

Sesame Oil: More Than Just a Seasoning

What Is Sesame Oil?

Derived from sesame (*Sesamum indicum*), a tall annual herb from the *Pedaliaceae* family, sesame oil is commonly used as a food ingredient and condiment. Sesame is one of the oldest cultivated plants in the world, used as far back as 3,600 years ago. It was valued for its medicinal uses, but was also known to promote youth and beauty. Roman soldiers ate a mixture of honey and sesame seeds for strength and energy.¹

Today, sesame grows extensively in Asia, particularly in China, Burma, and India. It is also one of the chief commercial crops in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.²

Sesame oil is derived from the plant's small, flat, and oval seeds, which have a nutty taste and a crunchy texture. There are two types of sesame oil: (1) light sesame oil, made from raw sesame seeds and has a light nutty flavor, and (2) dark sesame oil, made from toasted sesame seeds and has a stronger flavor and aroma.³

Uses of Sesame Oil

Sesame oil has been used for centuries in Asian cuisine. It also has medicinal purposes, especially in Ayurvedic medicine, where it is used as a base oil for about 90 percent of the herbal oils. In Ayurvedic therapy, sesame oil is renowned for its ability to strengthen and detoxify the body and ensure the proper functioning of all the vital organs. It's also used in sacred and religious ceremonies.

Today, sesame oil is a common component of skin and massage oils, hair care products, cosmetics, soaps, perfumes, and sunscreens. Sesame oil has great moisturizing, soothing, and emollient qualities. In aromatherapy, it is popularly used as a massage oil and a carrier oil for [essential oils](#).

Here are other uses for sesame oil:

- **Skin moisturizer.** Apply it to your skin to keep it soft and smooth and help prevent wrinkles from forming. You can also add it to your bath water to help treat cracked heels and dry knees and elbows. Sesame oil also soothes burns and prevents skin-related disorders.⁴
- **Removes toxins from your mouth.** It is traditionally recommended for [oil pulling](#). (However, I prefer using coconut oil for this because it tastes better.)
- **Natural sunscreen.** Apply the oil all over your face and body. You may need to reapply it, though, as the oil is easily removed, especially after heavily perspiring or jumping into water.⁵
- **Skin detoxifier.** Oil-soluble toxins are said to be attracted to sesame seed oil molecules. Apply sesame oil on your skin, leave it for 15 minutes, and then wash it off with warm water.⁶

- **Boosts your scalp and hair health.** Massage the oil into your scalp and hair to keep your locks strong and shiny. It also effectively relieves dry scalp, dandruff, and hair loss.⁷

Composition of Sesame Oil

Sesame oil contains high levels of [natural antioxidants](#) called sesamol, sesamol, and sesamin oils. Sesamin is a lignin with anti-inflammatory properties, and contains vitamin E, which helps keep your skin strong and supple.⁸ Meanwhile, sesamol possesses over two dozen beneficial pharmacologically active properties, most of which works to improve cardiovascular health.

Sesame oil contains 15 percent saturated fat, 42 percent oleic acid, and 43 percent omega-6 linoleic acid, with a composition similar to peanut oil. It is also loaded with B-complex vitamins, including thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, pyridoxine, and folic acid.⁹ It's rich in amino acids that are essential in building up proteins, and minerals like iron, copper, calcium, manganese, magnesium, selenium, phosphorus, and zinc.¹⁰

Benefits of Sesame Oil

Sesame oil has natural antibacterial, antiviral, and antioxidant properties, and many studies prove its therapeutic and health-promoting benefits. GreenMedInfo founder Sayer Ji lists some of the potential benefits of sesame oil for health conditions like:

- **Diabetes** - A 2006 study published in the *Journal of Medicinal Foods* found that sesame oil helps lower blood pressure and glucose in hypertensive diabetics.¹¹
- **Multiple sclerosis (MS)** – In mice studies, sesame oil helped reduce IFN-gamma secretion, a key factor in initiating autoimmune inflammation and injury in the nervous system, protecting mice from developing the disease.¹² It is also being researched for its potential role in Huntington's disease, another neurodegenerative condition.¹³
- **Atherosclerosis** – The sesamol in sesame oil was found to help prevent atherosclerotic lesions from forming in mice fed an atherogenic diet.¹⁴
- **Cancer** – The sesamin in sesame oil has been studied for its potential to inhibit the proliferation of various cancer cells, such as leukemia, multiple myeloma, and colon, [prostate](#), breast, lung, and pancreatic cancers.

“Sesame deserves to be recognized, along with garlic, honey, turmeric and a select few other substances, as an easily accessible and affordable food-medicine that, if consumed regularly, could quite possibly save lives,” Ji says.

How to Make Sesame Oil

Sesame seeds are pressed and crushed to release the oils. There are many processing methods for this oil, which either involve manually intensive techniques or chemical extraction methods. Some common techniques are cold pressing, hot

pressing, or toasting the seeds.¹⁵ A large number of seeds is needed to produce every ounce of this oil.

When buying sesame oil, look for a cold-pressed product, as this method preserves more of the oil's nutrients and healthful antioxidants.

How Does Sesame Oil Work?

Sesame oil can be used topically or ingested (in moderate amounts). It can also be used as nose drops to relieve chronic sinusitis, or as a mouthwash or throat gargle to kill strep and other common cold bacteria.

When applied to your skin, sesame oil absorbs quickly and penetrates through your tissues, up to your bone marrow. Your liver also accepts the oil molecules as "friendly molecules," and does not remove them from your blood.

Despite its popularity as an ingredient in many recipes, I do not advise consuming this oil in large amounts. Even though it's a rancid-resistant oil, its [high levels of omega-6 fats](#) can make your cells fragile and prone to oxidation. Getting excessive omega-6 fats from this oil may also throw your [omega 3 to 6 ratio](#) out of whack.

Is Sesame Oil Safe?

Sesame oil is generally safe. It has been evaluated safe for use in cosmetics. In a final assessment published on the *International Journal of Toxicology*, sesame oil was deemed safe for use as a cosmetic ingredient.¹⁶ To ensure that topical application of this oil does not cause any unusual reactions, try applying it to a small area of your skin first.

Because it's a mild inflammatory and has high omega-6 levels, I would recommend consuming it in very small amounts. If you have an allergy to sesame seeds, DO NOT consume or use this oil, as it may lead to allergic reactions.¹⁷

I also advise pregnant women or nursing moms to use extreme caution when consuming sesame seeds and sesame oil, as it may have hormone-inducing effects, triggering uterine contractions that can lead to preterm labor or miscarriage.¹⁸

Side Effects of Sesame Oil

Common symptoms of sesame allergy include asthma, itching, red and irritated eyes, hives, runny nose, and gastrointestinal problems. Although rare, some people with sesame allergy may experience anaphylaxis, an intense and rapid allergic response that can lead to difficulty breathing.¹⁹

Reports found that people with allergy to nuts like walnuts and peanuts may also experience allergic reactions to sesame seeds and oil. ²⁰