



## HEALING THROUGH TOUCH- THE ESSENCE OF ABHYANGA

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### ABSTRACT

Abhyanga, the ancient Ayurvedic practice of oil massage is a rejuvenating therapy that nourishes the body, calms the mind, and balance the doshas. In today's fast paced era, demanding work schedule and sedentary life style contributes to stress, fatigue and various health issues. Practicing Abhyanga as a dinacharya procedure serves as a simple but an effective modality to counterbalance these effects. Rooted in the principles of Snehana, Abhyanga nourishes the skin, improves the circulation and supports musculoskeletal health. This article explores Abhyanga, detailing its Steps, mode of action and benefits.

**KEYWORDS:** Abhyanga, Ayurveda, Dinacharya, Snehana, musculoskeletal health.

### INTRODUCTION

Abhyanga is one of the foremost massage maneuvers mentioned in Ayurvedic classics. With its multifaceted benefits, Abhyanga plays a crucial role in both preventive and curative aspect making it an integral part of Dinacharya. It assists in the transdermal absorption of Sneh Dravya as skin is the largest organ of the body. Modern pharmacology states that absorption through skin can be enhanced by suspending the drug in liquid media and rubbing the same on the skin.<sup>[1]</sup>

### ETYMOLOGY OF ABHYANGA

According to Amarkosha, 'Abhi' Upasarga added to 'Anga' makes the word 'Abhyanga', meaning some specific body movements done by using the Sneh.

### TYPES OF ABHYANGA

According to Vatsyayana Kamasutra

- 1) Samvahana
- 2) Kshamardhana
- 3) Utsadana

According to Tiruka

- 1) Shushkanga Mardana
- 2) Tailanga Mardana
- 3) Ksheeraga Mardana
- 4) Swayamanga Mardana
- 5) Yamalanga Mardana

### INDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA

#### ABHYANGA IN DINACHARYA

Abhyanga is included in the daily routines to promote the health in hale and healthy. Regular practice of Abhyanga is advised to maintain the physical fitness. Daily application of oil on body retards ageing, relieves shrama, annihilates the effects of aggravated vata, does dristhi prasadana, imparts good sleep and good skin tone.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### ABHYANGA IN RITUCHARYA

Indicated in Hemanta ritu, shishira ritu<sup>[3]</sup>,

**ABHYANGA IN VEGADHARANA JANYA VYADHI**

Natural urges have to be cleared as and when they manifest, lest they will cause imbalance of Dosha and produce symptoms. Holding or suppressing these urges produces certain symptoms. Abhyanga is advised for the treatment of symptoms caused by holding or suppressing the urges of Adhovata, Shakrit, Mutra, shvayathu, Shukra<sup>[4]</sup> etc.

**ABHYANGA IN VYADHI AVASTHA**

It is one among the vatasyaupakarma. indicated in disease like Ardita, pakshaghata, shwasa According to Kaiyyadeva Nighantu taila abhyanga is indicated in Vata vikaras, twak vikaras, in Krisha, & vishamajwara.

**CONTRAINDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA**

In spite of these therapeutic benefits Abhyanga is contraindicated in conditions like Kaphagrastha, Ajeerna, Krita samshudhha, Aama, ajeerna<sup>[5]</sup> Saamadosh, Taruna jwara, Santarpana Samutha Roga.<sup>[6]</sup>

**IMPORTANCE OF ABHYANGA**

Acharya Charaka explains the importance of Abhyanga with a simile, As a pitcher, dry skin and an axis becomes strong by the application of Sneha similarly the shareera becomes drudata and imparts good skin texture.<sup>[7]</sup>

Abhyanga does poshana to the dhatus, and is Varna bala prada.<sup>[8]</sup>

According to Narada Samhita, Lord Lakshmi resides in taila and Lord Ganga in jala, hence Abhyanga purvaka snana is done to remove the inauspiciousness, as it improves the health by expelling out the morbid matters which inturn helps in attaining the Purushartha Chatushtaya.

**DAY WISE SIGNIFICANCE OF ABHYANGA**

DAY		EFFECT
Surya	Sunday	It causes santapa or jwara
Chandra	Monday	Increases Kanti
Mangala	Tuesday	Causes Mrutyu
Chandrasuta	Wednesday	Bestows Lakshmi
Bruhaspati	Thursday	It may cause dhatu nasha
Shukra	Friday	It may cause vipatti
Suryatanaya	Saturday	Akhila bhoga prapti

**TRIVIDHA KARMA IN ABHYANGA PURVAKARMA****1) Atura pariksha**

According to Acharya Sushrutha Sneha for abhyanga should be selected after assessing the prakruti, satmya, ritu and vikara.

**2) Seleccion of Sneha**

According to Kalyanakaraka, Sneha should be selected based on doshas.

SNEHA	DOSHA
Taila	Kapha and vata
Ghrita	Pitta

**3) Atura siddhata**

Patient is asked to void the natural urges.

**PRADHANA KARMA**

Abhyanga is to be carried out in Anuloma gati and in 7 postures.

Sitting, Supine, Right lateral, Prone, Left lateral, Supine, Sitting Steps by Tiruka.<sup>[9,10]</sup>

- TARANGA HASTA** – A mild, fast rhythmic stroke resembling sea ripples. The thenar eminence and ulnar border of the palm should come in contact with the body alternatively. Mainly used for head massage, can be performed all over the body as well.
- ANGULIKREEDANA HASTA** – Very gentle, rhythmic movements of fingers of both the hands over the body. this can be adopted for head massage and whole body massage.
- MRUDUVANGALI TADANA** – Mild, fast rhythmic massage with the tip of fingers.
- DWIHASTA TADANA**- Palmar surface of hands (with fingers held together) strike the skin alternatively.
- GHARSHANA HASTA**- After smearing oil to the scalp, place both the palms on the head and move them briskly from front to back with gentle pressure.
- GHATITA HASTA** – Place both the palms on opposite sides of the head and apply gentle pressure. This technique is done around the entire head and it relieves headache and relieves heaviness.
- VIJAYAMALA HASTA** – Place the right hand at the right side of the subject's neck, left hand at the left side of the neck and with mild pressure bring the hand forward. This should be performed alternatively. The movement resembles a garland hence the name Vijayamala hasta.
- VIPAREETA VIJAYAMALA HASTA**- in this hands are placed diagonally across the neck and moved forward with mild pressure. This crossing pattern resembles a reverse garland hence the name vipareeta vijayamala hasta.
- SHAILA HASTA** – Right hand of the masseur over the left shoulder and slide the hands towards front with pressure, similarly on the other side. this is to be performed alternatively.
- DHEERAHASTA**- Right palm over left shoulder joint and massage with mild pressure in both clockwise and anticlockwise direction. Repeat the same on the other side.
- CHAKRA HASTA**- Hold the subject's right arm with left palm from outside and right arm with right palm from inside then move the hand **medially** with gentle pressure. Slide the hand from wrist to shoulder.
- VIPAREETA CHAKRA HASTA** - Hold the subject's right arm with left palm from outside and

right arm with right palm from inside then move the hand **laterally** with gentle pressure. Slide the hand from wrist to shoulder.

13. **ACHALA HASTA**- Hold the subject's palm down. The interlace therapist's fingers with patient's fingers to stretch the fingers apart. Grasp the whole hand and push back to stretch a bit. Then slowly turn the wrist from right to left and left to right.
14. **VIRUDDHA HASTA CHALANA**- Place both the hands on the subject's body with fingers together, and move them in opposite direction simultaneously, applying uniform pressure.
15. **DWIHASTA CHALANA**- Place both the palms over subject's body. Move them simultaneously in the same direction with uniform pressure.
16. **PRADAKSHINA HASTA**-Palm is placed over the abdomen and massage is done in **clockwise direction** with mild pressure. This should be done only in empty stomach, helps to relieve constipation.
17. **APRADAKSHINA HASTA** - Palm is placed over the abdomen and massage is done in **Anti-clockwise** direction with mild pressure.
18. **DHARA HASTA**- fast movements of ulnar surface of hands over the body surface. Fingers touch the skin surface as wrists moves up and down.
19. **MRIDUMUSTHI TADANA**- Sides of both loose fists contacting the skin alternatively. this technique is mainly adopted for back region.
20. **BHADRAHASTA**- This technique is used for massaging the waist region. Place the palm over the waist with the thumb over the spine region and fingers spread out. Massage forward with gentle pressure, then return the hand to the initial position
21. **MERUHASTA**- Place both the thumbs on the sacral spine and move them upward in circular motion with gentle pressure up to the cervical spine. Repeat the same from cervical spine to sacral region.
22. **SUDHARSHANA HASTA**- Lubricated lowerlimbs are compressed from all sides using palms and fingers, moving outward and opposite direction with steady pressure. Slide the hands towards the trunk of the body during movements
23. **VIPAREETA CHAKRA HASTA**- This technique is used for massaging the knee joint. Place the palmar surface over the knee joint and glide the hands inward with uniform pressure.
24. **DANDA HASTA**- Place right palm over posterior aspect of ankle joint and slide the palms over the calf region up to popliteal fossa with the gentle pressure, both the palms should be used alternatively.
25. **TRIKONA HASTA** – With the knee flexed, place the palms over the knee joint, slowly massage by sliding the palms up to popliteal fossa with pressure and bringing the palms back to initial position. Later place the palms over the calf region and slide downwards up to ankle joint followed by bringing the palms anterior surface of the ankle joint and the back to the initial position.

26. **PALLAVA HASTA** – Hold the feet with both palms at the anterior aspect of the ankle joint. Slowly slide the palms towards the toes with desirable pressure. Then hold the right toes with right hand and massage should be done with the left hand from the ankle up to toes. Thereafter hold the feet and rotate carefully in clockwise and anti-clockwise direction. At the end the ventral and dorsal aspect of the feet should be massaged transversally and vertically.

#### PASCHAT KARMA

Subject is asked to rest on the droni for 5minutes and advised to take bath with luke warm water.

#### MODE OF ACTION

According to Acharya Sushruta the four triyak dhamanis branch extensively, forming a network the opening of which is connected to Romakupa. Through these only the veerya of Abhyanga Dravya enters in to the body after undergoing paka with brajaka pitta in twacha and shows its action.<sup>[11]</sup>

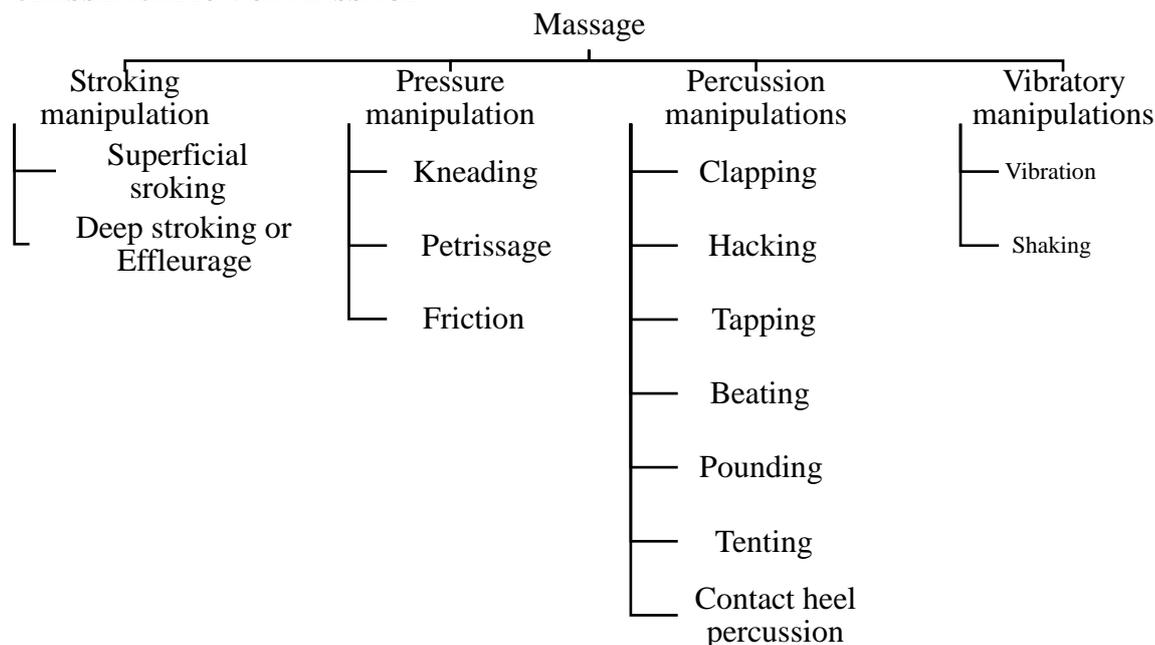
According to Dalhana the absorption of Sneha used in Abhyanga extends to various dhatus when applied for a adequate duration. This indicates that the bioactive compounds of Sneha are absorbed and distributed systematically, exerting a physiological influence beyond the superficial layers. Furthermore Dalhana emphasizes that once the snehana Dravya reaches to specific dhatus it helps in mitigating the disorders associated with that dhatu thereby contributing to disease management and overall health.<sup>[12]</sup>

DHATU	TIME	PERIOD
	MATRA KALA	IN SECONDS
Twacha	400	95
Raktha	500	160
Mamsa dhatu	600	190
Medo dhatu	700	228
Asthi dhatu	800	240
Majja dhatu	900	280

#### MASSAGE<sup>[13]</sup>

According to Beard, Massage is a term applied to certain manipulations of the soft tissues. These manipulations are most efficiently performed with the palmer aspects of hand and administered for the purpose of producing effects on the Nervous system, muscular system as well as on the local and general circulation of the blood and lymph.

## CLASSIFICATION OF MASSAGE



1) Stroking	Linear movements of hand or parts thereof, along the entire length of segment, with the lightest pressure and constant touch.
2) Effleurage	Linear movement of hand or a part thereof, along the entire length of segment, with moderate pressure and constant touch.
3) Kneading	Circular movements of soft tissue, parallel to the long axis of underlying bone, with constant touch and intermittent pressure
4) Petrissage	Circular movements of soft tissue, perpendicular to the long axis of underlying bone, with constant touch and intermittent pressure.
5) Friction	Small range to and fro movement of soft tissue with constant touch and constant deep pressure.
6) Percussion	Oscillatory movement of hand or a part thereof with intermittent touch and pressure.
7) Vibration	Small range oscillatory movement of hand in upward, downward, directions with constant touch.
8) Shaking	Small range oscillatory movement of hands in sideways direction with constant touch.

**DYNAMICS OF ABHYANGA**<sup>[14]</sup>

1) Physical pressure moving the fluids in internal environment

○ **Vata** is the dosha associated with chala guna. The skin is considered as one of the primary seats of **Vata**, so Abhyanga, which involves massaging the skin, directly impacts Vata's qualities, helping balance and harmonize it. ○ The skin is also closely linked to the **lymphatic system**. Abhyanga facilitates **lymphatic drainage**, helping to move lymph fluid through the body, which is essential for detoxification and immune function. ○ The lymph fluid contains a significant amount of the amino acid **tryptophan**, which is a precursor to **serotonin**. **Serotonin** levels are often found to be low in people with mood disorders such as **depression** and **schizophrenia**. Abhyanga may promote the transport of tryptophan to the brain by enhancing circulation and lymphatic flow, which could help raise serotonin levels

which potentially improves mood, reducing anxiety, and alleviating symptoms of irritability.

**2. Osmotic and Hydrostatic Pressure**

○ **Hydrostatic pressure**: The pressure exerted by fluid within the vessels can be manipulated through Abhyanga, which applies mechanical pressure to the skin and underlying tissues. This action can stimulate blood and lymph flow, creating a **hydrostatic pressure effect**. ○ **Osmotic pressure**: Along with hydrostatic pressure, the osmotic gradient between tissues and vessels can help draw fluids into the tissues. This promotes the movement of **toxins** from peripheral tissues into the bloodstream, which then makes its way to organs of elimination like the **liver**, **kidneys**, and **gastrointestinal tract**.

## DISCUSSION

Abhyanga is mainly indicated in Vataja vikaras. Due to the Ruksha, Guna Vridhi in Vata Dosha it leads to the Pain therefore Abhyanga is selected as the modality of the management. Due to Samvayi Sambandha of Vata with Asthi Dhatu, if there is an increase in the Vata Dosha it will lead to the depletion of the Asthi Dhatu hence Abhyanga is adopted for 900 Matra Kala as it is needed to get till Majja Dhatu (Narayan Ram Acharya 2014) which is approximately 5 minutes for each body part.<sup>[15]</sup>

Abhyanga acts through the principles of transdermal absorption, delivering bioactive compounds from medicated oils in to deeper tissues. It operates on both physical and subtle levels by engaging the skin, nervous system and the mind. It offers a dynamic interplay between mechanical stimulation and biochemical responses such as improved peripheral circulation, lymphatic drainage and neuromuscular relaxation.

Myofascial bands are the longitudinal tracts of fascia that transmit force and coordinate movement across the body. Adhesions in these bands can lead to pain, limited range of movement and postural imbalances. Warm oil and sustained pressure during abhyanga helps hydrate and softens the fascial layers increasing their glide over one another, strokes along the limb and torso follow the path of myofascial lines, promoting lengthening and release. Rhythmic kneading and stretching encourage the breaking up of these adhesions and improve tissue elasticity.

The mechano receptors in the skin get activated through gentle rhythmic pressure during abhyanga. This triggers the para sympathetic nervous system resulting in lowered stress hormones, reduces heart rate and blood pressure, improves sleep.

The gate control theory states that massage provides stimulation that helps to block the pain signals sent to the brain. It also eases certain chemicals such as serotonin in the body.<sup>[16]</sup>

A number of immune boosting white cells were found significantly higher in patients who received massage versus patients who did not receive massage.<sup>[17]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Abhyanga, deeply rooted in Ayurvedic Science, extends far beyond a mere physical therapy. It offers a multifactorial approach to health that encompasses physiological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. As a preventive and therapeutic practice, Abhyanga holds clinical relevance in managing stress-related disorders, musculoskeletal issues, and promoting systemic balance.

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