

## IMPORTANCE AND APPLICATION OF ABHYANGA IN CHILDREN

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**ABSTRACT**

*Abhyanga* is a traditional therapeutic practice in our classical texts also known as oil massage, the ancient holistic healing system of India. It involves the application of warm, herbal-infused oil to the body, followed by a gentle massage. It has several benefits for children and can be an essential part of their overall health and well-being. A daily oil massage is a routine practice in the care of children for their growth and development. It has been included as a part of *Dinacharya* as a health maintenance and as the treatment measure for certain diseases. The act of massaging and touching can have positive effects on a child's cognitive development and sensory perception. Several benefits in children include nourishment, health, protection and emotional well-being.

It has a great importance according to the pressure applied and the techniques adopted. An oil massage involving *Marma* points (vital parts of the body) which contain *Prana*, the vital energy leads to ultimate healing of body and mind. It is essential for the proper growth and development of children and considered best in controlling aggravated *Vata Dosha*. In this review article, an effort is made to elaborate the importance of *Abhyanga* in children based on the principles of *Ayurveda*.

**KEYWORDS:** *Abhyanga*, *Ayurveda*, Oil massage, *Marma*, *Vata Dosha*, *Dinacharya*.

**INTRODUCTION**

After the birth of the child, *Abhyanga* is advised to make them conscious and stable. The body of the baby is smeared with medicated oil and gentle massage is given to the child. The procedure, improves the vitiation of *Vata Dosha*, that occurred during the child's birth. *Vata* is present predominantly in the skin, the application of oil is best for skin, so one should hold

to it habitually. Massaging the body daily will have good tactile stimulation and strength. *Acharya Charaka* had given the scientific basis of *Abhyanga* in *Sutrasthana*. Oil has *Vata Shamaka* properties hence *Abhyanga* with oil is very useful for skin.<sup>[1]</sup>

In *Ayurvedic* classics there are some methods for application of oil over the body like *Parisheka*, *Samvahan* and *Mardana* respectively. During the *Pranaprttyagaman* procedure of neonate, there is indication of *Bala* oil. *Parisheka*, that means sprinkling of oil is useful to relieve the stress during labour and reduces the aggravated *Vata*, making the baby stable and conscious. *Samvahan* is smearing of oil over the body parts and gentle pressure is applied. Whereas, *Mardana* is an application of oil or *churna* over the body parts with compression of body muscular tissues in suitable manner.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Dinacharya* refers to daily routines or practices that are recommended to maintain optimal health and well-being. The practice of oil massage is an essential part of *dinacharya* and is considered highly beneficial when performed regularly. It's important to choose appropriate oils suitable for the child's age, constitution and any specific health conditions. For babies, gentle oils like almond oil, olive oil and coconut oil are commonly used. As children grow older, sesame oil infused with herbs can be beneficial. It's essential to use warm oil and gentle massage techniques appropriate for the child's age and comfort level. While application of an oil the safety measures are taken if any child develops allergies or sensitivities. A parental supervision is essential when performing oil massage on young children. The selection of oil and techniques should be performed under the guidance and consultation of an *Ayurvedic* practitioner or pediatrician.<sup>[3]</sup>

The word *Abhyanga* emanate from two words i.e. *Abhi* + *Anjana* = *Abhyanjana*.

*Abhi* means towards, upon, into etc. and *Anjana* means to smear, to and fro movements (rubbing with unctuous substance).

Application should be done in vertical direction. It should be practiced in the direction of hair growth. The specific movements in limbs and joints has been described in our classical texts. The circular movements over the joints improves the lymphatic drainage as well as venous drainage of the respected areas. Due to penetration of oil into the seven layers of the skin the tissues are nourished. The use of lukewarm medicated oil leads to stimulation of *Swedavaha srotas*, therefore leading to dilatation of the blood vessels and increasing blood circulation relieving the pain, reducing stiffness of the muscle and improving joints flexibility.

It is one among the *Ayurvedic* procedures which become applicable from the very first day after the birth itself and one of the important part of *Bahiparimarjana chikitsa*, leading to overall growth and body rejuvenation in children.<sup>[4]</sup>

### ABHYANGA IN CLASSICS

The principles and techniques of *abhyanga* work as a therapeutic and rejuvenating process in our ancient *Ayurvedic* classics. According to *Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana* Chapter 5, p-128; the necessity of *abhyanga* is described. The splendid description of *abhyanga* is portrayed by an example of *Kumbh* (pot), *charma* (leather) and *upangaadaksh* (axle of the cart). By the application of *sneha dravya* (unctuous substances like oil) the former things becomes strong and efficient, similarly the body becomes *dridha* (strong) and *sutwaka* (glowing). It pacifies the *vata dosha* and make the body *kleshasaha* (capable of withstanding fatigue and exercise).<sup>[5]</sup>

According to *Sushruta Samhita Chikitsasthana* Chapter 24, p - 133; it leads to *mardhavakara* (softening of body), *kaphavatanirodhana* (pacifies *kapha* and *vata*), *dhatunapushtijananno* (promotes *dhatu* or bodily tissues) and *mrijavarnabalapradha* (provides cleanliness, complexion and strength to the body).<sup>[6]</sup> The importance of *Sarvanga Abhyanga* as a part of *Dinacharya* is explained and must be performed daily as it helps to retard ageing (*jara*), exertion (*shrama*) and pacifies *vata dosha* and helps in promotion of vision (*drishti prasadha*), nourishes the body, increases longevity (*pushtayu*), leads to good sleep, good for skin and provides good physique (*swapna*, *sutwaka* and *dridhta*) as per *Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrasthana* Chapter 2, p - 24;.<sup>[7]</sup>

Its regular practice as a part of *dinacharya* is believed to have multiple benefits. Therefore, it must be performed with awareness, mindfulness, paying attention to child's preferences and requirements.

### INDICATIONS

**1. Approach:** It is performed in the morning before taking bath. As per *ritucharya*, it is said to be done specifically in *Hemanta* and *Shishir ritu*. This helps in preparing the body and mind for the day ahead and promotes a sense of freshness and alertness.<sup>[8]</sup>

**2. Selection of Oil:** Based on child's constitution (*Prakriti*) and any current health imbalances. Commonly used oil includes sesame oil, coconut oil, olive oil, almond oil and

herbal infused oil. Sesame oil is commonly used for pacifying *vata dosha*, coconut oil for *pitta dosha* and olive oil or mustard oil for *kapha dosha*.<sup>[9]</sup>

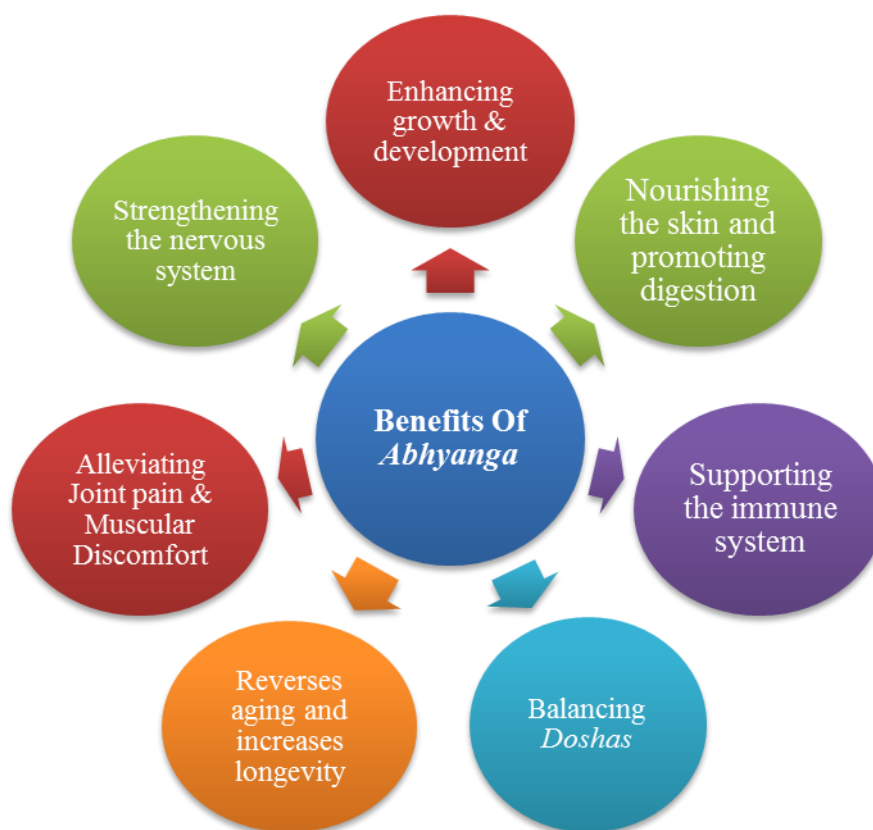
**3. Temperature:** The unctuous substance used for *abhyanga* in children should be warmed at optimum and at comfortable temperature. It helps in easy absorption by the skin and enhances the therapeutic effects of the massage.

**4. Methods and Technique:** The massage should be done gently to the body with love, affection and mindfulness. More attention is given to vital points or *marma* points in the body. Stimulating these points is believed to have specific therapeutic benefits. The massage stroke should be gentle yet firm and the oil should be applied to all the parts of the body. Circular motions can be used on joints, while long strokes are applied to the limbs.<sup>[10]</sup>

## **BENEFITS<sup>[11]</sup>**

*Acharya Charaka* mentioned that regular *abhyanga* helps to avoid *abhihata* caused by *abhighata* (heavy work). It makes the skin *susparsha*, development of body, good strength, pleasing appearance and signs of ageing develop slowly.

The practice of oil massage can be beneficial in addressing various childhood illness. In respiratory issues like cough, cold and congestion the application of an oil helps to improve blood circulation and lymphatic drainage which can aid in clearing respiratory passage. Gentle *abhyanga* on the abdominal area can support digestion and alleviate digestive discomfort in children. The calming and relaxing effects of *abhyanga* can help children with sleep disturbances, reduce anxiety and stress in children by strengthening the nervous system. Regular practice can promote overall health and well being. It helps balance *Doshas* and supports the body's natural healing mechanism.



## PROCEDURE<sup>[12]</sup>

The body of an individual is compared to tree, if the roots of trees are watered regularly it encourage deep rooting and structural balance. In the same way by *Abhyanga* the *Dhatu* of the body develops. The alternative postures of *Abhyanga* are sitting upright with knees extended, supine position, left lateral, right lateral and prone position. The proper procedure should be performed in seven steps as follows.

1. *Shiroabhyanga*
2. *Padabhyanga*
3. *Hashtabhyanga*
4. *Udaroabhyanga*
5. *Prishtabhyanga*
6. *Katiabhyanga*
7. *Januabhyanga*

While performing the procedure the health conditions of the child must be taken into consideration. The unctuous substance (*Sneha*) reaches all the parts of the body equally if procedure is performed with the above mentioned postures. For different bodily sites the way of massaging is in different manner. It is to be done in *Anuloma* direction from head to foot in

downward motion. The massage of joints like the elbow, shoulder, knee, ankle and lumbo - sacral should be done in circular manner and that of muscles in a linear manner. The umbilicus region is massaged in a circular motion. All five *Vayu* are influenced bringing about an optimal state of flow. By working with upward strokes (*Udan Vayu*) we can bring stimulation and invigoration. Working with downward strokes (*Apana Vayu*) will bring about an overall sense of tranquility.<sup>[13]</sup>

## DURATION

Ideally, it is recommended to massage the body for at least 10 – 15 minutes. For achieving the desired outcome suggested period is of 5 minutes in each position and can vary depending upon child's needs and time availability.

## MODE OF ACTION<sup>[14]</sup>

A description of the penetration of unctuous substance (*Sneha*) at various levels are given by *Acharya Dalhana* in the indication of *abhyanga*. The medicated infused herbal oil while massaging over the body is not only confined to the skin, it reaches into deeper *dhatu* within specific timings. It takes about 100 *Matra* each to penetrate through the consecutive *dhatu* in the body. The *sneha* invades through hair follicles and is digested by *Bhrajak Pitta*. *Twaka* is the natural seat of *Vata* and *Bhrajak Pitta* acts along with it which causes *Deepana* and *Pachana* of applied *Sneha*. *Twaka* being the area that is rich in vascular supply promotes the absorption of the *abhyanga dravya*.

### Attaining of *Sneha* in different *Dhatu*

<i>Dhatu</i>	<i>Kala</i>	
	<i>Matra</i>	Time in Seconds
<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

## CONTRAINDICATIONS<sup>[15]</sup>

Although *abhyanga* (oil massage) can be highly beneficial for children, there are some contraindications and precautions that need to be considered. It's essential to ensure the child's safety and well-being during the massage. Here are some contraindications enlisted below.

1. Fever (*Tarun jwara*)
2. Acute inflammation or injury
3. Pre – existing Skin conditions (Children with certain skin conditions like psoriasis and eczema may need to avoid *abhyanga* or use specific oils suitable for their condition under expert opinion).
4. Digestive disturbances (It should be avoided right after meal or in case of diarrhoea and vomiting).
5. Serious medical conditions
6. Emotional sensitivity (Children who are emotionally sensitive or have experienced trauma may not be comfortable with *abhyanga*. It's crucial to ensure that the child feels safe and comfortable during the procedure).

### MEDICATED OIL AND *GHRITA* FOR CHILDREN

Various medicated oils and *ghrita* (clarified butter) for therapeutic purposes in children are infused with specific herbs or prepared by using *Kwatha* (decoctions), making them more potent and targeted in their effects. Here are some common types of medicated oils and *ghrita* used for children.

1. ***Bala Taila***: Prepared with *Bala (Sida cordifolia)* as main ingredient along with other herbal drugs, it is often used for strengthening muscles and joints in children and promoting overall growth and development.<sup>[16]</sup>
2. ***Ksheerbala Taila***: It is prepared with *Bala (Sida cordifolia)* and milk and is used to support nervous system health, beneficial for children with *Vata* imbalances.<sup>[17]</sup>
3. ***Shankhapushpi Taila***: Prepared with *Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)* and other calming herbs. It helps promote better sleep, reduce anxiety and support the nervous system in children.<sup>[18]</sup>
4. ***Brahmi Ghrita***: Infused with *Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)* and other herbs known for their cognitive benefits. It is used to support brain health, memory and concentration in children.<sup>[19]</sup>
5. ***Panchagavya Ghrita***: This *ghrita* is a combination of cow products (milk, ghee, curd, dung and urine) and specific herbs. It is used for its detoxifying and immune-boosting properties in children.<sup>[20]</sup>
6. ***Dhanwantharam Thailam***: It is commonly used to alleviate *Vata* imbalances, joints pain and muscle stiffness in children.<sup>[21]</sup>



7. **Ashwagandhadi Taila:** This oil is used for the treatment of *Rajayakshama*. It has the additional property of *Sarvadhathu Vivardhanam* and due to its *Brimhana* effect it is used in LBW babies. It helps to promote immunity, muscle and bone strength, promotes growth and nourishment.<sup>[22]</sup>
8. **Kumkumadi Taila:** *Kumkumadi Taila* is an oil containing saffron and other skin-nourishing herbs. It is used to improve complexion and treat skin issues in children.<sup>[23]</sup>

Before using any medicated oil or *ghrita* for children, it's essential to consult with a qualified *Ayurvedic* practitioner. They can determine the medication on the basis of child's specific needs, *dosha* constitution and any existing health conditions. The practitioner will also guide on the proper application and dosage of these medicated oils and *ghrita* preparation for optimal benefits.

### **ABHYANGA ON MARMA POINTS<sup>[24]</sup>**

The *Marma* points influence the function of the internal organs by re - establishing the free flow of energy channels of the body. By working on them we can control *prana*. Through *prana*, the sensory and motor function can be controlled. The stimulation of *Marma* with the help of *abhyanga* is very well explained in our classical texts. *Padabhyanga* is among one of the procedure. According to *Ashtanga Hridaya* two nerves (*sira*) situated in between the foot are connected to the eyes. These nerves are responsible for the maintenance of good eyesight and relieve eyestrain. In *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* *Padabhyanga* is considered as *Drishti Prasad* and *Chakshushya*. With the help of medicated oil or *ghrita* the *sneha dravya* get absorbed into the *sira* by the skin of the foot and pacifies the *doshas*, thus stimulating and improving the function of eyes.

It plays an important role for children and is a body work technique that improves the function of brain, calms the mind and provide deep sleep.

### **CONCLUSION**

*Abhyanga* is one of the best suitable therapeutic measure in children from birth till adolescence. It helps in accelerating the growth and development, weight gain, enhances immunity, reduces pain, stimulating autonomic and central nervous system. With proper selection of oil under the medical supervision one can practice it without any harm. As a part of *Dinacharya* several benefits are considered by maintenance of health and prevention of



disease. Based on the utility, it can be performed on different parts of the body. It is an important treatment process that attributes in creating healthy lifestyle in children

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