



# The hype behind facial oils

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**T**he therapeutic benefits of plant oils have been documented for hundreds of years. The properties of medicinal and aromatic plants have been explored for their essential oils.

Essential oils are synthesized and used in a multibillion dollar global market for



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their curative properties, which include antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, chemoprotective, antiproliferative, antiatherogenic, and antidiabetic properties. More than 80% of the global population depends on traditional plant-based medicine for treating health problems.

There are currently over 3,000 known essential oils, among which 300 are commercially available for food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, sanitary, and perfume industries. The extraction of these oils and their use in cosmeceuticals has increased in the last decade, as minor ingredients in creams and skin cleansing preparations.

However, these oils are now being marketed for direct application on the skin. What's the hype about facial oils and why are there hundreds currently on the market?

Contrary to popular belief, oils are not solely for dry skin. Plant-based oils are filled with essential fatty acids, vitamins,

and antioxidants that act to strengthen the skin's protective barrier, prevent free radical damage, and increase skin elasticity. The chemical constituents of plant essential oils differ among species. Factors influencing these constituents include geographical location, environment, and stage of maturity of the plant. Furthermore, the stereochemical properties of essential oils can vary and depend on the method of extraction. There are over fifty different types of fatty acids in oils, and each oil has its own unique composition.

Choosing the right oil, however, is not easy. Most consumers shy away from pure oils because they fear breakouts or increased "oiliness" of their skin. Understanding the properties of the oils can help determine which oils will benefit specific skin types. Argan oil and sunflower oil, for example, are rich in essential fatty acids and vitamin E, which hydrate the skin and have antiaging properties. Tea tree oil has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory qualities which are great for acne-prone skin. Oils such as these are particularly effective if acne medications are used. Acne medications can strip the natural barrier of the skin and without proper hydration excess sebum is produced and can cause clogging of pores.

Skin oils help to repair the skin barrier and train the skin to rebalance itself if overstripped from harsh cleansers or medications. Rosehip seed oil, previously used by Native Americans for its healing properties, has regained popularity because it is a rich source of Vitamin E, C, D, A, and essential fatty acids. Cosmetic preparations of rosehip oil have been used for hydration, scar reduction, stretch marks, and decreasing facial erythema with rosacea.

Essential oils have antiaging properties as well. A study of sixty postmenopausal women who received oral or topical argan oil had significantly improved elasticity of the skin after 60 days, compared with the consumption of olive oil,

which produced no improvement of skin elasticity. Sunflower oil has been used in skin preparations for its rich antioxidant properties, which decrease free radical damage from UV radiation.

The use of oils is multidimensional. Oils are highly effective for removing makeup and are the best source for cleansing of dry, dehydrated, or sensitive skin. Similarly, oils applied to the hair can help restore the natural oils of the hair, which are often stripped from overwashing and from chemical hair treatments. Facial oils also help improve skin hydration and restore the natural barrier of the skin. In addition, facial oils can be used in place of moisturizers or under a moisturizer to help prevent transepidermal water loss in dehydrated or atopic skin.

But these oils have a downside. Fragrant plant-based oils can cause skin irritation, photosensitivity, and potentially, allergic reactions. Consumers with plant-based allergies or sensitive skin should therefore steer clear of fragrant oils and test every oil on their inner forearm prior to applying them on the face.

I am a believer in these products. Oils have come a long way in cosmetic products and their manufacturing process has been improved over the last decade, making them easy to use, noncomedogenic, and nongreasy. They are an essential part of skin care for anyone with inflamed, dry, or irritated skin. More cosmetically elegant than their predecessors, when used correctly, oils are among the best products in the cosmeceutical market today. ■

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