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# Healing *lifestyles & spas*

**Featuring: Skin Fitness Plus**

## Stimulate, Rejuvenate, and Detoxify through DRY BRUSHING

By Felicia M. Tomasko

When you wake up on a cold winter morning feeling a bit sluggish and tired, you may be tempted to reach for a cup of coffee. Fortunately if you want a great wake-up ritual without the buzz, there's an alternative routine that's rejuvenating, revitalizing, detoxifying, and even improves your outlook on life. Dry brushing is an invigorating way to begin the day, as well as an effective evening ritual to brush away the day's accumulated stress, tension, and toxins.

Dry brushing supports skin renewal, stimulates the lymphatic system (which positively affects the nervous, immune, and digestive systems), aids in removal of accumulated toxins, and brightens the spirit, giving your body and mind a fresh glow. As the name implies, it is practiced when the skin is dry, before bathing or applying oil or lotion. This promotes exfoliation, skin renewal and revitalization, and the stimulation of the lymphatic and nervous systems beneath the skin. Before a bath or shower is a delightful time to include dry brushing in your daily routine, especially since the subsequent immersion in water can support the removal of dead skin and continue the detoxification process.

### Exfoliation

First and foremost, our skin is our largest organ, and as such it also serves as our main system of elimination, which is a necessary component of detoxification. Dry brushing is exfoliating, and helps to slough off the dead skin cells promoting renewal of the skin.

According to Dr. Julia Tatum Hunter, dermatologist and owner of **Skin Fitness Plus** in Beverly Hills, California, proper exfoliation is particularly important for people with thick skin that tends to grow so quickly that the layers grow over themselves and block the pores. She does caution though, that people with thinner, more sensitive skin that is prone to rashes may want to be cautious and avoid overuse of exfoliation.

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Detoxification is an important part of maintaining our overall health and vitality. Encouraging regular detoxification through various methods of dry brushing is part of traditional systems of medicine worldwide and is a regular fixture on spa menus.

At the Townhouse Spa in New York City, owner Jamie Ahn offers dry brushing because she reports that "it removes dead skin cells and stimulates oil production, resulting in firm and smooth skin."

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## Stimulation

In addition to helping the outer layer of skin slough off, dry brushing gently stimulates blood flow to the skin through the smaller capillaries in the skin's deeper layers. The increased blood flow both promotes skin renewal and supports proper elimination and detoxification. Such areas of the body with thicker skin, larger muscles, and more insulation, as the thighs, hips, and buttocks, benefit from more vigorous brushing or extra stimulation, increasing circulation and encouraging elimination of toxins. This is particularly important if a daily routine involves long hours sitting at a desk, driving in a car, or even standing in one position, all of which can lead to stagnation.

In the tradition of Ayurvedic medicine, stimulating the skin through dry brushing can break through the dense, heavy *kapha* dosha. The *kapha* dosha in Ayurveda represents the qualities of water and earth in our bodies and governs our physical structure as well as our body's insulation (our fat layers) and the health of our immune system. When kapha is properly balanced, we feel strong, radiant, and experience long-lasting stamina. But when kapha becomes out of balance, we may feel sluggish, weighed down, sleepy, and experience accumulation of toxins (such as cellulite or dead skin).

To counteract this, particularly in the naturally kapha-increasing winter season, Ayurvedic specialist Jeff Turner of Living Ayurveda in Monterey, California, incorporates dry brushing techniques as part of the regular programs of traditional panchakarma cleansing programs. He suggests dry brushing, either at home or in the clinic, to invigorate a sluggish constitution, promote weight loss, uplift mood, and stimulate the lymphatic system.

## Lymphatic Cleansing

Deeper than the skin's surface, dry brushing stimulates the lymphatic system, one of the most important integrated systems in our body. The network of vessels in the lymphatic system acts as a filtration system throughout the body, cleaning up byproducts of metabolism, dead cells, and other waste material, returning fluids and materials to the bloodstream where they can be processed or eliminated.

White blood cells, our immune system's first line of defense, circulate throughout the body and the tissues through the lymphatic system as well as the bloodstream. Dry brushing stimulates the movement of these vital components of our immune system throughout our entire body. The combination of increasing the circulation of white blood cells along with removing built-up waste products strengthens our defense mechanisms, particularly during the winter cold and flu season. For this reason, spa detoxification programs, at such spas as San Francisco's Spa Solé Detox Center, Lake Austin Spa, and the Townhouse Spa incorporate dry brushing into treatments.

## Calm the Mind, through the Skin

The nervous system is also intimately connected to the skin, since we have so many touch receptors throughout the skin's layers. Touch can be soothing and calming when we're coping with stress or in need of relaxation, as well as uplifting and invigorating when we're depressed. For this reason, Turner often suggests a regular dry brushing routine for people who are coping with depression and has seen profound results in people incorporating this as a regular practice. No matter what a person's mood, a few minutes of dry brushing in the morning can make the difference between feeling sleepy and being ready to greet the day.

While the occasional use of dry brushing can be an effective pick-me-up, regular use is beneficial for maintenance. If you also include massage in your daily routine, schedule the dry brushing first, and then the oil massage. A daily dry brushing practice supports our physical and emotional health and also serves as a pampering technique that encourages self-love. When we take the time to touch, to connect to our own skin, and to set the intention for self-healing, it improves our self-esteem and sense of self.

[next page >](#)