

## SELF

### I Tried the ‘Grits’ Blackhead Removal Hack That’s All Over Reddit

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But first I consulted a dermatologist.



The Internet is going crazy for an interesting blackhead removal method. Coined by the SkincareAddiction Reddit community as “skin gritting,” this viral hack uses a mix of oil cleansing and a clay mask to remove the gunk from your pores. The result is something that’s both gross and satisfying: a spattering of black debris left on your hands just aching to be photographed.

The grits method rides this latest wave of fascination with pores and clearing them out. Between the overwhelming number of Dr. Pimple Popper videos, charcoal hacks, and DIY gelatin masks on the web, there’s clearly a trend that isn’t letting up anytime soon.

As a beauty editor and reporter, I’ve tried many DIY blackhead removal hacks, so it felt like my sworn duty to put grits to the test as well. I consulted dermatologists and scoured both the Internet and my face to learn how to get grits, if the process is safe, and—to quote My Cousin Vinny—to find out What is a grit, anyways? Keep reading to get the facts and learn whether the method is worth all the hype.

### **What exactly are grits?**

No, we're not talking about the Southern breakfast delicacy. Basically, grits are the dark gunk that comes out of your skin after a specific cleansing method (which we'll get to). It's not a clinical term, as you might have guessed. Grits started popping up on Reddit about three years ago, but recently the trend resurfaced with DIY skin care lovers sharing images of their hands covered in the speckled results of grit-removing techniques. To get a more scientific explanation of what exactly these grits are composed of, we spoke to dermatologists Joshua Zeichner, M.D., and [Ava Shamban](#), M.D.

"Grits may refer to excess dirt, oil, and dead cells that accumulate around the pores," explains Dr. Zeichner. If that is, in fact, what this accumulated gunk is—which Dr. Shamban believes it is—it probably gets its dark color through oxidation from exposure to air, like blackheads do. But Dr. Zeichner isn't convinced grits are actually blackheads themselves. "It is unclear to me whether the grits are in fact derived from blockage within the pores, or rather residual clay mask that has interacted with the oil cleanser," he says.

### **How exactly do you remove these (supposed) grits?**

For such apparently dramatic results, the process is actually a quite simple. All you do is cleanse using an oil cleanser, apply a clay mask, then use an oil cleanser again, this time massaging more forcibly to loosen blackheads. "Clay naturally absorbs oil and is commonly used in patients with acne-prone skin and high sebum levels," explains Dr. Zeichner. "Cleansing the face with an oil after applying the mask can help remove any residual clay from the skin [and] also help hydrate the outer skin layer."

Dr. Zeichner thinks grits are likely evidence of that residual clay, but Dr. Shamban thinks that this cleansing method could really work to scrub pores clean. She explains that regular cleansing typically removes the dead skin cells and oils on the surface of the skin, whereas this grits method goes a step deeper by actually extracting debris from the pores.

### **Is this safe for your skin?**

This is always an important question to ask yourself (and your doctor) when you discover new skin care hacks and methods online—no matter how viral they are. Both dermatologists believe that overall, yes, this is a safe process. However, there are a few things people should be aware of. "I caution people with sensitive skin from overly washing, as it can lead to skin irritation and inflammation," explains Dr. Zeichner. Dr. Shamban agrees and also recommends that people with rosacea and cystic acne avoid this process. To help soothe the skin after the vigorous

massaging, Dr. Zeichner recommends applying a bland moisturizer like Cetaphil Moisturizing Lotion (\$14).

**Does it work?**

Once I got all the basics covered, it was time for me to put this buzzy pore-clearing method to the test.



Courtesy of Emily Rekestis

To do so, I used Kiehl's Midnight Recovery Cleansing Oil (\$32) followed by Fresh Umbrian Clay Purifying Mask (\$62). There's not much to say about the first and second steps. I use oil cleanser almost daily and clay masks biweekly. They're great, I love them both. I applied the oil cleanser gently and rinsed and dried before applying the clay mask, which I left on for 15 minutes and rinsed off with warm water.



Courtesy of Emily Rekestis

It wasn't until I got to the final step, massaging the second round of oil cleanser forcibly, that I was doing something different. I typically use oil cleanser because of how gentle it is. So being so rough with it seemed weird. I should say I have sensitive skin, so I figured my face would get red and irritated during this step—I was right. It began to get red and hurt a little. However, through this inflammation, I could feel the tiniest of pieces become gritty as I ran my hands along my face. It wasn't anything shocking or exciting, it was mostly just me paying attention to the texture at hand (literally).



Courtesy of Emily Rekestis

When I pulled my hands away to look down, I saw maybe a dozen black specks that felt hard—grits. But nothing like the images I've seen on Reddit. Perhaps it's because I exfoliate too frequently to create a dramatic amount of buildup in my pores? (That's my optimistic hypothesis.) Or, if Dr. Zeichner was right, the spots on my hands was just leftover clay mask that I hadn't completely rinsed off. My face did feel especially soft afterward, like I cleared out my blackheads, but it didn't look or feel as satisfyingly gross as expected.

<http://www.self.com/story/grits-blackhead-removal>