We don’t often think of the mouth as being critically important to good health, but Ayurveda puts a lot of emphasis on oral hygiene.

In Ayurveda, oil gargling and swishing the oil through the teeth and mouth is said to bring many health benefits:
For example, it can enhance the clarity of the senses and the mind, and can strengthen the teeth, gums and jaw.
- It helps keep the sinuses clear and promotes sinus health.
- It can make breathing easier and clearer, as well as freshening the breath by reducing unhealthy bacteria in the mouth and throat.
- There is a chance it can bring relief for day to day neck and shoulder stiffness.
- It helps keep the skin of the face and neck hydrated and soft and may help to reduce the appearance of wrinkles in the cheeks.
- It is very good for singers or public speakers, because it can help to tone up the vocal cords, possibly improving the vocal range and smoothness of the voice.

Holding oil in the mouth is called Gandush, while gargling and swishing it through the teeth and mouth is called Kavalagraha. The common name these days is “oil pulling”, and it is becoming very popular.

Oil used this way also helps to reduce bad bacteria in the mouth, while supporting healthy bacteria. Keep in mind that the mouth is the beginning of the GI Tract, known as the “maha shrota” (the “great channel”), which runs from the mouth to the anus. The maha shrota handles all digestion, absorption and elimination functions of the body, as well as being the home of the microbiome, and much of the immune system is housed close to it.
So oil swishing and gargling can help to reduce the body’s toxic load.

Many recent research studies support Ayurveda’s emphasis on oral hygiene. In modern medicine, Heart health is becoming closely linked to oral hygiene:

Swedish study 1985: The result showed that subjects with a higher plaque index, marker of poor oral hygiene, were more likely to develop autoimmune diseases in 30 years.

Australian and Dutch studies 2016: A recent Australian study involving 172,630 individuals with Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) concluded that tooth loss and self-rated gum problems were markers for increased risk of ischaemic heart disease [22]. Joshy G, Arora M, Korda R, Chalmers J, Banks E. Is poor oral health a risk marker for incident cardiovascular disease hospitalisation and all-cause mortality? Findings from 172 630 participants from the prospective 45 and Up Study. BMJ Open. 2016;6(8):e012386 doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012386 [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

Another recent study involving 60,174 participants in the Netherlands clinically diagnosed periodontitis and found that it had an independent association with atherosclerotic CVD [23].
Similar associations have been reported in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Beukers N. G., van der Heijden G. J., van Wijk A. J., & Loos B. G. Periodontitis is an independent risk indicator for atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases among 60 174 participants in a large dental school in the Netherlands. J Epidemiol Community Health. 2017;71(1), 37–42. doi: 10.1136/jech-2015-206745 [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

Which oils to use?

- Traditionally, sesame oil is used, but other oils can also be used, especially by Pitta individuals, who may not tolerate sesame oil’s heating properties.
- Olive oil is good for this purpose.
- Coconut oil is best mixed with another oil, because some sources feel that its efficient antimicrobial action may strip out healthy mouth bacteria as well, if it is used alone for gargling and swishing.
- Banyan Botanicals sells “Daily Swish”, which is a mixture of sesame and coconut oils, with added helpful ayurvedic herbs, and a touch of mint or cinnamon.

How to do it:

This process is best done in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Put 3-4 teaspoons of warmed oil into your mouth and swish it around, also from side to side, and through your teeth. Every few minutes, gargle with the oil a few times.

Continue this process for 10-20 minutes, as time allows. You can do other things while doing the swishing. For example, you could have your shower, do an oil massage, make your lunch, or even go for a walk.

Don’t swallow the oil. When finished, spit it out down the toilet, because it may clog water pipes over time if you use the sink.

Rinse your mouth thoroughly with warm water afterwards.