

## 4 Natural Ingredients to Care for Your Skin

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Nature is full of powerful healing agents that can soothe and protect your skin without any harm
- › Eating one avocado daily for eight weeks may enhance elasticity and firmness of facial skin in women
- › Calendula enhances skin hydration and firmness, helps heal wounds and also offers other skin-restorative properties
- › Applying coconut oil topically benefits your skin in multiple ways, including reducing the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines, as the oil keeps your connective tissues strong and supple
- › Colloidal oatmeal baths are also used to soothe inflamed, itchy skin

As your body's largest organ, your skin provides an important barrier against pathogens, chemicals and injuries.<sup>1</sup> Dry skin, however, is very common and can lead to roughness, flaking, cracks and bleeding. These breaks in the skin not only are uncomfortable, but can increase your risk of infection.

Dry skin, also known as xeroderma or, in the case of severely dry skin, xerosis, is more common if you live in a cold, dry climate or work outside. People who wash their hands often are also at risk. Age, particularly being 65 or older, and underlying health conditions such as allergies and eczema, also increase your likelihood of suffering from dry skin.

Topical moisturizers and, in severe cases, topical steroid creams, are often recommended for dry skin treatment in conventional medicine. But petrolatum, a common ingredient in skin moisturizers, may be contaminated with cancer-causing polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) when not properly refined.<sup>2</sup>

Steroid creams, also known as corticosteroids, also come with a risk of side effects, including thinning of the skin, leaving it vulnerable to damage.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, nature is full of powerful healing agents that can soothe and protect your skin without any harm.

## 4 Skin-Healing Agents From Nature

Looking for natural ways to seal in moisture and heal your skin? These four ingredients provide a simple solution.<sup>4</sup>

1. **Avocado** — Avocados are a powerhouse of nutrition. Packed with monounsaturated fats, fiber, magnesium, potassium, B vitamins, vitamin K, vitamin E and carotenoids, they provide a well-rounded boost to overall health. Avocados' nutrient profile not only aids in satiety and weight management, but also contains avocatin B, a unique molecule with potential cancer-fighting properties.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of your skin, the monounsaturated fats, carotenoids and phenolic compounds in avocados are all beneficial. Past research has shown that consuming carotenoids improves skin aging.<sup>6</sup> Carotenoids may work by stimulating cells in your skin to produce more collagen and elastin, while also reducing inflammation and protecting against damage from the sun.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, a study published in the *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology* revealed eating one avocado daily for eight weeks may enhance elasticity and firmness of facial skin in women.<sup>8</sup> Study author Dr. Zhaoping Li, chief of the division of clinical nutrition at UCLA, said in a news release:<sup>9</sup>

*"This study showed more accurately that if you want your skin to be young and vibrant, then the best approach is not just topicals, but improving your*

*whole diet. When you take care of your entire body with proper nutrition then your skin is going to reflect that ...*

*What we have learned from this study is that avocado is a very unique fruit. It has a lot of fibers, monounsaturated fatty acids and phytonutrients and it has an impact on many, if not all, of the organ systems inside of our body."*

That being said, topical application of cream made from avocado oil and saffron may also benefit your skin. In one study, 20 healthy people used the cream every day for 12 weeks.<sup>10</sup> Researchers checked the participants' skin at the beginning of the study, after six weeks and again after 12 weeks, evaluating how deep their wrinkles were and how thick and elastic their skin was.

Most of the participants experienced improvements in their wrinkles after using the cream for six or 12 weeks. The folds near the nose became smaller and skin became more elastic after 12 weeks of using the cream.

Participants' skin also stayed hydrated. For an at-home remedy, you can mash up a small amount of avocado and apply it to your skin. Let it sit for 20 minutes before rinsing it off.<sup>11</sup> Although more research is needed, avocado may be useful for skin conditions other than dryness as well, including psoriasis, eczema and athlete's foot.<sup>12</sup>

- 2. Calendula** – Calendula, sometimes referred to as pot marigolds, boasts significant levels of flavonoid antioxidants, providing protection against free radicals.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, it has antimicrobial, antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties. Brazil's Ministry of Health has also approved calendula as a medicinal herb.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout history, calendula has been used for wound healing, alleviating menstrual cramps, addressing stomach discomfort, and enhancing skin hydration and firmness. It's also renowned for its skin-restorative properties. According to Mount Sinai:<sup>15</sup>

*"Calendula has been shown to help wounds heal faster, possibly by increasing blood flow and oxygen to the affected area, which helps the body grow new tissue. It is also used to improve skin hydration and firmness.*

*The dried petals of the calendula plant are used in tinctures, ointments, and washes to treat burns, bruises, and cuts, as well as the minor infections they cause. Calendula also has been shown to help prevent dermatitis or skin inflammation in people with breast cancer during radiation therapy."*

Further, as noted in a review published in Life (Basel), calendula extracts have a number of pharmacological actions, including reducing inflammation, fighting bacteria and fungi, and boosting the immune system.<sup>16</sup>

The plant contains various beneficial compounds like terpenoids, flavonoids and carotenoids, along with coumarins, quinones, volatile oils, amino acids and lipids, which contribute to its healing properties. Studies have shown that when applied to wounds in rats, calendula extract helped the wounds close faster and increased the levels of certain substances involved in wound healing.

Additionally, using calendula ointment may significantly speed up wound healing after a cesarean section. Research published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences similarly highlighted calendula extract's wound-healing potential.<sup>17</sup> The study found a special type of gel called polyacrylamide hydrogel, when combined with calendula extract, helped tissues grow back and sped up the healing process.

It also helped the body make more of the substances that help wounds heal and reduced the production of those that cause inflammation. The gel also increased the number of collagen fibers in the skin. Collagen is a protein that helps keep skin strong and elastic, and collagen fibers are important for healing wounds.

The researchers noted that using more calendula in the gel could make it even better at healing wounds due to calendula's anti-inflammatory properties. As an at-

home remedy, calendula preparations may be applied to skin up to four times a day for minor skin problems.<sup>18</sup>

**3. Coconut oil** – Applying coconut oil topically benefits your skin in multiple ways, including reducing the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines, as the oil keeps your connective tissues strong and supple. Limited evidence also suggests it may boost collagen production,<sup>19</sup> although the mechanism of action is unknown.

"People in the tropical countries have effectively used coconut oil as a traditional moisturizer for centuries," researchers wrote in *The Pharma Innovation*, adding that a body lotion made with virgin coconut oil as the base is ideal.<sup>20</sup>

Medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil, particularly lauric acid, have powerful antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. These, along with other phenolic compounds and antioxidants, act synergistically when applied topically, the scientists explained, boosting skin health via:<sup>21</sup>

- Boosting skin barrier homeostasis
- Antioxidative activities
- Anti-inflammatory properties
- Antimicrobial properties
- Wound healing support

In one study, after using moisturizing lotion containing virgin coconut oil for 28 days, skin hydration increased 24.8%, while skin elasticity increased 2.6%.<sup>22</sup> Further, coconut oil is useful for skin barrier repair and skin aging,<sup>23</sup> has been found to significantly improve skin hydration and increase skin surface lipid levels in people with xerosis.<sup>24</sup>

A study in children with atopic dermatitis also highlighted coconut oil's effectiveness.<sup>25</sup> Compared to mineral oil, those treated with virgin coconut oil for eight weeks had significant improvements in dermatitis severity, and better

transepidermal water loss, or TEWL, a measure of how much water was lost through the skin.

In the coconut oil group, 47% of the children had moderate improvement, while 46% showed excellent improvement. Yet another study<sup>26</sup> looked at the effects of cultured coconut oil derived from virgin coconut oil on human skin. The cultured coconut oil led to enhanced expression of collagen and hyaluronan synthase-3, which are important for maintaining skin elasticity and hydration.

The skin barrier was also strengthened while inflammation caused by ultraviolet radiation was reduced. The researchers attributed the beneficial skin effects to the high levels of polyphenols and fatty acid components in the cultured coconut extract. To use coconut oil, simply massage a small amount into your skin.

- 4. Oatmeal** – Oatmeal has a long history of use as a topical treatment for skin conditions. Colloidal oatmeal baths, in particular, are used to soothe inflamed, itchy skin due to xerotic dermatitis.

In addition to phenolic acids and tocopherols, oats contain avenanthramides (Avns), which have anti-inflammatory, anti-itching and anti-irritant effects, and help prevent oxidative stress-related diseases. Further, researchers noted in the journal *Oxidative Medicine and Cellular Longevity*:<sup>27</sup>

*"Among oat constituents, Avns are known to suppress histamine release at very low doses, helping to plump up the skin, reduce wrinkles, and restore the skin natural barrier. Indeed, oat Avns have been shown to represent the main group of active polyphenolic antioxidants responsible for oatmeal anti-inflammatory, antierythema (antiredness), antipruritic (anti-itching), and antihistaminic properties.*

*Consistently, several studies have demonstrated their benefits in reducing eczema and other inflammatory skin conditions. Another health and antiaging benefit of oat Avns is their antigenotoxic activity, which can*

*protect the DNA of epidermal cells against environmental insults, including UV irradiation."*

To try an oatmeal bath to relieving itchy dry skin, blend one cup of oatmeal into a fine powder, then pour it into a tub of warm water.<sup>28</sup>

## Healthy Skin Comes From the Inside Out

While natural options can soothe and relieve dry skin, a healthy lifestyle is essential for maintaining skin health. Consuming polyphenol-rich foods, for instance, may have a number of health benefits, including protecting your skin.<sup>29,30,31</sup>

In addition to eating whole foods, proper sleep matters. Research has shown that inadequate sleep quality can hasten intrinsic aging and impair the skin's ability to recover from external stressors, such as prolonged exposure to UV light.<sup>32</sup>

Omega-3 fat is also important for healthy skin. If your skin is rough, dry and wrinkly, you probably need more omega-3, as it helps regulate oil production in your skin, balance hydration, reduce inflammation and minimize the effects of sun damage and aging in general.<sup>33</sup>

Astaxanthin is another skin superstar. It's a carotenoid antioxidant derived from *Haematococcus microalgae*. The algae produce astaxanthin as a protective mechanism to shield itself from harsh UVs and other environmental stressors.

Research published in the *Journal of Clinical Biochemistry and Nutrition* showed 16 weeks of astaxanthin supplementation protected against wrinkles and loss of skin moisture, and improved skin elasticity.<sup>34</sup> A krill oil supplement will give you both astaxanthin and omega-3.

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