An alternative therapy?

Have you ever heard of oil pulling? Neither had Alison Lowe until one of her patients extolled its virtues. She decided to find out more.

Oil pulling is a traditional Indian dental practice which involves swishing oil in the mouth for claimed systemic and oral health benefits which include prevention of gingivitis and periodontal disease, erosion caused by acid reflux, dental caries, halitosis, dryness of the throat and cracked reflux, dental caries, halitosis, dryness of the throat and cracked

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n, what is oil pulling? Well, alternative medicine, oil pulling is a traditional Indian dental remedy that involves swishing oil in the mouth for claimed systemic and oral health benefits which include prevention of gingivitis and periodontal disease, erosion caused by acid reflux, dental caries, halitosis, dryness of the throat and cracked

The oil-pulling procedure

Oil pulling is an easy (although somewhat time consuming) process that should be repeated every day. The patient rinses their mouth with approximately one tablespoon of oil (sesame and sunflower are the most recommended) for 15 to 20 minutes, then spits it out. The best time is in the morning before breakfast, but it can be done before any meal. The aim is to thoroughly mix the oil with saliva until it becomes thin in texture and white in colour. The oil is put into the mouth with the chin tilted up and then slowly swished and pulled through the teeth, from left to right, back to front and vice versa.

‘Oil pulling resulted in a significant reduction in plaque and gingivitis and although it can’t be considered as a replacement for tooth brushing, there were no adverse reactions and it could definitely be used to supplement a patient’s oral hygiene routine.’

The theory is that the oil acts like a cleanser. When you put it in your mouth and work it around like a cleanser. When you put it in your mouth and work it around

The main disadvantage of oil pulling is that it is time consuming – how many of us can spare 15 to 20 minutes every morning? However, there is a similar procedure known as ‘Dinacharya’ where you just swish for four minutes, but I’m guessing that’s still three minutes too long for many people. On the plus side it is easy, inexpensive and relatively harmless.

Conclusion

I am a firm believer in evidence-based dentistry (EBD) and therefore must confess that I find myself slightly sceptical about the practice of oil pulling (I prefer to get my essential oils from Lis-terine mouthwash). Still, you shouldn’t knock it until you’ve tried it and although there is limited scientific evidence or proof of its efficacy, it is possible that oil pulling can be used as an effective, preventive adjunct in both maintaining and improving oral health.

References


About the author

Alison Lowe is a dental hygienist based in Cardiff, at The Orthodontic Centre, a private practice specialising in implants, cosmetic work and pe-rvious and Cardif Dental School. She has won several awards including Hygienist of the Year 2008 and is a columnist for the Western Mail. She thoroughly enjoys what she does and is delighted to be con-tributing to Dental Tribune UK.

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The oil-pulling procedure

In another randomly controlled, double blind study there was found to be a statistically significant reduction in the Strept mutans count in the plaque and saliva samples of both the study and control group using a Denstree 5M Strept mutans test. The researchers concluded: ‘Our study has shown that sesame oil has an antibacterial effect. The reduction in bacterial count ranged from 10 to 34 per cent and the average reduction in bacterial count was 20 per cent after 40 days of oil pulling. Therefore the sesame oil is found to be effective in reducing Strept mutans and adhesion.’

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