

Health

This Woman's Viral Photos Reveal a Surprising Danger of Essential Oils

She developed chemical burns on her neck and wrists.

By: Jacqueline Andriakos | May 02, 2017



Photo: Temmuzcan/Getty Images

While essential oils are known for their aromatic benefits, some people use them on their bodies as well. But as with anything else you put on your skin, it's crucial to read the product's label, as one woman learned the painful way.

In a Facebook post that's gone viral, Elise Nguyen shared photos of what she says are second- and third-degree burns from applying essential oils to her wrists and neck before a hot yoga class—and then later, lying in a tanning bed.

"Over the next couple of days, I developed nasty blisters due to a chemical burn," she wrote in the post, which has collected 35,000 comments and been shared more than 140,000 times. When she checked the label on the oil bottle, she discovered it carried a warning: "Turns out, there is a teeny tiny caution on the oil that states 'stay out of sunlight or UV rays for up to 12 hours after application' or something like that."

Nguyen went on to say that she doesn't blame the company. "It was my own damn fault. But every yogi that I've talked to has no clue that this could have happened." That's what drove her to share her pictures: "[A]s the weather is getting nicer, I just want everyone to be aware of this. Please, please read the bottles of anything you put on your skin. I wouldn't want this to happen to anyone else. It's been hell."



Nguyen likely had a phototoxic reaction to the oils, says Beverly Hills-based dermatologist **Ava Shamban**, MD, founder of the skin treatment center SKINxFIVE. A phototoxic reaction occurs when a product containing UV-sensitive compounds (known as psoralens) is used on the skin, and the skin is then exposed to UV light, she explained via email. "It's very common, and it is possible to get second-degree burns that need medical attention." (Dr. Shamban hasn't treated Nguyen.)

If you do use an essential oil on any part of your body, be sure to check the packaging for warnings, Dr. Shamban advised—and also protect that body party from exposure to sunlight (with clothing, for example). If you do get burned, try over-the-counter cortisone cream, aloe vera, or a vitamin C serum to reduce inflammation, she said. Aspirin can also help alleviate pain and inflammation. If a blister forms, see a doctor.

Essential oils aren't the only culprits of phototoxic reactions, Dr. Shamban added. Lime juice can make your skin more sensitive to the sun too. "Be careful of beach tequila with lime shooters! It's the most common cause of this phenomenon," she said. (Here's how to protect your skin while sipping margaritas in the sun.)

One more thing (and you know this): Avoid tanning beds at all costs. "[They are] the number one cause of premature aging and skin cancer," says Dr. Shamban.

<http://www.health.com/beauty/essential-oils-burns-phototoxic-reaction>