

REALSIMPLE

Is Olive Oil Good for Your Skin? We Asked Experts

Read this before you head to your pantry for some DIY skincare.



Olive Oil Benefits for Skin

It is true that olive oil has a slew of skincare benefits. The emollient is chock-full of monounsaturated fatty acids and antioxidants, so it has excellent moisturizing properties. If you suffer from extremely dry and/or compromised skin, olive oil might be a good option to reach for—especially during the cold winter months.

"The integrity of our skin relies on the lipid barrier, which holds the individual skin cells together—when the weather is cold, we generally begin utilizing heaters which evaporate the liquid barrier of the skin and lead to dry, cracked skin," explains Neda Mehr, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director at Pure Dermatology Cosmetic & Hair Center in Newport Beach, Calif. "Olive oil is an excellent skin moisturizer, especially when applied to wet skin when the pores are open, and can act as a second skin barrier for dry, cracked skin in the winter."

Olive Oil Side Effects for Skin

While olive oil might have some superb moisturizing properties, it can be kind of a nightmare for anyone dealing with acne. "When we talk about disorders of excessive oil production, such as acne, olive oil can be one of the worst products to apply to your skin, as it can clog pores and lead to severe acne breakouts," explains Dr. Mehr.

And while olive oil can help heal sunburn, you certainly don't want to use it while you're being exposed to the sun. "Think about in the '50s, when people would rub on baby oil and cook in the sun," says Dr. Mehr. "Olive oil applied in the mornings without sun protection from either long-sleeve clothing or sunscreen is a recipe for sunburns and potential severe skin damage."

Is Olive Oil Good for Your Skin?

The verdict on whether olive oil should be applied straight to skin is mixed. "As a general rule of thumb, olive oil is not an ideal choice as a skincare product," says Anna Babayan, an esthetician and owner of [Anna Babayan Skincare](#) in Boston. "Our skin does not have such enzymes to break down the molecules and allow the benefits of the olive oil to travel into the skin, and as a result, it just sits on top of the skin as a barrier layer and protects the skin from losing water." In order for all of its amazing properties to be useful, olive oil is best ingested, says Babayan.

On the flip side, Dr. Mehr suggests that olive oil can be beneficial for the very same reason. "It can be an excellent option for a patient with atopic dermatitis, also known as [eczema](#), which is a disorder of the 'skin glue' holding skin cells together," she says.

However, Dr. Mehr adds that using olive oil as a treatment for dark spots or hyperpigmentation is not worthwhile, despite its antioxidant properties.

"This is actually a gross overestimation of its antioxidant properties, as it can lead to acne breakouts and worsen hyperpigmentation if patients use it in the morning and then are exposed to the sun, making them susceptible to more pigmentation," she says.

How to Use Olive Oil for Skin

If you do choose to use straight olive oil on your skin, Dr. Mehr recommends applying the oil within three minutes of getting out of the shower at night (i.e., NEVER before sun exposure). And make sure to massage a few drops over your usual moisturizer to seal in hydration, rather than apply it to a dry face.

"Pat the skin dry [post-shower] and apply several drops of olive oil to the skin, preferably at bedtime, and only on non-acne prone skin (like the hands, forearms, and legs)," says Dr. Mehr. Additionally, make sure you choose an organic, extra-virgin variety, as olives can be sprayed with pesticides, and applying these toxins to the skin is never a good idea.