



REVIEW ARTICLE

ABHYANGA AS A DINACHARYA – A SCIENTIFIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Abhyanga, one among the *Dinacharyas* (daily regimen) is an ancient practice for maintaining a healthy life. *Ayurveda* considers it as method for healing, wellness and also in the management of many diseases. It is an important regime that is needed to be followed in this era. The uncontrolled and irregular lifestyle has led to the development of immense stress and strain that has affected man both physically and mentally. *Abhyanga* can slow down the degeneration, improve the circulation and pacify the vitiated *vata* and other *doshas* there by rejuvenating and revitalizing the human body providing a proper health to the body and mind. An effort to explore the effects of *Abhyanga* as per our literature has been made here.

Key Words: *Abhyanga*, Ayurveda, health, Dinacharya

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INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda being a science of life always emphasizes on the concept of maintaining good health for longevity of life. A healthy body is necessary to attain *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*^[1]. Disease is a condition of absence of good health that takes away the wellness from life, and hence the *acharyas* have emphasized the importance of maintaining a good health and preventing diseases^[2]. *Swasthavritta* deals with the basic habits for keeping the body *swastha* or healthy. A man is said to be healthy when his *dosas*, *agni*, *dhathu* and *malas* are in the state of equilibrium, along with mental, sensory and spiritual pleasantness and happiness^[3].

A set of regimens have been suggested in order to attain the good health under the concept of *dinacharyas* or daily habits. They are a group of practices to be observed daily including the time of waking, methods of brushing the teeth, bathing habits etc. The person who always consumes wholesome food and practices daily regimens is said to remain healthy. *Abhyanga* is one among these regimens that has to be adopted for healing, relaxation and treatment of various diseases. *Abhyanga* provides tone and rigor to the *dhatu*s^[4], and also stabilizes the *doshas* thereby maintaining a state of good health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Different Ayurvedic classics text, Journals and articles published reviewed and appropriate data has been collected to update the importance of *Abhyanga* in day today life.

Importance of *Abhyanga*

Abhyanga is one among the *bahirparimarjana chikitsa* (external therapies), which is defined as the process of anointing the body with oil (usually with medicated warm oil) in a specific systematic manner. The term *abhyanga* or *abhyanjana* are synonymous derived from the root words *abhi+anj*. *Abhyanjana* meaning to smear with unctuous substances and *Abhyanga* meaning to make movements into or towards^[5]. It has to be performed on a daily basis daily especially *siroabhyanga* (head massage), *padabhyanga* (foot massage) and *karnabhyanga* (massage to the ears)^[6]. *Abhyanga* is not a simple procedure of application of oil all over the body. It is a manoeuvre that helps in maintaining the excellence of tissues. Further the selection of specific oils helps in curing many ailments^[7].

Benefits of *Abhyanga*: *Abhyanga* has been described as a *dinacharya* and hence the daily practice of *abhyanga* is said to bring many benefits like delaying the ageing process, removing fatigue, and pacifying *vata* disorders. The process helps to improve vision, complexion, nourishments, life, gives good lustre to skin and provides proper strength

and tone to muscles and skin ^[8]. Massaging in a specific direction improves blood circulation, aids in removal of the toxic substances from the tissues, relieves physical and mental fatigue, improves the health of musculoskeletal system, and relieves stiffness and heaviness of the body leading to a feeling of lightness. Massage helps in reducing the heart rate and blood pressure in pre-hypertensive patients. There was a notable reduction in the systolic and diastolic pressure in studies conducted on healthy individuals who were asked to perform massage on a daily basis ^[9]. The major action of abhyanga is in the musculoskeletal system proving to be significant in reduction of pain score among patients suffering from osteoarthritis. Combined action of massage along with other treatment modalities has proved to be very effective in the management of muscular atrophy and hemiplegia. The total CPK (Creatine Phosphokinase, a marker for muscle function), showed progressive reduction only after one month of treatment along with decrease in rigidity of muscles, improvement in walking ability and performance of daily activities ^[10]. Daily massage with an oil helps in reduction of roughness and dryness, preventing skin cracks.

Padabhyanga (foot massage) helps in removing the dryness, stiffness, roughness, tiredness and numbness immediately. It also

make the skin smooth, provides strength and stability to the feet. *Padabhyanga* also improves the vision and also helps in reducing the *vata prakopa* ^[11]. This can be compared to reflexology – a specialised type of foot massage. More than 7000 nerves exist in each foot and foot massage results in stimulation of these nerves that results in reducing stress and relax body resulting in the equilibrium ^[12]. A study by Michigan State University offers a strong evidence that the practice of foot, massage can help cancer patients to manage their symptoms and perform daily tasks ^[13]. In addition foot massage has significant improvement in reducing dryness of the feet, lessening dryness associated with itching dryness associated with changes in the skin texture of the feet up to 98% reduction along with less cracks, associated pain ^[14]. *Vagbhata* states that the *indriyas* (sense organs) are in close relation with our mind and hence a healthy mind supports health of these *indriyas*. Thus *siroabhyanga* keeps the body and mind healthy and induces good sleep, moreover it prevents and cures head ache, hair fall, premature greying of hair, provides good sleep and also relieves the stress ^[15]. Disorders like anxiety, stress, insomnia etc are increasingly being accepted as a phenomenon that affects the society negatively. Continuous stress levels later leads

to the development of many psychological and physical difficulties^[16, 17].

The body is compared to a tree where the roots of tree are given water regularly, which lives for long time, in the same way by *abhyanga* there is an increase in the blood circulation providing better transportation of oxygenated blood and nutrients locally and all over the body. The person should make use of medicated *snehadravayas* to smear the body based on the nature of the body, constitution, habituation, season, habitat and aggravated dosha^[18]. The practice of *abhyanga* on a daily basis helps in relieving the stress, relaxation of the muscles and improved circulation.

Mode of action: The mode of action of massage lies mainly on the receptors in the skin. Skin is the largest organ in the human body supplies with millions of nerve innervations that helps the body in adjusting to the external environment. There are specialised receptors for light, touch and pressure as well as pain heat and cold that are distributed throughout the skin. *Dalhana* in his commentary for *Susruthasamhita* have described the action of *abhyanga* based on the duration of the procedure done. The time duration taken by the oil to reach the hair follicles when *abhyanga* is performed is given as 300 *matras* (95 sec), for the oil reaches the skin, *rakta dathu*, *mamsa dhatu*, *medo dhatu*,

asthi dhatu is 400 (133 sec), 500 (160 sec), 600 (190 sec), 700 (228 sec), 800 (240 sec) respectively and if the *abhyanga* is continued for 900 *matras* (280 sec) it reaches the *majja dhatu*^[19]. More the duration the effect of *abhyanga* will also be more. *Charaka* opines that the *vata* is responsible for the tactile sensation, and hence *abhyanga* is good to maintain the normalcy of *vata* not only at the site of application but the body as a whole^[20]. The type of oil used also has a significant role in the efficacy of *abhyanga*. Massage stimulates the two major controlling systems in the body i.e. the nervous system and the endocrine system. These systems are the communicating systems connecting all cells with information about what is happening in the body that provides information for control and integration. They not only cause stimulation of the peripheral nerves controlling different body emotions and feelings but they enter the general circulatory system through the dermal absorption which provides a more intricate effect. There are numerous theories explaining the action of massage. The gate control theory says that massage provides stimulation that helps to block pain signals sent to the brain. Another theory explains the release of certain chemicals such as serotonin or endonephrins in the body or cause beneficial mechanical changes in the body^[21].

Generally *tilathaila* is used for *abhyanga* as it is *tridoshagna* [22]. Since *abhyanga* stimulate the peripheral neurons the oils indicated in neurological disorders like *Mahanarayana taila*, *Ksheerabala*, *Dhanwantaram thaila* etc provides better effects than non-medicated oils.

Contraindications for *Abhyanga*:

Though *abhyanga* has a wide spectrum of benefits, it is not applicable to all. Acharyas have specifically mention about the people and conditions where *abhyanga* should not be performed. Persons suffering from *kapha* disorders and persons who have undergone purificatory measures are unfit for *Abhyanga* [23]. Susrutha opines that *abhyanga* should not be done in *samavashtha* of *dosha*, beginning condition of fever, indigestion, after purgation and disease due to *santarpana* and in pregnancy [24].

DISCUSSION:

Abhyanga can be explained as a combined effect of the oil used, the heats produced and the manoeuvre. The effect of *abhyanga* is basically explained based on the local stimulation it produces on the skin. By the application of the human body becomes strong and smooth skinned [25]. It is not susceptible to disease due to *vata* and the body also becomes resistant to exhaustion and exertion. This is because the seat of *vata* is related to the tactile sensory organ that is

located in the skin [26]. These stimulations provide impulses to the muscular system, gland and the blood vessels that are controlled by that particular nerve and keep the body healthy. *Abhyanga* also improves the circulatory system further aiding in reduction of pain. Further *siras*, *karna* and *pada* are the seats of many vital points in the body called *marmas* [27]. The massage done to these vital points provides a positive energy in the body thereby increasing the body immunity. Studies on massage have proved that the number of immune boosting white blood cells was significantly higher in patients who received massage vs. patients who did not receive massage [28]. A lot of the scientific research on massage therapy is preliminary or conflicting, but much of the evidence points toward beneficial effects on pain and other symptoms associated with a number of different conditions. Much of the evidence suggests that these effects are short term and that people need to keep getting massages for the benefits to continue [29].

CONCLUSION:

The modern lifestyle and practices have adversely affected our health. Man rarely finds time to follow any of the suggested *dinacharya* in a proper method due to his hectic life style. This have given rise to various kind of diseases, which is proved by the flaring up incidence of lifestyle disease like obesity,

mental tension stress etc. The effects of these *dinacharyas* especially that of *abhyanga* has to be recognized and should be incorporated as our daily routine as it has to be. The outcome of various researches succeeds in establishing the efficacy of massage not only as a daily habit but also an effective tool in treatment of various disease conditions pertaining to the body and mind. The heat produced during the process helps in opening up the small channels, removes the *ama*, melts the vitiated *kapha* and helps in deep cleaning and moisturizing of the skin.

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