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Role of *Abhyanga* (oil massage) in daily practice

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda literally means 'science of life'. According to Ayurveda the term health does not stand only for the freedom from diseases but it is called as healthy only when a person's mind, sense organs and the soul are in a perfect state of equilibrium to endow happiness and the body is free from diseases. To promote health certain procedure and methods are followed on daily basis (*Dinacharya*). *Abhyanga* (oil massage) is one among the ancient procedure explained in *Dinacharya*. It is an approach to adopt healing, relaxation and treating various diseases. In Ayurveda it is clearly mentioned that *Abhyanga* alleviates *Vata Dosha* and person develops strength both physically and mentally. Here an attempt is made to compile the importance, use and benefits of *Abhyanga* in daily life.

Key words: Ayurveda, *Dinacharya*, *Abhyanga*

INTRODUCTION

Abhyanga or oil massage is the inseparable part of daily life in ancient ages, as it provides huge benefits and makes human body strong and disease free. *Abhyanga* is also a type of *Bahya Snehana* (external oleation) which is a part of *Panchakarma* therapy. It has great results in both therapeutic as well as preventive purpose. At present we are reaching the point where we are becoming conscious of our bodies and the need to keep them in best possible condition. Around 250 types of massage therapies are available all over the world. Ayurveda has its own stand on the importance of *Abhyanga*.

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So, it is high time to show some light on very rejuvenating as well as relaxing natural and powerful method of *Abhyanga* and to establish some facts about it. In many books various types of method for Ayurveda are massage which have been named as *Abhyanga*, there is rare description of actual method of *Abhyanga* in classical texts. It has been said that *Abhyanga* should be done in *Anuloma* direction i.e., towards the growth of hair. According to Ayurveda, those who are desires of health and happiness should do *Abhyanga* to the body. *Abhyanga* is one among the *Dinacharya* and is an ancient Indian Ayurvedic approach adopted for healing, relaxation and treating various diseases. It is one of the most important day today activities of life, as how early to bed and early to rise, then brushing of teeth etc. are important.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Various Ayurvedic classics and article published till date are reviewed to update the importance of *Abhyanga* in day today life.

Importance of *Abhyanga*

Abhyanga means massaging the body with any *Sneha* (fats) in the same direction of hair follicles. *Abhyanjana* and *Snehana* are *Paryayas* (synonyms) of

Abhyanga. Ayurveda says *Abhyanga* 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, important parts that should be massaged are *Shira*(head), *Sravana* (ears), *Paada* (foot).^[1] One who applies *Tila Taila* (sesame oil) on his head regularly does not suffer from headache, graying of hair and gets sound sleep. Person suffering from neurological disorder or insomnia it is good to use medicated oil for *Abhyanga*. The massage has very soothing effect on nervous system. Therefore, it is very important for people who have a tendency to be nervous or who are always under the influence of stress to perform *Abhyanga*.

Generally, *Tila Taila* is best for all *Prakruthis* (body constitution), because it is considered as the best among all the *Tailas* in Ayurveda, it is *Tridosahara* (subsides all 3 *Dosha*) and nourishes the body. Sesame oil is poly unsaturated fats and contain unusually large amounts of linoleic acid is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent and is known to inhibit pathogenic bacteria. However, for *Pitta Prakruti* or if it is summer season *Narikela Taila* (coconut oil) is best. Generally, many medicated oils are used for *Abhyanga* in various disease like neurological disorders, disease of head etc. few important *Tailas* like *Triphaladi Taila*, *Bhringamalakadi Taila*, *Chandanadi Taila*, *Ksheerabala Taila*, *Narayana Taila* etc. are used for *Shiroabhyanga*.^[2]

Application of oil to skin which is followed by massage in specific direction is well known as *Abhyanga* in Ayurveda. Massage in specific direction improves blood circulation, facilitates removal of toxins from 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 reduces body weight as well as fat.

Indication of *Abhyanga*

- *Abhyanga* in daily routine - it promotes health in hale and healthy, regular practice of *Abhyanga* is advised to maintain physical fitness.

- *Abhyanga* in different seasons - it is advised to protect the body from the cold of *Hemanta Ritu*, extreme cold and dry weather is characteristic of *Shishira Ritu*. *Abhyanga* is beneficial to counteract the effect of cold weather.
- *Abhyanga* in trivial manifestation - natural urges which are withheld causes imbalance in *Dosha* and produce symptoms. *Abhyanga* is advised for the treatment of symptoms caused due to suppressing the urges of *Adhovata*, *Shakrit*, *Mutra*, *Kshut*, *Nidra*, *Shramaswasa*, *Vamathu*, *Shukra* etc.
- *Abhyanga* in different diseases - it is indicated in mainly *Vata* predominant state of disease. Oleation along with sudation brings down the disfigured and painful body parts due to aggravated *Vata* into normalcy. Indicated in diseases like: *Vatavyadhi*, *Shyawathu*, *Kushta*, *Switra*, *Rajyakshma*, *Twagarishta*, *Jeernajwara*, *Dahajwara*, *Madatyaya (Vatika)*, *Vatika Kasa*, *Kshataja Kasa*, *Shwasa*, *Sheetajwara*, *Raktapitta*.^[3]

Contraindication of *Abhyanga*

Abhyanga should be avoided by the person suffering from aggravation of *Kapha*, who have just undergone purificatory therapies like emesis, purgation, enema etc. and who are suffering from indigestion.

Beneficial effects of *Abhyanga*

Following are some of the beneficial effects like: *Mrijaprada* (cleanses dirt), *Vranaprada* (improves the body complexion), *Twakdardyakara* (helps to maintain the elasticity of skin), *Vyadhikshamatwa* (restore natural immunity), *Jarahara* (rejuvenates body tissues, promotes health and prevents aging process), *Vatahara* (alleviates *Vata Dosha*), *Kaphahara* (alleviates *Kapha Dosha*), *Abhigata Sahyatva* (reduces the effect of trauma if any), *Shramahara* (relaxes muscles and relieves fatigue), *Balavan* (improves the physical strength), *Dhatu Pushti Janana* (promotes the excellence of body tissues), *Priyadarshana* (beautifies the body), *Swapna Kara* (induces sound sleep), *Drishti Prasadakara*

(improves eyesight), *Pushtikara* (nourishes body tissues), *Ayushkara* (prolongs lifespan).^[4]

DISCUSSION

Abhyanga if followed daily it makes man healthy. The *Taila* used for *Abhyanga* nourishes the tissues, gives strength and increases the *Agni*. Tissue is nourished, hypothetically by the knowledge about seven layers of skin, its thickness and the time duration for the oil to reach the different *Dhatus* are needed to understand. The seven layers of the skin mentioned in the Ayurveda, the average thickness mentioned by modern science is 1.5- 4mm. The effect of *Abhyanga* on different *Dhatus* is based on the duration of how long the *Abhyanga* should be performed as a part of daily routine to maintain a healthy life.

Abhyanga Kaala

SN	Name of the <i>Dhatu</i> (body tissue)	Penetrating time of oil
1.	<i>Roma Kupa</i>	300 <i>Maatra</i> (95 sec)
2.	<i>Twak</i>	400 <i>Maatra</i> (133sec)
3.	<i>Rakta</i>	500 <i>Maatra</i> (160sec)
4.	<i>Mamsa</i>	600 <i>Maatra</i> (190sec)
5.	<i>Meda</i>	700 <i>Maatra</i> (228sec)
6.	<i>Asthi</i>	800 <i>Maatra</i> (240 sec)
7.	<i>Majja</i>	900 <i>Maatra</i> (280sec)

Therefore, as a daily routine 10 minutes is sufficient but for diseased condition 30 to 60 min of *Abhyanga* is needed. In diseased person medicated oils are preferred for curing the condition. Hypothetically it can be said that the blood amino acids like tryptophan increases after massage. Massaging reduces pain and stress. By *Abhyanga* the nervous system gets stimulated, thus providing stimulation to the muscular system, vessels and glands governed by the particular nerve and keeps human body healthy. Massaging also improves the circulatory system thus reducing the pain. Luke warm oil is used for massaging it stimulates the *Swedavahasrotas* (perspiring body channels)

thus causing dilatation of blood vessels. By doing massage vital points gets stimulated and produce positive energy, thereby protecting, rejuvenating and increasing the immunity towards the environmental changes. It is scientifically proved that massage increases the white blood cell count and antibodies which provide more resistance against disease. The soles of feet have *Marma* points, which in turn stimulates the *Indriyas* (sense organs). Thus, massage is very important to lead a healthy life and to create a healthy society.

CONCLUSION

Abhyanga practiced today is following a single rule of increasing the circulation of vital fluid in the applied part, as well as to stimulate the nervous system to provide soothing and relaxing effect to the patient. *Abhyanga* should be done in the *Anuloma* direction to prevent any damage to the hair roots. 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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