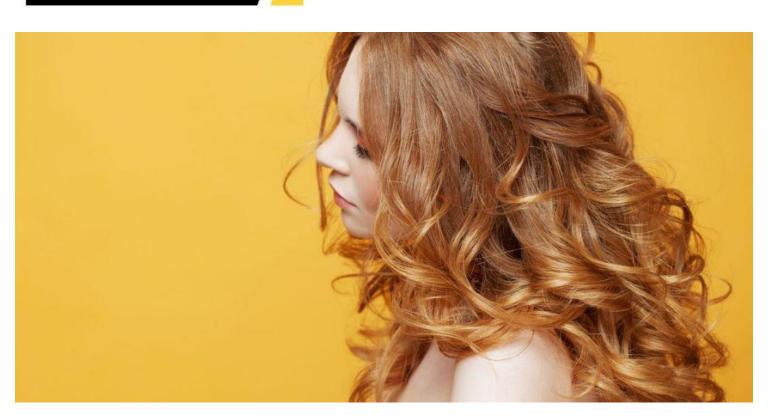Prevention

# Castor Oil Can Give You Seriously Glowing Skin, Prettier Hair, and Healthier Nails

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## From Prevention

You might think that the only person who swears by castor oil as a part of her beauty routine is your 90-year-old grandma. But eventually, everything old becomes new again—including this stuff. Yup, a growing number of natural beauty buffs are swearing by the pale yellow oil as a cure-all for smoother skin, prettier hair, and gorgeous nails.

Just as olive oil comes from olives and coconut oil comes from coconuts, castor oil comes from the beans of the castor plant, also known as *Ricinus communis*. You can easily find it at most drugstores and on Amazon. "Castor oil is widely used in skincare and cosmetic products in a variety of concentrations and for a number of different reasons," says Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in California. Sometimes, castor oil is used for its skin-boosting benefits. Other times, it helps with the actual structure of beauty products, she says.

"Castor oil is a skin-conditioning agent, meaning that it can help make the skin soft and supple," Dr. Bailey says. "It has been shown to penetrate skin and can increase penetration of other ingredients in skincare products."

So, what's the best way to add it to your beauty routine? Here's a look at some of the most commonly touted skin and hair benefits of castor oil, whether they're worth trying, and any side effects to consider.

## What are the benefits of castor oil?



### 1. It hydrates and calms the skin.

The research on castor oil as a skin salve is pretty limited, says Robin Evans, M.D., a clinical instructor of dermatology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and founder of Southern Connecticut Dermatology. However, slathering the stuff on will, at the very least, give your skin a dewy, more youthful glow. "It can function as a lubricant. Moist skin looks better than dry skin—think of a raisin versus a grape," Dr. Evans says.

Some of the benefits are thought to come from ricinoleic acid, an anti-inflammatory fatty acid that boasts antimicrobial and antioxidant properties. "Since dry skin is oftentimes inflamed, the presence of ricinoleic acid is important, as it can decrease inflammation," explains Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. If you struggle with dry skin, he recommends applying castor oil to your skin before bed, or mixing with your go-to moisturizer to use once or twice a day.

It's not the right choice for everyone though. If you have a condition like eczema, findings suggest that castor oil could further irritate your skin. It's also mildly comedogenic—or pore-clogging—so it might exacerbate blackheads and whiteheads if your skin is already oily, says Dr. Evans.

## 2. It can tame frizz for a smoother look.

Because castor oil functions as a lubricant, it can add help make dry, frizzy strands look smoother, Dr. Evans says. But in that respect, you'd likely get the same benefits from any type of oil you might already have in the pantry. Less is more here, otherwise you run the risk of looking greasy.

## 3. Your hair will look seriously shiny.

What's more, castor oil can make your locks a little more lustrous. (It specifically causes a change in the reflection of your hair strands, Dr. Bailey says.) However, it can make your hair mat up, which is why Dr. Bailey recommends diluting it with coconut oil and using it as a hair treatment. Create a one-to-one mix, about two to three tablespoons of each. Then, massage it on your hair, comb it through, and let it sit for a few hours. (You can wear a shower cap to protect your clothes or sheets.) Then, rinse thoroughly.

## 4. It can help reverse hair damage.

Your hair can be damaged by a slew of different things, including harsh shampoo, hair dye, over-drying, and elements in the environment. Castor oil combats this in two different ways, Dr. Goldenberg says: It can hydrate your hair shaft, as well as your hair follicles, which live in your the scalp. And again, it can decrease inflammation going on in your scalp. "I recommend using it as one of the ingredients in a hair mask once per week," Dr. Goldenberg says.

## 5. You can use it to hydrate rough cuticles.

Dry, cracked cuticles don't exactly feel great—and because these bits of skin act as protective grout, it's important to keep the area healthy. "Castor oil, like many oils, is rich is fatty acids that are hydrating by nature," says Dr. Goldenberg. "I recommend applying it before bed time to the cuticles and nail folds."

## 6. It can help make your eyebrows look fuller.

It's the same reason that castor oil can lead to softer hair—it's a hydrating oil. If you want to try it on your eyebrows, Dr. Goldenberg recommends applying a little oil to your brows before bed and gently washing it off in the A.M. It won't necessarily make your brow hairs grow, but it will help condition them to give them a fuller appearance.

## 7. Or, get rid of dandruff with a DIY treatment.

This, once again, goes back to ricinoleic acid and its anti-inflammatory properties, Dr. Goldenberg says. Dandruff is often caused by skin inflammation and castor oil can help soothe the issue, he says. For best results, he recommends applying castor oil to your scalp before bed and sleeping in a shower cap. Then, wash your hair first thing in the morning.

# Are there side effects of castor oil? Who *shouldn't* use it?

Avoid ingesting castor oil if you're pregnant. Castor oil has long been used as a folk remedy to jumpstart labor; in addition to stimulating intestinal contractions, some animal studies suggest that it could trigger contractions in the uterus. Whether it actually works is unclear, but it's better to err on the side of caution and avoid consuming it, says Sherry Ross, M.D., OB/GYN at Providence St. John's Medical Center in Santa Monica, California. But if you're looking to use it for a skin or hair pick-me-up? Dr. Ross says to go right ahead.