

swish, swish!

Will an ancient health remedy solve a mother's mouth issues?

by Laura Kenyon

THE CHALLENGE Instead of store-bought mouthwash, swish every morning with unrefined oil to see if it makes your mouth cleaner and remedies oral woes.

THE FAMILY Jennifer and Patrick Cvelic of Kernersville, North Carolina, and their daughters, Kailey, 6, and Summer, 3



In search of a cure: For stay-at-home mother of two Jennifer Cvelic, things haven't always been peachy between her choppers. Despite making every effort to eat nutritiously, exercise, and keep her family as healthy as possible, the certified physical education teacher and former corporate fitness center director has struggled for years with various issues: inflamed gums, occasional oral sores, and dry mouth and sinuses. To top it off, Jennifer's lifelong TMD (temporomandibular disorder, a painful condition caused by problems with the jaw joint and muscles) has grown more intense since the removal of her wisdom teeth a few years back.

A new, ancient remedy: Despite knowing nothing about oil pulling initially, Jennifer became excited when she read up on its origin (it hails from Ayurveda, a system of traditional Indian medicine dating back thousands of years) and all the touted benefits. Although scientific opinions vary, oil pulling enthusiasts praise it as a cure for all sorts of ailments—from bad breath and gingivitis, to allergies and hangovers.

The idea is to swish a tablespoon of unrefined, organic oil—coconut or sesame are the traditional lipids of choice—in your mouth for 10 to 20 minutes a day. The oil supposedly pulls out harmful bacteria and fungi, eventually turning milky white, signaling that it's time to spit.

Fitting it in: Jennifer opted to start her challenge with unrefined, solid virgin coconut oil. Luckily, the initial texture shock (the first few seconds were "like chewing on lard") passed quickly as the oil liquefied, and she found the process to be surprisingly manageable.

The greatest obstacle was not oil pulling itself, but carving out the time to do it. Beginners often start with five minutes of swishing and work their way up, but Jennifer was able to

devote 20 minutes a day, despite being a busy mother of two (usually while prepping her daughters' meals or after her morning workout). The family even created a game out of mom's new time commitment—oil pulling charades—which helped the minutes pass surprisingly fast.

A bright beginning: As early as a few days in, Jennifer noticed positive changes to her lips, teeth, and gums. Her lips were definitely getting some extra moisture from the oil, she says, and her entire mouth looked glossier. After three weeks, inflammation seemed to have gone down (her gums no longer bled while flossing), her teeth showed no visible plaque, and she'd noticed no oral sores or additional dryness. She even managed to eat a cheeseburger (something that, thanks to her TMD, she'd previously had to cut with a knife and fork) during her daughter's sixth birthday party.

Looking ahead: While oil pulling may not be a cure-all for everyone, Jennifer felt it definitely improved her oral health and plans to continue. "I'm eager to see if the inflammation in my jaw and ear [from the TMD] reduces even more; and if oral irritation continues to stop," she says. "A month has shown improvements, but I'm curious if it's coincidence or actual results." She recommends it for anyone who suffers from swollen gums, or is looking for a natural way to brighten teeth and clean the mouth.

When the coconut oil is finished, Jennifer plans to see if other types—like sesame or sunflower—produce different results. And she isn't giving up on spreading the morning health change to the rest of her household. "So far my husband has not joined me, but after my completing a month and seeing changes, he has become intrigued." Challenge, part deux? ●

