

PART THREE

The Practice of Abhyanga Therapies

Benefits

Massage is the most ancient technique used for relieving pain. Still a valid and thriving art in most regions of India, and in particular Kerala, abhyanga is used to manipulate and correct dosha disorders, especially of the Vata kind; to cure orthopedic injuries; to relieve swollen tissues; and to promote regeneration of the tissues and organs, as well as the internal functioning of the body. Moreover, massage stimulates skin, muscles, veins, arteries, the circulatory systems and the nervous system. It improves the skin, strengthens the lungs, intestines and bones, and regulates the digestive system.

Massage increases bodily heat and the flow of life-supporting oxygen; it also improves circulation, causing the body to flush out its waste products more efficiently. Promoting vitality, strength, stamina and flexibility, abhyanga also improves concentration, intelligence, confidence, esteem and youthfulness.

Especially excellent for the aged and the infirm, massage therapy benefits everyone.

Necessary Aids

- Treatment gown*
- Loin cloth*
- A glass bottle containing two cups of massage oil
- A small stainless steel funnel with a 1/4 inch opening at the spout
- Two clean cotton hand towels
- A clean cotton sheet
- A comfortable upright chair for the subject to sit on during head massage

* See Appendix D

Abhyanga Therapy

Season: all year

Body Type: all types

Duration of Treatment

Vata: 45 minutes; early morning or early evening

Pitta: 45 minutes; early or mid-morning

Kapha: 60 minutes; early morning

Note: Subject's head should be pointing towards the east if massage is performed in the morning and towards the west if in the early evening. Full body massage treatment should not be administered after dark.

This therapy is to be administered as a preliminary measure before pancha karma or as a general body/mind rejuvenator throughout the year. As a preliminary measure before pancha karma, the massage may be shortened to forty minutes for all body types.

General Techniques

1. **Soothing rubbing movement:** Use soothing rubbing movements on the surfaces of the arms and legs.
legs: from the sides of the feet to the groin
arms: from the fingertips to the armpit
2. **Pinching technique:** Muscles are grasped between the forefinger and thumb, away from the bones. Apply pinching techniques only to the following areas: chest, arms, legs and back.
3. **Kneading technique:** Grasp the larger muscles with the hands and coax them into vitality. Kneading may be applied to the entire body.
4. **Pressing technique:** Press along the hard body surfaces with flat hands moving in a circular manner. Caress and compress the softer areas of the body, applying wave-like pressure while constantly moving upward.
5. **Small circular thumb movement:** Small, circular, clockwise and counter-clockwise massage movements are generally applied with the thumb to essential marma points of the body.

Order of Massage

1. Shirobhyanga
 2. Padabhyanga
 3. Abhyanga: Arm and Hand Massage
 4. Abhyanga: Abdomen and Chest Massage
 5. Abhyanga: Back Massage
 6. Special Hip Massage
 7. Special Belly Massage

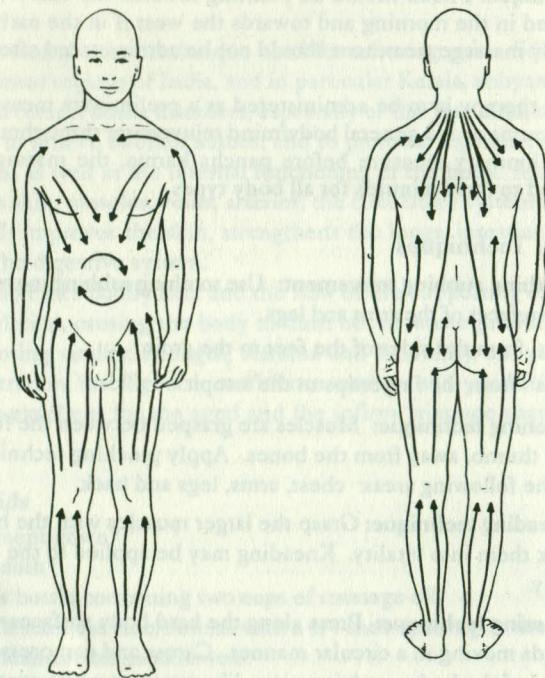


Figure 2: Directional Flow of Massage

SHIROBHYANGA: HEAD, NECK, AND SHOULDER MASSAGE

(while subject is in a sitting position)

Head Massage: First Phase

Directions

The head is the most important part of the body, carrying eight of the body's

ten sacred gates or apertures: the two openings of the nostrils, eyes, and ears, the mouth, and the most auspicious point, called *Brahma Randhra*, situated eight finger-widths from the center top of the eyebrows. The embryo receives its nutrition via the *Brahma Randhra* until it makes its journey from the womb. According to the Vedas, the soul departs the body from this point (also called *sushumna*, the seventh chakra) after death, and thus its name *Brahma Randhra*, the gate of *Brahma*, the creator. The remaining two gates of the body are the anus and genitalia. In abhyanga therapy, the massage always begins with the head.



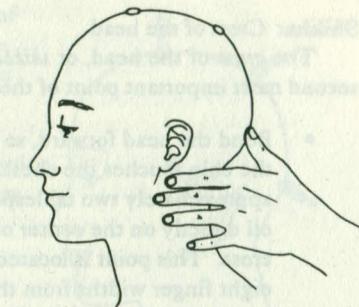


Figure 3: Three Points on Head

Benefits

Shirobhyaṅga increases the flow of cerebro-spinal fluid, thus strengthening the nervous system. This massage balances the pituitary and pineal glands. Eyes, lungs, heart, brain, colon, and stomach also become toned as a result. Shirobhyaṅga also helps to improve both experiential and cognitive memory, alertness and stability.

Ayurveda recommends that a small amount of sesame or coconut oil be placed on the summit, or soft spot, of the cranium for the first nine months of an infant's life. This measure serves to improve the child's memory, intelligence, energy and sight. A daily head massage also strengthens the nervous system and energy of the child. The same benefits may be observed by adults to varying degrees.

Oiling the Three Major Points of the Head: First Phase

Brahma Randhra: Soft spot of the head

Before commencing the massage, wash your hands thoroughly. Then, shake them and gently turn your wrists in a circular clockwise motion. Accelerate the rhythm of your hand movements until you feel a tingling sensation in your fingers. This activity allows your healing energy to flow freely.

Have the subject sit in an upright chair and take your position, standing behind the chair. Part the hair in the center and pour approximately two tablespoons of oil on the Brahma Randhra spot (Fig. 4).

- Begin by massaging the oil into both sides of the head, above the ears.
 - Spread the oil over the front portion of the head, while firmly rubbing the head with both hands.

Shikha: Crest of the head

The crest of the head, or *shikha*, is the second most important point of the head.

- Bend the head forward, so that the chin touches the chest. Pour approximately two tablespoons of oil directly on the center of the crest. This point is located about eight finger widths from the medulla oblongata, the place where the skull meets the neck.
- Spread the oil over the back of the head, while firmly rubbing the head with both hands.

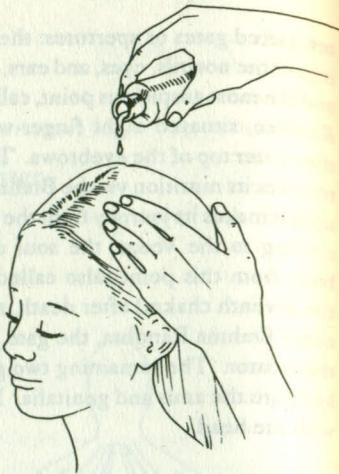


Figure 4: Oiling the Head

Medulla oblongata: Base stem of the brain

At the center back of the head, where the skull meets the neck, is the third most important point of the head. Called the medulla oblongata, this point is pivotal to the way the brain communicates with the entire nervous system.

- Gently bend the subject's head completely forward and pour approximately one tablespoon of oil directly on the medulla oblongata point.
- Using both hands, rub the base of the skull and the back of the neck firmly to excite the fine capillaries of circulation and the nervous system.
- Finally, press both thumbs on each side of the medulla oblongata point, and hold for a minute or so.

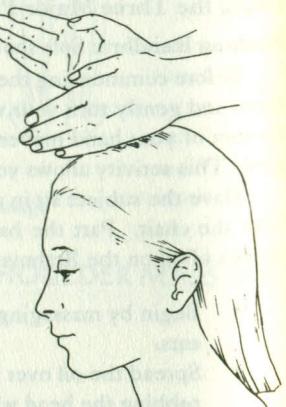


Figure 5: Scissor-like Motion

Head Massage: Second Phase

- Bring both hands together in a prayer pose. Place your clasped hands on the crest of the subject's head.
- Moving your hands in a scissor-like motion, begin to decisively pound the center line of the head, moving both hands forward while pounding the head, to the top of the forehead; then move the hands back again, remaining all the while on the center line of the head.

- As you pound towards the lower back of the head, have the subject bend his/her head forward and downward so that the chin touches the chest.
- After pounding the center line of the head, take a small amount of hair, rooted directly over the three auspicious points of the head (Brahma Randhra, shikha and medulla oblongata) and twist it (Fig. 6).
- Gently pull each one of the hair twists beginning with the Brahma Randhra point and ending with the medulla oblongata point.



Figure 6: Twisting the Hair;
Massage Points Around Ears

Head, Neck, Face and Shoulder Massage: Final Phase

- Pour approximately one tablespoon of oil into your hands and begin rubbing the neck. Use both thumbs and apply pressure along the center back line of the neck, while your fingers apply gentle pressure to the front of the neck.
- Make a fist with both hands and use the thumbs to apply gentle pressure in a subtle counter clockwise circular movement over and around the ears, with emphasis on two points behind the ears, one directly above the ear and the other behind the lobe (Fig. 6).
- Using both hands, gently stimulate the temple on both sides of the head, by subtly moving your fingers in a circular counter clockwise manner.
- Pour another tablespoon of oil into your hands and apply it to the shoulders. Massage the shoulders with broad strokes, using both hands, beginning from the center of the back and massaging your way outward toward the arms.
- Press firmly downward from the neck toward the upper back.
- While continuing to stand behind the subject, rub the subject's shoulder blades with both hands.
- By using firm downward pressure, continue to massage the upper chest.
- Guide the subject to the massage table and ask him/her to disrobe and put on the loin cloth. Cover the subject with a clean sheet and invite him/her to rest for a few minutes while you wash your hands and prepare for the full body massage.
- When you return, ask the subject to close his/her eyes and guide the subject into total relaxation.

- Pour approximately one tablespoon of oil into your hands and rub the face, beginning with the forehead and continuing to the cheeks. Use your thumbs to massage the sides of the nose, around the mouth and chin.
- Place a few drops of oil into the nostrils and quickly rub the inside of the nostrils with your index finger.
- With ease and delicacy use your thumbs to rub over the closed eyes.
- Finish the face massage by dripping two tablespoons of oil through a small funnel directly onto the third eye, the *shapani* marma point.
- While dripping the oil, gently rock the funnel by moving it one inch from side to side over the third eye.
- Pat the excess oil from the face with a towel.

Note: Shirobhyanga may also be applied as an independent massage when *mardana*, or light pressure massage of the head, is required.

PADABHYANGA: FOOT AND LEG MASSAGE

Benefits

Padabhyanga, foot and leg massage, stimulates all the organs of the body and increases ojas and a state of deep relaxation, inducing a sense of total wellness in the entire system. Massaging the feet, one of our five organs of action, relieves insomnia, nervousness, and dryness or numbness of the feet. Massaging the legs energizes the belly, pelvis, and colon, improves circulation and fertility, and cures numbness.

Foot and Lower Leg Massage: First Phase

- Remove the covering sheet from the legs.
- Firmly shake one leg at a time by placing both hands on the back of the foot and lifting the leg slightly.
- Apply two tablespoons of oil to the sides of the right foot and rub thoroughly, massaging in a clockwise circular movement.
- Place the subject's heel in your right palm and press firmly into the ankle joint with your thumb and fingers (Fig. 7).
- Using your left hand, press the tips of the toes and then pull each toe firmly. Apply oil to the toenails and rub them once more.
- Use both hands to massage the "neck" of each toe (Fig. 8).

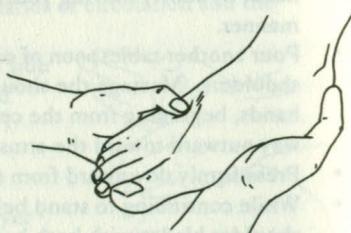


Figure 7: Foot Massage

- Beginning eight inches above the ankles, firmly massage the leg with both hands, gradually making your way down to the feet.
- Massage the top and bottom of the foot at the same time by holding the foot underneath with your fingers and using both thumbs to press the top of the foot.
- Repeat the same procedure on the left side, but using a counter clockwise motion, where indicated.

Lower Leg Massage: Second Phase

- Prop the right leg up, so that the knee is bent and the sole of the right foot rests on the massage table.
- Pour two tablespoons of oil on the right leg and begin massaging from the knee downward.
- Firmly knead the muscles of the calf.
- Place your thumbs on the lower part of the knee cap and press firmly into the tendons.
- Make small circular movements with the thumb (clockwise motions on the outer leg points and counter clockwise motions on the inner leg points) on the ten essential lower leg points which follow: two points on either side of lower knee cap; two points on either side behind the knee; two points on either side of the mid-calf; two points on either side immediately below the calf; and finally, two points on either side of the leg, behind the ankle bone (Fig. 9).
- Massage the lower leg with both hands from the knee downward, ending at the ankle. Gently shake and rotate the ankle until it feels loose.
- Straighten the leg and repeat the same procedure on the left leg.

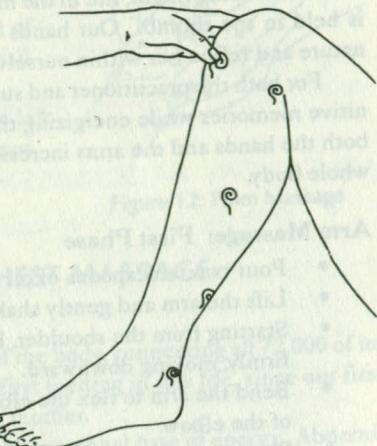


Figure 9: Lower Leg Massage

Upper Leg Massage: Third Phase

- Pour two tablespoons of oil on the upper part of the right leg.
- Using both hands, begin massaging from the top of the leg, kneading the thigh firmly (Fig. 10).
- Massage slowly downwards until you reach the knee.
- Prop the leg up slightly and continue kneading the back of the thigh.
- Gently place the leg back down and perform long rubbing strokes from the top of the leg down to the knee.
- Repeat the same procedure on the left leg.

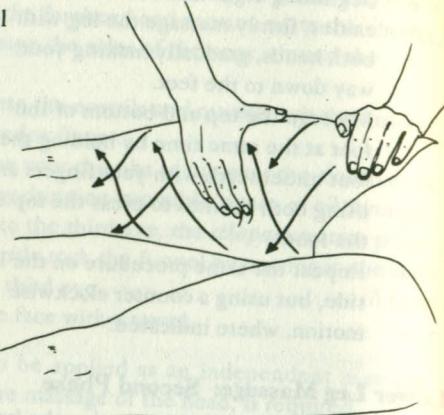


Figure 10: Upper Leg Massage

ABHYANGA: ARM AND HAND MASSAGE

Benefits

Our hands, also one of our five organs of action, energetically speaking, hold the five elements on the tips of our fingers. The earth is held in the little finger, water in the ring finger, fire in the middle finger, air in the index finger, and space is held in the thumb. Our hands are vital extensions that enable us to touch nature and refine her within ourselves.

For both the practitioner and subject, hand massage stimulates our deep cognitive memories while energizing the tissues and organs of the body. Massaging both the hands and the arms increases flexibility and refreshes the energy of the whole body.

Arm Massage: First Phase

- Pour two tablespoons of oil on the right arm and rub it in gently.
- Lift the arm and gently shake it, allowing the tension to leave.
- Starting from the shoulder, begin to massage the arm, kneading it firmly, moving downward.
- Bend the arm to flex the elbow joint. Press the nodes in the hollow of the elbow.
- Place your hands on the back of the arm and, using your thumbs, press the inner arm all the way down to the wrist.

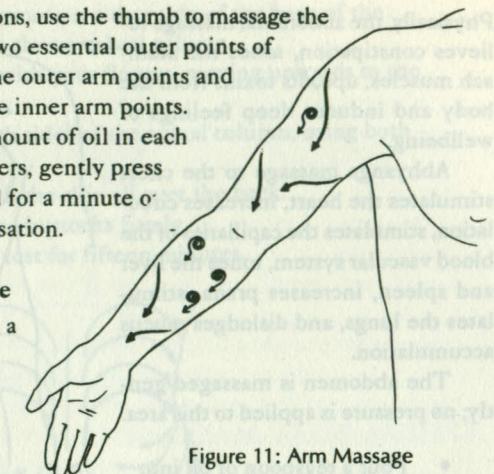


Figure 11: Arm Massage

Hand Massage: Second Phase

- Rub the right hand with a small amount of oil.
- Massage the palms of the hand by pressing with your thumbs.
- Use small circular clockwise movements with your thumb to stimulate the mound in the palm below each finger.
- Rub each fingernail with oil and massage each finger by gently pulling on it.
- Press each finger firmly and rotate.
- Bend the fingers backward, then forward, by extending and flexing the wrist.
- Firmly shake and rotate the wrist until it is loose and has released its tension.
- Use your thumbs and press the back of the hand, following through to the nail of each finger.
- Repeat the same procedure with the left hand, using counter clockwise motions on the mounds in the palms as indicated.

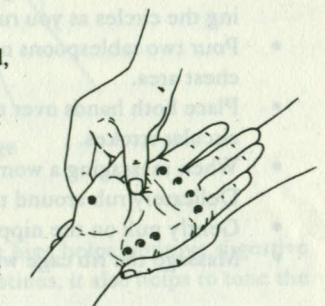


Figure 12: Palm Massage

ABHYANGA: ABDOMEN AND CHEST MASSAGE

Benefits

The navel is considered the epicenter of the body, connecting all 72,000 of its nerves. It also contains the memory of our first feeding in this life, since our first vital sustenance flowed through it from our mother.

Center of belly and body, the navel is a phenomenal base of energy. Abdominal massage helps to move stagnant energy and revitalize this basic life source.

Physically, the abdominal massage relieves constipation, tones the stomach muscles, uproots toxins from the body and induces deep feelings of wellbeing.

Abhyanga massage to the chest stimulates the heart, increases circulation, stimulates the capillaries of the blood vascular system, tones the liver and spleen, increases prana, stimulates the lungs, and dislodges mucus accumulation.

The abdomen is massaged gently; no pressure is applied to this area.

- Pour a teaspoon of oil into the navel. Using your right hand, gently rub the area around the navel, using a clockwise motion. Begin with small movements, gradually enlarging the circles as you rub away from the navel.
- Pour two tablespoons of oil over the heart and rub evenly over the chest area.
- Place both hands over the chest and massage gently, using outward, circular strokes.
- When massaging a woman, apply no pressure on the breasts. Delicately rub around the breasts with light circular movements.
- Gently pull on the nipples of both males and females.
- Massage the rib cage with firm pressure.

ABHYANGA: BACK MASSAGE

- Have the subject lie on the stomach, placing the arms above or underneath the head.
- Pour four tablespoons of oil along the spine, starting from the base of the spine and pouring upward to the base of the neck.
- Place both hands on either side of the base of the spine and use your thumbs simultaneously to massage in small semicircular movements, with the left thumb going in a counter clockwise direction and the right thumb going in a clockwise direction.
- Gradually move upward while maintaining your semicircular thumb massage, until you have reached the base of the neck.

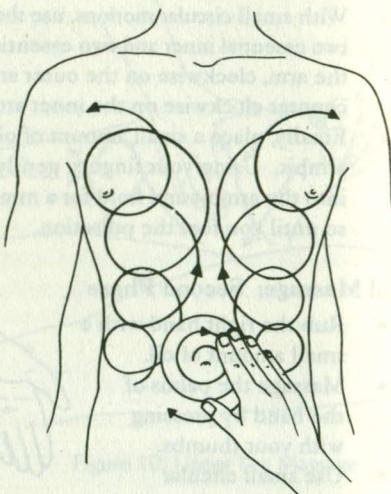


Figure 13: Chest Massage

- Position your hands once more on either side of the base of the spine, your thumbs beside the vertebral column.
- Firmly massage the back with your fingers, moving upwards to the base of the neck.
- Knead the muscles on both sides of the spinal column, using both hands simultaneously.
- You may also quickly pinch the skin all over the back.
- Finally, rub the sides of the buttocks firmly.
- Cover the subject and let rest for fifteen minutes.

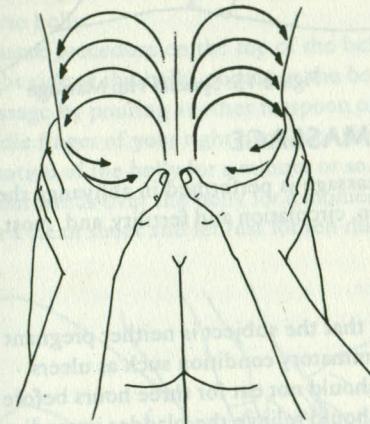


Figure 14: Back Massage

SPECIAL HIP MASSAGE

Apart from toning the muscles, massaging the hips helps improve digestive fire and the peristalsis movement of the large intestines; it also helps to tone the liver and spleen.

Directions

- Have the subject lie on the left side.
- Pour one tablespoon of oil on the right hip.
- Grip the hip firmly with both hands, your thumbs on the back of the hip and your fingers at the front (Fig. 15).
- Massage both the waist and hip areas firmly and steadily for five minutes, maintaining a general circular motion with your hands.
- Repeat the same procedure on the left hip.

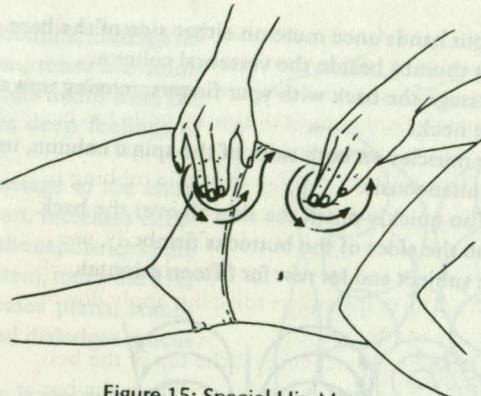


Figure 15: Special Hip Massage

SPECIAL BELLY MASSAGE

A special belly massage is performed in abhyanga therapy to tone the stomach, improve digestion, circulation and fertility, and, most significantly, to relieve constipation.

Caution

- Make certain that the subject is neither pregnant nor has an abdominal inflammatory condition such as ulcers.
- The subject should not eat for three hours before treatment.
- The subject should relieve the bladder immediately before receiving the massage.
- Discontinue the massage if the subject complains of pain in the belly.

Directions

- Have the subject lie on the back with the knees propped up, the soles of the feet resting flatly on the massage table.
- Have the subject inhale through the nostrils deeply into the abdomen and release the breath through the mouth for a few minutes.
- Rub the subject's shoulders firmly, until you feel the tension leaving the body.
- When the abdomen is completely relaxed, you may start the massage.
- Sitting on the subject's right side, pour one teaspoon of oil in the navel. Gently place both hands over the belly, covering the navel for a minute or so, in complete silence.

- Using your right fingers, gently begin to stroke the belly with a rhythmic succession of short strokes.
- Begin at the navel and move in a circular clockwise manner, creating an outward spiral until the entire belly has been stroked (Fig. 16). Maintain a delicate but firm stroking throughout the massage.
- Use the palm of your hand to continue rubbing the belly in a circular clockwise motion.
- Beginning at the lower left side of the belly, use both hands and begin to knead the muscles gently, while gradually increasing your pressure. Move upward steadily, but apply downward pressure to this area of the belly.
- Repeat the same procedure on the top of the belly and then move on to the right side of the belly, ending at the bottom.
- End the massage by pouring another teaspoon of oil into the navel. Put the middle finger of your right hand into the oiled navel and feel the pulsation of the belly for a minute or so.
- Rest both your hands over the belly for a moment. Then cover the subject with a clean sheet and let rest for ten minutes.

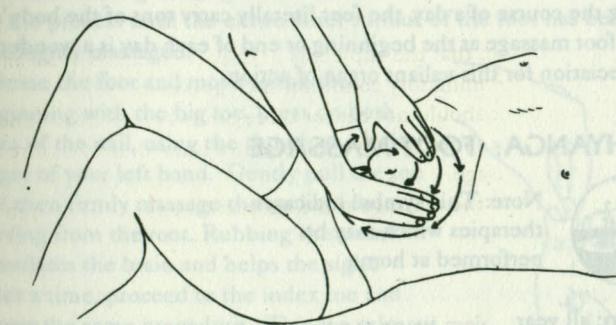


Figure 16: Special Belly Massage

Post-massage observations

- If oils were used during massage therapy, dust the body with freshly ground urad or chickpea bean powder or sandalwood powder (see formulas at the end of this chapter). Then, lightly rub the body with a towel, using downward strokes, to remove the oils and powder.
- Have the subject rest for fifteen minutes and then take a cool bath. Vata types may take a lukewarm bath.

PART FOUR

Self Application of Foot Massage

A daily foot massage, padabhyanga, is a simple and most revitalizing sadhana for maintaining good health. Padabhyanga has been practiced for millennia as a prerequisite to sound sleep, to infuse the day's activity with equanimity, and, as a more exotic activity, in the royal courts of India and China, as a prelude to sexual activities. According to Ayurveda, many marma points for the body's vital organs and sense organs are located in the soles of the feet. Padabhyanga not only invigorates and renews the entire body, but also encourages its natural "valium" to flow. A peaceful night's rest or a calm day's activity is assured after the feet are thoroughly massaged.

During the course of a day, the feet literally carry tons of the body's dynamic weight. A foot massage at the beginning or end of each day is a wonderful way to show appreciation for this valiant organ of action.

PADABHYANGA: FOOT MASSAGE



Note: This symbol indicates therapies which may be performed at home.

Season: all year

Body Type: all types

Time of Application: early morning or before bed

Conditions

Rough or dry skin; dullness of sense organs; fatigue; insomnia; poor vision; nervous tension; lethargy

Self Massage

- Wash your hands, face, and feet and put on a fresh robe. Pour 1/4 cup of the appropriate oil into a small bowl and place it next to you.
 - Sit in a comfortable posture, either on a clean mat on the floor or in an upright chair.

- Close your eyes and sit in contemplative silence for a few minutes before beginning your massage.
 - After contemplation, gently lift the right leg, rest the right ankle on the knee of the left leg, and pour a small amount of oil on the right foot.
 - Using both hands, clasp the foot, the thumbs resting on the bottom of the foot and the fingers resting on the top.
 - Crimp the fingers and press firmly into the center top line of the foot, beginning at the ankle and moving along the foot to the middle toe. At the same time, press the thumbs into the bottom of the foot, beginning at the heel and moving along the inner and outer edges of the bottom of the foot. Synchronize both hands so that they move at the same pace, the top and bottom of the foot being massaged simultaneously.
 - Continue this procedure for five minutes, always starting from the heel and working the fingers and thumbs towards the toes, repeating the process until the entire outer surface of the foot has been thoroughly massaged.

Palms the foot and move to the toes



Figure 17: Padabhyanga



Figure 17: Padabhyanga

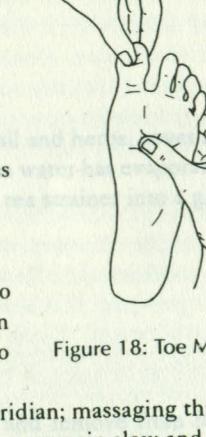
- Release the foot and move to the toes. Beginning with the big toe, press on both sides of the nail, using the thumb and index finger of your left hand. Gently pull the toe and then firmly massage the under side, starting from the root. Rubbing this point stimulates the brain and helps the sight.
 - After a time, proceed to the index toe and repeat the same procedure. This toe releases energy to the lungs.
 - Continue in this way, toe by toe. The meridian for the large intestine flows through the middle toe; massaging it helps to tone the colon. The fourth toe is the location of the kidney meridian; massaging it helps to increase the flow of vital energy to the kidneys. The little toe houses the heart meridian; massaging this toe stimulates the heart and enables its beat to remain slow and rhythmic.

Figure 18: Toe Massage



Figure 18: Toe Massage

- The entire massage may be repeated once more. Before changing feet, press your thumb firmly into the four marma points indicated on the bottom of the foot (Fig. 19).
 - Reverse the position of the legs and repeat the entire procedure on the left foot.

After massaging both feet, gently rub off any remaining oil with a dry towel. Wash your hands and observe a brief meditation. Prepare to greet the day with joy or succumb to a peaceful night's rest.



Figure 19: Marma Points
of the Foot



PART FIVE

Abhyanga Formulas

ABHYANGA OIL PREPARATIONS

Oils are used in both abhyanga massage and snehana therapies to soothe and stabilize the body; they also act as a carrier for the nourishing herbs and substances added to the oils. Oils regulate the doshas of the female genital organs and provide the body with heat. They tone the skin and bodily tissues. Oils usually alleviate Vata disorders, stabilize Pitta disorders and aggravate Kapha.

A wide variety of Ayurvedic oils is used for massaging each part of the human body. Sesame oil is used as the dominant base for most rubbing oils due to its warm, nutritive and penetrating qualities. See Appendix A for extensive lists of massage oils.

Formulas for Ayurvedic Herbal Oils

Herbal Oil Decoction

4 c water

1 c oil

1/4 c herb

Bring water to boil in a stainless steel pot. Add oil and herbs, cover and simmer on low heat for 4 to 6 hours, or until all the water has evaporated. Allow herbal oil to cool, then pour oil through a tea strainer into a glass jar. Cover and store in a cool place.

Herbal Oil Infusion

1 c oil

1/4 c herb

Bring oil to boil in a stainless pot. Add herbs and remove from heat. Cover and let steep for 10 hours. Pour oil through a tea strainer into a clean glass jar. Cover and store in a cool place.

Fresh Herbal Oil Sun Decoction

1/4 c fresh herbs
1 c oil

Lightly mince the fresh herbs and place them in a clean glass container with the oil. Cover with a piece of cotton gauze and secure with a rubber band. Allow the jar to sit in the sunlight between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. for 25 days. Be careful not to expose the jar to extreme cold, rain or moonlight. At the end of the infusion period, strain into a clean glass jar. Cover securely with a proper lid and store in a cool place.

Combining Oils

Generally, Ayurveda does not combine the base oils. Instead, oils are either added to herbs and other substances or are used singularly. Essential oils are added in minute quantity to primary rubbing oils for accent. When adding essential oil to a base oil, use ten drops of essential oil to one fluid ounce of base oil.

Combining Oils with Juices and Gels

The blending of oils, herbs and aromas is a fine art intrinsic to the Ayurvedic rejuvenative practices. For example, the fresh juices of herbal roots, such as ginger and garlic, or the fresh herbal juice extracted from mint and cilantro, may be combined with warm or cool oil. The proportion is usually one part juice to two parts oil. When a gel, such as aloe vera, or gum resins, such as asafoetida or pine gum, are added to oil, the procedure is slightly different. For a gel substance, the ratio is one part gel to three parts warm or cool oil. A hard gum resin is grated to a powder, added to the warm oil, and let sit for a few hours before using. When the gum resin is soft, it is added to the oil and the mixture is simmered over low heat for 15 minutes. Generally, ten pinches of gum powder or ten drops of soft gum resin are added to one fluid ounce of base oil.

When fresh juices or gels are combined with oils, the preparation should be made fresh before each application to avoid spoilage.

Warming Massage Oils

Generally, Ayurveda recommends warming the oils used for abhyanga. In certain instances when Pitta conditions are being treated, the oils may be used at room temperature. It is best to warm the oils in a double boiler, unless the oils are diluted with water. Never use electrical stoves or electrical heating devices to warm massage oils. Electrical energy disrupts the energy quanta of the oils, which in turn send chaotic vibrations through the skin when the oils are applied. Gas stoves, or other heating devices which produce an open flame, are best for heating the oils and substances used in abhyanga.

Massage Oil Containers

In ancient times, various metal, glass, ceramic and earthenware were used as conductors of energy for massage oils. The materials used to make the containers influenced the energy of the various oils they contained. For instance, gold, bronze, or brass containers were used to carry the oils used for Vata and Kapha disorders, while silver, pewter, or platinum containers were used to hold the oils used for Pitta conditions. Generally, earthenware and ceramic containers were used to maintain warmth and impart humidity to the oil, which in turn transferred that vibration to the patient to whom the oil was applied. Glass containers of various colors were also used to contain the oils, since each color carries its own unique healing vibration. Moreover, the transparency of a glass container allowed the oil it contained to be influenced by the energies of the sun or the moon, when the numinous vibrations of solar or lunar energies were necessary to the healing of the person for whom the oil was intended.

Likewise, appropriate gems were placed in oils intended for massage, and special mantras were recited, in order to produce the desired results after the oils were administered.

You, too, may continue the use of these ancient and luminous procedures as you practice these timeless sadhanas of healing.

Abhyanga Oil Formulas

Base oils

The following base oils or lubricants may be used alone or as a base for the appropriate herbs or essential oils best suited for each type.

Vata: dark or light sesame, ghee, jojoba, avocado, walnut, almond

Pitta: light sesame, coconut, sunflower, canola, ghee

Kapha: light sesame, canola, corn, walnut, almond

Essential oils

The following are a few examples of the essential oils which may be added to the appropriate base oils for each type. Use ten drops of essential oil to one fluid ounce of base oil. Add the essential oil after the base oil is removed from heat, if the base oil is to be heated.

Vata: jasmine, rose, sandalwood, cardamom, yellow champa, nutmeg, cinnamon, lavender, frankincense, saffron, lilac, vetiver

Pitta: sandalwood, jasmine, fennel, coriander, lavender, peppermint, lemon, lime, saffron, orange, lilac, rose

Kapha: sage, myrrh, patchouli, allspice, eucalyptus, cardamom, cinnamon, yellow champa, lemon, lime, neroli, geranium

Herbs used in oil infusion and decoctions

The following are a few examples of the herbs which may be used in oil infusion or decoction for abhyanga.

Vata: ashwagandha, bala, bhringaraja, gotu kola, licorice, cloves, comfrey, calamus root, ginger, ginseng

Pitta: neem, mahabala, amalaki, gotu kola, gokshura, shatavari, bhringaraja, peppermint, fennel, licorice

Kapha: bhringaraja, gotu kola, bibhitaki, haritaki, gokshura, neem, wild ginger, rosemary, sage, horseradish

Ubtans

Fresh ground flours, *ubtans*, from a myriad of beans, and occasionally grains, have been used even before Vedic times to enliven the skin tissue, stimulate the body and make it glow. Ubtan is an inexpensive and irreplaceable final measure to abhyanga or preliminary process before baths.

Ancient cultures used the earth's sacred grains and legumes not only to cleanse the body, enhance its physical prowess and nourish it, but also to clean the dishes and living space as well. Inherently astringent in nature, the ground legumes combined with certain antiseptic herbal powders become a powerful all-round cleanser.

Application of Ubtans

To remove excess oils from the body after massage therapy, and preserve moisture in the skin, apply an ample amount of finely ground powder on the body with long upward strokes.

Remove the powders by using firm downward strokes until the body is cleared of both excess oil and powder. A lukewarm bath may be taken afterwards.

Ubtan Preparations

Season: all year

Body Type: all types

8 parts legume flour

1 part oil

1/16 part herbal powder

Note: Occasionally, grain flour may be used instead of legume flour (see legume and grain grinding directions below).

Note: See "Base oils" for each type in abhyanga formulas above.

Legume Flours

Vata: chickpea, mung, urad, brown lentil, brown rice, wheat and oat

Pitta: chickpea, aduki, soya, urad, barley, wheat and millet

Kapha: aduki, chickpea, mung, red lentil, corn, millet and barley

Herbal Powders

Vata: ashwagandha, bhringaraja, bala, haritaki, vidari, ginseng, jasmine, rose, ginger, walnut, rose hips, sandalwood, star anise, licorice, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom

Pitta: bhringaraja, shatavari, musta, neem, gokshura, turmeric, raspberry, red clover, rose, jasmine, white oak, wintergreen, strawberry leaves, lemon grass, hibiscus, coriander, fennel

Kapha: bhringaraja, neem, musta, ajwan, ashwagandha, bibhitaki, turmeric, strawberry leaves, sage, rosemary, peppermint, wild ginger, lemon balm, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, birch

Grinding Legumes/Grains

Use a hand food grinder to grind enough legumes or grains for a fortnight's use. (See grain grinding technique in Appendix E.) The beans or grains may be ground to a fine flour for dusting excess oils from the body or to a coarse grainy texture for bodily cleansing needs. These flours, coarsely ground, may be used for cleansing the face as well.

PART SIX

Preliminary Fomentation Treatment

Fomentation therapy, also called *svedana*, is performed to aggravate the fat tissue, thereby forcing excess sweat out of the body. Used as a preliminary treatment before pancha karma, fomentation helps to liquify and uproot the aggrieved doshas, rendering them ready for expulsion from the body. The primary therapies in pancha karma, namely emesis, purgation and/or enema treatments, complete the process of ejecting the fluid and uprooted excess doshas from the system.

Fomentation treatment also helps to relieve bodily stiffness, heaviness and coldness. Although sweat therapy is used to evacuate the excesses of all three doshas, it is generally used to relieve Vata and Kapha disorders. Because of the production of sweat, the channels of the body are cleansed, thereby regulating Vata. Vata is further assuaged by the soothing action on the joints caused by the heat during fomentation.

Due to the regulated production of sweat in the body during fomentation, Kapha is also relieved in that it is reduced, along with conditions such as excess weight, lethargy, loss of appetite and low digestive fires.

Because of Pitta's natural bodily heat, only mild forms of fomentation treatments are recommended. (See Chapter Six for the various forms of *svedana* therapies.)

For preliminary fomentation treatment before pancha karma, a steam room, heated by hot rocks or bricks sprinkled occasionally with water to facilitate steam, is preferred. An enclosed steam room or wooden box, traditionally called baspa sveda, heated by a gas generator, will also suffice. Avoid electrically charged steam rooms or boxes. If a steam room or box is not available to you, the simple sudation applications which follow may be used.

FOMENTATION TREATMENT



Time of Application

Vata and Kapha: 30 minutes

Pitta: 15 minutes

Note:

1. Fomentation therapy is to be applied after abhyanga therapy and before pancha karma.
2. The conditions and restrictions set out in Chapter Six are to be adhered to here as well.

Ginger Compress

Ginger compress may be applied to the body and limbs, but not to the head. Use two extra-large, heavy stainless steel pots filled with ginger water. One pot of ginger decoction is kept simmering over low heat while the other pot of decoction is in use. Follow directions for Ginger Compress given below, adjusting the amounts to 4 gallons of water and 2 cups grated ginger, and applying a towel compress to the whole body.

Note: See list of Ayurvedic herbs used in *svedana* and common sweat-producing herbs in Appendix A. These may be used in the decoction in combinations of three to seven different herbs, depending on the intensity of heat required for fomentation.

Ginger Compress - Treatment for Kidneys

1 gal water

1 handful of grated fresh ginger

Bring water to boil in a large stainless steel pot. Place the grated ginger in a small, clean cotton pouch, secured by a draw string. Using your stronger hand, firmly squeeze the pouch so that the ginger juice seeps through the bag and into the boiling water. Then drop the ginger pouch into the pot of boiling water. Cover and let simmer on low heat for thirty minutes. Donning protective mitts, remove the pot from heat and carefully carry it to the treatment room; let sit for five minutes before uncovering.

Directions

Hold the ends of a towel with both hands, and dip the slack of the towel into the pot with the hot ginger water, without letting the water touch the ends you are holding. Twist the towel to relieve any excess water into the pot. Cover the pot to retain the heat of the water. Firmly shake the towel loose to release some heat. First test the temperature of the towel by gently placing it on the subject's back for a brief moment. Check with the subject to make certain the heat is bearable before applying the compress.

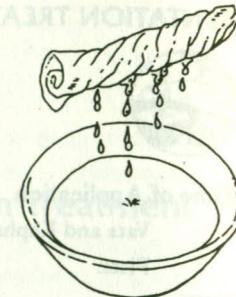


Figure 20: Wringing the Towel

Fold the towel and apply directly over the kidney area on the lower back. Use your hands and apply firm pressure over the towel. When the temperature of the towel turns lukewarm, remove it and repeat the dipping and wringing procedures in the hot water.

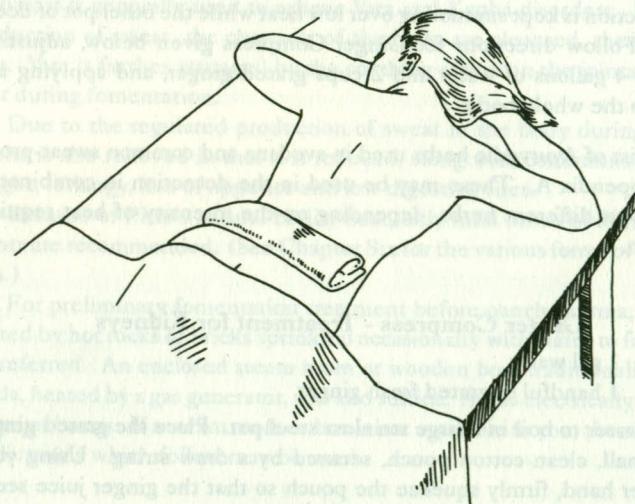


Figure 21: Ginger Compress

Repeat application of the hot towel on the subject's back approximately five times or until ginger water loses its heat.

Pre- and Post-procedures

Rub an ample amount of warm sesame oil on the back of the subject directly before treatment and directly after treatment.

Nadi Sveda for the Whole Body

Nadi sveda may be used to foment the entire body, instead of just a localized part, as explained in Chapter Six, Part Three.

Alter the treatment to accommodate the whole body, excluding the head, observing all of the rules which apply to nadi sveda.

CHAPTER FIVE AYURVEDIC LOVE THERAPY: SNEHANA



The meaning of the Sanskrit word *sneha* conveys unconditional love and innermost consciousness, the essential spirit imbued in human nature. Snehana therapy is meant to invoke these deeply imbedded codes of our nature and reawaken our cognitive capacities.

The main emphasis of this therapy is on relating, unbinding, lubricating, and cleansing both the internal and external body. The outpouring of caring energy from the practitioner into the patient, along with the pouring of oily substances, aids the bodymindspirit to bind, stretch, and remember its cognitive nature. The moisturizing of lubrication, external seclusion is a holy alliance of nine intrinsic qualities carried by Ayurvedic herbs and substances deeply into the tissues through the skin. These nine qualities are: warmth, strength, invigoration, tenderness, mending, fluidity, accommodation, restfulness, and cognition. Together they form a symphony of energy to force the negative elements from the body and lubricate the positive elements. Snehana opens the channels through which circulation and energy flow. As a result, we are able to freely access intuition, and sustain a fine balance between our experiential activities and cognitive functions. Without attachment, life can be truly joyful and cold.