

Can Dry Brushing Help Your Lymphatic System?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Energizing, invigorating and stress relieving, dry body brushing gently cleanses and exfoliates dead skin cells to reveal soft, glowing skin, but other good habits and supplementation can also help your skin be its best
- › One of the most basic reasons to begin dry brushing your skin is to stimulate your lymphatic system, which is essentially a network of tissues and organs that help transport metabolic waste out of your body
- › Using the correct body brushes (one with a long handle comes in handy) as well as the right methods, body brushing can impact your body in ways that promote healing, skin vibrance and improved circulation

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Your skin is the largest organ of your body, so treating it with TLC and maintaining its health will go a long way toward making you look and feel your best. Besides consisting of blood vessels, sweat glands and nerve endings, your skin helps remove waste, aids in digestion and has a lot to do with good circulation.

Nicole Eckert, a certified holistic nutritionist based in Newmarket, Ontario, believes that delving into a balanced, nutritionally optimal lifestyle should include a practice some have never heard of – skin brushing, something ancient Greeks, Native Americans and Ayurvedic medicine have known about for centuries. Gentle daily detoxing involves

several practices that can be done several ways and for several reasons. It's extremely inexpensive and it takes just a few minutes every day.

Discovering (and taking advantage by actually practicing) healthy removal of toxic waste is one of the most crucial habits you can get into. It's also a way to increase your energy while decreasing stress, lifting brain fog and supporting your **digestive health**, which are practical considerations that help you not only feel good but look good! Eckert states:

*"Your lovely liver, kidneys, lungs, skin and colon, are your superstar detoxification organs and their overall function is just critical for your optimal health and well-being. With your skin being your largest organ – and your largest detoxification organ for that matter. The simple detox habit of dry brushing is a super enjoyable practice that's going to make your skin glow, and get you detoxing fo-sho (rhyming intentional)."*¹

Many people who started with a softer, gentler brush have graduated to one that's a little firmer, using a firmer pressure gradually as well.

How Does Dry Brushing Your Skin Impact Your Lymphatic System?

One of the most basic reasons to begin **dry brushing your skin** is to stimulate your lymphatic system, which is essentially a network of tissues and organs that help transport metabolic waste out of your body. Parts of your overall lymphatic system include your thymus gland, lymph nodes, spleen, liver and tonsils.

Something you may not realize is that for most people, especially as they get older, when your system begins getting sluggish, moving slower and slower, it compromises your immune system.

When your immune system isn't working as it should, your body becomes more susceptible to problems like sinus infections. Further, one of the reasons you keep

hearing how crucial exercise is involves your lymphatic system, because movement is essential for it to function as it was designed to do.

It doesn't have a pump, so it relies on muscle contractions — aka exercise — to "shake things loose," so to speak, which helps your body in its detoxification process. Further, many of your lymph vessels run just below your skin's surface, which is how brushing your skin can impact how well your lymph glands perform. Brushing your skin is an innovative way to gently cleanse and protect your skin and improve circulation.

There are brushes for your hands, feet and nails, face (which have softer bristles), hair and body. Besides the type for dry brushing, there are brushes you can use as you bathe.

Why Do People Brush Their Skin?

Exfoliation rids your body of **dead skin cells**. When you consider that you lose more than a million skin cells every day, it's no wonder we all experience a slightly irritating dry, itchy sensation from time to time. You're still wearing last week's dead skin cells! The problem often causes such skin conditions as acne, eczema, psoriasis and various rashes.

In fact, dry brushing your skin is said to be, for your skin, something similar to what milk thistle does for your liver. You release up to a pound of toxins through your skin, your largest eliminative organ, every single day, which is about a quarter of the total waste you excrete on a daily basis. You may not know exactly what's going on inside your body, but your skin is often the first to tell the tale. According to Bare Natural Health:²

"(These) are signs that you're in dire need of some toxic dumping, but when our skin is clogged full of dead cells, our toxins get stuck in a traffic jam and have nowhere to go. Instead, they get reabsorbed into the body, taxing our kidneys and liver, or stored in fat cells, which can contribute to cellulite."

Body brushing may also help prevent and reduce cellulite. Although it's not a tested science conducted in a clinical setting, there's plenty of anecdotal evidence that dry brushing helps ease the clumpy signs of cellulite. It may help distribute fatty deposits to

tone muscles and tissues below your skin's surface, Mother Earth Living maintains, and circular motions may also reduce the appearance of cellulite.³

Energizing, invigorating and stress relieving, it also reveals soft, glowing skin. Dry brushing not only clears clogged pores of dirt, oil and other residue, it stimulates your hormone and oil-producing glands and **your circulation**, which helps leave your skin feeling fresh and more prone to healing, and allows your skin to "breathe" properly.

What Type of Brush Is Best?

There's actually a brush designed to dry brush your skin. Quality brush bristles are made from natural fibers rather than synthetic materials, and they're available online and in some health food stores. You want the bristles to be dense, stiff and strong so that the experience is, as Eckert quips, "comfortably uncomfortable" – not too soft, but not so stiff that they scratch your skin, either. Eckert notes:

"I started out with [a] classic Bath Brush. I love this one because of the long handle (it's the ultimate back scratcher). I recently upgraded to [an] Energy Brush, which is handle-free but has these super-cool bronze bristles made from a copper-tin alloy, which creates this super soothing effect and a pleasant tingling sensation – this is like the big-cheese of dry brushing. I've also got this cute little Facial Brush, which is a savior on dry-face days."⁴

Eckert recommends a body brush designed expressly for this purpose. A long brush for hard-to-reach places like your back, the bottoms of your feet and the back of your legs made from bristles of the konjac plant is another recommendation.

Depending on where you live, environmental toxins are wreaking more havoc on your body today than ever before. Sometimes the air you breathe isn't necessarily negotiable, but what you eat, drink and put on your skin certainly is – dry brushing may help to rid your body of those variables you can't control.

How to Use Your Body Brush

No matter what time of day you shower, it's right beforehand that you want to take advantage of everything body brushing can do for you. Pick up your brush and get to work, starting with the lower part of your body first with swift, gentle upward strokes. "It's important to work in this direction as it supports the natural 'highway' of your lymphatic system," Eckert says.⁵

1. Start working on your feet, using gentle, circular, upward motions toward your heart from the tips of your toes, including the tops of your feet, your soles and moving upward, first one side and then the other.
2. Brush slowly and gently; even if you're ticklish, making it difficult to cover your stomach, sides and chest, it will become less so as your body gets used to the sensation.
3. Do your arms, neck and as much of your back as you can get to. Remember to avoid areas where you might have scratches or anything that would make contact with the brush painful.
4. Don't use the regular brush on your face, as your skin is far too delicate. Use a specially designed facial brush, which has softer bristles.
5. Once you're finished, you can shower, which washes away all the dead skin cells you've loosened. Water set at warm or hot further increases your circulation.

This routine can be done before every shower or just three or four times a week, but perhaps hard-to-reach areas can be done once a week – whatever your schedule allows and your needs call for. You may also want to try an alkalizing bath, which adds a new dimension. One more thing: Since skin brushing is stimulating, doing it in the morning seems to be preferable to "waking up" your skin at night.

Caring for Your Body Brushes

Body brushes may be constructed of solid waxed beech for dry brushing or beech plywood for wet brushing, with wild boar, horsehair or even a combination of horsehair

and bronze bristles, among other options.⁶ The plywood brush is best for wet brushing, as it can take sitting in water for long periods, as well as with alkaline baths.

1. It's best not to expose your wooden brushes to long periods in water, so when you're not brushing, place the brush with bristles downward on the edge of the tub.
2. If you do alkaline wet brushing, the bristles of the brush should be rinsed well using clear water. Excess water can be "tapped" off using a towel and the brush should be placed bristles downward on a dry towel.
3. Wooden brushes should be air-dried, not with a hairdryer or placed on warm heating appliances as it can crack and damage the wood.
4. The bristles of your body brush can be washed with lukewarm soapy water, but without excessively wetting the wooden parts. In time, the color of the wood will probably darken somewhat.

Experts also recommend replacing your brush every six to 12 months because the bristles do begin to break down.

More Strategies for Optimizing Your Skin Health (and Other Areas)

Drinking [water with lemon](#) added to it and/or placing a few teaspoons of apple cider vinegar into water to drink on a daily basis, as well as drinking the right amount of water for your body, are easy strategies for optimizing your health.

Eating plenty of vegetables will also go a long way toward optimizing your skin, because the antioxidants in them fight free radicals and support your immune and mitochondrial systems. Key supplements also kick in nutrients you can't always get through your diet, including:

- **Collagen peptides**, which help repair your skin as well as your hair and nails, plus it treats leaky gut.⁷

- **Vitamin C** helps your body synthesize new collagen and protects your skin from excess sun rays, inflammation and oxidative stress.⁸
- **Glutathione** makes its own **antioxidants**, but also helps your body rid itself of toxins, which discourages acne.⁹
- **Resveratrol** contains polyphenols that are worth their weight in gold for protecting you from signs of aging. That also goes for your skin, as they also help protect against excessive sun damage.¹⁰
- **Caffeine** reduces inflammation and calms redness, increases your circulation and repairs sun damage, as well as your DNA.¹¹ While I don't recommend taking a caffeine supplement, organic black, shade-grown coffee is one potential source.

It may sound too easy, but simple steps like these can balance your pH and help move food through your colon to maintain regular bowel movements, which also positively affects how you feel and how you look, including your skin.

Sources and References

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