

AYURVEDA ABHYANGA (MASSAGE) PROCEDURE - A REVIEW**Dr. Dinesh Sharma*¹, Dr. Gopesh Mangal² and Dr. Rajendra Garg³**¹PG Scholar, Department of Panchakarma, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan.²Associate Professor, Department of Panchakarma, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan. PG Scholar.³PG Scholar, Department of Panchakarma, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan.Article Received on
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Ayurveda science deals with treating the diseases and maintaining the health of the healthy. The prime aspiration of *Ayurveda* is to maintain health of healthy person and cures the disease of the patient. Nowadays, stress in the workplace has such a devastating effect on the individual, that it can lead to the manifestation of many diseases. It has been mentioned in *Ayurvedic* texts that to maintain health certain techniques and remedies in everyday activities can be followed, this is referred to as *Dinacharya*. The number one procedure in *Dinacharya* is *Abhyanga* (Oil massage), which can treat many diseases and for maintenance of health it heals and rejuvenates the individual. It is an

important treatment modality and especially so, in maintenance of health in the healthy. Worthy to note here that *Abhyanga* controls the *Vata Dosha*, which is the causative factor for a host of diseases. In this review article, collection of materials that expound the significance and functionality of *Abyanga* in everyday activities has been made.

KEYWORDS: *Abhyanga*, *Dinacharya*, Oil massage, Stress.**INTRODUCTION**

Ayurveda proclaims that those individuals who are desirous of being healthy and happy should perform *Abhyanga* as part of *Dinacharya*. *Abhyanga* is adopted for healing, relaxation and as a treatment modality in many diseases. According to *Dinacharya*, it is one of the most important therapy of the daily routines.^[1] In this article an attempt has been made to gather thoughts on how *Abhyanga* can aid to avoid stress and create a healthy lifestyle.

Massage is not a new concept, almost every culture has employed massage; including Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Japanese, Chinese and the *Ayurvedic* managed by Indians. But the oldest and most scientific scripture is *Ayurveda* only. Massage is a systematic rubbing and manipulation of the body to prevent stiffness, promoting circulation and positive health. Massage is one of the most valuable of remedial measures. Basis of massage is touch, and there is increasing medical evidence to show the great value of touch.

Ayurveda is to maintain health of healthy person and cures the disease of the patient, so to avert ailments, massage of whole body is required to improve blood circulation and strength. According to season and climate condition on skin vasodilatation and vasoconstriction take place and by these two ways skin also effect inner tissues i.e. in very scientific elaborated manner with definition to timing, its effects on the body, its indications and contra indications to body. *Abhyanga* is said to be an external therapy described and also in *Sneha Vicharana* i.e. roots of administration of unctuousness.

The word *Abhyanga* is derived from *Abhi+Anjana Abhyanjana*.

Abhi- towards, into, upon etc.

Anjana - to smear, to anoint Rubbing with unctuous substance, smearing the body with oil.

Abhyanga means massage of whole-body including head with oil.

Abhyanga means applying oil and lightly massaging the body. Often medicated and usually warm, the oil is massaged into the entire body before bathing. It can be beneficial for maintaining health and used as a medicine for certain disorders. It can be incorporated into a routine appropriate for almost everyone. *Abhyanga* therapy is an ancient practice which predates the Vedic period. Early humans practiced life-sustaining ways for manipulating the body to produce strength, mobility, flexibility and memory which interlaced with the cosmos. Application of oil to the skin followed by massage in specific directions is well known by the name *Abhyanga* in *Ayurveda*. Massage in specific direction improves blood circulation, facilitates removal of the toxins from the tissues, relieves physical and mental fatigue, improves the functioning of musculoskeletal system, clears stiffness and heaviness of the body and leads to feeling of lightness. It assists development of healthy body, helps in improvement of body figure, recuperates the body tissues and reduces body weight as well as fat.

Added to this in a plethora of diseases *Abhyanga* has curative effect by the pharmacological action of the drugs used in the processing of the oil. The Sanskrit word *Sneha* means both “oil” and “love,” and the effects of *Abhyanga* are similar to the effect of saturation with love. Both experiences can give a deep feeling of stability, warmth and comfort. All the *Ayurvedic* classics have described the various benefits of *Abhyanga* along with its contra indications. There is no such description about the procedure of *Abhyanga* except the commentary of *Dalhana*, who mentioned that *Abhyanga* should be applied in *Anuloma* (downward) direction. Again, in later period, the specific movements of *Abhyanga* in limbs and joints has been described. He told that in the limbs, *Abhyanga* should be practiced in the direction of hair growth. This is probably because, if *Abhyanga* is applied in opposite direction of the hair growth, then it may cause breaking of the hairs as well as it will do discomfort to the receivers. The logic behind circular movements over the joints may be the presence of lymph nodes and co-lateral venous networks around the areas. Massaging these areas may be improving the lymphatic drainage as well as venous drainage of the respected areas. Considering these advantageous effects of this special maneuver, in the promotion and maintenance of health in the healthy, as well as cure of illness in diseased, this procedure has gained ample importance in the clinical practice. This process of manipulating skin and muscles is highly recommended in *Ayurveda* for routine practice even for a healthy person who has the conscious of happy healthy life. This is also reckoned to be an effective therapeutic procedure in abating and eliminating the pathological process playing havoc in the body tissues.

Indications of *Abhyanga*

1. *Abhyanga* in daily routine: *Abhyanga* is included in the daily routines to promote the health in hale and healthy. Regular practice of *Abhyanga* is advised to maintain the physical fitness
2. *Abhyanga* in different seasons: *Abhyanga* is advised to protect the body from the biting cold of *Hemant Ritu*. Similarly, extreme cold as well as dry weather is characteristic of *Shishira Ritu*. *Abhyanga* is beneficial in this season to counteract the detrimental effect of the cold weather.
3. *Abhyanga* in trivial manifestations: Natural urges have to be cleared as and when they manifest, lest they will cause imbalance of *Dosha* and produce symptoms. Holding or suppressing these urges produces certain symptoms. *Abhyanga* is advised for the

treatment of symptoms caused by holding or suppressing the urges of *Adhovata*, *Shakrit*, *Mutra*, *Kshut*, *Nidra*, *Shramaswasa*, *Vamathu*, *Shukra* etc.

4. *Abhyanga* in different diseases: *Sneha* used for *Paana*, *Nasya*, *Anuvasana* and *Abhyanga* at the proper time, quickly brings down the aggravated *Vata*. *Abhyanga* is indicated mainly in *Vata* predominant states of diseases. Oleation along with sudation brings down the disfigured and painful body parts due to aggravated *Vata* into normalcy. The analogy given by *Vagbhata* about *Abhyanga* is worth explaining here. *Vagbhata* says that proper *Snehana* and *Swedana* given to an inanimate dry stick will help to regain its original condition, then what to say about the living body. Some of the diseases in which *Abhyanga* is indicated in Ayurveda are as follows:

1. *Vata Vyadhi*
2. *Shwayathu*
3. *Kushta Vata Rakta*
4. *Switra Hidma*
5. *Rajayakshma*
6. *Twagasrita Jeernajwar*
7. *Dahajwar Madatyaya (Vatika)*
8. *Mutrakricha (Vatika)*
9. *Vridhhi (Vatika)*
10. *Gulma (Vatika)*
11. *Vatika Kasa*
12. *Kshataj Kasa and Shwasa*
13. *Sheetajwar*
14. *Rakta Pitta*

Importance of *Abhyanga*

Abyanjana and *Snehana* are synonyms of *Abhyang*.^[2] According to *Ayurvedic Dinacharya*, *Abhyanga* should be performed daily and if this is not possible, at least oil should be applied to the head, ears, feet to maintain a healthy lifestyle.^[3] *Abhyanga* is done by massaging the body with any *Sneha* in the direction of the hair follicles. By performing *Abhyanga* daily, the body becomes strong and resistance is built up against stressful situations. Application of *Tila Taila* (Sesame oil) on the head daily prevents headaches, greying of the hairs and induces a sound sleep. It has a very soothing effect on the nervous system, which is controlled by *Vata Dosha*. Hence it is of utmost importance for those people in stressful job situations, to perform *Abhyanga* daily.

In most situations, *Tila Taila* (Sesame oil) is recommended, as it can be applied to all *Prakriti* persons and it is one of the best *Taila* mentioned in *Ayurvedic* texts.^[4] It is *Tridoshaghana* (Subsides all the three *Doshas*) and gives nourishment to the body. *Tila Taila* unique property is that it is a polyunsaturated fat which contains large amounts of linoleic acid.^[5] Linoleic acids are a well-known anti-inflammatory agent and is also known to inhibit pathogenic bacteria. Generally, many medicated oils are utilized in *Abhyanga* some in specific diseases of the head. Some oils are *Ksheerbala Taila*,^[6] *Narayana Taila*,^[7] and *Chandanadi Taila* are used for *ShiroAbhyanga* (Head massage).

Abhyanga should be done daily before physical exercise. It should be done specially to the head, ears and feet. As a pitcher, a dry skin and an axis (of a cart) become strong and resistant by application of oil. So, by massage of oil human body become strong and smoothed skinned, it is not susceptible to the diseases due to *Vata*, it is resistant to exhaustions and exertions. The body is compared to tree, if the roots of trees are given water regularly, then it lives for long time. In the same way by *Abhyanga* the persons *Dhatu* becomes healthy. The intelligent person should make use of either medicated oil or ghee for oil bath and anointing, considering the nature of the body, constitution, habituation, season, habitat and aggravated *Dosha* etc.

Procedure of *Abhyanga*

Initially, one should commence the procedure with *ShiroAbhyanga* and then continue to the rest of the body doing *Mardana*. According to *Chikitsa Manjari* and *Chikitsa Sangraha*, generally *Abhyanga* should be performed in *Anulomana Gati*. They have also mentioned the specific direction of movement depending on *Pratiloma Gati* in *Kapha Dushti* and alternate *Anuloma* and *Pratiloma Gati* in *Pitta Dusthi*.^[8]

The oil (prescribed by *Ayurvedic* Physician) with optimum temperature should be applied to the head first in the anterior frontanelle and then the whole scalp. Then oil massage of the Ear, Palm and Feet should be done prior to the main procedure. The heated oil should be applied uniformly to the body, by the two therapists standing on both sides of the *Droni* table. Then, massage of the scalp, head is done and subsequently moves down to the neck, upper back, shoulders, upper arms, forearms, hands, chest, abdomen, lower back and lower limbs.

The proper procedure of *Abhyanga* is that it should be performed in seven (7) postures which are: sitting, supine, left lateral, prone, right lateral, supine and sitting. Alternative postures are: 1. Sitting upright with knees extended 2. Supine position 3. Left lateral position 4. Right lateral position 5. Prone position. Prone positioning should be avoided as much as possible in patients with chronic diseases of heart, lungs and GIT. It is important to note that massage of limb joints should be done in a circular manner and muscles in a linear manner while the umbilicus region is massaged in a circular motion.

Time and duration-As the procedure of *Abhyanga* is done in seven (7) postures and each posture takes approximately five minutes. So, the whole procedure should take place in approximately 35 to 45 minutes.

Basis of Classification of *Abhyanga* (Massage): Principles & practice of therapeutic massage.

Application of touch and pressure in various manners constitute the maneuvers of massage. The effects produced by a technique entirely depend upon the type of tissue approached during a particular technique and the character of the technique governs this. Magnitude of the applied force depends upon:

- Direction of force
- Duration of force
- Means of application of force.

Character of techniques

- Stroking
- Pressure
- Percussion
- Vibration

Depth of tissue approached

- Light massage
- Deep massage

Part of body used

- General Massage
- Local massage

Means of application of pressure

- Manual massage
- Mechanical massage

On the basis of nature of drug used

- Dry Massage
- Powder Massage
- Oil Massage

Types of massage (Swedish) according to movements

- Touch- Is a sensation which is carried through brain.
- Stroke-Touch with movement with one/both palms slowly.
- Friction-Grasp the part & move with little amount of pressure.
- Kneading-Alternate compression of the tissues by grasping them against the underlined body surfaces and muscle mixing.

Paschat Karma

Oil is wiped off with a soft towel. Patient is advised to take rest for at least fifteen minutes. Patient is advised to take bath with warm water or *Rasanadi Churna* is applied all over the body. The necessary/mandatory instructions are to be given to the patient to achieve the maximum therapeutic benefits to avoid the complications.

Mode of Action of *Abhyanga*

Acharya Dalhana has indicated that *Abhyanga* should be done for specified times, also a description of the penetration of *Sneha* at various levels are given in the table below.^[9] Thus, *Abhyanga* should be performed for at least 5 minutes in each position if the desired outcome is to effect deeper tissues like *Majja*.^[10]

According to *Ayurveda*, oil etc. used for massage does not have their actions confined to skin alone. The drugs with which these are boiled permeate through the skin and reach different tissue elements of the body. The medicated oil used for massage remain in the skin for 300 seconds (*matras*) and gradually and consecutively permeates through different tissues elements like *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, the medicated oil takes about 100 *Matras* each, to persuade and permeate through these different categories of tissue elements.

Table 1: Reaching of *Taila* to different *Dhatu*s or effect on *Dhatu*s.

<i>Dhatu</i>	<i>Kala</i>	
	<i>Matra</i>	Time/Secs
<i>Roma</i>	300	95
<i>Twak</i>	400	127
<i>Rakta</i>	500	159
<i>Mamsa</i>	600	190
<i>Meda</i>	700	220
<i>Asthi</i>	800	254
<i>Majja</i>	900	285

Modern Aspect of *Abhyanga*

Abhyanga can be compared with modern science in many aspects.

There is different technique of massage according to their movements.

- Touch-sensation – sensation which is carried through brain.
- Stroke-Touch with movement with one/both palms slowly.
- Friction-Grasp the part and move with little amount of pressure.
- Kneading-Alternative compression of the tissues by grasping them against the underlined body surfaces.
- Vibrations-Fine vibratory/shaking movements communicated to the body through the hands.
- Percussion-The movements/blows administered in various ways with varying degrees of force.
- Joint movements-both assisted and resisted movements are performed.

Physiological Effects

The therapeutic value of massage lies in its numerous and combined physiological effects and technique dependent. Massage, be it manual or mechanical, imparts pressure and stimulates mechanically the various tissue approached at the time of application of a particular technique. It is the magnitude, duration, and the direction of force applied during a particular technique that determines the effects, produced by that technique on that body.

1. Effects on the circulatory system

A. On the venous and the lymphatic flow

B. On the arterial flow

- Effects on the mobility of the soft tissue.
- Effects on the skin.
- Effects of massage on the circulatory system

A. On the venous and the lymphatic flow

- Massage facilitates the forward movement of the venous blood and the lymph.
- So reduces the chance of stagnation of the blood and the lymph in the tissue space. The mechanical action of massage resembles with that of normal muscular contraction. The different techniques of massage alternately compress and release the soft tissue. This facilitates the venous and lymphatic flow.

- Massage facilitates the drainage, and reduces the stagnation of fluids and speeds up the removal of waste products.

B. On the arterial flow

Massage improves the blood supply of the area being massaged. A definite vasodilation along with an increase in the peripheral blood flow is usually observed after massage. This moderate, consistent and definite increase in the arterial flow may be attributed to the following events happening during massage.

1. Release of vasodilators
2. Activation of axon reflex
3. Decrease of venous congestion

1. Effects on the Soft Tissue

Elasticity, Plasticity and Mobility of soft tissue enhanced. The tissues which can be affected by massage include muscles, sheath, ligaments, tendons, and joint capsule superficially as well as deep fascia.

1. Effects on the Skin

- It improves the nutritive status of skin and rises the temperature of skin. Massage facilitates the movement of skin over the subcutaneous structure. As a result, skin becomes soften, more supple and finer.
- After prolonged massage the skin also becomes tough, more flexible, elastic and its sensitivity is reduced. It has a soothing effect on the highly sensitive and vascular papillae, over which deeper layers of the cuticle fits.
- The dead cells are removed by the constant contact of the hand over the skin. The sweat glands, hair follicles and the sebaceous glands, thus, become free from obstruction and can function more effectively.
- Massage, by activating the sweat glands, increases perspiration, so that the heat dissipation is increased. It also facilitates the sebaceous secretions from exocrine glands of skin and thus, improves the lubrication and appearance of skin.

Combine Physiological Effects of Massage

- Increases Venous and lymphatic flow.
- Increases Arterial blood flow to the muscle and skin.
- Increases Stagnation of fluid in tissue space.

- Increases Removal of waste products of metabolism.
- Increases WBC, RBC and platelets count in circulating blood.
- Increases Nutritive exchange between blood and cells.
- Increases Tropic status of the part massaged.
- Induce sedation.
- Decreases Pain.
- Facilitate contraction in hypotonic muscle.
- Increases Excitability of motoneuronal pool in neurologically health person.
- Modulate autonomic response.
- Increases Electrodermal response or GSR.
- Increases Removal of secretion from lung.
- Increases Gaseous exchange across pulmonary capillaries.
- Increases Removal of dead cells from skin.
- Increases Activity of sweat and sebaceous gland.
- Modulate psychosomatic arousal.
- Mobilize soft tissue.
- Break the soft tissue adhesions.
- Accelerate various metabolic processes.
- Promote lypolysis.

Table 2: Contraindications of Massage.

General Contraindication	Local Contraindication
1. High fever 2. Severe renal or cardiac diseases 3. Deep X- Ray therapy 4. Osteoporosis 5. Severe spasticity 6. Very hairy skin 7. Patient's preference	1. Acute inflammations 2. Skin diseases 3. Recent fractures 4. Severe varicose veins 5. Atherosclerosis 6. Thrombosis 7. Myositis ossificans 8. Malignancy 9. Open wound 10. Poisonous foci

Screenings of Patient

1. a) To selection of a patient according to *Prakriti*
 - b) Taking the full history of patient.
2. a) Behavior modification of patient

- b) Physical activity
- c) *Desha, Kala (Ritu)*

3. Selection of oil according to this condition.

DISCUSSION

By performing *Abhyanga* daily, it makes the individual healthy and strong. The medicated oils utilized during the process, nourishes the tissue, gives strength and stimulates the *Agni*.^[11] The tissues are nourished when the oil penetrates the seven layers of the skin and the time duration has been mentioned in the table before.^[12] *Abhyanga* reduces pain and takes away stress, it stimulates the nervous system which in turn effects the muscular system, glands and vessels. Usually, lukewarm medicated oils are used, which stimulates the *Swedavaha Srotas*, thus causing dilation of the blood vessels, thereby increasing the blood circulation, reducing pain, stiffness and contraction of vessels.

The human body has 107 *Marma* points. At these points, the *Prana* (energy) resides and by doing *Abhyanga* of these points, positive energy is generated. Hence protecting, rejuvenating and increasing the immunity toward external environmental changes which makes *Abhyanga* very important part of daily activities.

During physical exercise or ordinary work, some metabolic products get accumulated in the neuro-muscular junctions leading to fatigue. If the neuro-muscular junctions are kept clean and if both nerve and muscle tissues are toned up, then the person could avert fatigue in spite of hard work and physical exercise. This is possible through massage therapy. The movement of soft tissue probably helps wastes (free radicals) and nutrition to flow in appropriate manner by helping to relax tension in the tissue. When waste and tension are removed then tissue and organs return to their ground-state status of natural functioning--a restful alertness where sensory apparatus is ready and able to function. In this section an additional benefit is realized from deeper touching or massage. There is no evidence that this and the former section obtain benefits which are mutually exclusive. Rather, the idea is simply that stress may be released from different levels of the anatomy, depending upon the type of massage such as light or deep. This section does emphasize that the connection to healing can be through the body first and then the emotions and nervous system. Thus, another avenue of releasing stress and providing pleasure and well-being is added to the above aspects.

CONCLUSION

By oil massage the *Sharira* (body) becomes strong and gains resistance to exhaustion caused by stressful jobs. *Ayurveda* says *Abhyanga* (oil massage) should be performed daily or if not daily, at least applying oil to the head, ears and foot is must to lead a healthy life thus showing the importance of massage to the most important parts such as *Shira* (head), *Karna* (ears) and *Pada* (foot). Hypothetically it can be concluded that *Abhyanga* should be done for 10 minutes daily as a part of *Dinacharya* and to treat any condition depending upon the strength, age etc.

Anatomical knowledge of *Shadanga Sharir* is quite beneficial while attempting the process of *Abhyanga*. The various kinds of *Abhyanga* (massage) therapies has been practiced today following the single rule of increase the circulation of vital fluid in the applied part, as well as to stimulate the nervous system to provide a soothing and relaxing effect to the patient. *Abhyanga* should be done in *Anuloma* (to the direction of hair growth) to prevent any damage to the hair roots. It is practiced in circular movements in the joints to facilitate the lymph drainage and venous drainage as most of the lymph nodes are situated in the joint spaces and collateral venous networks are also there in the joint regions so circular movements help in emptying the vessels. All the benefits of *Abhyanga* are directly or indirectly related with the stimulation of autonomic nervous system and central nervous system.

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