

Hamamelis Virginiana

Witch-hazel



Witch hazel is a plant with powerful medicinal properties that can be used in a variety of ways. There are many species of witch hazel, but *Hamamelis virginiana* — a type of shrub native to North America — is most commonly used in folk medicine in the US. The leaves and bark are made into teas and ointments.

Most often applied to the skin and scalp, witch hazel is widely known for its ability to ease inflammation and soothe sensitive skin.

It can also be added to herbal teas and ingested orally in small amounts as a natural treatment for other conditions.

Here are the top 8 benefits and uses of witch hazel.

1. Relieves Inflammation

Inflammation is a normal immune response designed to protect your body against injury and infection.

However, chronic inflammation is thought to play a central role in the development of certain diseases .

Witch hazel contains many compounds with potent anti-inflammatory properties, including gallic acid and tannins.

It also contains antioxidants that help prevent widespread inflammation and neutralize free radicals, which are disease-causing compounds that can build up in your body .

Therefore, witch hazel could have far-reaching benefits and may be useful in the treatment of inflammatory-related issues, such as acne, eczema or psoriasis.

Studies show that topically-applied witch hazel can effectively reduce inflammation and help soothe your skin .

2. Reduces Skin Irritation

Sensitive skin, defined by abnormal sensory symptoms, is a very common condition, affecting an estimate of up to 45% of Americans .

Some research suggests that applying witch hazel topically to sensitive skin may be beneficial in the treatment of inflamed, irritated or broken skin.

In fact, witch hazel has been shown to suppress erythema — a reddening of the skin caused by injury or irritation — by up to 27% .

One study in 40 people found that using a lotion with as little as 10% witch hazel extract was effective in reducing skin inflammation and treating erythema .

Similarly, another small study found that a topical preparation containing witch hazel was able to provide relief for sensitive or irritated facial skin.

3. Helps Treat Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are caused by the swelling and inflammation of the veins in your rectum and anus, resulting in symptoms, such as itchiness and bleeding.

Witch hazel is often used as a natural remedy to provide relief from the discomfort and pain caused by hemorrhoids.

It's typically added to a cloth or cotton ball and applied directly to the affected area to soothe the skin.



Though research is limited, witch hazel is believed to help treat the itching, redness, pain and swelling associated with hemorrhoids due to its anti-inflammatory effects .

What's more, it has hemostatic properties, meaning that it may stop bleeding caused by hemorrhoids .

However, more studies in humans are needed to examine the effectiveness of witch hazel on hemorrhoids.



4. Fights Acne

Thanks to its powerful anti-inflammatory properties, some research suggests that witch hazel could be useful in the treatment of acne.

It can be applied directly to your face after cleansing or steaming for maximum effectiveness. It acts as an astringent, causing your tissues to contract to help shrink pores, while also soothing your skin and relieving inflammation .

This may prevent acne-causing bacteria from infecting your skin. For this reason, witch hazel is commonly added to many over-the-counter acne products and is especially useful for individuals with oily skin.

Still, studies on the effects of witch hazel on acne are limited and further research is needed to determine its efficacy.

5. Alleviates Scalp Sensitivity

Scalp sensitivity can be caused by a number of factors, ranging from cosmetic hair treatments to dermatological conditions, such as psoriasis or seborrheic dermatitis.

Applying a bit of witch hazel to your scalp before washing your hair may help treat scalp sensitivity and provide relief from symptoms, such as itching and tenderness.

According to one study in 1,373 people, using a shampoo containing witch hazel extract was effective in reducing scalp irritation .

Witch hazel may also help relieve inflammation, which could be useful in reducing scalp sensitivity caused by conditions like psoriasis or eczema.

It's also sometimes used as a natural remedy to relieve symptoms of other scalp problems, such as dandruff and dryness.

However, additional research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of witch hazel in the treatment of these conditions.

6. Soothes Sore Throat

Because of its ability to decrease inflammation and act as an astringent, witch hazel is sometimes used to treat sore throats.

Boiling one teaspoon (5 ml) of witch hazel in one cup (240 ml) of water for about 10 minutes, then gargling with the mixture, may provide relief.



This is believed to help reduce swelling, decrease pain and dry excess mucus caused by a sore throat.

Yet, even though the anti-inflammatory properties of witch hazel are well documented, its use for treating sore throats is based solely on anecdotal evidence.

High-quality studies are needed to ascertain the potential benefits of witch hazel on sore throats.

In addition, taking witch hazel orally may cause stomach irritation due to its high tannin content, so it's important to proceed with caution and consult your doctor if you have any concerns.

7. Protects Against Skin Damage

Witch hazel is rich in tannins, a natural plant compound with powerful antioxidant properties that can help protect your skin against damage when applied topically.

One animal study found that tannins can act as a barrier, preventing inflammation-causing substances from entering your skin cells.

What's more, a test-tube study showed that witch hazel helped neutralize harmful free radicals and prevented the spread of skin cancer cells .

Similarly, another animal study discovered that the tannins in witch hazel were able to slow skin tumor growth in mice exposed to radiation.

However, most research is currently limited to test-tube and animal studies. More studies are needed to evaluate the effects of witch hazel on humans.



8. Wards off Infection

Some studies indicate that witch hazel may be beneficial in fighting certain types of viral infections.

One test-tube study, for example, found that the tannins in witch hazel exhibited antiviral effects against both influenza A and human papillomavirus (HPV) .

Another test-tube study showed that witch hazel extract inhibited the activity of herpes simplex virus 1, which is often the culprit behind cold sores .

For this reason, witch hazel is often applied topically as a natural remedy to help fight cold sores and relieve symptoms.

But although test-tube studies have found promising results, human studies are still lacking.

More studies are needed to look at the effects of witch hazel and its potential impact on viral infections in healthy adults.

How to Safely Use Witch Hazel

Most people can use witch hazel safely with minimal risk of adverse side effects.

Ointments and extracts can be applied directly to your skin several times per day and safely administered for the treatment of hemorrhoids after each bowel movement.

Some people may experience skin irritation or allergic reactions after applying witch hazel topically.

Doing an initial skin patch test on a small portion of your skin can help prevent unwanted side effects and skin reactions.

Additionally, while taking 3–4 teaspoons (15–20 ml) of witch hazel per day is generally considered safe, ingesting large amounts may cause stomach irritation and vomiting.

Therefore, it's best to only use small amounts orally and to discuss any side effects or concerns with your doctor.