

Myrrh Oil: Benefits of This Holy Oil

You may have heard of myrrh from Biblical stories, as it's one of the precious gifts (together with gold and frankincense) offered by the three wise men to the newborn Jesus. This valuable element actually has a long history of use, especially in ancient civilizations. Today, myrrh is most commonly known as an essential oil. Keep on reading to learn more about its many benefits.

What Is Myrrh Oil?

Myrrh oil comes from a dried resin extracted from the *Commiphora myrrha* tree, which belongs to the Commiphora plant genus.¹ Like frankincense, myrrh comes from the Burseraceae plant family.² Native to Northern Africa and the Middle East, particularly in Somalia, Ethiopia, Arabia, and Yemen, the tree grows up to five meters high, and can be identified by its light bark, knotted branches and small white flowers.³ The word "myrrh" comes from "murrh," which means "bitter" in Arabic, probably referring to the resin's bitter taste.

Myrrh was very popular among ancient cultures. The Chinese valued it as a medicine, while Egyptians used it for embalming their pharaohs⁴ as well as for their sun-worshipping rituals. In fact, myrrh was mentioned in *Ebers Papyrus*, one of the oldest Egyptian medical texts, dating back to 1550 BC.⁵ Even the Greek soldiers made use of this resin, bringing it with them to battle to stop their wounds from bleeding.⁶

To extract myrrh, the bark of the tree is cut, and a yellow sap comes out. This sap dries into reddish-brown, walnut-sized lumps, with a unique sweet and smoky aroma, that are then used to make myrrh oil. Myrrh oil has a golden yellow or brownish color, and a rich, smoky and balsamic aroma.⁷

Uses of Myrrh Oil

Both myrrh resin and myrrh oil have a long history of medicinal use, valued for their wound-healing properties. Egyptians used myrrh to treat hay fever and heal herpes.⁸ Myrrh oil has also been used as incense and a holy oil in religious rituals and ceremonies for over 5,000 years.⁹

Maintaining healthy skin is one of myrrh oil's renowned uses, as it prevents the signs of aging and soothes cracked or chapped skin. This is why it's commonly added to many skin care products today.¹⁰

Myrrh oil is also used for:¹¹

- Adding fragrance for perfumes
- Embalming
- Flavoring food products

Myrrh oil is also a valuable aromatherapy oil that can be used for massages, mixed in bathwater, or simply applied on the skin. You can also:

- **Use it as a mouthwash** to help eliminate dental infections.
- **Put it in a cold compress** to relieve sores and wounds.
- **Add it to creams and lotions** to help relieve skin infections, such as athlete's foot, ringworm, weeping eczema, bedsores, boils, carbuncles, and acne.

Composition of Myrrh Oil

There are many health-enhancing compounds in myrrh oil, such as terpenoids, a class of chemicals with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.¹² It also contains up to 75 percent sesquiterpenes, which are compounds that can affect certain parts of your brain, particularly your hypothalamus, pituitary, and amygdala, which control your emotions and produce many important hormones in your body.¹³

Other components of myrrh include alpha pinene, cadinene, dipentene, limonene, eugenol, cuminaldehyde, m-cresol, cinnamaldehyde, acetic acid, formic acid, and heerabolene.^{14, 15}

Benefits of Myrrh Oil

Myrrh oil's benefits can be attributed to its powerful antioxidant, antifungal, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, anti-parasitic, expectorant, and antispasmodic properties. This essential oil can help with many health conditions, such as:

- **Respiratory problems** - Myrrh oil works well against coughs, colds, and sore throat. It also helps relieve congestion and expel phlegm.
- **Digestive ailments** – It promotes digestive health and helps cure problems like stomach upset, diarrhea, dyspepsia, indigestion, flatulence and hemorrhoids.^{16, 17}
- **Gum and mouth diseases** – It helps relieve toothache, gingivitis, and mouth ulcers, and also freshens your breath. Myrrh oil is even used as a natural ingredient in mouthwashes and toothpaste.
- **Immune system health** - It strengthens and activates your immune system to keep your body protected from infections.

A study conducted by Chinese researchers, published in the *Journal of Medicinal Plants Research*, also found that extracts made from myrrh resin may be effective against human gynecologic cancer cells.¹⁸

How to Make Myrrh Oil

Myrrh oil is traditionally steam-distilled directly from myrrh resin. The oil has a milder and more pleasant smell than the actual resin, although some formulas are a bit strong. You can try making your own myrrh oil infusion at home. Here's what to do:¹⁹

Materials:

Myrrh resin
Olive or any vegetable carrier oil

Glass vial
Mason jar

Procedure:

1. Put a cup of the oil of your choice into a small saucepan, along with a quarter ounce (or seven grams) of myrrh resin to the oil. Set the heat to low, and allow the mixture to sit for six hours, occasionally stirring it.
2. Put the oil in a mason jar and put it in a place with direct sunlight, such as by a window, for up to two weeks.
3. Filter the oil to remove any residues.
4. Pour the myrrh oil into a glass vial.

How Does Myrrh Oil Work?

Myrrh oil works by preventing infection and putrefaction, which helps clear toxins and promote tissue repair. It also has an expectorant action that make it useful for expelling excess mucus and soothing mucus membranes, which help alleviate respiratory conditions.²⁰ Meanwhile, its calming effects on the mind and body are mostly attributed to the chemical compounds that stimulate the pituitary gland.²¹ You can use myrrh oil by:

- **Diffusing or inhaling it.** You can also add a few drops to hot water and inhale the steam.
- **Applying it topically.** Apply it directly on your skin to get its skin rejuvenating and healing properties. You can use it undiluted or mixed with carrier oils. Myrrh oil blends well with lavender, frankincense, sandalwood, and all spice oils.²²
- **Taking it internally.** Myrrh oil has been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be used as a food additive and flavoring agent. However, I do not advise ingesting it without the supervision of a qualified health care provider.

Is Myrrh Oil Safe?

If used in moderation and correct dosage (especially when ingesting it topically), myrrh oil is generally safe for adults. However, as with other essential oils, I advise you to use this oil with caution.

Myrrh oil is not recommended for pregnant women and nursing moms, as it can induce menstruation and lead to premature labor.²³ Children age six and below should also refrain from using this oil. Diabetics and other people suffering from health conditions should also consult their physician before using myrrh oil.

To make sure that myrrh oil will not have any allergic effects when applied topically, do a skin patch test on your inner arm first.

Side Effects of Myrrh Oil

According to a study²⁴ published in the journal *Phytotherapy Research*, if myrrh oil is consumed in excessive amounts, it may affect your heart rate and lead to severe heart irregularities. Other possible side effects of myrrh oil include:

- Lowered blood pressure
- Uterine bleeding
- Making a fever worse
- Diarrhea

Some people with sensitivities to myrrh oil may also experience allergic contact dermatitis²⁵ when using this oil. This oil may also interfere with anticoagulants, so I advise that you avoid using it orally if you are taking these medications.²⁶