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Coconut Oil for Hair: Use this Food for a New Level of Luster

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By Dr. Mercola

Did you know one of the best personal care products you'll ever find may be sitting in your kitchen cupboard right now?

I'm talking about coconut oil, which is equally beneficial externally as it is taken internally, and can be used for both skin and hair.

The featured coconutoil.com article written by Brian and Marianita Shilhavy discusses several of the lesser-known benefits of coconut oil for your hair.

According to one study, which compared mineral oil, sunflower oil, and coconut oil as possible products for nurturing and conditioning hair, coconut oil was the only oil that reduced protein loss for both damaged and undamaged hair.¹

These findings were true when used as either a pre-wash or post-wash grooming product, but coconut oil achieved the greatest results when used as a pre-wash treatment.

Part of the reason for this is because coconut oil is hydrophobic, meaning it repels water.

So when applied as a pre-wash conditioner, it inhibits the penetration of water into each strand, 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.

According to the study, which was published in the *Journal of Cosmetic Science*:²

"The findings clearly indicate the strong impact that coconut oil application has to hair as compared to application of both sunflower and mineral oils. ...

Both sunflower and mineral oils do not help at all in reducing the protein loss from hair. This difference in results could arise from the composition of each of these oils. Coconut oil, being a triglyceride of lauric acid (principal fatty acid), has a high affinity for hair proteins and, because of its low molecular weight and straight linear chain, is able to penetrate inside the hair shaft.

Mineral oil, being a hydrocarbon, has no affinity for proteins and therefore is not able to penetrate and yield better results. In the case of sunflower oil, although it is a triglyceride of linoleic acid, because of its bulky structure due to the presence of double bonds, it does not penetrate the fiber, consequently

resulting in no favorable impact on protein loss."

More porous types of hair may find coconut oil particularly beneficial, such as African- and chemically treated hair. The featured article on coconutoil.com includes a couple of videos demonstrating how some people are using coconut oil for hair care.

Can Coconut Oil Successfully Treat Head Lice?

Another interesting study relating to the use of coconut oil on hair was published in the *European Journal of Pediatrics* two years ago.³ Here, the researchers compared the effectiveness of a coconut oil and anise spray versus 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 the answers 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 from a woman named Linda (quoted in the featured article by Brian and Marianita Shilhavy⁴) 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.

Yet another anecdotal head lice treatment was received from one of my own readers, several years ago, named Patty. She suggests just using a nit comb in lieu of toxic chemical treatments like Kwell and Nix. However, in order to be really effective it's best if you can pull the comb through your or your child's hair quickly and smoothly. To address tangles, she suggests using two tablespoons of baking soda in a quart of water. Rinse your hair with the solution after shampooing and leave in, which reportedly leaves your hair silky smooth and easy to comb through.

Coconut Oil as a Skin Moisturizer

One of the core principles to remember when it comes to skin care is that whatever you slather onto your skin will absorb into your body and enter your bloodstream. This is why it's so important to avoid personal care products containing questionable chemicals! Your skin is an *excellent* drug delivery system, so you should be just as careful with what you put on your skin as you are with what you eat, if not more so, as your gut actually helps protect you against some of the toxins you ingest by filtering them out...

I've long advocated using plain organic coconut oil for your skin care needs.

It's been used for decades by professional massage therapists to knead away tight stressed muscles, and coconut oil is well-known for its skin care benefits. It helps protect your skin from the aging effects of free radicals, and can help improve the appearance of skin with its anti-aging benefits.

In fact, physiologist and biochemist Ray Peat, Ph.D. considers coconut oil an antioxidant,⁵ due to its stability and resistance to oxidation and free radical formation. Plus, he believes it reduces our need for the antioxidant protection of vitamin E. Like Dr. Peat, many believe coconut oil may help restore more youthful-looking skin. When absorbed into your skin and connective tissues, it helps reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles by helping to keep your connective tissues strong and supple. It also aids in exfoliating the outer layer of dead skin cells, making your skin smoother.

A Most Beautiful Food...

Clearly, if you're looking for an alternative to toxic personal care products, it doesn't get much better than an otherwise health-promoting *food*. The naturally-occurring saturated fat in coconut oil has many amazing health benefits, including:

Promoting your heart health ⁶	Supporting your immune system health ⁷	Providing you with an immediate energy source ⁸
Aiding weight loss, when needed ⁹	Supporting a healthy metabolism ¹⁰	Supporting the proper functioning of your thyroid gland ¹¹

Part of the "secret" that makes coconut oil such a healthful oil is its high lauric acid content—about 50 percent of coconut oil is lauric acid. This fat is quite rare in nature, and has a unique set of health promoting properties. For example, your body converts lauric acid into monolaurin, which has anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-protozoa properties,¹² which may also help explain its potent healing powers when used topically for skin and scalp issues. Capric acid, another coconut fatty acid present in smaller amounts, has also been found to have antimicrobial activity.

Monolaurin (converted from the lauric acid in your body) is potent enough to destroy lipid-coated viruses such as:

- HIV, herpes
- Measles
- Influenza virus
- Various pathogenic bacteria
- Protozoa such as giardia lamblia

Feeding Your Skin from the Inside Out

Ideally, you'll want to avoid toxins and feed your body with proper nutrition both inside and out. If your diet and overall lifestyle is poor, it tends to be reflected in your skin and hair.

For example, if the skin on the top of your hand is not smooth as a baby's behind, it's a strong indication that your body is deficient in omega-3 fats. I believe most people need to be taking a high quality omega-3 supplement as omega-3 deficiency is as rampant as vitamin D deficiency. My favorite is [krill oil](#), as its overall health benefits surpass that of regular fish oil, largely because it is far more bioavailable, better protected with antioxidants and therefore not rancid, and far more sustainable than fish oil.

Krill oil also naturally contains another excellent skin benefactor, namely astaxanthin—a potent antioxidant that has been identified as being beneficial for your complexion. Not only can [astaxanthin](#) give your skin an attractive glow, it may also help [prevent wrinkles](#) from the inside out, and can help protect your skin against a variety of radiation, both from medical scans and harmful UVA sun rays. Yes, it actually works like an internal [sunscreen](#)!

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Get Your Glow On!

One of the most profoundly effective ways to improve your complexion is by consuming vegetables and fruits that are high in carotenoids. Carotenoids give red, orange and yellow fruits their color, and also occur in green vegetables. Astaxanthin, which is also part of the carotenoids family, is produced only by the microalgae *Haematococcus pluvialis*. It is what gives shrimp and flamingos their pink color, courtesy of the astaxanthin in the algae that is part of their staple diet.

Studies have shown that eating foods with these deeply colored pigments can help make your face actually look healthier than being tanned. In one study, the more red and yellow tones found in the person's skin, the more attractive they were found to be.¹³ The redder tones are caused when people are flushed with blood, particularly if the blood has lots of oxygen in it. Dr. Stephan found that, given the choice between skin color caused by suntan and skin color caused by carotenoids, people preferred the carotenoid skin color, so if you want a healthier and more attractive skin color, you are better off eating a healthy diet.

I'm also convinced that astaxanthin can be a profoundly beneficial supplement for most people, much like omega-3 fat, because of its multi-varied health benefits.

Not only is it a potent antioxidant, but it is probably the most potent natural anti-inflammatory we know of, and it is likely to help prevent cataracts and macular degeneration, the most common cause of blindness in the US. While krill oil contains astaxanthin naturally, it does not contain what is now believed to be therapeutic amounts, so I recommend taking a separate astaxanthin supplement for most people. Studies suggest the ideal dose is around 10-12 mg per day for clinically relevant benefits.

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