

ABHYANGA: AYURVEDIC OIL MASSAGE

“The body of one who uses oil massage regularly does not become affected much even if subjected to accidental injuries, or strenuous work. By using oil massage daily, a person is endowed with pleasant touch, trimmed body parts and becomes strong, charming and least affected by old age.” Charaka Samhita Vol. 1, V: 88-89

Abhyanga is applying oil to the body. Often medicated and usually warm, the oil is massaged into the entire body before bathing. For thousands of years, people have used abhyanga to maintain health, improve sleep patterns and increase longevity. It has also been used as a medicine for certain disorders. Abhyanga can be incorporated into a routine appropriate for almost anyone.

The Sanskrit word sneha can be translated as both "oil" and "love". It is believed that the effects of abhyanga are similar to those received when one is saturated with love. Like the experience of being loved, abhyanga can give a deep feeling of stability and warmth. Sneha is subtle; this allows the oil/love to pass through minute channels in the body and penetrate deep layers of tissue.

In Ayurveda, it is believed that there are seven layers of tissue in the body (called dhatus). Each successive layer is more concentrated and life-giving. For sneha to reach the deepest layer, it is believed that it must be massaged into the body for roughly five minutes.

This practice needs to be done as regularly as possible to get the best results.

Benefits of Abhyanga (applying oil to the body)

- Produces softness, strength and colour to the body
- Decreases the effects of aging
- Bestows good vision
- Nourishes the body
- Increases longevity
- Benefits sleep patterns
- Benefits skin
- Strengthens the body's tolerance
- Imparts a firmness to the limbs
- Imparts tone and vigour to the tissues of the body
- Stimulates the internal organs of the body, including circulation
- Pacifies Vata and Pitta and harmonizes Kapha
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Benefits of applying oil to the scalp:

- Makes hair grow luxuriantly, thick, soft and glossy
- Soothes and invigorates the sense organs
- Removes facial wrinkles

Benefits of applying oil to the ears:

- Benefits disorders in the ear which are due to increased Vata
- Benefits stiff neck
- Benefits stiffness in the jaw

Benefits of applying oil to the feet:

- Coarseness, stiffness, roughness, fatigue and numbness of the feet are alleviated
- Strength and firmness of the feet is attained
- Vision is enhanced

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- Vata is pacified
- Sciatica is benefited
- Local veins and ligaments are benefited

Vata Pacifying Abhyanga:

The primary qualities of vata are dry, light, cool, rough, subtle and mobile. Most of these qualities are opposite to those of oil. This is why warm oil is especially good for pacifying vata.

If your vata is high, either in your Prakriti or Vikriti, doing abhyanga daily can be highly beneficial, even life-changing. Sushruta says, "*The deranged vayu [vata] of the body is restored to its normal condition by the help of Udvartana (massage).*" (Sushruta Vol.2, 24:28)

Just be sure to do the abhyanga in a warm place and avoid getting chilled afterwards.

Abhyanga Routine:

Put approximately 3 teaspoons of oil in a plastic bottle. Once you have done this a few times you can judge how much oil you need.

- Place the bottle of oil in a pan/mug of hot water until the oil is pleasantly warm.
- Sit or stand comfortably in a warm room, on a towel that you don't mind ruining with oil accumulation. Make sure you're protected from any drafts.
- Apply the oil to your entire body, beginning at the extremities and working toward the navel. Use long strokes on the limbs and circular strokes on the joints. Massage the abdomen and chest in broad, clockwise, circular motions.
- Apply oil to the crown of your head and work slowly out from there in circular strokes. Oil applied to the head should be warm but not hot.
- Put a couple drops of warm oil on the tip of your little finger or on a cotton ball and apply to the opening of the ear canal. (If there is any current or chronic discomfort in the ears don't do this without the recommendation of your health care practitioner). If you suffer from air borne allergies or want to avoid breathing in any bacteria put a little oil on your little finger and apply the oil inside your nostrils.
- Leave the oil on for about twenty minutes and then have a hot shower or bath. This will push the oil deeper into the tissues and feed the ojas or life force.
- When you get out of the shower, towel dry. Keep a special towel for drying off after your massage because it can eventually get ruined, due to the accumulation of oil.

If you do not have time for a full body massage or abhyanga, the feet and legs can be massaged in the same way. This should be done in the evening and the oil left on. You can wear socks in bed to protect the sheets. This is especially good for people suffering from insomnia.