



Can You Use Essential Oils To Get Rid Of Cold Sores?

Here's the lowdown on the popular natural remedy.

BY KORIN MILLER July 10, 2017



"I'm so happy I have a cold sore!" said no one, ever. So it's understandable that you'd want to do whatever you can to get rid of one if it pops up. If you search online for quick-fix remedies, you may notice one thing in particular keeps popping up: People swear essential oils can help get rid of cold sores.

In case you're not familiar with them, essential oils are natural oils that come from plants, and they smell amazing. There are a slew of different essential oils you can try to treat just about anything, but people are specifically recommending bergamot, chamomile, eucalyptus, lavender, tea tree oil, and a few others for cold sores.

The idea of treating a cold sore with something that smells great is tempting, but is this safe or are you running the risk of ticking off your cold sore and making it even worse?

It can't hurt, says **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. If you get a cold sore every now and again, it's fine to put a little essential oil on your sore. "Essential oils act as an anti-inflammatory that also moisturizes the lips and skin and improves healing," he says.

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, agrees. "Essential oils have been reported to be of benefit in treating a variety of skin conditions, including cold sores," he says, noting that a variety of essential oils have been shown in the lab to exhibit antiviral properties against the herpes simplex virus (HSV), the virus that causes cold sores. "By killing the virus, the oil can help speed healing of the cold sore," he says.

But if you get sores every time you go in the sun or when you're under a lot of stress (i.e. more than every so often), an oral antiviral medication may work better to prevent cold sores when you feel one coming on and decrease the duration of outbreak, Goldenberg says. Also, if you have cold sore outbreaks more than six times a year, taking an oral antiviral daily has been shown to prevent cold sores, he says.

That doesn't mean you can't use essential oils, too—they can still moisturize the area and improve healing, Goldenberg says. (Just a note of caution: Essential oils react with the sun and can cause you to get a burn if you're sitting outside, so don't apply them in the a.m. or before you know you're going to be spending a fair amount of time outdoors.)

So, whether you rarely get a cold sore, or have them crop up pretty often, it's probably not a bad idea to have some essential oil handy. If nothing else, it'll make your face smell amazing.