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What Is Tea Tree Oil and How Does It Work?

Tea tree oil comes from the leaves of *Melaleuca alternifolia*, a small tree native to Queensland and New South Wales, Australia. Although *Melaleuca alternifolia* is known as the tea tree, it should not be confused with the plant that produces leaves used to make black, green and oolong tea. Tea tree oil contains a number of compounds that have been shown to kill certain bacteria, viruses and fungi. These germ-fighting properties make tea tree oil a valued natural remedy for treating bacterial and fungal skin conditions, preventing infection and promoting healing.

1. Hand Sanitizer: Tea tree oil makes an ideal natural hand sanitizer. Studies have shown that it kills several common bacteria and viruses responsible for causing illness, including *E. coli*, *S. pneumoniae* and *H. influenzae*. Moreover, a study testing several types of hand wash shows that adding tea tree oil to the cleansers boosted their effectiveness against *E. coli*. *Combine 2-3 drops of tea tree oil with hand sanitizer.*

Usage: Pea size drop per use, 30 uses out of 2 ounces.

2. Insect Repellent: Tea tree oil may help keep pesky insects away. One study found that 24 hours after being treated with tea tree oil, cows had 61% fewer flies than cows not treated with tea tree oil. Furthermore, a test-tube study revealed that tea tree oil had a greater ability to repel mosquitoes than DEET, the most common active ingredient in commercial insect repellents.

Usage: Place at thin layers of skin (2 on neck, wrists, elbow bend areas, ankles and behind knees if skin is exposed.)

3. Natural Deodorant: Tea tree oil antibacterial effects may help control underarm odor related to perspiration. Sweat itself does not smell. However, when secretions from your sweat glands combine with bacteria on your skin, a moderate to strong odor is produced. Your underarm area contains a large concentration of these glands and is mainly responsible for what is commonly referred to as "body odor."

Usage: 2.5 ounce lasts 3 to 4 months

4. Antiseptic for Minor Cuts and Scrapes, Boost Wound Healing & Soothe Skin Inflammation: Injuries that result in broken skin make it easy for germs to enter your bloodstream, which can lead to infection. Tea tree oil can be used to treat and disinfect minor cuts and abrasions by killing *S. aureus* and other bacteria that can cause infection in open wounds. Research has shown that tea tree oil helps reduce inflammation and triggers the activity of white blood cells that are instrumental in the healing process. A common form of skin irritation is contact dermatitis, which occurs when skin comes in contact with an allergen, such as nickel. Exposure to the allergen leads to red, itchy and sometimes painful skin. Animal and human research suggest that applying tea tree oil may help reduce the severity of these symptoms.

5. Fight Acne: Tea tree oil can be a powerful weapon against acne. Several studies have shown that it helps reduce the amount and overall severity of acne. In one study, tea tree oil was found to be as effective against acne as benzoyl peroxide, the most common anti-acne medication.

6. Get Rid of Nail Fungus and Treat Athlete's Foot: Fungal nail infections are quite common. Although they aren't dangerous, they can be unsightly. There are medications that can treat nail fungus, though some people may prefer a more natural approach. Tea tree oil has been shown to help get rid of nail fungus when used alone or in combination with other natural remedies. Known medically as *tinea pedis*, athlete's foot is a contagious fungal infection on the feet that can also spread to the toenails and hands. Symptoms include peeling, cracking, blisters and redness. Antifungal medications are considered standard treatment for athlete's foot. Yet studies suggest that tea tree oil may be an effective alternative for relieving symptoms.

7. Control Dandruff, help rid Lice and Relieve Psoriasis: Dandruff, or white flakes of dead skin that fall from the scalp, isn't dangerous. However, it can be annoying and embarrassing. Although there is little published research on tea tree oil's effectiveness in treating dandruff, one controlled study suggests that it may be helpful, try adding a few drops of tea tree oil to a dollop of shampoo when washing your hair. After performing a patch test, apply a few drops of tea tree oil on the patient's scalp, let it sit overnight. The following morning, the hair can be combed through to remove the dead lice. You can follow this procedure by washing the hair with shampoo and conditioner containing tea tree oil.

Psoriasis is an autoimmune condition characterized by outbreaks of red, itchy, scaly skin. Although there are medications that can improve symptoms, the condition itself is chronic and there is no known cure. Tea tree oil contains anti-inflammatory compounds, which, according to emerging evidence, may be helpful for easing psoriasis symptoms. Tea tree oil has shown results in removing lice on some patients.

Usage: 3.5 ounce Shampoo bar, lasts equivalent of 24 ounces of ALL-in-one Shampoo, Body wash, shave cream.

Cautions: Research has shown that tea tree oil appears to be safe overall. However, there are some things to be aware of before using it. Tea tree oil should not be ingested because it may be toxic if swallowed. Therefore, tea tree oil should be stored out of reach of children. Prior to using tea tree oil for the first time, test a drop or two on a small area of your skin and wait 24 hours to see if any reaction occurs. Likewise, people with sensitive skin may experience irritation when using undiluted tea tree oil. Additionally, using tea tree oil in pets may not be safe.

Final notes: As you can see, tea tree oil can be helpful for a number of reasons. It's an inexpensive natural alternative to chemical-based skin and nail treatments, personal care products and disinfectants, among other things. However, tea tree oil is not a magic cure-all. In fact, some people may experience skin irritation or allergic reaction after using it. Overall, tea tree oil serves many purposes and is a good item to have on hand.