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What is beef tallow?

Beef tallow is purified animal fat (usually from cows) that's been promoted online as a "natural" moisturiser. Some brands claim it helps repair the skin barrier or soothe dry skin.

What does the science say?

At present, there's no good scientific evidence showing that beef tallow is better—or even equal—to the many plant-based and medical-grade moisturisers already available.

Products like ceramide creams, plant oils, and pharmacy moisturisers have been carefully tested and proven safe and effective in large studies. Beef tallow has not.

Are there any risks?

Yes.

Infection: If tallow is made at home or not properly sterilised, bacteria can grow in it and cause skin infection—especially if applied to broken or inflamed skin.

Allergy: Because tallow smells strong, many products add fragrance or essential oils to make it pleasant to use. These additives can trigger allergic contact dermatitis or irritation.

Blocked pores: Tallow is heavy and can clog pores, leading to pimples or blackheads.

Quality control: Animal fats vary widely depending on how they're made, so consistency and safety can't be guaranteed unless produced in a regulated lab setting.

What's the safer alternative?

For most people, it's better to choose dermatologist-recommended moisturisers that have been properly tested. These include:

- Fragrance-free creams or ointments with ceramides, glycerin, or urea.
- Plant-based oils (like sunflower or jojoba) in reputable formulations.
- Pharmacy-grade emollients designed for eczema or sensitive skin.

These products have strong safety data and consistent quality control.

NZDSI recommendation

Beef tallow should not be used as a first-choice moisturiser.

If you decide to try it, make sure it's from a reputable manufacturer, patch-test it on a small area first, and avoid applying to broken or irritated skin.

People with eczema, acne, open wounds, or weakened immune systems should avoid it completely.

Until high-quality research proves otherwise, NZDSI recommends using established, evidence-based emollients for skin care and dryness.