



Castor Oil

What is Castor Oil?

Castor Oil is extracted from castor seeds (*Ricinus Communis*). It is a very pale yellow liquid that has a thick, sticky feel. Castor oil is an anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant oil which has been used for centuries for its therapeutic and medicinal benefits. It is believed that most of castor oil's healing abilities are derived from its high concentration of unsaturated fatty acids especially ricinoleic acid. Although it has a strong and rather unpleasant taste, castor oil is used in cosmetics, soaps, textiles, medicines, massage oils and many other everyday products.

What are the Benefits of Castor Oil?

Castor oil has been used both internally and externally for thousands of years. Castor oil has been shown to increase circulation and promote elimination and healing of tissues and organs underneath the skin. It is particularly effective in being absorbed into lymph circulation which can improve digestion, immune function (increases mobility and effectiveness of white blood cells when used for 4 consecutive days) and reduce swelling in injured muscles, joints and extremities. It has also been specifically used in cases of headaches, menstrual irregularities, uterine fibroid cysts and ovarian cysts. For maximum effectiveness, it is necessary to apply the pack as often as possible. Castor oil packs are NOT to be used during pregnancy. Some specific benefits include:

- **Muscle and Joint Pain Relief:** The anti-inflammatory properties of castor oil make it an excellent massage oil for relieving arthritic joints, rheumatism, gout, nerve inflammations, and sore muscles and joints. Use the standard castor oil pack or the direct application.
- **Constipation and Digestive Remedy:** Castor oil has been used internally for the treatment of constipation and digestive disorders for centuries. We recommend that any internal use of castor oil be prescribed and monitored by a naturopathic doctor. Small doses of castor oil can be a very strong laxative, whereas too much can be a poison. Castor oil is also effective for constipation and digestive disorders, with a much safer window, when used topically – especially with children. For the topical use of castor oil use the standard castor oil pack or the direct application. Keep in mind, that when treating constipation, if symptoms persist for longer than 3 days, consult your naturopathic doctor immediately.
- **Skin Problems:** Successful studies have approved the use of castor oil for skin infections and other skin problems such as sunburn, abrasions, acne, dry skin, boils, warts, scar tissue, stretch marks and liver/age spots. Castor oil contains undecylenic acid which has germ-killing and disinfectant properties. This makes it an effective treatment for athlete's foot, other fungal infections, skin ulcers, chronic itching and inflamed skin. For stubborn fungal infections or extremely dry and callused skin or nails, it is recommended to soak the affected area in Epsom Salts or Alkaline Salts for 10-15 minutes to soften and disinfect the skin before applying castor oil. This can help speed up the healing process.
- **Menstrual Disorders, Fibroids and Cysts:** Castor oil is very effective in decreasing the pain and inflammation associated with menstrual disorders and in decreasing or eliminating fibroids and cysts. The ricinoleic acid, present in castor oil, is emenagogue in nature and helps open menstruation in cases of delayed or painful or stopped menstruation. Either the standard castor oil pack or the direct application method can be used. Keep in mind that the administration of castor oil during a period will increase blood flow, hence it is typically contraindicated during menses.
- **Stye Treatment:** The anti-bacterial components of castor oil have been found to be effective against styes (oil gland infections on the eyelid). Simply apply a very small drop of castor oil to a Q-tip and apply directly onto the stye 2 or 3 times per day.
- **Hair Care:** The germicidal, insecticidal and fungicidal properties of ricin and ricinoleic acid present in castor oil protect the scalp and hair from microbial and fungal infections. Hence, using hair care products that contain castor oil can help keep dandruff at bay and can improve the texture of coarse and dry hair. For a more direct impact, massage the oil into the scalp, leave it on overnight and wash hair the next morning.
- **Wrinkle Treatment:** Castor oil is a natural emollient and moisturizer that penetrates the skin and helps



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stimulate the production of collagen and elastin which can soften and hydrate the skin. Therefore, castor oil is a wonderful natural treatment for wrinkles since it restores and rejuvenates skin's natural youthful appearance by making skin smoother, softer and pliant. When applied in the winter it will prevent your skin from drying up and getting white patches. Dip a small cotton ball into pure castor oil and apply it on wrinkled skin before going to bed. Use only a small amount of oil when applying it to the skin near the eyes.

Castor Oil Pack

- Make a small pad by folding a small piece of unbleached cotton flannelette into 3 or 4 layers.
- Dip the cotton pad into castor oil (can let material soak in bowl several minutes) and place it onto the affected joint or muscle.
- Cover the pad with plastic wrap.
- Place a hot water bottle or heating pad on LOW over the plastic wrapped cotton pad. The plastic wrap will prevent the heat source from getting oily. **DO NOT MICROWAVE CASTOR OIL PACK.**
- Leave the cotton pad on for 45 minutes to an hour, once per day. (on breasts 30 min., abdomen 60 min.)

This castor oil pack can be reused. Place in a plastic ziplock bag and refrigerate it for re-use. Add more oil as it dries out. A pack must never be washed – discard old packs when they begin to change colour. Make new pack after 5 applications. Don't share packs.

For maximum effectiveness, it is necessary to apply the pack as often as possible, preferably daily for at least 3 weeks.

Direct Application

The easiest way to use castor oil is to massage it onto the body on the problem spot, along the spinal cord, the abdomen, or following the lymph drainage pattern (above breast line to pubic line and around each side of body).

For superficial problems, direct topical application without the use of a heating pad is typically sufficient.

- Alternatively, put castor oil directly on the skin or area of concern. Cover it and leave it on overnight (take heat away after allotted time). Cover with old clothing/towels as the oil stains clothing and sheets.
- Dip a cotton ball into castor oil and apply it onto the affected skin in the morning and at night.
- Alternatively, for larger skin areas, soak an appropriately large piece of unbleached cotton cloth in castor oil and wrap the affected area overnight.
- If the area is very small, soak a Band-Aid in castor oil and cover the infected skin overnight.
- To clean off any oil residue, wash off with soap and water.

What are the Side Effects of Castor Oil?

Castor oil is normally safe if used in moderation. However, pregnant and lactating women and people with intestinal blockage, acute inflammatory intestinal disease, appendicitis or abdominal pain should not take castor oil without their doctor's approval. Note that precautions must be taken when taking the oil internally, so you should always follow the directions on the package and consult your doctor or naturopathic professional before consuming it. Internal ingestion of castor oil may result in diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain or cramping.

References:

- Cayne E. 1993 The Oil that Heals, a physician's successes with castor oil treatments. A.R.E. Press
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