

# How Castor Oil Can Simplify Your Beauty Regimen

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Castor oil is an unsaturated omega-9 fat derived from the seeds of the castor plant; it is well-known for having a distinctive, unpleasant taste
- › Castor oil has been used for millennia as a fuel and to treat medical conditions, most notably digestive issues such as constipation
- › While most of the evidence for its effectiveness is anecdotal, castor oil is beneficial as a facial cleanser and moisturizer due to its anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties
- › Castor oil has also been shown to promote hair growth, including eyebrows and eyelashes, and strengthen cracked and weak nails

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published January 6, 2018.***

Castor oil is a translucent vegetable oil with a yellow tint that is derived from the seeds of the castor plant. It is an unsaturated omega-9 fat well-known for having a distinctive, nauseating taste. Depending on your age, you may remember being forced to drink castor oil, perhaps to relieve constipation, which some thought was associated with a child's unpleasant mood.

Despite its strong taste, castor oil has been used for millennia to treat medical conditions — most notably digestive issues, including constipation and dysentery. In modern times, castor oil continues to be used in laxatives, as well as in a wide variety of everyday items — from cleaning products, coatings and cosmetics to paints, plastics and perfumes.

Although some users of castor oil complain of negative reactions, such as itching, rashes and swelling, others praise it for its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial and moisturizing effects. If you have not yet tried castor oil, you may want to consider using it for your face and skin, particularly as part of the oil cleansing method.

## **Castor Oil Has Long Been Used as a Fuel and Laxative**

Castor oil is made by pressing the seeds of the castor plant (*Ricinus communis*), which is native to India and has since appeared in tropical areas within Africa and Asia. It has a long history of use as a fuel and a laxative.<sup>1,2</sup> In India, the use of castor seed oil as a laxative and a fuel for lamps dates back to 2000 B.C. Castor oil is known as a cleanser and purifier in Ayurvedic tradition, which also promotes it as a cure for arthritic diseases.

Castor seed oil was also used as a fuel and laxative by the Greeks, as well as the Egyptians, in whose ancient tombs castor seeds have been found. It appeared in Europe during the early Middle Ages for similar applications, and later fell into disuse.

Today, castor oil is found in hundreds of cosmetic products. It continues to be regarded for its laxative effects and is sometimes still used to induce labor. It also has many industrial uses such as in the production of nylon and other synthetic fibers, as well as resins. Castor oil is found in food containers, insulation, motor oil, paint, plastics, soap and varnish.<sup>3</sup>

## **Castor Oil's Effects on Your Body**

Castor oil is a triglyceride composed of fatty acids, 90% of which is ricinoleic acid. It is broken down into ricinoleic acid in your small intestine, which speeds up the process of digestion and elimination. Beyond its laxative effects, castor oil is also known for possessing the following characteristics as it relates to your face and skin:<sup>4</sup>

- **Anti-inflammatory** — Because castor oil and ricinoleic acid have known anti-inflammatory properties, they are useful in treating irritated skin, including acne,

dermatosis and psoriasis.

- **Antimicrobial** – Research published in the International Journal of Molecular Medicine and Advance Sciences affirmed castor oil's antimicrobial properties, finding it to be an effective agent against bacterial infections resisting invading pathogens. The study authors said:<sup>5</sup>

*“The seed extract of the castor oil plant inhibited the growth of Bacillus subtilis, Staphylococcus aureus (ATCC15156), Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Salmonella typhi and Escherichia coli. Also, growth of Candida albicans was inhibited by a crude extract of Ricinus communis (castor oil) seeds.”*

- **Cleansing** – Castor oil is naturally astringent and helps pull impurities from your skin. It has even been shown to be effective in cleansing not only oily but also acne-prone skin.
- **Moisturizing** – Due to its oily nature, castor oil adds a protective layer that prevents water from leaving your skin. The presence of triglycerides also help maintain moisture.

Before applying castor oil to your face or skin, it's important to do a skin test to see if any adverse reactions occur. In those with sensitivities, castor oil has been known to cause itching, rashes and swelling. If you have an allergic reaction, stop using castor oil immediately and, if necessary, seek medical attention.

Due to its strength, as well as to aid in its absorption, you should dilute castor oil in an organic carrier oil prior to applying it to your body. Although you may need to experiment to find the right one, some recommend choosing a carrier oil based on your skin type:<sup>6,7</sup>

- **Dry skin** – Use coconut oil or sesame oil as your carrier oil
- **Normal skin** – Use grapeseed oil or olive oil
- **Oily skin** – Use jojoba oil

## **Castor Oil Nourishes Dry, Aging Skin**

Castor oil has a remarkable effect on all skin types. Due to the presence of vitamin E, castor oil offers antioxidants that help moisturize your skin while reducing the signs of aging. Since castor oil has a low comedogenic score, it is unlikely to clog your pores. Assuming you do not have a sensitivity to castor oil, you can use it regardless of your skin type because it does not promote acne or blackheads.

Applying castor oil daily (or nightly) during the winter months can be especially helpful because that is when your skin is driest and in the most need of nourishment. While there is very little scientific research to support its skin-enhancing benefits, plenty of anecdotal evidence suggests castor oil:<sup>8</sup>

**Heals chapped lips** – Due to its high viscosity, castor oil provides a thick layer of moisture and nourishment to chapped, cracked or dry lips. You can apply castor oil to your lips proactively to prevent chapping. For this reason, castor oil is found in many commercial lip care products.

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**Nourishes dry skin** – Castor oil soothes dry, flaky or scaly skin, adding moisture and soothing relief. The presence of fatty acids helps your skin stay healthy and glowing.

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**Prevents stretch marks** – Because it works as a humectant, castor oil helps your skin retain moisture and elasticity, which prevents stretch marks.

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**Reduces wrinkles and other signs of aging** – Castor oil is an effective remedy for crow's feet, fine lines and wrinkles because it helps stimulate the production of collagen and elastin, which promote younger looking, radiant skin. It also treats hyperpigmentation, clearing your skin of age spots and other unsightly marks. Using castor oil can also diminish the signs of blemishes and scars. You might even try it on skin tags and warts.

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**Softens calluses** – Because it is a thick oil, castor oil has beneficial effects on calluses, corns and cracked heels. It adds moisture and softens tough, dry skin anywhere on your body.

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**Treats sunburn** – Due to its anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties, castor oil reduces swelling and soothes blisters resulting from sunburn.

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## **Castor Oil Promotes Hair Growth**

Similar to its purported benefits for your skin, scientific evidence for castor oil's positive effects on your hair are mainly anecdotal. That said, this versatile oil has been shown to deeply condition your hair and thicken hair strands. If you have fine hair, castor oil can help build up individual hair strands, giving them a fuller and more vibrant appearance. Similar to a deep-conditioning treatment, you can use castor oil to control and reduce split ends.

Due to its follicle-stimulating and nourishing properties, castor oil is believed to thicken your eyebrows and eyelashes as well. It provides the fatty acids, protein, vitamins and other nutrients your hair follicles need to stimulate hair growth. While it will take several weeks, you can begin thickening your eyebrows simply by rubbing a drop or two of castor oil into them at night before you go to bed. Continue this treatment until your eyebrows reach the desired thickness.

Beyond its positive effects on your skin and hair, some suggest castor oil can strengthen weak and cracked nails. Applying castor oil regularly to your nails is also believed to reduce your risk of fungal infection. Although nail problems such as thin or brittle nails may be a sign of illnesses like hypothyroidism, I see no harm in trying castor oil on your nails.

Particularly if your nails chip, crack, peel or split as a result of long-term nail polish use or repeated exposure to moist conditions, including frequent dishwashing or swimming, castor oil may be just what they need.

## **Have You Tried the Oil Cleansing Method?**

While it may sound counterintuitive, cleansing your face with oil is just what your skin needs. If you've never heard about or tried the oil cleansing method, now is the time to become informed. While castor oil is the perfect oil to use with this method, you'll need a secondary oil and the patience to do some experimenting.

It will take a few tries to figure out which types and blends of carrier oils work best for your skin type, especially if you are dealing with any particular skin-related issues.

You might start with a blend containing 25% castor oil to 75% carrier oil and adjust from there. Create very small batches, such as 1 teaspoon castor oil and 3 teaspoons carrier oil, until you figure out the right blend for you. In performing this method, there is no need to wet your face or remove your makeup. Start "as is" and perform the cleanse as follows.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Applying the oil blend to your face:**

- Place a teaspoon of your oil blend in your hand and rub your hands together to warm it
- Massage the oil gently onto your face using circular strokes for about two minutes
- Leave the oil on your skin for up to 10 minutes if you want a deeper cleansing of your pores; simply relax while you wait

#### **Removing the oil from your face:**

- Soak a clean washcloth with very hot tap, wring it out and drape it across your face (no scrubbing is required)
- Leave the washcloth on until it cools; the heat will gently open your pores
- Rinse and reapply the hot washcloth once or twice more, as desired

Repeat this deep cleansing method on a regular basis, but not too often. Try it two to three times a month and adjust up or down from there. If your skin becomes overly dry, you are probably cleansing too frequently. Also, don't be surprised if it takes a few treatments for your skin to adjust and achieve balance. Initially, your pores will be

sending out blockages, impurities and oil in a good amount, which you may take as a sign the cleansing is doing more harm than good.

Even if it doesn't seem like the cleanse is working, it is. In time, you will see positive results as your skin adjusts and becomes healthier. After a few treatments, any signs of redness or irritation will subside and your face will begin to achieve a healthy, radiant glow.

## **Benefits of Adding Essential Oils to the Oil Cleansing Method**

The website Castor Oil Review provides the following recipe for a castor oil face cleanser you can use when performing the oil cleansing method described above.<sup>10</sup> The beauty of this recipe is the addition of essential oils, which are highly concentrated, non-water-soluble phytochemicals distilled from the flowers, leaves or roots of plants. Essential oils are potent and thought to contain extensive healing properties.

### **Ingredients**

- 1/4 cup castor oil
- 1/4 cup virgin olive oil
- 6 drops of frankincense, geranium or lavender essential oil

### **Procedure**

1. Place all ingredients in a glass jar
2. Close lid tightly and shake well to combine the oils
3. Use this oil blend in the oil cleansing method outlined above

Besides the outstanding benefits of the castor oil itself, this blend provides the following benefits from each of the other oils:

- Olive oil provides restorative and moisturizing properties that improve your skin's elasticity and reduce under-eye wrinkles. It also contains antioxidants and good fats to fight free radicals and facilitate healing.
- Frankincense essential oil promotes healthy cell regeneration and keeps existing cells and tissues healthy. It can help treat dry skin, reverse signs of aging and reduce the appearance of scars and stretch marks.
- Geranium essential oil has antiseptic properties that help speed up the wound healing and treat a variety of skin problems, such as burns, eczema and fungal infections. It helps eliminate the appearance of scars and dark spots by improving blood circulation just below the surface of the skin and promoting an equal distribution of melanin.
- Lavender essential oil is known for its anti-inflammatory, antifungal, antidepressant, antiseptic, antibacterial and antimicrobial properties. It is useful in the treatment of acne, eczema, psoriasis and wrinkles, as well as cuts and burns. Lavender essential oil also promotes relaxation.

## **Beware of the Castor Plant and Its Seeds**

While castor oil is regarded for its many healing properties, you should know the castor plant contains a potent poison called ricin. Ricin is found in raw castor beans and the "mash" left behind after castor oil has been processed. Intaking ricin orally, nasally or via intravenous transfusion, can kill you. According to Popular Science:<sup>11</sup>

*"Ricin, a toxic protein, infects cells, blocking their ability to synthesize their own protein. Without cells making protein, key functions in the body shut down; even in survivors, permanent organ damage is often the result of ricin poisoning.*

*It's a highly unpleasant way to be poisoned: Within six hours, according to the Center for Disease Control, victims who have ingested ricin will feel gastrointestinal effects like severe vomiting and diarrhea, which can lead to serious dehydration. Then the ricin infects the cells of the vital gastrointestinal*



*organs as they pass through the body, leading to the failure of the kidneys, liver and pancreas."*

Ricin is so potent that ingesting or inhaling 1 milligram of it may be fatal,<sup>12</sup> just as eating four to eight castor seeds can lead to death.<sup>13</sup> Given there is no antidote for ricin, it is commonly used as a chemical warfare agent. In 2013, there were reports of ricin being mailed to U.S. senators and former President Barack Obama.<sup>14</sup>

While ricin is highly toxic, you need not worry about the risk of ricin poisoning from castor oil. Ricin is extracted from castor seeds during the manufacturing process. The International Journal of Toxicology<sup>15</sup> affirms product safety, confirming ricin does not "partition" into the oil. This explains how castor oil can be added to cosmetic products without any toxic effects.

## **Castor Oil Contraindications**

That said, do not use castor oil if you are pregnant as it has been shown to induce labor. If you are using it as a laxative, do so only under the direction of your physician. Do not use castor oil if you are recovering from surgery, or if you suffer from digestive problems such as colitis, cramps, diverticulitis, hemorrhoids, irritable bowel syndrome or ulcers.

Finally, make sure you purchase organic, cold-pressed castor oil from a reputable source. Much of the commercial castor oil sold in stores comes from castor seeds heavily sprayed with pesticides or processed with solvents such as hexane, making it the last thing you'd want to apply to your skin.

## **Sources and References**

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- <sup>2, 3</sup> [New World Encyclopedia, Castor Oil Plant](#)
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- <sup>11, 14</sup> [Popular Science, April 17, 2013](#)

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