

# BENEFITS OF WHOLE OILS



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**IN AROMATHERAPY OR OTHER** holistic therapies, vegetable oils used for massage are referred to as "carrier oils." The term "carrier" in some ways belittles the practical value and dynamics that lie behind the ubiquitous vegetable oils. Nutritionists have long known the true value of oils and fats and their necessity in our diet. Different vegetable oils have special properties of their own, and aromatherapy has certainly pioneered their use and brought them to prominence

They are largely composed of fatty acids, which in turn are composed of two parts, one fatty and the other acid. Linked together, they are fatty acids. Oils and fats differ from one another, mainly in terms of the amount and variety of fatty acids they contain. Some fatty acids are "essential," meaning that the body cannot synthesize them, but we have to ingest them in order to be healthy. Linoleic acid and linolenic acid are the two essential fatty acids. The quality or the use of the

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in a number of ways. Oils and fats do not have the glamour of essential oils. It is true that they lack the aroma and excitement of essential oils, but they are always there. Indeed, the term "fat," like carrier, is not very exciting.

In reality, oils and fats have astounding benefits and fundamental applications for anyone who is interested in holistic body work. They can actually form the foundation or even the actives in many cosmetic formulas and expensive treatments. Vegetable oils are an intrinsic part of the repertoire of an aromatherapist in most parts of the world. In particular, the UK has promoted the use of vegetable oils as carriers for essential oils used in massage. Essential oils and vegetable oils are, of course, very compatible.

All vegetable oils are defined as lipids. They are organic compounds containing carbon, hydrogen and oxygen.

oil will very often depend upon the fatty acid profile or the fatty acids it contains.

The big question is whether or not the vegetable oil itself contributes anything to a treatment.

Aromatherapists are perhaps today's leading proponents of topical application of oils and fats to the skin. However they have been making a comeback in the skin care industry. One of the newer trends is oil based cleansers, and the therapeutic application of oils to the skin as part of a daily regime, particularly for mature skin. Fats or oils are the major components of cell walls and intracellular membranes, so it is not surprising that these oils are important in skin care. Vegetable oils provide, at the very least, emollient properties to the skin. They are among the oldest health and cosmetic materials known to mankind. They are regularly used and chosen because of their low

incidence of irritation, sensitization and comedogenicity. Moisturizing and softening the skin are basic uses for oils. As we age, our own natural moisture factors do decrease, and so these vegetable oils are a natural replacement. Some oils are absorbed more quickly than others, and some are thicker than others based on their chemical structure. Coconut, for example, can feel greasy due to its saturated fat content. Unless it is fractionated oil, medium touch oils are usually monounsaturated oils such as avocado, almond, olive and sesame. Sunflower and walnut are polyunsaturated oils, and are much thinner and lighter. Logic might tell us that thinner oils could penetrate more easily. However each oil has a certain viscosity, a more accurate term than thickness or thinness. What might be classified as a thick oil can behave very differently when placed on warm skin.

When using the term carriers in reference to describing vegetable oils, we do not just mean that they hold or mix with essential oils in bottles, but rather that they carry essential oils into the skin. Essential oils are volatile; their nature is to go upward into the atmosphere—not downward into the skin. In general terms, we need to understand that when essential oils are blended with vegetable oils, they travel down into the skin more efficiently. When the skin is dry, oil will penetrate to the lowest levels of the skin. It becomes a moisturizer not only by acting as a barrier to water loss, but also by being bioavailable, which contributes to the natural moisturizing factors of the skin, even as a breakdown product of biosynthesis, and it is supportive of skin activity.

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BY TRISH GREEN





Following menopause, fatty acids are found to decrease in older skin. As these constitute natural moisturizing factors (NMFs), it would be appropriate to apply them at the site where they are needed, on the skin and/or by digestion. As the skin condition deteriorates with age or stress, it may become more sensitive, with the potential for irritation and disturbance in oil production. Dry skin and topical eczema typically always show up poor lipid barriers and low ceramide content in the epidermis. The skin becomes drier and less elastic as we age, and the alteration in structure is in part due to the important lipidic film on the surface of the skin. The composition of the film includes essential fatty acids, phospholipids and ceramides. Thus, it follows that blends of oils topically applied and containing the right compounds can only benefit the skin as it ages. The epidermis is capable of metabolizing the elements necessary to recover its corrective barrier function. It should be perfectly possible to improve the skin's health and appearance by topical applications of suitably balanced oil blends or complexes. What cannot be dismissed is the value of vegetable oils in the treatment of difficult skin conditions. With or without essential oils, combinations of topically applied vegetable oils have been shown to be of great value in the treatment of psoriasis and eczema. This particularly applies to oils rich in gamma linoleic acid.

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In 1993, *The Dermatological Archive* reported the following: Topical applications of individual lipids or incomplete mixtures of lipids interfere with barrier recovery, while complete mixtures of cholesterol, fatty acids and ceramides allow for normal barrier repair.

The message is clear: Get blending with whole oils!

### The oils

Each oil is unique in itself, having its own origins and benefits. They can be used alone or in combinations, and are as much a part of nature's gift as essential oils. As long as you use the best grade oils for the intended purpose, they are safe and reliable. They have been used for thousands of years in body work and massages. Always choose the best quality for the purpose in mind. This means that you should understand what you are buying, especially as a therapist. If one oil is more expensive than another of the same name by more than a few pennies, there is usually a difference in quality. Do not assume that all refined oils are inferior—they are not. Also do not assume that they have all the same qualities as their cold pressed counterparts—they do not. Above all, make sure your oil is fresh. Most oils have no smell. Rancid oil not only smells—it is a free radical bomb. Free radicals contribute to premature aging and tissue degeneration. They promote glycation and reduce the skin's elasticity.

### Sweet almond oil

This oil is useful throughout the year, but particularly for dry skin during seasonal changes. Almond oil is highly nutritious, being a good source of trace minerals and rich in linoleic acid, a polyunsaturated fatty acid. It is an excellent emollient for

chapped hands, and is used extensively in skin care preparations. It is a popular ingredient in cosmetics for moisturizers, night creams and body milks, as well as a skin softening massage oil. It is almost an industry standard in aromatherapy for massage and body work. It gives great slippage, as it does not absorb too quickly. The oil should be pale yellow in color with a slight odor. If the oil is clear, it has been refined.

### Argan oil

Argan oil has been known for centuries for its cosmetic and pharmaceutical virtues. As a free radical scavenger, it has more vitamin E than most and contains carotenes and phytosterols. It prevents the drying and slows the physiological aging of the skin by restoring its hydro-lipid film. Argan oil is also recommended to fortify fragile nails. Try adding this oil to your skin care protocols, and keep some onhand at the manicure table.

### Avocado oil

This oil is extracted from the flesh of the fruit, which contains up to 30 percent pure oil. Avocado oil is highly moisturizing and skin softening; it promotes cellular regeneration, and its effect on dry and fragile skins is well documented. Repeated use and massage of this oil on the skin has shown an increase in hydration to the upper layers of the skin, as well as an apparent boost in elasticity. I highly recommend it for alipidic, mature skin and the treatment of prematurely aging skin. I personally use it daily as a part of my skin care regime. The viscosity is thicker than most, and so it needs to be combined with other oils for use in massage or simple daily application to

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reinforce the skin's lipid barrier. It is unique in that it contains more vitamin D than most eggs and feels wonderful on the skin, especially in the cold depths of winter.

### **Borage oil**

Borage is known for being rich in GLA. It is one of the richest sources known. Borage oil is sometimes used to boost the GLA content of other oils such as evening primrose oil. It is ideal for dry and sensitive skins. It is found in formulations for fighting wrinkle formation, dehydration and loss of elasticity in aging skin because of its regenerative and firming properties.

### **Calendula oil**

Native to the Mediterranean, this oil is generally used as an infused oil, and it is one of my favorites. It has highly anti-inflammatory and soothing properties that work well in the treatment of rashes and dry, chapped skin. It also makes an excellent base for treating eczema. Calendula is said to be excellent for venous complaints, especially when blended with essential oils of lemon and cypress. When applied consistently, there is a decrease in the symptoms of varicose veins and venous congestion. My experience is that it provides immediate relief from the constant ache that varicose veins can create, especially at night.

### **Hazelnut oil**

Hazelnut oil is quite similar to almond oil in composition and stability, and has similar properties. However its diffusion and penetration properties seem to be far greater. Therefore this oil is recommended as a carrier oil because of its ability to penetrate the epidermis without leaving the skin greasy. Hazelnut has good regenerative properties on the skin. Due to its diffusive characteristics, it prevents dehydration of the skin and is particularly recommended for sensitive skin and baby skin, leaving it smooth and soft. When combined with sesame and calendula oil, it makes an excellent after sun oil.

### **Hypericum (St John's wort)**

Hypericin is the principal active ingredient, and is a psychotropic activator of neuronal metabolism. This would account for its antidepressant and mood lifting properties. The oil is used topically for mild burns, bruises, hemorrhoids, varicose veins, wounds, sores and ulcers. It has also been indicated for nerve pain such as neuralgia, sciatica and even rheumatic pain for some. When using this oil for massage, warm it (to no more than 37 degrees) to ease joint stiffness, inflammation and general aches and pains. Make sure to exercise caution, as this oil can increase photosensitivity.

### **Jojoba oil**

Jojoba oil is highly compatible with the skin. Chemically, it is actually a liquid wax versus an oil. It contains hardly any triglycerides but has a combination of esters and fatty alcohols. Naturally moisturizing and healing, its traditional use is

being protective for dry skin conditions, but it can be used on all skin types. However it should be noted that it is ideal for regulating sebum, and is useful for oily scalp conditions.

### **Macadamia oil**

Macadamia oil deserves a mention simply because it feels wonderful on the skin. It is high in palmitoleic acid, an unsaturated fatty acid not commonly found in other oils. Palmitoleic acid is also found in sebum; thus macadamia oil has often been recommended for mature skins that start to dry out and become alipidic. It is very nourishing, and I recommend every skin care specialist utilize it.

### **Rosehip seed oil**

Extensive clinical work in South America indicates that rosehip seed oil is extremely beneficial in tissue regeneration for conditions such as burns, facial wrinkles and the treatment of scars. I have used this oil successfully to counter the effects of the sun, and also in the treatment of scars to reduce redness, hyperpigmentation and to help minimize keloid tissue formation. It is believed that these properties are due to the very high levels of both linoleic and alpha-linolenic fatty acids.

### **Soybean oil**

Cold pressed soybean oil is the second best source of vitamin E after wheat germ oil. Soybean oil is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids. It is good for massage and suitable for all skin types, as it has a regenerative effect on the cutaneous tissue due to the presence of the fatty acids. It therefore enhances local circulation in the treated area to bring about revitalization of the dermis. It is a valued emollient for cosmetic use, containing intrinsic phytoestrogens.

### **Wheat germ oil**

Wheat germ oil is an extremely valuable source of vitamin E and fatty acids. Due to its vitamin E content, it is a natural antioxidant. It promotes the formation of skin cells, improves blood circulation and helps relieve symptoms of dermatitis. However for massage and facial treatments, make sure it is well blended with other vegetable oils, using maybe one or two milliliters, as it does have a strong, pungent odor. ■

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