

oil pulling rinse

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Oil Pulling Rinse

Swishing oil — traditionally sesame, now usually coconut — around the mouth for ten to twenty minutes, then spitting it out. Oil pulling is an Ayurvedic practice with a long history, a large modern following, and a thin evidence base that is worth setting out plainly.

What it is

The traditional practice, *kavala* or *gandusha*, uses **sesame oil**; the modern commercial version is usually **coconut oil**, sometimes with essential oils or MCT oil added, and sold in sachets or jars.

The proposed mechanisms are two: that the oil **emulsifies with saliva and traps bacteria** in the resulting emulsion, which is then spat out; and that **lauric acid** in coconut oil has antimicrobial activity, including against *Streptococcus mutans*.

Both are chemically plausible. Neither is the same as a demonstrated clinical benefit.

What the evidence actually shows

- **Some small studies report reductions** in plaque scores, gingival indices and *S. mutans* counts, several comparing oil pulling favourably with chlorhexidine.
- **Those studies are mostly small, short, poorly blinded** — blinding a mouthful of oil against a mouthwash is close to impossible — and frequently from a small number of research groups.
- **Professional dental bodies do not recommend it.** The American Dental Association's position is that there is insufficient reliable evidence to support oil pulling as a dental hygiene practice, and it should not replace brushing, interdental cleaning or fluoride.

The honest summary: it is unlikely to be harmful in itself, the mechanism is not absurd, and the evidence does not support replacing anything with it. Twenty minutes a day is a substantial commitment for a benefit that has not been demonstrated.

The genuine cautions

Three, and they are specific rather than theoretical:

1. **Lipoid pneumonia.** Aspirating oil into the lungs causes a chemical pneumonitis, and cases have been reported from oil pulling. **Do not do it while lying down, while distracted, or with children.** Twenty minutes of swishing invites a slip.
2. **Never swallow it.** The whole point is that whatever was captured is spat out.
3. **Never spit it into a sink or a toilet.** Coconut oil is solid below about 24 °C and it **solidifies in the drain.** Spit into a bin.

And the omission that matters most: **it contains no fluoride**, so it does nothing for caries prevention, and someone who has replaced brushing with it has removed the best-evidenced preventive measure in dentistry.

If you do it

Ten to twenty minutes, a tablespoon, seated and upright, gently — vigorous swishing for twenty minutes causes jaw ache. Then spit into a bin, rinse with water, and **brush normally afterwards** with a fluoride toothpaste. As an addition to a routine it is harmless; as a replacement it is not.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(11) oral products** — for a product marketed to cleanse or freshen. **No premarket approval.**

The claims are where this category runs into trouble. **"Whitens teeth", "treats gingivitis", "removes toxins", "cures" anything** are drug claims under FD&C Act sec. 201(g), and marketing oil pulling as a treatment for oral or systemic disease is straightforwardly outside what a cosmetic may say. The **"detox" claim in particular has no mechanism** — there is no toxin being drawn from the body through the oral mucosa.

In the EU, oral cosmetic products fall under Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009, and the **Common Criteria** require claims to be supported by verifiable evidence — a standard this category's claims would struggle against.

Shelf life

12–24 months. Coconut oil is relatively stable; sesame and blended oils go rancid faster, and **oxidised oils are irritants** — a rancid oil held in the mouth for twenty minutes is a poor idea.

A sharp, crayon-like or paint-like smell means it has gone. Single-use sachets avoid the jar-and-fingers problem entirely; a jar dipped into with fingers or a used spoon is contaminated from that moment.

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- [Health and Wellness](#) · [The FDA Isn't That Great](#) — the evidence and regulation context.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.