



HEALTH AND BEAUTY TIPS FROM

ANCIENT EGYPT



“New” Trends Are Not Always So New

There’s a hygiene trend that has gradually been spreading around the world for the past three decades. This trend happens to be humanity’s focus on natural remedies for both healing and beauty.

This fixation, however, may cause harmful results due to the synthetic nature of healthcare products available today. With a focus on creating products from tons of lab chemicals, tracking body security has become increasingly difficult. You never know what the side effects of a chemical could be, especially in relation to your unique biology.

A newfound aversion to such harmful chemicals has slowly led to a revived interest in natural remedies. Use of natural products, especially organically grown ones, have become central in beauty treatments for many enthusiasts.

Understanding Natural Remedies by Looking to the Ancient Past

What better way is there to find natural remedies than to look at societies of the past? Since we are discussing beauty products here, the remedies used won’t be “magical hocus pocus,” but instead will be based on practical use. These remedies must have natural effects that are visible on the aesthete.



Considering that ancient cultures lacked the technologies we have today, using natural remedies was a must. Here, we explore the remedies used by Ancient Egyptian Societies.

This is a society that has developed its culture over thousands of years, and for almost all of them, a focus on beauty was involved to a great extent. Because of this, no better society from history can be sought for such tips than Ancient Egypt. This applies especially with the meticulously recorded histories of Egyptian culture available for study and introspection.

There’s One Rule to Remember about Ancient Beauty Though

While Ancient Egypt did care a lot for beauty, one thing should be emphasized. Beauty was auxiliary to practicality.

Being an ancient agrarian society that depended heavily on labor, beauty had to be simple, lacking in complexity. In addition to the labor of the time, you had to factor in the environmental conditions. Egypt is a hot desert environment, where reliance on cream concoctions for beauty has messy results.

This focus on simple beauty, low maintenance, and practicality will be emphasized in the following tips!

Ancient Egypt Beauty Tips

Tip #1: Hair as a Pure Aesthetic

A fun fact that many people might not know about Ancient Egyptians was their propensity for shaving their heads completely bald and wearing wigs. This practice was a tradition to a majority of Egyptians in ancient times for many reasons.

One of the benefits of this practice involves comfort in warmer climates. The long, thick strands of dark hair that women were expected to have could be extremely uncomfortable in those rough desert temperatures. Because of this, shaving off their hair and wearing a wig allowed a compromise, allowing women to maintain comfort while conforming to society's beauty standards.

For men, it didn't matter as much, because they did not have social expectations to grow long hair in Ancient Egypt. Nonetheless, wearing wigs still brought them more comfort than actual shoulder-length hair would have.

Other practical benefits included improved hygiene, specifically to combat lice. Lice were a major problem for Ancient Egyptians, since working out in the heat was nearly intolerable with an itchy scalp. Fortunately, this problem was easily rectified by shaving and wearing wigs. And because they could easily be removed, washing and caring for the wigs was much easier.

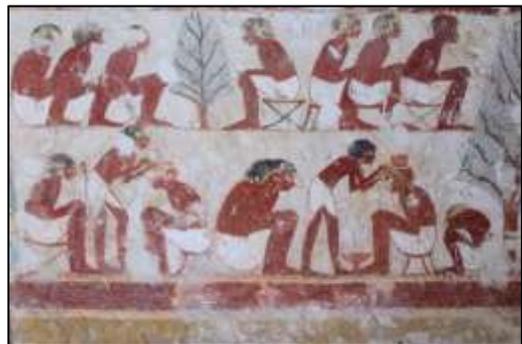
There was also a great emphasis on cleanliness in Egypt over looks. This can be seen in the records of the Greek historian Herodotus, who noted that Ancient Egyptians looked down on bodily hair. It was seen as a sign of barbarism and was considered uncivil. Because of this, hair shaving extended beyond the shaved head into bodily hair as well.

The aversion to facial hair would extend as far as removal of it by men. This is the main reason why many Ancient Egyptian paintings do not feature bearded men. It simply was not a favored part of aesthetics.

Considering the lack of scissors available at the time, concoctions were required for hair removal. These included using pumice stones and depilatory creams for the cleaning process.

Replacements for hair were made from two types of materials. The first came from vegetable fibers, which were considered the low quality form purchased by masses. The second were natural human hair, leftovers from shaving, bought by the upper class. Since human hair that was usable for wigs was hard to acquire, they were more expensive naturally.

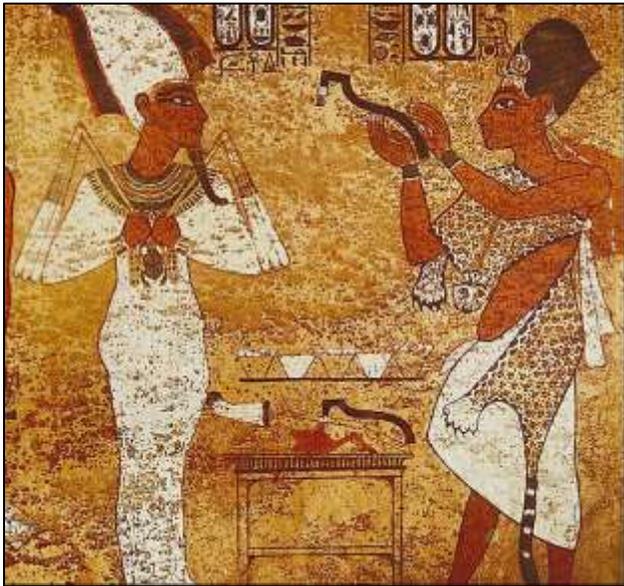
In fact, because of the widespread aversion to hair, wig-making became a large industry in Egypt. High quality wigs were always in demand, but they involved collecting hair from leftover shavings. This was done at what we now call barber shops, which were widespread in Ancient Egypt. Scenes of barber waiting lines can be seen in tomb drawings at the site of Userhet.



Tip #2: Cover Up Signs of Old Age

There is a common worldwide misconception about old age and status. It is commonly thought that in ancient cultures, being old was a sign of authority and power. While this is relatively true, it didn't apply to *all* ancient cultures.

Ancient Egypt was one of them; able to resist the notion of status and authority. The looks of old age did not imply authority and respect, but were instead looked at as beauty defects. This is seen in the Ancient Egyptian use of Henna for hair dye, specifically as a cover for old age. White hair was hidden with the reddening effect of Henna grinds.



This has been used as far back as 3400 BC, which can be seen in the 18th Dynasty Hunutmehet. Henna, to be more accurate, is a form of aesthetics that is still in use today. It is primarily used by Arab women as hair dyes and skin decorations.

Additionally, there were attempts to reduce hair fall as much as possible. This is seen in the use of multiple oil types by Egyptians, most of which were believed to stimulate hair growth. Examples of these include almond oil and rosemary oil.

Extreme measures for preventing hair loss sometimes involved dung. Of course, we're not just discussing any type of dung here. The rarest form, used by the noble and royalty, was

crocodile dung. In addition to the belief that it aided in hair loss prevention, it was thought to prevent skin problems (next tip actually).

An important truth is echoed by this attempt to cover up old age by an ancient culture. This would be the need to feel young.

The idea of old age signifying high status goes back to hunter-gatherer societies, where old age meant effective survival. An old man had the knowledge of the world's dangers to aid in guiding the younger generations. Thus, the old provided guidance to youth in order to help them fulfill their potential.

Ancient Egypt on the other hand, was not a hunter-gatherer society. It was a full-fledged civilization. It had an economy, a military, a culture, and social hierarchies. There was a form of stability that allowed Ancient Egyptians to care less about dangers from the wild.

This has led to the abandonment of the old man reverence in civilized countries. In fact, this same pattern is repeating itself in today's societies. We live in an age where youth is emphasized to an extreme. Youth is emphasized to the point where older models are seen as culturally backwards or oppressive. In terms of expression, this manifested itself in the world's beauty culture. The same applies to Ancient Egypt, having a strong focus on anti-aging aesthetics.

Tip #3: Skin Care is as Vital as Hair Care

The need to maintain youth also extends to skin. When hair is shaved, more attention is paid to skin hygiene publicly. It is difficult not to notice wrinkles or bad skin on someone who is bald.

Reducing aging looks involved using a series of remedies that are still seen as effective today. For example, natron and water combinations were used to make baking soda, specifically for skin cleansing. This prevented the development of bad odors and the development of skin rashes. Furthermore, the killing action of baking soda would eliminate the bacteria caught in skin, ensuring a lack of skin inflammation.

Another remedy from Ancient Egypt, Dead Sea Salt was used for therapeutic reasons and to slow down aging. This was noticeably used by Queen Cleopatra, as she was known to add a few cups to her bath before each use.

The Dead Sea today is a tourist resort that is visited by many for skin therapies. Bathing in Dead Sea Salt was sometimes combined with or replaced by Epsom Salt, where its high mineral content helped aid in reducing skin problems.

Of course, sourcing such salt, even by higher class individuals, would have been quite difficult. Thus, there were backup remedies used for skincare by Ancient Egyptians. The most common of these was bathing in milk and honey and using their smoothing effects as natural skin moisturizers. This meant that there was no dry skin to worry about, which mimicked the looks of old age.

As seen from the previous tips, skincare relied on two factors. The first would be stench prevention. In addition to the shaving of bodily hair, natural remedies were used to act as deodorants. The second would be skin moisturizing and reducing wrinkles. This was to maintain a maximally youthful look.

Youth wasn't the only factor in governing skincare though. There was also skin color.

Being a labor-based society, a lot of Egyptian workers were exposed to hot desert climates on a continuous basis. This would lead to the development of darker skin tans, which was seen as a sign of class inferiority. Darker skin was basically a sign of a laborer in the sun.

As such, upper classes emphasized lighter skin colors when taking care of their skins. This was done through use of lightening creams and avoiding sunlight as much as possible. This form of skincare was mostly used by women, as to distinguish themselves from their slave laborers.



Tip #4: Smells Matter Too

So far, we've discussed hair and skin care... but appeal to the sense of smell has not yet been explored. This was actually a specialty of the Ancient Egyptians.

The development of perfumes was actually a huge trade in Egypt at the time of Christ. Ancient Egypt was known as the world's largest exporter of perfumes to other cultures. Perfumes were widely used by many in society, being specifically blessed by the Egyptian God, Nefertum.

Organic substances with very powerful smells were used as perfumes, such as myrrh, cinnamon, and cardamom. These three ingredients were great staples in many Ancient Egyptian perfumes.

The strength of the materials in smell may also be attributed to the earlier mentioned dung use by Ancient Egyptians.

Dung isn't exactly the most pleasant smelling compound to be used for beauty. Not only is it scientifically ineffective, but its odor is difficult to remove. Removal of the odor would require use of strong smelling compounds, like the ones mentioned previously.

Tip #5: Facial Cosmetics

Ancient Egyptian facial cosmetics emphasized eye liners made of dark colors. This was done through makeup material, which involved a choice from malachite or (black) kohl.

Malachite was the green eyeliner used by Ancient Egyptians for color. It was formed from a base copper carbonate pigment.

Kohl is actually a synthetic compound developed using basic mineral filtering in Egypt, done by combining rock salt and natron. Throughout the later periods of Ancient Egypt, this would be the predominant form of eye makeup for ocular emphasis and was applied mostly to eye lashes.

To this day, kohl is still applied for eyelashes around the Middle East as a beauty measure. Of course, it is now more sophisticated in its use and application due to proper chemical technologies.

These eyeliners were used by women for their beauty, in addition to ocular disease protection. The disease protection properties specifically come from kohl, which involve use of an ore of lead. When exposed to the skin, the ore would slowly convert into and feed nitrites to the body, providing protection qualities to eye-skin.

Lipstick was not available back in Ancient Egypt, with the closest alternative to that being henna. Henna was mentioned previously as a hair dye, but really it is a beauty product with a multitude of uses. Those uses include aesthetics for cheek reddening and can also be used as nail polish.

To slight extents, the red pigments were also used on lips for slight color. Henna did not provide the bright and glazing effect that modern day lipstick affords, however.

Extra Factors to Consider About Ancient Egyptian Beauty

A lot of Ancient Egyptian cosmetics focused on practicality when dealing with the hot environment of the region. This is seen in the body hygiene used by Ancient Egyptians, along with the makeup styles that were meant for protection.

Even certain items which may have cosmetic use, have been observed to have practical functions too. The first would be soap. Prototypes of soaps existed in Ancient Egypt but were not similar to the types we use today. While perfumes were extremely common in Ancient Egypt, soap bars were still non-existent. It would take at least a millennia for soap bars to appear as an invention for use.

Soap has the function of facilitating fat removal from the body and is itself made from animal fats. A primitive alternative of soap existed in Ancient Egypt called “swabu,” which was based on a mixture of clay and oils. In addition to use for washing, it had the function of combatting skin disease. Thus, the item had a practical medical function as well as being cosmetic.

Practicality also extends to fashion use by Ancient Egyptians. The most common articles of clothing worn there were white in color, which is observed often in drawings. Men would commonly wear white short skirts called “shendyt,” while not wearing any items as tops. Women, alternatively, would either wear white robes or white netted garments, both made from muslin.

The white coloring has the function of sunlight reflection, therefore aiding Egyptians in staying cool. Muslin’s light fabric ensured that sweat was not trapped under the clothing, inducing skin irritations, and possibly disease.

To make up for the blandness of coloring and style in clothing, Ancient Egyptians used jewelry heavily. In fact, when speaking of Ancient Egyptian artifacts, the first thing to come in mind is usually jewelry.

Jewelry of the time involved a heavy use of gold that was mined locally, in addition to silver that was mainly imported from Asia. Additionally, turquoise was extremely widespread in the area of Sinai. It was appreciated especially for its unique bluish color.

This jewelry was worn all over the body by Ancient Egyptians. Headbands, necklaces, and earrings were commonly worn by all classes in Egypt.

In Ancient Egypt, Beauty Followed Practicality

As mentioned previously, just because an environment has harsh temperature conditions, doesn’t mean that beauty should be ignored. This is something that is definitely seen in Ancient Egypt, where cosmetics augmented practicality.

Additionally, Ancient Egyptians placed a high importance on hygiene maintenance. Hygiene was a vital part of culture, seen as a primary form of avoiding health problems and cosmetic issues as a result of the natural conditions there.

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