

# TOOTHFULLY. *speaking*



Dr. Preety Desai

## OIL PULLING: WHAT'S THE REAL TRUTH?

I get asked about “oil pulling” weekly in my office. It is the reality of life that people become disheartened with the drudgery of regular dental cleanings or even feel the desire to take over one’s own oral health (which I am all for!) that leads people to question the regularity of dental cleanings. With the widespread resistance to antibiotics and the polypharmacy that patients are prescribed, patients are more interested in a natural/holistic/alternative approach to health care.

I have a number of patients who have said they practice “oil pulling” as part of their oral hygiene regime which involves a 15 minute rinse with coconut oil after brushing and flossing. Both had fairly good periodontal health to begin with and only minor gum recession - but no active inflammation and yes both had been “oil pulling” for several years. Research is unclear as to “oil pulling” added any improvement beyond conventional oral hygiene regimen, but there is also a consensus that it did not seem to cause any harm or abnormal tissue conditions. And does it really make a difference if you “pull” for 1 minute, 5 minutes or the full 15 minutes according to Ayurvedic protocol?

Historically, oil pulling therapy has been used extensively as a traditional Indian Ayurvedic remedy for strengthening teeth, gums, and jaws but also to prevent decay, oral malodor, bleeding gums and dryness of throat, and cracked lips. Research has shown that all kinds of chewing sticks described in ancient Ayurveda texts have medicinal and anti-cariogenic properties (sanguinaria root); but the same cannot be said about oil pulling for periodontal health. The ancient thought was that the healing affects of “coconut oil” could “pull toxins” out of the depths of the gums to heal the gums and teeth. A basic knowledge of oral biology and physiological make up of these microscopic areas, will lead to an understanding that it is physically impossible to reach the depths of a 5-6mm periodontal pocket let alone a 7-9mm pocket.

What does make sense is that the oil and lignans isolated from sesame and coconut oil have a saponification or emulsification effect during oil-pulling therapy but studies have proven NO antibacterial affect on strep mutans or strep mitis (the main cavity causing bacteria). What this means is that the slippery texture of the oils prevent NEW plaque from adhering to the tooth surface but this only affects the supragingival (above the gums) plaque not the subgingival (below the gums) plaque that 75% of people have. Thus overall bleeding and plaque buildup above the gum line was lowered but not below the gum. Thus the “oil pulling” had no ability to “pull” any toxins - just prevent new toxin buildup!

So pull to your heart’s content if you so desire, but don’t think you can replace your hygienist or dentist regularly!



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