look dry.

2. Use when making compost tea[16] for your garden to reduce foam.

3. Use as a metal polish. Make sure to test a small area first.

4. Moisturize and soften leather goods as you would using other leather conditioners.

5. Season your cast iron pots and pans[17] using coconut oil in lieu of lard or corn oil.

6. Lubricate squeaky hinges and sticky mechanisms with coconut oil instead of WD-40.

7. Clean and condition wooden furniture in lieu of furniture polish. Make sure to test a small area first.

8. Lubricate your guitar strings.

9. Clean soap scum from your shower using a small dollop of coconut oil on a damp cloth. Spray the area with white vinegar and wipe dry with a lint-free cloth.

10. Clean your hands and paint brushes with coconut oil after using oil-based paints, in lieu of mineral spirits.

11. Clean and condition the inside of your car by adding a small amount to a soft lint-free cloth. Rub in and wipe off excess.

12. Clean and sanitize your mouth guard by applying a thin layer of coconut oil. Leave the coconut oil on when not in use. Rinse before using.

13. Cleanse and add a glossy finish to indoor plants by wiping the leaves with a small amount of coconut oil on a lint-free cloth.

14. Remove chewing gum from virtually any area, including carpets and hair.

[+] Sources and References

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