People Swear by Oil Pulling for Cleaner Teeth—but Is It Actually Safe? We Asked Dentists

Swishing coconut oil for 20 minutes might actually be worth the hype.

It may be an ancient tradition, but oil pulling has gained traction in the holistic wellness world recently. This alternative oral care practice—which involves swishing and spitting oil, similar to mouthwash—is thought by many to improve oral and dental health. But does it actually work, and is it safe to do? Here, dentists help demystify the process and purported benefits of oil pulling.

Is oil pulling safe?

With no known health risks of oil pulling, it's a generally safe practice. (Just be sure not to swallow the oil, which could upset your stomach.) "Oil pulling is absolutely safe, beneficial, and healthy," Dr. Huang says. "It's a great way to keep your teeth clean and white naturally, and also helps produce additional saliva, which helps keep bad breath at bay."

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[Alex Rubinov](#), DDS, a dentist in New York City, explains that oil pulling works like liquid floss. "It's a wonderful way to create a more favorable microbiome in your mouth and make sure there's no harmful bacteria hiding in the crevices of your mouth and between your teeth," he says. "There are no known contraindications to incorporating oil pulling into your daily life, but you might feel a texture change in your mouth from the properties of coconut oil, although most people enjoy the smooth, gliding feel."

What's the right way to practice oil pulling?

If you're new to the practice, Dr. Rubinov suggests swishing one teaspoon of coconut oil in your mouth for five minutes daily. Eventually, you can try to work your way up to 20 minutes per day for maximum benefits.

"Try it as a weekend spa treatment for your mouth and see how you like it," he says. "It's definitely not for everyone, but it's often hard already to get people to floss daily and brush twice, so I would encourage anyone to give it a try and see if it's for them."