



Should I Be Using Clay to Treat Acne?

The key to clear skin might just be a little dirt.



BY KEZIAH WEIR APR 25, 2017

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I have cranky skin (sensitive, prone to tantrums), and over the years, I've tried all manner of soaps and tonics and leave-ons aimed at calming it down and clearing it up, always favoring the more extreme formulas strong enough, so I thought, to snuff out all the oil and dirt clogging it up. Until two months ago, when I spoke to Manhattan-based dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, MD, and my skin-care worldview was shattered. "Acne doesn't mean you're dirty,"

Zeichner told me. "People who wash their skin regularly may break out, and people who don't may have clear skin." And then the kicker: "Overwashing may disrupt the skin barrier." In other words, not only had I not been solving the problem, I may have been causing it.

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And dirt, long considered my foe, might actually be my greatest ally. Specifically, dirt's electrically charged component—clay—which, as Zeichner explained, combats excess oil and draws out impurities (e.g., inflammation-causing excess sebum) without stripping the skin of moisture completely. Clay as cleanser isn't anything new—Cleopatra is said to have maintained her poreless complexion with the help of white-clay masks—but it's new to me: The first standouts in my experiment are Fresh's Umbrian Clay, a no-nonsense gunk-extractor mask, and Borghese Fango Delicato Active Mud for Delicate Skin, a silky, seafoam-colored concoction fit for a mermaid. While slathering the former on my oily T-zone and the latter on my more delicate décolletage, I'm struck by how natural—and almost spiritual—it feels to cover myself in mud. Perhaps it's no coincidence that ancient civilizations, from the Incans to the Greeks, theorized that a creator deity fashioned human beings out of glorified dirt. (It's a claim that a group of scientists at Cornell all but backed up in 2013, when they found that clay can act as an incubator for DNA and the other building blocks of life.) Better yet, the stuff actually worked: My windburned skin was less ruddy and softer to the touch.

Now hooked, I consult Yael Alkalay, founder of skin-care brand Red Flower. A decade ago, Alkalay launched her hammam set, a clay-centric line partially inspired by visits to Turkish and Moroccan bathhouses that left her with a "feeling of lightness and renewal." I have a similar reaction the first time I sluice myself down with her Moroccan Mint Tea Silt Purifier body wash; paint myself from hairline to pinkie toe in a thin layer of Jasmine Rose Rhassoul Clay combined with a capful of apple cider vinegar (to balance out the clay's alkaline base); dollop L'Oréal Paris Hair Expert Extraordinary Clay Pre-Shampoo Mask on my scalp; and then soak in the bath for an hour. The next morning, the Rhassoul Clay has significantly reduced a painful cystic breakout on my jawline (brought on, I think, from forgetting to heed Zeichner's warning about overcleansing), and by the next evening, my oil-prone roots still

look as if they've been freshly shampooed. As my new favorite saying goes, a little dirt don't hurt.



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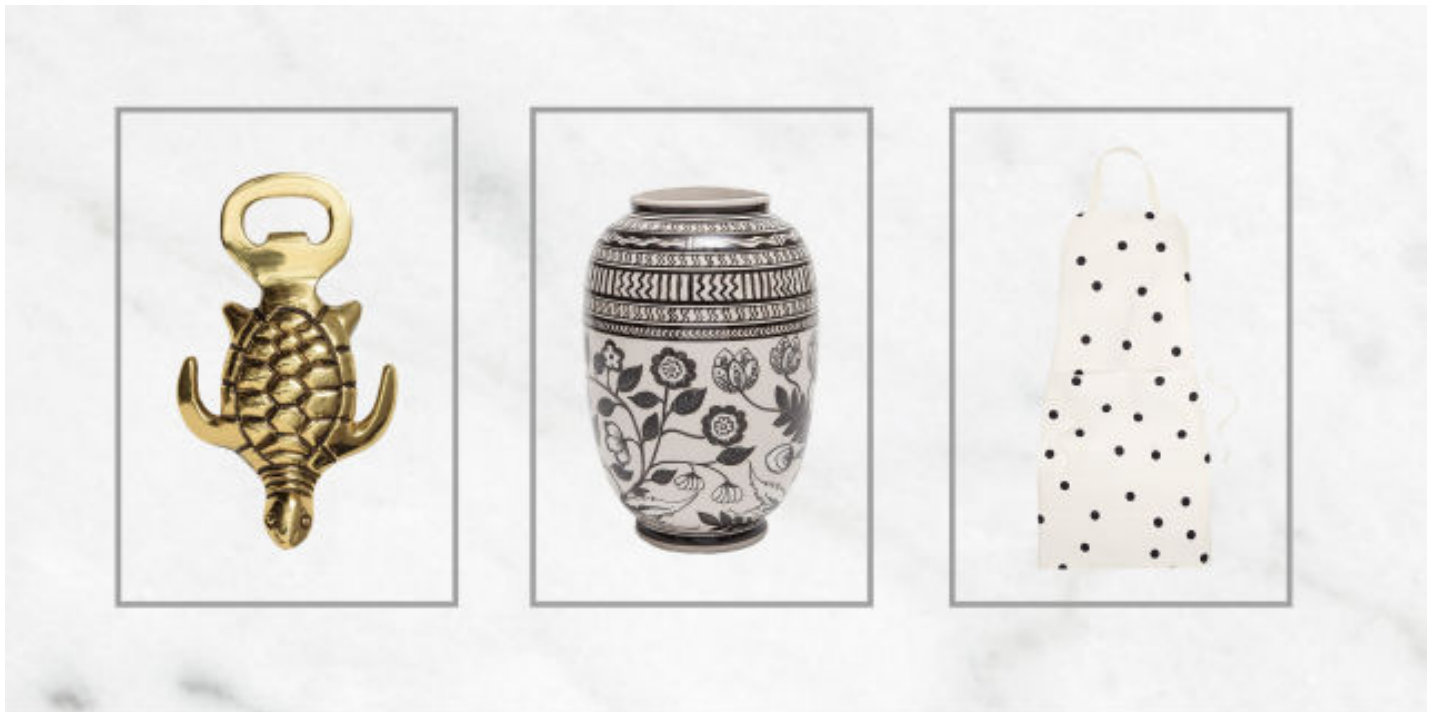
1. The Dirt Natural Toothpaste.
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3. Fresh Umbrian Clay Purifying Mask.
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6. Yes to Tomatoes Clear Skin DIY Powder-to-Clay Mask.

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