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What to Know About Arnica, the Post-Op Skin Protector

Allie Hogan | June 22, 2022



After having an operation or any in-office treatment, from lasers to injectables, your skin is more vulnerable and delicate than usual, so it requires a bit of extra TLC. Arnica is a natural ingredient widely beloved by doctors for its ability to reduce swelling, bruising and pain. If you've ever considered implementing arnica in your post-op skin-care routine, we have all the answers on how, why and when to use it.

What is arnica?

Arnica, also referred to as arnica Montana, is a plant that has potent benefits for skin and body. It's "a botanical herb extracted from European yellow mountain daisies and has been used for centuries as a homeopathic remedy," explains Omaha, NE dermatologist Joel Schlessinger, MD. "Arnica is a natural anti-inflammatory and may increase blood flow, which speeds healing," explains Palo Alto, CA facial plastic surgeons David Lieberman, MD and Sachin S. Parikh, MD. "Inflammation contributes to many post-op issues—pain, swelling, bruising—so reducing inflammation can help in all of those areas."

Arnica is great for post-op skin care

Arnica has a range of benefits, especially in relation to post-op skin healing. It's "shown to have anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties," says Dr. Schlessinger. "Arnica has been purported to help minimize swelling, pain and bruising post-surgery." However, he notes that studies confirming the efficacy of the ingredient have produced mixed results. "My feeling is

that it has been helpful in many of my patients, but only if used early and often. Even better, it should be used prior to procedures to ‘prime’ the area,” says Dr. Schlessinger.

Washington, D.C. dermatologist Tina Alster, MD instructs her patients to apply arnica directly on the area, if the skin is intact, twice daily. If the skin is not intact, she recommends applying the ingredient as close to the area as possible. Houston plastic surgeon Henry Mentz, MD advises his patients to begin taking arnica tablets two weeks prior to surgery and three weeks post-operation.

It can be beneficial for other procedures or pain

In addition to helping heal skin after surgery, arnica can also come in handy after injections such as Botox Cosmetic and fillers, says Beverly Hills, CA facial plastic surgeon **Kimberly J. Lee, MD**. Dr. Mentz notes it can also be beneficial following laser treatments.

“If you would rather use a natural remedy, bruise easily after injections or are advised by your physician to avoid traditional anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen, you could try a homeopathic preparation of arnica,” says Dr. Schlessinger. “When combined with other ingredients, it may help relieve symptoms of sore muscles and sprains and help bruises to heal faster.”

Oral supplements versus topical products

The experts are split on the best way to incorporate arnica into your skin-care routine following a procedure, so it’s best to check in with your doctor. Dr. Alster says she doesn’t feel oral supplements are as useful as topical formulas in this case. Dr. Schlessinger agrees and also notes that he feels “many supplements can cause allergic reactions,” whereas “the topical forms are well tolerated and provide good results if used as directed.”

On the other hand, Dr. Lee feels that oral supplements are more effective for post-surgical and post-injection patients. In her practice, the topical form comes into play if there is bruising. After surgery, Drs. Lieberman and Sachin give patients 1000 mg oral arnica tablets. “They can get them at Whole Foods or nutrition stores, as well. Pairing the topical arnica with the ingestible —taking the inside-outside approach—seems to yield the best results as far as post-op bruising and swelling,” they explain.

The benefits: reduced swelling, bruising and pain

“Arnica tablets and arnica topical can significantly reduce post-surgical bruising and swelling,” says Dr. Mentz. “It can relieve pain, speed up wound healing, and decrease puffiness.” If taken ahead of time, Dr. Lee says arnica can help prevent the bruising that happens after a procedure or it can help heal bruises when taken after. Dr. Schlessinger points to a 2010 study that found that a topical arnica ointment may help reduce bruising more effectively than a placebo or a vitamin K treatment.

Arnica can help reduce pain. Dr. Alster notes that this may be related to the reduction in swelling. “Due to its anti-inflammatory properties, arnica has been used for many years as a homeopathic option to relieve muscle pain and tension,” says Dr. Schlessinger. He adds that it’s even be used to help alleviate symptoms of osteoarthritis. A 2013 study found it as effective as ibuprofen gel for hand osteoarthritis.

Expert-approved arnica products

Dr. Mentz and Drs. Lieberman and Sachin recommend prior *NewBeauty* Award winner Alastin Skincare INhance Post-Injection Serum (\$58). Dr. Alster suggests The A Method Soothe HC Arnica Recovery Balm (\$50-\$140) and OcuMend Gel Pads, which patients can get through their physician.

Dr. Schlessinger recommends Eminence Organics Calm Skin Arnica Masque (\$56), Naturopathica Alpine Arnica & Magnesium Gel (\$34), DerMend Moisturizing Bruise Formula Cream (\$30) and Teoxane RHA Deep Repair Balm Ultra-Comfort Soothing Balm (\$70) for at-home care.

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