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# Importance of *Abhyanga* in Today's Scenario

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## ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic system of medicine has holistic approaches in a particular way to prevent and promote a healthy life by following certain methods and therapies in day today activities (*Dinacharya*) which could be considered as a part of a health. In 21<sup>st</sup> century people are running behind wealth and not taking care of health. To fulfill the aim of Ayurveda in the today's scenario, promotion among the fast moving people and stressful life of this 21<sup>st</sup> century. So to take care of health, *Abhyanga* (oil massage) which is one among the *Dinacharya*, is an ancient Indian 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 tooth etc. are important. In Ayurveda it is clearly mentioned that the *Abhyanga* controls *Vatadosha* and the person develops strength both physically and mentally. Here an attempt has been made to compile the importance of *Abhyanga* in day today life to keep the society healthy.

**Key words:** *Abhyanga*, Oil massage; *Dinacharya*.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Ayurveda, those who are desirous of health and happiness should do *Abhyanga* (massage) 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.<sup>[1]</sup> *Abhyanga* has been considered as a type of *Bahya Snehana*. In classics, *Abhyanga* has been mentioned as the part of *Dinacharya*. Person should resort to *Abhyanga* every

day if he wants to keep himself healthy. The body is compared to the tree. If the root of tree is given water regularly, then it lives for a long time. Similarly our body needs *Abhyanga* daily to live a healthy life. Here an attempt has been made to compile how *Abhyanga* can create a healthy individual or society.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

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

## Necessity of *Abhyanga*

*Abhyangais* defined as a procedure of application of *SnehaDravyas* over the body and make to and fro movements. *Abhyanga* means massaging the body with any *Snehas* (fats) in the same direction of hair follicles. *Abyanjana* and *Snehana* are *Paryayas* (synonyms) of *Abhyanga*.<sup>[2]</sup> 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<sup>[3]</sup> thus showing the importance of massage to the most important parts such as *Shira* (head), *Sravana* (ears) and *Paada* (foot). By oil massage the *Sarira* (body) becomes strong and gains resistance to exhaustion caused by today's life style

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and stressful life. One who applies *Tila Taila* (sesame oil) on his head regularly does not suffer from headache, graying of hair and gets a sound sleep. But once the person is diagnosed as insomnia or as suffering from neurological disorders etc., and then it is good to use medicated oils for *Abhyanga*. The massage has a very soothing effect on the nervous system, which is governed by *Vata Dosha* - one of 3 basic principles of Ayurveda. Therefore, it is very important for people who have a tendency to be nervous or who are always under the influence of stress or who travel a lot.

Generally *Tila Taila* (sesame oil) is best for all *Prakruthis* (body constitution), because it is considered as the best among all the *Tailas* in Ayurveda.<sup>[4]</sup> It is *Tridoshagna* (subsides all three *Doshas*) and nourishes the body. Sesame oil has a unique value because it comes under poly unsaturated fats and contains unusually large amounts of linoleic acid.<sup>[5]</sup> Linoleic acid is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent and is known to inhibit pathogenic bacteria. However, for *Pitta Prakruti* (body constitution), or if it is a summer season *Narikela Taila* (coconut oil) is best. Generally many medicated oils are used for *Abhyanga* in various disorders like neurological disorders etc. But in disorders like sleeplessness, neurological disorders, diseases of head etc. few important *Tailas* like *Bhringamalakadi Taila*,<sup>[6]</sup> *Ksheerabala Taila*,<sup>[7]</sup> *Triphaladi Taila*,<sup>[8]</sup> *Narayana Taila*,<sup>[9]</sup> *Chandanadi Taila*,<sup>[10]</sup> etc. are used for *Shiroabhyangam* (head massage).

SN	Medicated oils	Indication
1	<i>Dhanvantara Taila</i>	Cures <i>Kampa</i> (tremors), <i>Akshepa</i> (convulsions), <i>Unmada</i> (insanity), all types <i>Vataja Rogas</i> (neurological disorders) <sup>[11]</sup>
2	<i>Narayana Taila</i>	Cures all types of <i>Vataja Rogas</i> <sup>[9]</sup>
3	<i>Bala Taila</i>	<i>Kasa</i> (cough), <i>Swasa</i> (dyspnoea), <i>Jwara</i> (fever), <i>Chardi</i> (vomitting), <i>Murcha</i> (fainting), <i>Ksaya</i> (emaciation),

		<i>Apasmara</i> (epilepsy), <i>Vatavyadhi</i> (neurological disorders) <sup>[12]</sup>
4	<i>Pinda Taila</i>	<i>Vata Rakta</i> (rheumatoid arthritis) <sup>[13]</sup>
5	<i>Sahacharadi Taila</i>	<i>Kampa</i> (tremors), <i>Akshepa</i> (convulsions), <i>Unmada</i> (insanity), <i>Vataja Rogas</i> (neurological disorders) <sup>[14]</sup>
6	<i>Ksheera Bala Taila</i>	<i>Rasayanam</i> (rejuvenator), <i>Vatasruk</i> (gout), Neurological disorders, Good for sense organs. <sup>[7]</sup>
7	<i>Lakshadi Taila</i>	<i>Balya</i> (improves strength), <i>Apasmara</i> (epilepsy) and all neurological disorders of children and pregnant women <sup>[15]</sup>

We can compare your *Sharera* with, How pot, leather and axle of cart become strong and efficient by oiling, similarly the body becomes strong and stable and so also the skin becomes *Drudha* and good by anointing it with oil, *Abhyanga* pacifies *Vata*, and body becomes capable of withstanding fatigue and exercise.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Sarvanga Abhyanga

*Abhyanga* should be done daily because it helps to,<sup>[17]</sup>

- *Jara* (retards ageing), *Srama* (exertion) and pacifies *Vata*.
- *Drusti Prasada* (Good for vision)
- *Pusti Prasada* (Nourishes the body)
- *Ayu Prasada* (Increases longevity)
- *Swapna* (induce good sleep)
- Good for skin (complexion and firmness )
- Provides good physic.

### Importance of Shiro Abhyanga

According to *Sushruta*<sup>[18]</sup>

- *Shiro Abhyanga* eliminates diseases of head
- Makes *Kesha* (hair) grows *Mardhava* (soft), long, thick, *Snigdha* (glossy) and *Krusna Kesha* (blackness of hairs)

- Makes satiety in head, Removes facial wrinkles,
- *Santarpana Indriya* (nourishes the sense organs) and does the *Pratipurana* of *Shiras*.

According to *Charaka*<sup>[19]</sup>

- By applying oil daily to head, does not get *Shirashula* (headache), *Kalithya* (baldness), *Phalithya* (greying of hair), *Na Kesha Prapatanti* (nor there be hair fall).
- *Bala Shira Kapalanam* (Bones of skull and forehead will become strong)
- *Drudhamula* (Roots of the hair become strong); *Dhrighakasha* (hairs will be long) and *Krushna Kesha* (black coloured).
- Rejuvenates the *Indriyas*, increases the skin complexion of the face.
- *Nidra Labha Sukha* (Gets good sleep easily and feels happy).

#### Importance of *Karna Poorana*

According to *Sushruta*<sup>[20]</sup>

- Instilling of oil into the ear helps to *Hanu, Manya, Shira* and *Karna Shula* (remove pain in the jaw, carotid region, head and ear).

According to *Charaka*<sup>[21]</sup>

- Daily instillation of oil in ear helps to keep away *Vataja Karna Roga*
- It removes stiffness of the neck and jaw.
- Normal pitched voice can be heard (no necessity of high pitch), and *Badiryā* (deafness) will not arise.

#### Importance of *Padabhyanga*

According to *Sushruta*<sup>[22]</sup>

*Abhyanga* of feet helps to,

- *Nidra Sukha* (get good sleep)
- *Deha Sukha* (pleasure to body)
- *Chaksusya* (good for vision)
- Removes *Srama* (fatigue) and *Supti* (numbness of feet).

- *Pada Mrudukara* (softens the feet)

#### Specific site of *Abhyanga*

- According to *Astanga Sangraha*<sup>[23]</sup> and *Astanga Hrudaya*<sup>[24]</sup>

*Abhyanga* should be done specially to *Shira, Karna* and *Pada*

#### Method of *Abhyanga*<sup>[25]</sup>

- The *Abhyanga* can be done either in standing or sitting or lying position. Massage should be done in the direction of hair with the palms.
- Early morning massage with slight warm oil should be started by applying a small amount of oil on the scalp and massaging the head gently.
- The open palms of the hands and the flat surfaces of the fingers should be used rather than the fingertips for the whole massage.
- The massage should be in circular way so as to stimulate the marma points which influences all the parts of the body.
- Massage the face and the ears, using the fingers. Applying oil and mild stimulation by fingers to the ears is very important.
- Massage the neck and the upper part of the back with flat surfaces of open palm and fingers. Massage the arms vigorously.
- For the joints use a circular motion for massaging. Then gently massage the chest, stomach and pectoral areas. Massage the back and spine vigorously. Massage the legs vigorously in the circular motion for joints and straight motion for long bones. Then massage the feet. Bath should be with lukewarm water.

#### The *Abhyanga* should be done in the following seven positions;

- Sitting Position - Head, Ear, Face, neck
- Supine Position - Anterior aspect of the body.
- Left lateral Position - Rt. side of trunk, Inner aspect of Rt. arm and outer aspect of Lt. leg
- Right lateral Position - Lt. Side of trunk, Inner aspect of Lt. arm and Outer aspect of Rt. leg

- Prone Position - Posterior aspect of the body
- Sitting Position
- Supine Position

### Benefits of Abhyanga

According to *Charaka*<sup>[26]</sup>

- Regular *Abhyanga* helps to avoid *Abhigata* caused by *Abhighata* or heavy works it will not effect skin complexion.
- It makes the skin *Susparsha*, well grown body, *Balavana* (good strength) , *Priyadarshana* (pleasing appearance)and *Alpajara* (signs of ageing develop slowly).

According to *Susrutha*<sup>[27]</sup>

- It helps *Mardhavakara* (softness of body)
- Pacifies *Kapha* and *Vata*
- *Dhatu Pusti* (promotes *Dhatu*)
- Provides *Mruja* (cleanliness), *Varna* (complexion) and *Balaprada* (strength).

### Benefits of *Padabhyanga*<sup>[28]</sup>

- Removes *Kharatva* (roughness), *Sthamba* (stiffness), *Rouksha* (dryness), *Srama* (fatigue) and *Suptischa Pada* (loss of sensation of feet) get relieved immediately by anointing and massaging the feet.
- Feet become soft, strong and steady
- Person obtains *Drusti Prasada* (clear vision) , and pacifies *Vata*
- Not effected by *Grudrasi* (sciatica), *Sputana* (cracks of feet) and
- Not effected by *Sankocha* (contraction) of *Sira* and *Snayu*.

### Indication

- *Adharaniya Vega* (*Mutra*, *Purisha*, *Retasa*, *Nidra*)<sup>[29]</sup>
- *Pittaja Gulma*<sup>[30]</sup>
- *Apasmara*<sup>[31]</sup>

- *Vatodara*<sup>[32]</sup>
- In *Atiyoga* of *Vamana*<sup>[33]</sup>
- Scorpion bite<sup>[34]</sup>
- *Vataja Hrudroga*<sup>[35]</sup>

### Contraindications

According to *Sushruta*<sup>[36]</sup>

- *Dosa* associated with *Ama*
- *Taruna Jwara* and *Ajeerna*( Indigestion)
- Those who have been given *Vamana* or *Virecana* or *Niruha Basti*
- If *Abhyanga* done in *Taruna Jwara* and *Ajeerna* it causes severity or incurability of disease
- If *Abhyanga* is done in same day it causes *Agnimandhya* and produces diseases.
- In the diseases caused by *Santarpana* (over nutrition).

According to *Astanga Hrudaya*<sup>[37]</sup>

*Abhyanga* should be avoided in persons,

- Suffering from aggravated *Kapha*.
- Undergone *Panchakarma* therapy.
- *Ajeerna*.

### DISCUSSION

If *Abhyanga* is followed daily it makes the man healthy. The *Taila* used for *Abhyanga* nourishes the tissues, gives strength and increases the *Agni*.<sup>[38]</sup> How the tissues are nourished, to speak it hypothetically the knowledge about the seven layers of skin, its thickness and the time duration for the oil to reach the different *Dhatu*s are needed. The seven layers of skin are very clearly mentioned in *Ayurveda*.<sup>[39]</sup> The average thickness mentioned by modern science is 1.5 - 4 mm. Now the effect of *Abhyanga* on different *Dhatu*s based on time duration should be discussed to know how long the *Abhyanga* should be performed as a part of daily routine to maintain a healthy life.

### Effects on *Dhatu*

*Dalhana* the commentator of *Susruta* has described the effect of *Abhyanga*. According to the duration of *Abhyanga* done, the oil used in *Abhyanga* reaches;<sup>[40]</sup>

- Root of hair of the skin - 300 *Matras* (96 sec.)
- *Twacha* - 400 *Matras* (133 sec.)
- *Rakta* - 500 *Matras* (160 sec.)
- *Mamsa* - 600 *Matras* (190 sec.)
- *Meda* - 700 *Matras* (228 sec.)
- *Asthi* - 800 *Matras* (240 sec.)
- *Majja* - 900 *Matras* (285 sec.)

*Abhyanga* should be applied at least 5 to 10 minutes continuously to get its maximum effect in deeper tissues like *Majja*. Therefore as a daily routine 10 minutes is sufficient but for diseased condition 30 to 60 min of *Abhyanga* is needed. In diseased persons medicated oils are preferred for curing the conditions. By *Abhyanga* the nervous system gets stimulated, thus providing stimulation to the muscular system, vessels and glands governed by the particular nerve and keeps the human body healthy. Massaging also improves the circulatory system thus reducing the pain. Usually lukewarm medicated oil should be used for massaging. The warm oil stimulates the *Swedavaha Srotas* (perspiring body channels) thus causing dilatation of the blood vessels there by increasing the blood circulation, thus revealing pain, stiffness and contraction of vessels. Screening the blood supply and nerve supply of skin it's very clear that the skin is with a network of blood supply.

The human body is having 107 *Marma* (vital points).<sup>[41]</sup> In *Marmas*, the *Prana* (energy) resides. By doing massage the vital points gets stimulated and produce positive energy, thereby protecting, rejuvenating and increasing the immunity towards environmental changes. It is scientifically proved that massage increases the production of white blood corpuscles and antibodies, which provide more resistance against the diseases. The soles of the feet are said to 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.

#### Mode of Action<sup>[42]</sup>

- *Vayu* dominates in the *Sparshanendriya*, and this sensory organ is located in the skin.

- The *Abhyanga* is beneficial to the skin, so one should practice it regularly.

#### Purpose of *Abhyanga*

*Abhyanga* can be done for four different purposes.

1. ***Dinacharya*** - For the prevention of several diseases and for the maintenance as well as promotion of positive health.
2. ***Purva Karma*** - Along with *Abhyanga*, fomentation is also given before administering several categories of elimination therapies like *Vamana*, *Virecana*, *Basti* and *Nasya*.
3. ***Pradhana Karma*** - It can also be done as a special therapy for a limited period in many indicated diseases.
4. ***Paschat Karma*** - In *Mukhalepa*, after drying *Lepa* is removed and in that place *Abhyanga* is preferred

#### CONCLUSION

*Abhyanga* is one among the *Dinacharya* to maintain health and prevent disease. On the basis of utility, *Abhyanga* can be applied to *Sarvanga* or *Ekanga*. Ayurveda says *Abhyanga* (oil massage) should be performed daily or if not daily, atleast 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), *Sravana* (ears) and *Pada* (foot). Hypothetically it can be concluded that *Abhyanga* should be done for 5 -10 minutes daily as a part of *Dinacharya* and to treat any condition depending upon the strength, age etc.

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