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Spa in Your Kitchen ***At-home beauty treatments are easy and affordable***

By Lisa Lance

Do you ever wish you could give yourself a spa treatment at home? Do a Google search for “food” and “facials” and you’ll get roughly 2 million results. The myths about at-home beauty treatments abound, but do any of them really work?



In my quest to find beauty in the kitchen, I subjected myself to some fun (albeit unscientific) experiments. But before you reach into the fridge and start slathering your face with the first thing you pull out, here is some expert advice.

“Oatmeal is comfort food, and it can also be used as an exfoliator,” said Linda Hoff, aesthetics manager at The Face & The Body Day Spa in Brentwood. “It’s good for loosening impurities in the pores and is especially good for dry, irritated or sensitive skin.”

Believe it or not, I had actually tried this before. I mixed about three tablespoons of plain oatmeal with just enough water to form a paste. I applied the mixture to my makeup-free face and let it dry. The oatmeal smelled nice, like a wholesome breakfast, but I looked like I’d been on the losing side in a food fight. I let the oatmeal dry on my skin and then wiped it off with a damp paper towel. The results? My face definitely felt smoother, and my cheeks were flushed with a rosy glow. If you try this in the bathroom, put a paper towel in the sink to catch the oatmeal; otherwise, do this over the kitchen sink. I also tried this treatment using the oatmeal as a scrub instead of letting it dry, but the results weren’t nearly as good.

Hoff also suggested using cotton pads soaked in chilled buttermilk to soothe tired eyes and applying yogurt as a face mask. “Yogurt is a valuable source of amino acids and proteins, and is easily absorbed into the skin,” she said. “It balances the pH and makes a great soothing mask for oily skin.” It’s a good idea to use plain yogurt without a lot of additives (and without the chunks of fruit).

I tried this mask, but used vanilla yogurt. I applied the yogurt in a thin layer all over my face and left it on for about 15 minutes. It had a calming effect and smelled great. It also made a nice snack, as I ate the unused yogurt from the container while I waited for the mask to work – yum! The next morning, my skin still felt soft and smooth.

Another treatment Hoff recommended was using mashed papaya as a mask and either letting it dry on the skin or steaming the face at the same time. She explained that papain, an enzyme found in papayas, has been used for centuries as a face exfoliator. It works by digesting dead skin cells, she said, and may cause less irritation than other treatments because it doesn't affect live skin cells.

About ten years ago I read an advice column in the newspaper that recommended using egg yolk as a face mask to improve the appearance of pores and clear up acne. I'll admit I still have less-than-perfect skin, so I was game to try this again. I cracked and separated an egg and applied it to my (clean) face, using a paper towel like a brush. When the egg first touched my skin it felt cold and a bit slimy. Soon my face was covered in a sheer, bright yellow film. As the egg dried, I could feel my skin tighten. After rinsing off the dried yolk and using cleanser to completely remove it, I inspected my face. To my surprise, my pores did look smaller. My skin felt smoother and taut, but not dried out. I was actually very pleased with the results.

There are some everyday steps that can be taken to make skin look healthier. Hoff said maintaining a consistent skin care regimen is always a good idea. Some basic things that every skin type needs are hydration, antioxidants and sunscreen.

My hair stylist told me she'd heard of using a mixture of strawberries and baking soda to whiten teeth. Baking soda is a common ingredient in whitening toothpaste so I tried this suggestion, but I definitely do not recommend it. (I did hear it from a hair care professional after all, not a dentist.)

I mashed three medium, ripe strawberries and added a teaspoon of baking soda. Immediately, the mixture started bubbling and fizzing. I put some of the runny red paste on my front teeth and held it there with my finger, lips open. The first drawback to this treatment was the mixture didn't stick to the teeth, so it was very messy and dripped everywhere. The second drawback was simply that it tasted terrible. Here's a tip: It's not a good idea to brush your teeth with mint toothpaste right before you try this.

I held the strawberry-baking soda paste on my teeth as long as I could stand it, which was about three minutes. After I rinsed my mouth out, I looked in the mirror. I thought my teeth seemed a little whiter, but that may be because I was really hoping to get a good result after the bad experience. In the past, I have tried over-the-counter whitening strips and trays with whitening gel, but I think the strawberries and baking soda treatment was the messiest and the most difficult.

It's been rumored that washing your hair with beer will make it shiny. This is one urban legend that really worked for me. I shampooed my hair as usual and then poured a bottle of beer over my head, making sure I completely covered my hair in the brew. For a moment I felt like I was trapped in some sort of sexist beer

commercial, but after I rinsed it out, my hair felt squeaky clean. I blow dried and styled as usual and found my hair was actually much shinier and smoother than before. I tried this treatment twice, once with a Budweiser and once with a Schlafly Pale Ale, and both worked equally well. Who knew these local favorites could do more than provide refreshment on a hot summer day?

Susan Foizey, a senior hair stylist at Ginger Bay Salon & Spa in Kirkwood, said she's heard this trick works, but the beer must be flat. "All shampoos have been concocted by a person at some point so if it works, go for it," she said.

Many beauty products boast natural ingredients. Foizey said she believes someone could get similar benefits from using a home treatment with those same elements. "A lot of times people will tell me they can't afford the top products," she said. "Organic ingredients are expensive. I tell them to get some sort of recipe to do at home." She suggested making a paste of mashed avocado and mayonnaise to improve the look of dry hair, or using lemon juice and sunshine to keep blonde hair bright. But brunettes should stay away from the lemon juice, she warned. "It'll turn brown hair orange."

What makes hair shiny and healthy-looking? "Definitely a healthy body," Foizey said. "Hair is nourished from the inside out." She said good nutrition is key and recommended taking vitamins if necessary.

Can home beauty treatments be harmful? While Foizey doesn't think it could be harmful to experiment at on hair home, she said to make sure the ingredients used in any hair treatment are rinsed out really well. Hoff said there's a possibility of problems because of unknown allergies and cautioned against using old ingredients. She recommended storing any food mixture in the refrigerator, and only for a day or two. Spoiled food should never be given new life as a beauty treatment. "Any food used – make sure that it's fresh," said Hoff. "If it's not fit to eat, it's not fit to put on your skin."

At-home beauty treatments are inexpensive and fun to try. So, next time you want to treat yourself with food, consider wearing it instead of eating it. The tools for a more beautiful you could be just on the other side of the refrigerator door.

Simple At-Home Beauty Treatments

Beer Hair Rinse

-Shampoo hair as usual. Pour one bottle of beer over your head, covering all hair. Rinse thoroughly and style as usual.

Oatmeal Face Scrub

Courtesy of The Face & The Body's Linda Hoff

- Mix about 3 tablespoons of plain oatmeal with just enough water to form a paste.
- Apply to clean skin and let the mask dry.
- Remove with a damp washcloth.

Yogurt Face Mask

Courtesy of The Face & The Body's Linda Hoff

- Spread plain yogurt in a thin layer onto clean skin. Wait 10-15 minutes. Rinse.

Papaya Face Mask

Courtesy of The Face & The Body's Linda Hoff

- Mash up one ripe papaya. Apply to clean skin.
- Let dry and then remove with a damp washcloth.