



HERBAL MEDICINE

Treating Skin/Hair Fall Dryness With Camellia Sinensis

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Greetings from the land of tea (and fair tea maidens). The fall harvest is being plucked, and the weather along China's east coast has changed from the torrential hot rains and high humidity of summer into the welcome, cooler and drier fall season. This weather takes its toll on our bodies, particularly the lungs - and related skin and hair, especially in the more arid climes.

Most people have seen all of the advertisements promoting anti-dryness, anti-aging products enhanced with green tea. Many of us are aware of the folkloric uses of tea as an herb for health maintenance, and modern research has determined that the primary health constituents of tea include antioxidants, oils, emulsifiers (detergents), proteins, vitamins, and minerals.

How many of us intentionally use tea for cleaning and nourishing the skin and hair? Have you ever used tea for treating sunburn? It works very well for these purposes!

Here in China, it is common for restaurant workers to use leftover tea (instead of soap or detergent) to wipe down the table tops when busing tables. The oil- and grease-cutting power of tea is higher than you might think, and is strong enough to cleanse oily skin and hair conditions, producing "squeaky-clean" results. Hong and I use tea leftovers (from the previous day) every morning as a hair and skin final rinse/conditioner, to take full advantage of the tea oil's ability to nourish. (Just steep your day's tea leaves overnight to leach out all of the untapped nutrients.)

We take hour-long tea baths, sometimes together for a little variety, about one day, every week or so. When I awoke earlier today, I was "unpleasantly surprised," or so I thought at the time, to find out that our neighborhood's household water was cut off, and would be for the next 24 hours. Being the ignorant foreigner that I am, I did not have an extra tub of wash water sitting around to handle minor

common emergencies such as this. To make matters worse, I am basically unapproachable in the morning until I have taken my wake-up shower and finished drinking my first infusion/teapot full of one of my favorite teas.

"Not a great way to start the day. Today is the deadline for me to go sit in front of the computer to write the tea article," I grouched to my wife.

We decided to dedicate our leftover tea for face-washing only. With three applications, using only a cotton hand towel and about six liquid ounces of tea in total, my face was remarkably clean.

Cool Things Happen

A rather extreme situation regarding skin and tea treatment occurred a couple of years ago, when we were snorkeling in Key West, Fla. It was August, and the summer sun was hot. We neglected to put on any sunscreen before jumping, which is usually not a problem, since most of our time on snorkel trips is spent underwater. This happened to be a guided tour, and the skipper insisted that we all wear life jackets "so we don't drown." This was in a lofty six inches of chop in a calm sea. Aside from feeling like I was on a Disneyland float ride for kids, it was a splendid day for me. Unfortunately for Hong, she spent most of the afternoon at the stern, wrapped in a towel and hanging over the rail, as she was unaccustomed to diesel fumes and the ocean's motion.

On our cruise back to the marina, Hong noticed that my shoulders looked as red as a cooked lobster. (I had only been out of the water for an hour.) By the time we got home, the pain was bad, and reminded me of past outdoor experiences that had resulted in second-degree burns (involving peeling skin). We had no aloe vera, and all of the stores were closed.

Hong suggested trying a tea bath. I laughed. Then I tried it anyway - I thought it might help; it couldn't hurt; and at least the cool water would help. We decided to sacrifice a full ounce of our favorite green oolong for this experiment, the details of which follow.

First, we ground up the whole dry tea leaves into a powder so that it would infuse later, and as much as possible. Then we steeped the tea powder in a large pot for one hour (using water that had been brought to a full boil). We added it to cool bath water (about 72° Fahrenheit), which I lounged in for about two hours. That night, the skin-burned areas did not bother me much.

The next day, rather than having pain and the expected "shedding" look, my skin was merely pink and pain-free. Much to my total amazement, I could even slap my back without pain. There was one side-effect, however. My hair was silky smooth.

Take the Tea Bath Challenge



Co-author Hong Ji, blissfully tea bathing.

Do yourself a favor. Splurge and experience the sensation yourself. Prepare one ounce of high-grade tea leaf (green tea, preferably a green oolong) as described above. Soak in it for one full hour or longer. Be sure to completely submerge your face and hair often (snorkel and partner optional).

Enjoy your tea!

NOVEMBER 2005