

ABHYANGA IN NEONATES: AN AYURVEDIC PROTOCOL AND SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Abhyanga (oil massage) is an essential component of Ayurvedic neonatal care. This practice is mentioned in classical texts such as *Kashyapa Samhita*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and continues to be relevant in modern pediatrics for promoting growth, immunity, and neurodevelopment. This article discusses the importance, protocol, benefits, contraindications, and scientific basis of Abhyanga in neonates.

KEYWORDS: Abhyanga (oil massage) is an essential component of Ayurvedic neonatal care.

INTRODUCTION

In Ayurveda, neonates (Jatak Matra Shishu) require specialized care for healthy development. Among these care practices, **Abhyanga (oil**

massage) plays a vital role. This therapeutic intervention is not only a traditional ritual but is also increasingly validated by scientific research.

Classical Foundations of Abhyanga Textual References

- **Kashyapa Samhita:** Recommends daily massage with medicated oil from the 10th day of birth to promote strength and immunity (Lehanadhyaya).^[1]
- **Ashtanga Hridaya:** Advocates for oil massage as part of daily regimen (Dinacharya) for maintaining doshic balance, especially Vata.^[2]
- **Charaka Samhita:** Lists Abhyanga under daily practices to promote health and longevity.^[3]

Rationale Behind Abhyanga in Neonates Ayurvedic Viewpoint

- **Vata dosha** is predominant in the neonatal stage; Abhyanga pacifies Vata.
- It strengthens the **Dhatus** (body tissues), enhances **Sneha (unctuousness)**, and promotes **Ayus (longevity)**.

Modern Scientific View

- Improves **weight gain, blood circulation, and neuromotor development**.
- Enhances **parent-infant bonding** and reduces **cortisol levels** (stress hormone).^[4,5]

Detailed Protocol of Abhyanga in Neonates

1. Age of Initiation

- Start from the **10th day after birth**, once the umbilical cord stump has fallen off and healing is adequate.

2. Time of Day

- Morning is ideal (7:00–9:00 AM) when the baby is alert, and the environment is warm.

3. Environment Setup

- Warm, quiet, and clean room.
- Ensure baby is calm, not immediately after feeding.

4. Selection of Oil

Oil Name	Properties	Indication
Bala Taila	Strength-promoting, Vata pacifying	General use
Lakshadi Taila	Cooling, nourishing	Hot climates, skin care
Dhanwantaram Taila	Strengthens muscles, nerves	Premature or weak infants
Tila Taila (Sesame oil)	Warm, penetrating	Base oil in many tailas

Oil should be **lukewarm** before application.

5. Abhyanga Technique

Body Area	Technique
Scalp and Head	Gentle circular strokes
Face	Light strokes from center outward
Chest and Abdomen	Clockwise circular motion
Back	Long strokes down the spine
Arms and Legs	Long strokes from proximal to distal
Palms and Soles	Circular motion with thumb

- Duration: **10–15 minutes**
- Finish with **gentle bathing using warm water** or wiping with a warm damp cloth.

6. Post-Abhyanga Care

- Wrap baby in soft cotton.
- Allow rest or sleep.
- Avoid direct exposure to cold or wind.

Benefits of Abhyanga in Neonates

Domain	Benefits
Physical Growth	Improves weight gain and muscle tone ^[6]
Neurological	Enhances myelination and motor responses ^[7]
Skin Care	Moisturizes skin, reduces dryness ^[8]
Sleep	Promotes better and longer sleep cycles ^[9]
Digestion	Helps reduce colic and bloating

Scientific Evidence

- **Field et al.:** Found improved vagal tone and gastric motility in massaged preterm infants.^[7]
- **Darmstadt et al.:** Showed that emollient therapy (like oil massage) significantly reduced neonatal mortality.^[8]
- **Cochrane Review:** Confirms massage therapy aids in weight gain and reduces hospital stay.^[9]

Contraindications

- Fever or infection
- Skin lesions, rashes, or wounds
- Immediately after feeding
- Hypothermia or unstable vitals
- Low birth weight babies (<2.5 kg) should be handled very gently

Precautions

- Always test oil on a small area for allergy.
- Oil should not enter eyes, ears, or nostrils.
- Do not use excessive pressure.
- Massage should be stopped if baby is irritable or restless.

CONCLUSION

Abhyanga in neonates is an integral part of Ayurvedic childcare that supports healthy development through tactile stimulation and doshic balance. Following a well-defined protocol ensures safety and maximizes benefits. Integrating Abhyanga into modern neonatal care can enhance holistic child development.

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