



ANCIENT SECRETS

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Body Work

In ayurveda, a warm-oil body massage (called abhyanga) isn't a monthly indulgence:

It's a daily 10-minute self-care ritual believed not only to soften skin but also to help fight cellulite and keep muscles supple.



MODERN

BEAUTY

*Eastern rituals believed to rid the body of toxins
and increase attractiveness are gaining popularity
in the U.S. And, experts say, the lore is legit.*

BY CAITLIN M. KIERNAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAMS + HIRAKAWA



Tongue scraping. Nasal cleansing. Eye palming. These are—no joke—the hottest new treatments promising radiant skin and a gleaming smile. Only they're not new. In fact, they're ancient ayurvedic practices dating back more than 3,000 years. Why the resurgence now? From juice cleanses to meditation, holistic health and beauty ideas have become far more mainstream. And it doesn't hurt that celebs like Oprah and Gwyneth have been known to sing their praises.

Although there are few studies that support the effectiveness of these practices, both ayurvedic pros and many traditional M.D.'s believe in the beauty benefits. "Brushing the teeth wasn't studied when people started doing it, but we suspected it was beneficial," says Kulreet Chaudhary, M.D., director of neurology at Wellspring Health at Scripps Memorial Hospital, in La Jolla, California. "Common sense and empirical knowledge stand the test of time." Experiment with these rituals and see if they help turn back time for your face and body.



EYE PALMING

Tablets. Smartphones. TV. Computers. No wonder vision problems are on the rise—making the centuries-old practice of eye palming almost more relevant now. Heat and pressure from your hand can help rest the optic nerve and relieve tension in the muscles around the orbital bones. "Just like we have blood pressure, we also

have eye pressure," says Amita Banerjee, holistic health educator at Atmananda Yoga in New York City. It's a noninvasive Rx for headaches, too.

EXTRA PERKS: "Relieving eyestrain relaxes those muscles around the eyes that can cause fine lines and wrinkles," says Mark Jacquot, O.D., optometrist and

LensCrafters senior director of eye care in Cincinnati.

DO IT: Warm your hands by rubbing them together. Close your eyes and press the heel of each palm on the corresponding cheekbone, then cup your fingers over the eyelid. Breathe deeply and slowly in this position for five minutes.

GANDUSHA (Oil Pulling)

A lot of gunk passes through your mouth—and we don't just mean junk food: Lymph nodes located along the jaw, near the ears, and in the neck are responsible for filtering bacteria and toxins from the face, nasal cavity, and pharynx. Enter oil pulling: swishing oil around in your mouth to draw out impurities.

"We believe that swishing breaks down bacteria and draws toxins out of the salivary glands, trapping them in the oil," says cosmetic dentist Brian Kantor, D.D.S., a partner in Lowenberg, Lituchy and Kantor in New York City. Which means that, when you oil-pull, it can make it harder for bacteria and plaque to form. The result can be a brighter, whiter smile.

◆ **EXTRA PERKS:** "An inflammatory response in the mouth like gum disease could lead to having inflammatory responses such as heart disease or diabetes," says Kantor. "A healthy mouth can be a pathway to a healthy body."

◆ **DO IT:** High levels of bacteria can accumulate in the mouth overnight (hello, morning breath!), so swish one tablespoon of organic oil around in your mouth for 10 minutes in the a.m. before brushing your teeth; spit into a toilet. Coconut oil is popular because of its sweet taste—try 365 Everyday Value Organic Coconut Oil (\$6, at Whole Foods Market). But devotees like Shailene Woodley prefer sesame; try Napa Valley Naturals Organic Cold Pressed Sesame Oil (\$6.19, napavalley.naturals.com).

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JIVA SODHANA (TONGUE SCRAPING)

While we sleep, bacteria gather on the surface of the tongue. "Scraping the tongue has cumulative benefits: fresher breath, less plaque buildup, and healthier gums," says Kantor.

◆ **EXTRA PERKS:** By "unclogging the pores on the tongue, you may taste your food more and feel more satisfied"—possibly curbing your appetite, says nutrition counselor Sayler Crouchley, founder of Sayler Crouchley Wellness in New York City and Connecticut.

◆ **DO IT:** Use a metal scraper that spans the width of the tongue. Try Dr. Tung's Tongue Cleaner (\$6.50, amazon.com). Before brushing your teeth, but after oil pulling, gently glide the scraper from the back of the tongue to the tip, then along the sides; repeat a few times. Make sure to rinse the scraper between each swipe.

PADABHYANGA (FOOT MASSAGE)

Much like the tongue, our feet are linked to all the organs and hormones in the body via nerve endings, pressure points, and lymph nodes, according to ayurvedic teaching. In India, many devotees massage their feet with warm oil before going to bed each night to stimulate circulation and energy in the lower extremities. "When done on a regular basis, we think foot massages can help reduce fatigue and improve sleep," says Chaudhary—two factors key to overall health and well-being.

◆ **EXTRA PERKS:** Ayurvedic practitioners believe that the four major nerves in the feet connect directly to the eyes, so massaging feet in this manner is thought to help reduce stress from chronic headaches. "My clients have amazing results," says Banerjee.

◆ **DO IT:** Before bed, clean your feet with warm water. While sitting down, rest one foot on the opposite thigh. Using brisk strokes, start massaging from the top of the foot; when you get to the toes, bend them up and down with your hand. Then firmly massage the bottom of the foot with your thumbs and the heel of your hand, using stronger pressure on the toes (many of the nerve endings in the foot are there). Focus the flow toward the toes, using circular motions.

NETI POT (Nasal Cleansing)

It looks like Aladdin's lamp—and for people with sinus issues, allergies, or congestion, a neti pot can grant easier-breathing wishes just as well. Flushing salt water up one nostril and back out the other with this teapot can nix bacteria, germs, pollen, mucus, and everyday environmental irritants. And, says Chaudhary, it can be used as a preventive treatment, too. "By flushing the mucous membranes, you can reduce the microbes and airborne pollutants before they cause trouble," says Melanie Sachs, author of *Ayurvedic Beauty Care* and co-owner of Diamond Way Ayurveda in California. "I do it after flying—who knows what gets up your nose when you're breathing recycled air for hours?"

◆ **EXTRA PERKS:** Since allergies can cause the tiny blood vessels around your eyes to become inflamed and press up against the skin, reducing allergens can stop dark circles from forming, says dermatologist Francesca Fusco, M.D. Ayurvedic practitioners also say that irrigating the nose can reduce puffiness by moving around liquids pooled under the eyes.

◆ **DO IT:** Mix $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm distilled or filtered water, one teaspoon kosher salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda into the pot. Bend forward, lean your head to the left, and pour the water into the right nostril. Do it over the sink to catch the water that spills out of your left nostril. Repeat on the other side. Try Yoga Rhino Horn Nasal Cleansing System Neti Pot (\$5.27, dx.com). ■