**Benefits of Castor Oil**

Castor oil has been used both internally and externally for thousands of years. Castor oil has been shown to increase circulation and promote elimination and healing of tissues and organs underneath the skin. It is particularly effective in being absorbed into lymph circulation which can improve digestion, immune function (increases mobility and effectiveness of white blood cells) and reduce swelling in injured muscles, joints and extremities. It has also been specifically used in cases of menstrual irregularities, uterine fibroids and ovarian cysts. Some specific benefits include:

**Muscle and Joint Pain Relief:**

* The anti-inflammatory properties of castor oil make it an excellent massage oil for relieving arthritic joints, rheumatism, gout, nerve inflammations, and sore muscles and joints. Use the standard castor oil pack or the direct application.

**Constipation and Digestive Remedy**

* Castor oil has been used internally for the treatment of constipation and digestive disorders for centuries.
* Any internal use of castor oil must be prescribed and monitored by a naturopathic doctor. Small doses of castor oil can be a very strong laxative, whereas too much can be a poison.
* Castor oil applied topically can be effective for constipation and digestive disorders, with a much safer window – especially with children. For the topical use of castor oil use the standard castor oil pack or the direct application.

*🡪 Note: when treating constipation, if symptoms persist for longer than 3 days, consult your naturopathic doctor immediately.*

**Skin Conditions**

* Castor Oil packs are used for skin infections and other skin problems such as sunburn, abrasions, acne, dry skin, boils, warts, scar tissue, stretch marks and liver/age spots.
* Castor oil contains undecylenic acid which has germ-killing and disinfectant properties. This makes it an effective treatment for athlete’s foot, other fungal infections, skin ulcers, chronic itching and inflamed skin.
* For stubborn fungal infections or extremely dry and callused skin or nails, it is recommended to soak the affected area in Epsom Salts or Alkaline Salts for 10-15 minutes to soften and disinfect the skin before applying castor oil. This can help speed up the healing process.

**Menstrual Disorders, Fibroids and Cysts**

* + Castor oil is very effective in decreasing the pain and inflammation associated with menstrual disorders and in decreasing or eliminating fibroids and cysts.
  + The ricinoleic acid, present in castor oil, is an emmenogogue in nature and helps open menstruation in cases of delayed or painful or stopped menstruation. Either the standard castor oil pack or the direct application method can be used.

*🡪 Note: the administration of castor oil during a period will increase blood flow; hence, it is typically contraindicated during menses.*

**Styes**

* The antibacterial components of castor oil have been found to be effective against styes (oil gland infections on the eyelid). Simply apply a very small drop of castor oil to a Q-tip and apply directly onto the stye 2 or 3 times per day.

**Hair Care**

* The germicidal, insecticidal and fungicidal properties of ricin and ricinoleic acid present in castor oil protect the scalp and hair from microbial and fungal infections.
* Using hair care products that contain castor oil can help keep dandruff at bay and can improve the texture of coarse and dry hair. For a more direct impact, massage the oil into the scalp, leave it on overnight and wash hair the next morning.

**Wrinkles**

* Castor oil is a natural emollient and moisturizer that penetrates the skin and helps stimulate the production of collagen and elastin which can soften and hydrate the skin.
* Castor oil is a wonderful natural treatment for wrinkles since it restores and rejuvenates skin's natural youthful appearance by making skin smoother, softer and pliant. When applied in the winter it will prevent your skin from drying up and getting white patches. Dip a small cotton ball into pure castor oil and apply it on wrinkled skin before going to bed. Use only a small amount of oil when applying it to the skin near the eyes.

**Other conditions which respond well include:**

* headaches
* liver disorders
* constipation
* intestinal disorders
* gallbladder inflammation or stones
* conditions with poor elimination
* night time urinary frequency
* arthritis and inflamed joints

**Castor Oil Pack** *(most effective method)*

**Materials Needed:**

* Castor Oil (can be found at any health food store)
* Flannel or cotton cloth large enough to cover the affected area
* Plastic large enough to cover the flannel cloth (Saran Wrap works well)
* Heating pad with a low setting or a hot water bottle
* Water in which a bit of baking soda has been dissolved (this is for cleaning oil residue from your skin)

**Procedure:**

* Fold the flannel to a size that fits over the affected area.
* Pour a small quantity of the castor oil into a glass dish or pan. Soak the flannel with the castor oil (you want it to be saturated but not dripping).
* Lie down somewhere comfortable and place the castor oil soaked flannel over the affected area.
* Cover the flannel with a piece of plastic to prevent staining of clothes, linens or furniture and place the heating pad/hot water bottle on top.
* Leave the pack in place for 45-60 minutes. Use this time to relax.
* When finished store the pack in an airtight storage container or zip-lock bag.
  + To clean oil residue on your skin, use a wash cloth that has soaked in the baking soda water and been wrung out.
* You can re-use the pack several times adding more oil only when necessary. Replace the pack when it begins to change color.

🡪*For maximum effectiveness, it is necessary to apply the pack as often as possible. Patients who use the pack daily will receive the most beneficial effects. At the very least, 3 consecutive days are needed to benefit from this therapy.*

**Direct Application Method**

The easiest way to use castor oil is to massage it onto the body on the problem spot, along the spinal cord, the abdomen, or following the lymph drainage pattern (above breast line to pubic line and around each side of body). *For superficial problems, direct topical application without the use of a heating pad is typically sufficient.*

* + Put castor oil directly on the skin or area of concern. Cover it and leave it on overnight (take heat away after allotted time). Cover with old clothing/towels as the oil stains clothing and sheets.
  + Dip a cotton ball into castor oil and apply it onto the affected skin in the morning and at night.
  + For larger skin areas, soak an appropriately large piece of unbleached cotton cloth in castor oil and wrap the affected area overnight.
  + If the area is very small, soak a Band-Aid in castor oil and cover the infected skin overnight.
  + To clean off any oil residue, wash off with water in which a bit of baking soda has been dissolved.

**Side Effects of Castor Oil:**

Castor oil is normally safe if used in moderation. However, pregnant and lactating women and people with intestinal blockage, acute inflammatory intestinal disease, appendicitis or abdominal pain should not take castor oil without their doctor's approval.

*🡪 Note that these precautions apply to taking the oil internally – so you should always follow the directions on the package and consult your doctor or naturopathic professional before consuming. Internal ingestion of castor oil may result in diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting, abdominal pain or cramping.*

**Discussion:**

Castor oil has been shown to:

* Increase circulation and promote elimination and healing of tissues and organs under the skin.
* It is absorbed into lymph circulation, which can result in improved digestion, immune function, and reduction of swelling in injured joints and extremities.
* Castor oil packs have been shown to increase white blood cell count when used for 4 consecutive days.

**References:**

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Grady H (1998) *Immunomodulation through castor oil packs.* **Journal of Naturopathic Medicine**; 7(1):84-89.

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