

ABHYANGA WITH SESAME OIL: A PROTECTIVE RITUAL FOR SWIMMERS**^{1*}Dr. Anil A. Bhawade and ²Dr. Sunita S. Mane**

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ABSTRACT

Swimming is an excellent exercise for physical and mental well-being. Swimming in chemically treated water, particularly pools containing chlorine and other disinfectants, often leads to adverse effects on the skin, such as dryness, irritation, and inflammation. These pool chemicals disrupt the skin's natural barrier, compromising its health and resilience. In response to this issue, Ayurveda offers a preventive solution through the practice of *Abhyanga* (oil massage) using sesame oil. This ancient ritual involves applying sesame oil to the skin before swimming, creating a protective shield against harsh chemicals while nourishing and fortifying the skin. Sesame oil's unique properties, including its hydrophobic nature, antioxidant activity, and soothing effects, are explored within the context of pool-related skin care. This article emphasizes the integration of *Abhyanga* with sesame oil as a modern, natural approach to preserving skin health, offering practical steps to incorporate it into the routine of frequent swimmers for

optimal protection and recovery.

KEYWORDS Abhyanga, Sesame oil, Pool chemicals, Skin health.

INTRODUCTION

Swimming is widely regarded as a wholesome activity for physical fitness and mental relaxation. It offers numerous benefits, such as cardiovascular health, improved muscle tone, and stress reduction. However, frequent exposure to chemically treated water, particularly in

swimming pools, can have undesirable effects on the skin. Chlorine and other disinfectants.^[1] while essential for maintaining pool hygiene, are known to strip the skin of its natural oils, disrupt its protective barrier, and cause irritation. Prolonged contact with these chemicals may lead to dryness, itchiness, redness, and even premature aging of the skin.

In response to these challenges, Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, presents a natural and effective solution: the practice of *Abhyanga*^[2] or oil massage, using sesame oil.^[3] Rooted in tradition, *Abhyanga* is celebrated not only for its therapeutic benefits but also for its ability to protect and nourish the skin. Sesame oil, considered one of the most potent oils in Ayurveda, is revered for its unique qualities. It is rich in antioxidants, fatty acids, and vitamins, which help create a protective barrier on the skin, locking in moisture and shielding it from external irritants like pool chemicals.

This article delves into the application of *Abhyanga*^[4] with sesame oil as a preventive ritual for swimmers. It examines the science behind sesame oil's protective properties, its Ayurvedic significance, and its practical role in reducing skin damage from chemically treated water. By integrating this ancient practice into their pre-swim routine, swimmers can enjoy the benefits of aquatic activities without compromising their skin's health and vitality.

Chlorine's Effects on Skin Health

Chlorine, a widely used pool disinfectant^[5], can have significant effects on skin:

1. Depletion of Natural Oils: Chlorine strips the skin of its natural sebum, leading to dryness and a compromised skin barrier.
2. Irritation and Sensitivity: Prolonged exposure can result in redness, itchiness, and inflammation, especially in individuals with sensitive skin.
3. Oxidative Stress: Chlorine residues left on the skin can increase oxidative stress, accelerating premature aging.

The Practice of Abhyanga Before Swimming

Performing *Abhyanga* before swimming ensures optimal protection and nourishment for the skin. Here's a step-by-step guide:

Preparation: Warm the sesame oil slightly for better absorption.

Application: Massage the oil generously over the entire body, focusing on exposed areas like arms, legs, and face. Use circular motions for joints and long strokes for limbs.

Absorption: Allow the oil to sit on the skin for at least 5–10 minutes before entering the pool.

Post-Swim Care: After swimming, cleanse the skin gently with a mild soap to remove residual chemicals, and reapply sesame oil to replenish moisture and soothe irritation.

Regular *Abhyanga* with Sesame Oil Counteracts These Effects, Preserving the Skin's Natural Resilience

The Ayurvedic Perspective

From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, swimming in chlorinated water may cause *dushti* (vitiation) of *Vata*, *pitta* and *kapha dosha* properties of skin due to its drying and irritative qualities. *Abhyanga* with sesame oil pacifies *Vata* through its unctuousness and grounding properties, while its cooling effect on skin externally soothes *Pitta* imbalances. Sesame oil has unique *tvachya* property (i.e. it relieves the different skin ailments)

- **Ritucharya Integration:** *Abhyanga* is particularly beneficial during dry seasons or when swimming in cold weather, as it prevents the skin from becoming excessively dry or irritated.
- **Balance and Harmony:** Consistent practice ensures *doshic* balance and enhances *Ojas*, or vitality, supporting the skin's overall health and immune defence.

The Science Behind *Abhyanga* with Sesame Oil^[6]

To fully appreciate the protective benefits of *Abhyanga* with sesame oil, it's helpful to understand the scientific basis of this Ayurvedic practice.

Sesame oil is a cornerstone of Ayurvedic skin care due to its unique properties.

Molecular Composition of Sesame Oil: Rich in linoleic acid, oleic acid, and sesamin, sesame oil boasts a unique chemical profile. Its emollient properties lock in moisture, while its antioxidant components, like vitamin E and sesamol, protect against free radical damage.

Hydrophobic Nature: The oil's hydrophobicity ensures that chemicals like chlorine and bromine in water cannot easily penetrate the skin's surface, forming a robust shield.

Protective Shield: It forms a hydrophobic layer on the skin, preventing direct contact with waterborne chemicals.

Nourishment: Rich in fatty acids, vitamins, and antioxidants, it replenishes the skin's natural moisture barrier.

Healing and Soothing: Its anti-inflammatory properties calm existing skin sensitivities and promote healing.

Detoxification: Sesame oil has mild detoxifying abilities, helping the skin expel impurities absorbed during swimming.

Benefits of Abhyanga Before Swimming

Prevention of Dryness: The oil counteracts the drying effects of pool chemicals, keeping the skin hydrated.

Reduction of Irritation: The protective layer minimizes contact with irritants, reducing the likelihood of rashes and redness.

Enhanced Skin Resilience: Regular practice improves the skin's ability to withstand external aggressors.

Promotion of Overall Skin Health: Sesame oil nourishes and rejuvenates the skin, making it supple and glowing.

Incorporating Abhyanga into a Swimmer's Routine: To reap maximum benefits, *Abhyanga* should be part of a holistic pre- and post-swim care routine.

Pre-Swim Practices: Include hydration and light yoga stretches to prepare the body. Apply sesame oil generously, focusing on joints, face, and extremities.

Post-Swim Care: After cleansing, reapply sesame oil to replenish moisture.

CONCLUSION

Integrating *Abhyanga* with sesame oil into your swimming routine is a simple yet powerful way to protect your skin from chemical irritation. This Ayurvedic ritual not only preserves skin health but also provides a grounding and calming experience, connecting mind and body before engaging in water-based activities. With the right care, swimmers can enjoy the benefits of swimming without compromising their skin's integrity.

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