

Thyme may be better for acne than prescription creams

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Herbal preparations of thyme could be more effective at treating skin acne than prescription creams, according to research presented at the Society for General Microbiology's Spring Conference in Dublin this week. Further clinical testing could lead to an effective, gentler treatment for the skin condition.

Researchers from Leeds Metropolitan University tested the effect of thyme, marigold and myrrh tinctures on *Propionibacterium acnes* – the bacterium that causes [acne](#) by infecting skin pores and forming spots, which range from white heads through to puss-filled cysts. The group found that while all the preparations were able to kill the bacterium after five minutes exposure, thyme was the most effective of the three. What's more, they discovered that thyme tincture had a greater antibacterial effect than standard concentrations of benzoyl peroxide – the active ingredient in most anti-acne creams or washes.

Dr Margarita Gomez-Escalada who is leading the research project explained how tinctures are made from plants and herbs. "The plant material is steeped in alcohol for days or even weeks to prepare a tincture. This process draws out the active compounds from the plant. While thyme, marigold and myrrh are common herbal alternatives to standard antibacterial skin washes, this is the first study to demonstrate the effect they have on the bacterium that causes the infection leading to acne," she said. The researchers used a standard in vitro model that is used to test the effect of different substances applied to the skin. The effects of the tinctures were measured against an alcohol control –

proving their antibacterial action was not simply due to the sterilizing effect of the alcohol they are prepared in.

These initial findings pave the way for more research into the use of tinctures as a treatment for acne. "We now need to carry out further tests in conditions that mimic more closely the skin environment and work out at the molecular level how these tinctures are working. If thyme tincture is proven to be as clinically effective as our findings suggest, it may be a natural alternative to current treatments," explained Dr Gomez-Escalada.

A herbal treatment for acne would be very welcome news - particularly for acne sufferers who experience skin sensitivity. "The problem with treatments containing benzoyl peroxide is the side-effects they are associated with," said Dr Gomez-Escalada. "A burning sensation and skin irritation are not uncommon. Herbal preparations are less harsh on the [skin](#) due to their anti-inflammatory properties while our results suggest they can be just as, if not more, effective than chemical treatments."

Provided by Society for General Microbiology

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