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Lately, I have had some clients ask me about oil-pulling. It is being touted by a well-known celebrity as being beneficial giving her a “whiter, oscar winning smile.”

What Is Oil Pulling?

It is the ancient Ayurvedic practice of swishing virgin coconut oil around the mouth for up to 20 minutes.

It is believed the oil acts as a powerful magnet and picks up the bacteria hiding under the crevices in the gums and in the pores and tubules within the teeth.

Does It Work?

People that “oil pull” claim it helps whiten their teeth, alleviates bad breath and even reduces inflammation of their gum tissues. Some feel it has helped with gum and tooth sensitivity as well.

The technique has been used in Indian culture for 3000-5000 years so perhaps it is time that some of the ancient techniques and products be tested in more rigorous scientific settings.

How Do I Perform Oil-Pulling?

It involves swishing approximately 1 tablespoon of oil -- typically coconut, sesame, or sunflower oil -- in your mouth for about 20 minutes and then spitting it out

To me---20 minutes seems like an awfully long time!

If you are able to swish for the whole 20 minutes—great! If not, try and build-up your swishing time in increments. Start with 5 minutes and slowly increase your time.

- Swish gently. If your jaw starts aching after five minutes, slow down. You’re working too hard!
- Do not swallow the oil while swishing. If you find it hard not to, you likely have too much oil in your mouth. Spit it out and try again with a smaller amount
- Once you have finished pulling, spit the solution into the trash. Do not discard the oil in the sink or down the toilet because over time the oil may build up and clog the pipes
- Do not drink anything before rinsing your mouth. Rinse with water first before consuming a beverage.

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My Professional Opinion

It is my feeling that more research and larger scale studies are needed to legitimize oil pulling. My research indicates there have only been a few published clinical trials to date.

[A 2008 study by Asokan et al.](#)

In conclusion, if you want to try oil pulling---go ahead BUT use it in conjunction with regular brushing and flossing.

I did come across one other paper which reported an increased risk of recurrent [lipoid pneumonia from oil pulling](#). Lipoid pneumonia is a chemical lung disease caused by breathing in small amounts of oil. The long duration of mouth swishing with oil recommended by oil pulling advocates may increase the risk of developing this type of pneumonia.

No matter how “natural” and “ancient” a treatment is---you should not assume it is entirely without risk.