

Is There Any Truth to Dry Brushing?

Maybe we spend way too much time on Pinterest, but when we first heard about dry brushing, it sounded like a [skin-care](#) miracle. Proponents of the technique [claim](#) dry brushing stimulates the lymphatic system, unclogs pores, exfoliates dead skin cells, reduces cellulite, and basically gives you the skin of your dreams. But, like we do when anything sounds too good to be true, we took a deep dive into the facts to see if the benefits match up to reality.

The Brush-Off



The proper way to dry brush: Give your body a thorough rub-down while your skin is dry, using a bristled brush, an exfoliating mitt, or washcloth to brush in circular motions toward your heart. (The stiffer the bristles, the better.) The aim is to leave your skin clear, cellulite reduced, and your body energized. It's also, [supposedly](#), a way to stimulate your circulatory system and remove toxins from the body.

The problem is that these claims aren't entirely true, says [Paul Jarrod Frank](#), M.D., a board-certified cosmetic dermatologist and [Alphaeon](#) physician. The skin is the largest organ of the body, and as such, comes fully equipped with one of the most intricate circulatory systems.

So while your skin does create "toxins," like dead skin cells (we get a [fresh 'dermis every 28 days](#)), the circulatory system whisks them away to the liver, which gets rid of them without needing any help.

Hypothetically, *massage* (which can be a happy side effect of dry brushing) could stimulate lymphatic drainage and optimize circulation in whatever part of the body you're working on, Frank says. That's all well and good, but he says the circulatory system also pretty much takes care of itself—so you really don't need to worry about "toxins" floating around in your body.

And even if there were, they wouldn't cause cellulite. While scientists are still researching the causes of cellulite, it likely just comes down to genetics, says [Omar Ibrahim](#), M.D., dermatologist and medical director of the Connecticut Skin Institute. Cellulite is mechanically caused by fibrous bands that pull down on superficial parts of the skin, and there's no evidence that it's actually caused by "toxins." Hence why [cellulite affects everyone, buff or not](#), Ibrahim says.

The Real Deal

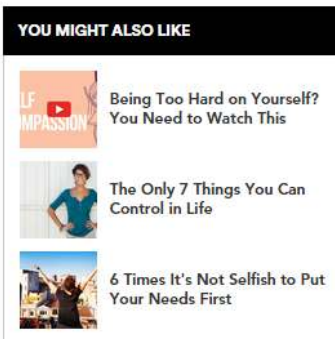
So why do people keep dry brushing if it doesn't actually work? The answer probably lies in the massage aspect, says [A. Yasmine Kirkorian](#), M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology at Children's National Health System—in other words, it just feels really damn good.




"We know massage [increases people's feeling of well-being and happiness](#), so if [dry brushing] is done in the same way, it stimulates people in the same way," Kirkorian says. So as they say, you do you—and if dry brushing makes you happy, go for it.

Plus, *any* type of massage will leave skin looking plump as a result of the increased circulation, meaning that cellulite may look lessened temporarily, Frank says. But that effect is extremely short-lived. Think of how rosy your cheeks are when you're out in the cold, and how quickly it fades when you come inside, Kirkorian says. It's the same effect—[vasodilation](#)—at work.

Other than that, dry brushing is really just good for exfoliating the skin, Ibrahim says. Our top layer of skin cells [can get thicker](#), or more adherent, as we get older (or slack off on moisturizing), so rubbing all over with a gentle brush or washcloth can help to some degree.

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Just make sure you're not going at it too roughly, or else you risk causing tiny wounds and infections, which can look like an inflamed hair follicle—or worse, Ibrahimi says. Frank recommends starting with a washcloth and working upward until you get the effect you're looking for, and follow with a moisturizer to seal the deal.

The Bottom Line

Pretty much everything you see about dry brushing "clearing out toxins" to "banish cellulite" is bunk. A little massaging never hurt anyone, but it won't make a long-lasting difference to your skin's surface, and toxins are taken care of on their own (thanks, liver). If you hate the loofah or love the TLC, go forth and dry brush, but sadly, body 2.0 probably won't be there when you wake up.