

## THERAPEUTIC IMPORTANCE OF ABHYANGA IN TODAY'S ERA

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**ABSTRACT**

*Ayurveda* is a 'science of life.' *Ayurveda* described the term health as only when a person's mind, sense organs and the soul are in a perfect state of equilibrium to endow happiness and longevity of life. *Abhyanga* is the therapeutic intervention of *Panchakarma* in which the body is treated with simple or medicated oil. It is massage of whole body with warm oil for maintaining, caring, to rejuvenate, to improve blood circulation, strength and to have a cosmetology effect of the largest sense organ i.e., skin. Whenever there is a discomfort or uneasiness over the body, we unknowingly try to soothe it through massage. *Abhyanga* restores the balance of the *doshas* and enhances well-being. It is believed that the effects of *Abhyanga* are like those

received when one is saturated with love. *Abhyanga* can give a deep feeling of stability and warmth. *Vagbhatacharya* stated that, "*Abhyangam aacharet nityam*" i.e., *Abhyanga* should be done regularly. Regular *Abhyanga* is especially grounding and relaxing for *Vata dosha* imbalances, but everyone can benefit from this practice. Therefore, it is also mentioned in *Dincharya* by various *Acharyas*.

**KEYWORDS:** *Abhyanga*, Oil massage, *Dincharya*, *Rutucharya*.

**INTRODUCTION**

A Sanskrit term, *Abhyanga* is derived from *Abhyanjana* *Abhi-* towards, into, upon etc. *Anjana* - to smear, to anoint Rubbing with unctuous substance, smearing the body with oil.<sup>[1]</sup> *Abhyanga* is a special type of *Ayurvedic* warm oil massage that involves anointing oneself with healing *dosha*-specific oils.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Abhyanga* is not a new concept to the World. Almost every culture has employed massage; including Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Japanese, Chinese. But the oldest and most scientific scripture is *Ayurveda* originated in India. Massage is a systematic rubbing and manipulation of the body to prevent stiffness, promoting circulation and positive health.

The *Abhyanga* is external Oleation (*Bahya sneha*) therapy described in *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya* and in *Snehavirechana* also i.e., roots of administration of unctuousness and in modern science also many studies conducted and researches were done.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

*Ayurvedic* classics and Articles published in well-known journals till date were reviewed to update the therapeutic importance of *Abhyanga* in today's era.

## MATERIAL FOR MASSAGE<sup>[3]</sup>

Cotton seed oil is most used for massaging, but butter is used for filling out cheeks and the neck region. If the patient is averse to oil, talcum powder may be used. Oil should not be used by the persons with excessive body hair. General body massage may be done for 40 to 45 minutes and local body massage for 10-15 minutes. The oil should be washed off completely after massage.

## THERAPEUTIC IMPORTANCE OF ABHYANGA

Massage can be used with advantage as a method of treatment for many common ailments.

**Massage of the Joints:** Stiff and swollen joints can be cured by massage combined with mechanical movements. Massage is, however, not recommended in serious inflammatory cases of the joints and in tubercular joints. It should also be avoided in infectious diseases like diphtheria and gonorrhoea which cause formation of pus as massage may spread the pus to the entire system. Sprains and bruises can be cured by massage.

In these cases, affected parts should first be bathed with hot water for 15 to 30 minutes. Next the massage should be done for a few minutes. Gentle stroking and kneading are recommended on and around the injured tissues. Fractures can also be treated through massage.

This form of massage is of great help in atrophy of the muscles which usually follows if the muscles are not used for any length of time.

Massage provides additional nourishment to feed the muscular tissues, helping them to grow strong. Tapping, striking and vibrating help the muscle to develop its contractile power. Muscle massage is brought by first effleurage, kneading, followed by tapotement. Later, active and passive movements are given.

Massage is employed for eliminating muscle contraction and for breaking of adhesions. A little moderate kneading, and percussion cause muscles to contract and become stronger. Deep circular kneading and vibration loosens the muscles. Kneading under and round the muscles breaks up adhesions.

### **Massaging the Nerves**

Massage benefits many nerve problems. In case of acute inflammation of the nerves, massage should be done carefully. Light and gentle stroking are recommended. Deep pressure should not be used on swollen nerves for it will increase the inflammation. All that is needed is just a gentle tapotement or beating of the nerve.

Nerve compression is recommended for soothing nerves. Grasp the limb with both hands, and create firm pressure around and down the arm. Start with the shoulder and proceed down to the wrist. As you leave the grip, bring the hands down a little and make another pressure. As a result, blood circulation will increase. Spinal nerve compression is extremely beneficial. It is done by the palm of the hand. Vibration of the fingers stimulate it. Sleeplessness can be cured by long slow and gentle stroking down the spine and entire back.

**Abdominal Massage:** This form of massage is beneficial in constipation. It stimulates the peristalsis of the small intestines, tones up the muscles of the abdomen walls and mechanically eliminates the contents of both large and small intestines. Abdominal massage should not be done in general, femoral, inguinal, and umbilical hernia, inflammation of the uterus, bladder, ovaries and fallopian tubes, kidney stones, bladder or gall bladder, ulcers of the stomach and intestines, and pregnancy.

Abdominal massage should not be done after a heavy meal, but after two hours or so. The bladder should be emptied before the massage. The patient is made to lie on his back with his knees drawn up. This enables the abdomen wall to relax. The masseur should stand at the right side of the patient and use his finger tips for friction round the umbilical region from right to left. He should likewise alternatively knead the walls and roll with both hands,

making deep and firm pressure. He should knead with the hand and finger tips and keep clear of any wound or tender places. He should later take up massaging the larger intestines.

The manipulation of the large intestine should begin on the right side. Keep it going upwards and across the transverse colon and move right-down on the left side to the sigmoid flexure and rectum. Circular kneading should be done with the help of the three middle fingers. At the same time press into the contents of the abdomen, following the course of the larger colon with a crawling motion. Keep kneading by means of a few circular movements in one spot with the help of finger tips. Keep moving the fingers a little further along, Knead repeatedly. Use knuckles of the hand to make deep pressures along the large colon, moving the hands along after each pressure.

Once the kneading of the abdomen is over, follow up by tapotement with both hands cupped or use the knuckles of the hand. Vibration may also be employed. The patient could also be asked to do some gymnastic exercises for strengthening the walls of the abdomen. Since blood pressure increases during abdominal manipulation, patients with hypertension should avoid abdominal massage. Massage should also be avoided in cases where there has been recent bleeding in the lungs, the stomach, or the brain.

**Chest Massage:** Chest massage is helpful in many ways. It strengthens the chest muscles, increases circulation, and tones up the nervous system of the chest, heart, and lungs. It is especially recommended in weakness of the lungs, palpitation, and organic heart disorders. Bust and mammary glands can be developed by proper massage.

The patient is made to lie on the back with the arms at the sides. The masseur starts manipulating the chest by means of strokes with both hands on each side of the breast bone. A circular motion is formed by the movement made up and down, moving down the chest. Next the muscle kneading is done by picking up the skin and muscles with both hands. Treatment is given to both sides of the chest likewise. Circular kneading is next done by placing one hand on each side of the breast bone and making the circular motions outward towards the sides. Tapotement follows by hacking and slapping.

**Massage of Back:** The purpose of the massage of the back is to stimulate the nerves and circulation for treating backache, rheumatic afflictions of the back muscles, and for soothing the nervous system.

The patient is made to lie down with arms at the sides. The masseur effleverages the back from the shoulders downwards using both hands on each side of the spine. Stroking is done from the sacrum upward. Friction follows with each hand at the sides of the spine going down slowly. Next, kneading by muscle picking is done with squeezing, Alternate rapid pushing and pulling movement of the hands sliding down the spine. Circular kneading should also be done. The treatment should end by slapping, hacking, and cupping on each side of the spine. Gentle stroking and light kneading of the back is relieving and soothing, Percussion and vibration result in stimulating experience. Vibration of the end of spine benefits the sacral nerves and pelvic organs. It is recommended in constipation, haemorrhoids, weakness and congestion of the bladder and sexual organs.

**Massage of the Throat:** This helps to overcome headache, sore throat and catarrh of the throat. The patient is made to throw his head back. The masseur places palms of both hands on sides of neck with thumbs under the chin, and fingers under the ears. A downward stroke is next made towards the chest over the jugular veins. Do not exert heavily on the jugular veins. Repeat several times.

### CONTRAINDICATION OF MASSAGE

Patients who were taken *panchakarma* procedures recently like *Vamana* (emesis), *Virechana* (purgation) etc.<sup>[4]</sup>

In *Ama* state diseases, patients of fever and Indigestion should never be anointed.<sup>[5]</sup>

General contraindication<sup>[6]</sup>

1. High grade fever.
2. Severe Kidney and Heart diseases.
3. Deep X- Ray therapy.
4. Osteoporosis.
5. Severe spasticity.
6. Excessive hairs on skin.

Local contraindication<sup>[7]</sup>

1. Acute inflammations
2. Skin diseases
3. Recent fractures
4. Severe varicose veins
5. Atherosclerosis

6. Thrombosis
7. Myositis ossificans
8. Malignancy
9. Open wound
10. Poisonous foci

### **TYPES OF MASSAGE<sup>[8]</sup>**

Application of pressure in different manners constitute the manoeuvres of massage. The effects produced by a technique entirely depend upon the type of tissue approached during a particular technique and the character of the technique governs this. Magnitude of the applied force depends upon:

- Direction of force
- Duration of force
- Means of application of force.

### **METHODS AND DURATION OF MASSAGE<sup>[9]</sup>**

1. **Effleurage:** This involves sliding with the hands, u long even strokes over the surface of the body. Effleurage is performed in five ways, namely with palms of two hands; (1) the palm of one b (ii) the knuckles; (iv) the ball of the thumb and (v) the finger tips. Effleurage increases blood circulation and soothes the nervous system. It also warms and relaxes. It is very helpful in atrophied condition of the skin.
2. **Friction:** The movements, which are circular in nature are performed with the help of the thumb and tips of fingers or the palm of the hand towards the joints or around the joints. Friction limbers up joints, tendons, and muscles and facilitates the removal of deposits by breaking them. It also helps in reducing swelling after nerve inflammation.
3. **Petrissage:** This is the process of kneading, pressing, and rolling of the tissues and is performed with one or both hands, with two thumbs or with thumbs and fingers. One should apply heavy pressure for deep kneading and light pressure for superficial kneading. Petrissage is a treatment of the muscles. It increases nutrition, strengthens muscles, relieves intestinal congestion, and helps elimination of poisons. It boosts lung activity and cellular respiration, eliminates fatigue poisons, and tones up nerve endings.
4. **Tapotement:** This involves hacking, tapping, clapping, and beating and is achieved by striking the body rapidly. Short and quick blows are generally given from the wrist. Tapotement helps in atrophied condition of the muscles. It increases blood supply,

soothes nerves and strengthens muscles.

5. **Vibration.** This is achieved by rapidly shaking the pressing movements by use of the hand or fingers on the body. Vibrating hand should move constantly. This is beneficial in neuritis and neuralgia after the inflammatory stage is over. It stimulates circulation, glandular activity, and nervous plexuses. It also helps in bowel movement.

Another form of massage helpful in most ailments is the vibratory massage. This can be done by trained persons only. The vibratory massage is more efficiently administered by a special, electrically operated machine.

### **BENEFITS OF MASSAGE<sup>[10]</sup>**

The general massage, dealing with all parts of the body, is highly beneficial in many ways. It tones up the nervous system, influences respiration and quickens the elimination of poisons and waste material from the body through the various eliminative organs such as the lungs, skin, kidneys, and bowels. It also boosts blood circulation and metabolic processes. A massage removes facial wrinkles, helps to fill out hollow cheeks and neck and eases stiffness, sore muscles, and numbness.

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

1. While performing massage, mechanical force should be applied to the soft tissue of the body. These forces must not produce any change in the position of the joint.
2. The force should be applied in unidirectional towards the periphery of the body.
3. The technique must evoke some physiological and/or psychological effect which serves to achieve the therapeutic, restorative or, the preventive goal.

### **ABHYANGA KARTA (MASSEUR): (A person who performs massage)<sup>[12]</sup>**

1. Masseur should have affection towards his patient.
2. Masseur should be younger than oneself.
3. Masseur should be energetic than oneself.
4. Masseur should be healthy than one's health, otherwise, instead of benefit, there is a possibility of transfer of body's energy power to the body of the person doing the massage.
5. Masseur should be devoted to the patient, should have soft hands, and cut nails, should not be in haste and whose hands do not sweat.

**Table. No. 1: OILS TO BE USED.**

| Sr.No. | Medicated oils                           | Indications                                                                                                                |
|--------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1      | <i>Bala Tail</i> <sup>[13]</sup>         | <i>Kshaya</i> (emaciation), <i>Vatavyadhi</i> (degenerative disorders)                                                     |
| 2      | <i>Sahacharadi Taila</i> <sup>[14]</sup> | <i>Kampa</i> (tremors), <i>Akshepa</i> (convulsions), <i>Unmada</i> (insanity), <i>Vatavyadhi</i> (degenerative disorders) |
| 3      | <i>Lakshadi Tail</i> <sup>[15]</sup>     | <i>Balya</i> (improves strength), <i>Apasmara</i> (Epilepsy).                                                              |
| 4      | <i>Ksheera Bala Tail</i> <sup>[16]</sup> | Neurological disorders of children, <i>Rasayanam</i> (rejuvenator), <i>Vatasruk</i> (Gout)                                 |
| 5      | <i>Pinda Tail</i> <sup>[17]</sup>        | <i>Vatarakta</i> (Rheumatoid arthritis)                                                                                    |
| 6      | <i>Dhanvantara Taila</i> <sup>[18]</sup> | <i>Unmada</i> (insane), <i>Akshepa</i> (convulsions), <i>Kampa</i> (tremors), <i>Vatavyadhi</i> (degenerative disorders)   |
| 7      | <i>Narayana Taila</i> <sup>[19]</sup>    | <i>Vatavyadhis</i> (degenerative disorders)                                                                                |

## DISCUSSION

*Abhyanga* is not a new concept to the World. Almost every culture has employed massage; including Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Japanese, Chinese. But the oldest and most scientific scripture is *Ayurveda* originated in India. Massage is a systematic rubbing and manipulation of the body to prevent stiffness, promoting circulation and positive health.

Massage can be used with advantage as a method of treatment for many common ailments. Massage of the Joints, Massaging the Nerves, Abdominal Massage, Chest Massage, Massage of Back, Massage of the Throat all are described in detail. Like indication, contraindications should also be known to the masseur. In major diseases we generally avoid the massage (*abhyanga*). There are various types of massage depending upon the Application of pressure in different manners constitute the manoeuvres of massage. Magnitude of the applied force depends upon the Direction of force, Duration of force, Means of application of force. Effleurage, Friction, Petrissage, Tapotement, Vibration are the methods of massage. There are special techniques for the massage according to the application of pressure and force. A person who performs massage i.e., masseur should be well trained and should have certain qualities. *Bala tail*, *Sahacharadi taila*, *Lakshadi tail*, *Ksheera bala tail*, *Pinda tail*, *Dhanvantar tail*, *Narayana tail* can be used for massage for the best results.

The practice or tradition of massage has been going on since very ancient times, every family of India has been giving recognition to this method which brings comfort to the body. Old grandmother, can still be seen in homes massaging grandchildren. If *Abhyanga* is followed daily it makes the man healthy.

## CONCLUSION

*Abhyanga* is one of the important procedures in the *Dinacharya* to maintain health and prevent various diseases. Based on utility, *Abhyanga* can *Sarvanga* or *Ekanga*. *Ayurveda* says *Abhyanga* (oil massage) should be performed daily or if it is not possible every day, at least apply 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), *Shravanendriya* (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.it will help in the longevity of life.

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