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Emu Oil for Post Piercing (and Tattoo) Care

Rings of Desire, New Orleans

Emu oil (yes, as in the big bird) has shown to be helpful for treating thinning tissue in stretched lobe piercings. There are some exciting new developments in the body art field regarding this natural non-vegan/non-vegetarian product: use on healing piercings and tattoos!

I'm honestly not one to make changes in my studio policies or procedures at the drop of a hat. I'm all for growth and improvement, but admittedly sometimes I take a while to catch on. That's why it is so surprising that I've taken to using and suggesting Emu oil for piercing care.

It started when the sales rep from Desert Palms Emu Ranch called me. Companies hoping to get the Association of Professional Piercers (APP) "seal of approval" for their various piercing-related products frequently contact me. Such a backing doesn't even exist, so it can't be given. (That is, the APP does not endorse products per se — "suggest" perhaps, but not "endorse"). But the rep seemed genuinely passionate about his product, and that piqued my interest. So I told him to go ahead and send me some samples.

According to their web site:

"Emu oil is deep penetrating, anti-inflammatory, non-irritating, highly moisturizing, all natural nutritional supplement for your skin. It is hypo-allergenic, giving it a low potential for irritating the skin. Emu oil doesn't clog pores. It contains essential fatty acids required by the body. Topical application of Emu oil delivers these nutrients deep into the skin to

support healthy cell growth. Emu Oil is an excellent Emulsifier and does not leave the skin feeling oily or greasy. Pure Emu oil soothes the skin after new artwork or piercing. Burning and itching are instantly soothed. Healing takes place more rapidly because Emu oil has healing properties and does not cover the skin with a petroleum type air barrier. It allows the skin to breathe and heal."

And, I'd have to say that their claims do seem genuine after my experience with the product over the past year or so.

The first test was with my favorite guinea pigs, my staff. My piercer, Jen had been struggling to heal a bilateral pair of conch piercings that had been done about 8 months prior. Never a speedy healer, she found that the simultaneous healing of both sides always kept at least one of the piercings irritated and sore. She found instant palliative relief from the discomfort, and the localized irritation, redness, and was gone about two days after starting application of Emu oil! The slight lumpiness took about a week to disappear. She was sold, and I was starting to get more interested.

Next was a good customer, Bruce, who'd received a pair of deep vertical nipple piercings behind his original, traditionally placed horizontal set. One of them had gotten a hard lump behind the nipple, and there was excess crustiness, swelling and tenderness. I asked him if he wanted to try the product (making clear that it was new to us) and he decided to give it a go.

We received a call from Bruce the next day. He said, "I put it on once before I went to bed. I woke up at about 3 am and it felt about 50% better. When I woke up this morning, my nipple was FINE!"

Wow! Now I was starting to get really impressed.

So, it went on from there: we tried it on a nostril bump here, a red, irritated navel there, and so on. During the course of a month we experimented with Emu oil for troubleshooting, and had excellent success with no negative results whatsoever. Therefore, we decided to give it a go on a fresh piercing.

Jen, ever the dedicated employee, decided to get a double labret, side-by-side, adjacent the midline of her lower lip. She used Emu oil (and occasional saline) for care on both the exterior AND on the interior. (Yes, it is safe for use inside the mouth, and no, it doesn't taste like bird, or anything at all. High quality Emu oil is odorless and tasteless). She used no Provon/Satin, and no mouth rinse.

She described that her lip felt very soothed when she applied the product. She had a minimum of swelling and discomfort. And Jen had previously tried a single labret that swelled so much she ended up abandoning it shortly after the piercing! She was extremely impressed with the product and the progress of her healing.

One of my old tragus piercings started to get that tight, sore, almost itchy feeling and crust up again. I put Emu oil on it twice (morning

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and evening) and the problem was completely gone! I've had flare-ups with that piercing (on my "phone ear") that lasted for weeks! This one was nipped in the bud. I was really starting to like the stuff!

We started offering samples for post piercing care to some of our good customers who have lots of healing experience. Everyone was so unanimously favorably impressed that following the period of experimentation, I started to offer the product in my studio. I sell a half-ounce dropper bottle, which is plenty to get through the healing of any body piercing, for \$5.00 (below usual market price)! A little dab will do ya. We are seeing faster healing times than with saline-only, or Provon/Satin-and-saline regimens.

Since their inception some years ago, we have used the APP Suggested Aftercare Guidelines in my studio (I wrote them, after all). Now we offer people a choice of soap product (Provon or Satin), or Emu oil.

There are a variety of studies showing that Emu oil actually promotes tissue epithelialization, and also some showing that it doesn't. The good news is that the studies all demonstrate that there was no harm done by the product. To date we've had exactly zero complications reported from Emu oil (no skin irritation, etc.), nor from any of the piercings people have used it on! Everything is healing in record time, comfortably and easily.

One of the other aspects I like about Emu oil is how simple and convenient it is to use. The basic instructions are to shake the bottle, and rub a single drop onto the piercing with a clean or gloved finger, 2-3 times daily. Because Emu oil penetrates the skin, there is definitely no need to turn the jewelry. (I have been advocating the no-turn method for Provon/Satin since the last APP Conference in May.)

Emu oil helps to keep the skin softer and more moisturized, and the emollients help prevent crust from adhering to the skin or jewelry. Even though it is called "oil," it is more like a lotion. The idea of an "oil" on a piercing seems kind of appalling to me after all my anti-

ointment preaching over the years. All I can say is, "This is different!"

But wait, there's more: it is also great for healing tattoos!

From personal experience, I can say that Emu oil also works great on mosquito bites, rashes, cuts, scrapes, burns, and dry irritated skin! It almost instantly healed a mean gash on the roof of my mouth caused by a tortilla chip, and one of those painful, inflamed taste buds, too. My husband is prone to red, itchy rashes for no apparent reason (I call it "dermatitis du jour"). Emu oil provides him instant relief every time. I keep a little bottle in my purse so we're never without it!

The manufacturers suggest it for these uses among others:

- * moisturizes dry, cracked, itchy skin
- * promotes healthy gum tissue
- * alleviates sun burn pain
- * helps prevent cold sores and canker sores
- * sexual lubricant
- * eases teething pain
- * helps get rid of ring worm on pets
- * alleviates "hot spots" on animals
- * helps pass fur balls in cats
- * reduces hemorrhoids
- * promotes healthy nails and cuticles
- * helps clear up diaper rash
- * moisturizes dry noses & paws on pets

I'm not sure how many of their claims are true, but I must say I've been more than impressed with it for everything I've tried it on so far.

APP Member, Suzanne Beam, from Jones Custom decided to try Emu oil after talking to me about my results. She says, "My clients like how convenient it is to use. It's far easier to carry a small bottle of Emu oil with you and apply it on the go (after washing hands or using hand sanitizer of course) than to use Satin/Provon and water while at work, out shopping, or traveling. In my experience, clients are more likely to adhere to proper aftercare instructions if they are kept simple. Emu oil is simple, safe, and effective."

Later follow-up from Suzanne brought this

comment, "I haven't had a single negative reaction to it. Everyone who has tried it has absolutely loved it. Many of them are coming back to buy larger quantities because they've been using it for other purposes such as a moisturizer or aftershave. My husband has also been having excellent results using it for tattoo aftercare. I'll let you know if anyone comes in with a complaint or concern about it, but so far, everyone's been 100% pleased with it."

In all fairness, not everyone is as impressed with the product. APP Board Member, Paul King, of San Francisco tried out some samples. He states, "I, nor anyone I've given EMU oil to for piercings has noticed any difference one way or the other." Maybe it's the difference in weather, humidity, or some other such factor? I noticed a distinct change in my Emu oil when I visited Paul in San Francisco. In New Orleans (where it is hot and humid) the Emu oil is nearly a liquid in consistency. In San Francisco's colder climate it turned so thick that to dispense the product I had to run the bottle under warm water first. Though Mr. King did state that everyone who had tried it on tattoos LOVED it.

As with body jewelry, quality of Emu oil will vary between manufacturers. If you intend to try Emu oil, I would strongly suggest obtaining it from Desert Palms. The rep can tell you all about the differences in the quality. I've tried other brands and found them inferior. One type smelled and tasted like a big dead bird. ICK! Desert Palms brand is definitely superior.

The new APP revised care guidelines were recently released. Emu oil came along a little too late to be included. But if I have anything to do with the next revision, I'd put my two cents in for the inclusion of Emu oil as an option. ❖

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