

ABHYANGA – Cardinal Part of PANCHAKARMAAMIT CHOWDHARY* AND RACHNA GUPTA¹*Department of Kayachikitsa, Dev Bhoomi Medical College of Ayurveda and Hospital, Manduwala, Dehradun-248 007 (Uttarakhand), India***(e-mail: amitchowdhary18@yahoo.in; Mobile: 78884 64485)*

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ABSTRACT

Abhyanga part of *Panchakarma* is a kind of *Bahya snehan*, playing an important role for pacifying *Vata Vyadhis*. Due to hurry in day-to-day life; peoples are busy in daily routine having no time to take whole *panchakarma*, whereas *Abhyanga* plays important role in pacifying *vata* disorders in short period of time (only 5 - 35 min). The ultimate goal of any *Abhyanga* is the achievement of symptom-free movement and function and to subside vitiated *Vata Dosha*. Present article explains *Abhyanga* in totality.

Key words: *Abhyanga, Vata Vyadhis***INTRODUCTION**

Abhyanga is defined as *Ayurvedic* procedure of application of *sneha dravyas* over body with certain amount of (mild) pressure in specific direction. It can be applied to the whole body or locally. *Abhyanga* is a subtype of *Bahya snehana* i.e. external *oleation*. This is one of the chief external measures employed for relieving various ailments especially *Vata* dominant disorders.

Many of the prevalent modern techniques are the modified forms of *Abhyanga*. These are developed from *Keraleeya kalari chikitsa*, *kathakali abhyanga* and martial arts. Hygienic *Abhyanga* is simply "Oil Bath" that can be done generally all over the body. While "sports *Abhyanga*" is mainly meant for the fitness of athletes, therapeutic *Abhyanga* is mainly indicated for specific disease conditions.

The ultimate goal of any *Abhyanga* is the achievement of symptom-free movement and function and to subside vitiated *Vata dosha*. To effectively use *Abhyanga* in a patient, the *Panchakarma* specialist / therapist must know the basic principles and effects of *Abhyanga* on musculoskeletal, neuromuscular, cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

Etymology: The word *Abhyanga* is derived by prefixing *abhi + anga*. The *Anga Dhatu* is used for denoting motion. Thus, its literal meaning becomes motion in different direction. One

can use medicated *ghee* or oil (may be scented) depending upon *Prakriti, Ritu, Satmya, Dosha, Desha* and *Roga* of the patient.

Indications: It is generally indicated for each and everyone as a part of *Dinacharya* and *Rityacharya* for maintaining good health. It is also recommended as *Poorva karma* in patients of *Vamana, Virechana, Basti* (local) and *Nasya* (local).

Goals of Abhyanga**Increases strength**

- The strength refers to the force output of a contracting muscle and is directly related to the amount of tension a contracting muscle can produce.
- To increase the strength of a muscle, the muscle contraction must be loaded or resisted so that increasing level of tension will develop because of hypertrophy and recruitment of muscle fibers.
- Strength training has been defined as a muscle or muscle group lifting to increase endurance.
- Endurance is the ability to perform low-intensity repetitive exercise over a prolonged period of time.
- Muscular endurance is improved by performing *Abhyanga* against mild resistance for many repetitions.

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- In most *Abhyanga* programs strength and muscular endurance increase.
- Total body endurance can also be improved with prolonged low-intensity *Abhyanga*.

Increases flexibility

Flexibility is the ability to move a single joint or series of joints through an unrestricted, pain free range of motion. Often the term 'flexibility' is used to refer more specifically to the ability of the musculotendinous unit to elongate as a body segment or joint moves through the range of movement.

Increases skill in an activity

This includes co-ordination, balance, timing and speed. *Abhyanga* is used for accelerating the patient's recovery from injuries and diseases that have altered his normal way of living. It includes the prevention of dysfunction by subsiding vitiated *Vata* as well as development, improvement and restoration of

- Strength
- Mobility- flexibility
- Co-ordination balance
- Relaxation
- To promote, correct the insufficiency of specific muscle or muscle groups
- To regain the normal range of joint movements
- To encourage the patient to use the ability he has regained during *Abhyanga*.

METHODS of *Abhyanga*

The *Sneha* with which *Abhyanga* is to be done should be selected depending on *Dosha*, *Ritu*, *Satmya*, *Prakruti*, *Desha* and *Roga*. In cold climate, it should be used in a lukewarm form and vice versa. The direction employed for doing *Abhyanga* should be *Anuloma* i.e. that of the body hairs. In region of joints, *Abhyanga* is done in a circular manner. *Abhyanga* is done in following seven positions consecutively:

1. Sitting with straight legs
2. Supine
3. Lateral side of the body
4. Prone

5. Lateral side of body
6. Supine
7. Sitting with straight legs

Duration of *Abhyanga*: The duration of *Abhyanga* depends upon the level of penetration. Various levels are as given below:

Duration level of penetration

- 300 *matra* = 65 seconds* *Romanta*
 - 400 *matra* = 130 seconds* *Tvacha*
 - 500 *matra* = 195 seconds* *Rakta*
 - 600 *matra* = 260 seconds* *Mamsa*
 - 700 *matra* = 335 seconds* *Meda*
 - 800 *matra* = 400 seconds* *Asthi*
 - 900 *matra* = 465 seconds* *Majja*
- (*=Approximately)

Generally if we consider that *Abhyanga* in one position would last for 5 min then total duration will go up to 35 minutes. However, in diseased condition, this duration should be lengthened. After completion of *Abhyanga* patient is allowed to relax for 15 to 20 min. Subsequently sponging the body with tepid water is advisable. After that a warm bath is preferable.

Benefits of *Abhyanga*

1. **Jarahara:** *Abhyanga* counteracts the aging process.
2. **Shramahara:** *Abhyanga* relaxes the tensile muscles, thus helping in relaxation.
3. **Vatahara:** As *Abhyanga* is done with *Sneha dravyas*, which are having potent *Vatashamaka* properties; it is natural that *Abhyanga* is *Vatahara*.
4. **Drashti Prasadakara:** *Abhyanga* improves quality of eyesight and vision.
5. **Pushtikara:** *Abhyanga* nourishes various *Dhatus* producing *Pushti*.
6. **Ayushyakara:** *Abhyanga* increases lifespan.
7. **Swapnakara:** *Abhyanga* helps in inducing sound sleep.
8. **Twak Dardhyakara:** *Abhyanga* makes skin intact and increases its healthy status.
9. **Klesha Sahatva:** *Abhyanga* induces strength in body, making it adaptive for all types of condition. It increases its tolerance towards various external agents.

10. **Abhighata Sahatva:** Persons who are regularly exposed to *Abhyanga* are not affected much by any type of trauma.
11. **Kapha-Vata Nirodhana:** *Sushruta* says that *Abhyanga* pacifies both *Kapha* and *Vata*.
12. **Mrujavarna Balaprada:** *Abhyanga* improves complexion of body and increases its strength. *Tvacha* is a seat of *Sparshnendriya* and it is obvious that *Abhyanga* also pacifies vitiated *Vata dosha* in *Tvacha*, so it is very helpful in the disease *Pakshaghata*.

Modern science has also described some benefits of *Abhyanga* / massage, which include:

1. It increases circulation, especially to nerve endings and tones up muscle endings.
2. Toning of the muscles and the whole physiology and induces strength in weak muscles.
3. It acts as calming for the nerves.
4. It lubricates the joints ensuring proper movements of body parts.
5. It helps in increasing in mental alertness.
6. It helps in improvement in elimination of impurities from the body.
7. It makes the skin softer and smoother.
8. *Abhyanga* increases the levels of stamina throughout the day.
9. It induces better and deeper sleep at night.

Abhyanga (massage) with modern perspective: *Abhyanga* developed as rubbing and has been coexistent in the creation of man.

There are five fundamental procedures in *Abhyanga*.

1. **Effleurage:** This consists of long centripetal blows i.e. to touch lightly/ deep or gentle stroking in massage.
2. **Petrissage or kneading:** In this the tissues are picked up, lifted from the bones and rolled, squeezed, or wrung. It has a marked stimulant effect on the muscles and on the circulation in the deeper blood vessels and the lymphatics.
3. **Friction:** This is a circular rolling

movement, deep in character, used especially in the treatment of joints and around bony prominences. It is useful in breaking down adhesions and promoting absorption, and, over small areas, for the relief of stasis. It should be generally followed by effleurage.

4. **Tapotement:** This is performed in one of four ways: hacking, clapping, punctuation and beating. This is stimulating to the circulation and muscles, and may have either a sedative or stimulating effect on superficial nerve supply.
5. **Vibration:** This may be performed with several fingers or the whole palm or surface of the hand. A short vibration produces stimulation; a prolonged vibration, inhibition. For the reason mechanical vibration is superior to the manual, due to the fact that the human fingers will tire. "Vibration over the abdomen is effected with the whole palmer surface of the hand". This vibration is particularly helpful for its stimulating effect upon the stomach, intestines, and other abdominal organs. Vibration stimulates glandular and vascular activity and the organs of digestion. It has a stimulating effect upon the nervous system by its action upon the nerve centers and upon the nervous system by its action upon the nerve centers and upon the terminal nerve branches.

Golden Rules for *Abhyanga*

1. See that the patient is in as comfortable a position as possible, and that the operator is in the best position to do the work.
2. Always support the part that is being massaged.
3. The operator's muscles should be relaxed as well those of the patient.
4. The clothing of the operator should allow perfect freedom and ease of movement; no sleeve should be worn below the elbow.
5. All procedures should be started moderately, increasing both in force and frequency, and should end gradually, as started.

Always to keep in mind

In administering *Abhyanga* it must be remembered, that opposite effects may be produced by different methods of application. For example: the pulse may be slowed or hastened; blood pressure increased or reduced; vessels caused to dilate or contract. These different results are not contradictory, but are due to:

1. The movements used.
2. The way in which the movement is used.
3. The area of the body treated.

Probable mode of action of *Abhyanga*

Abhyanga makes body sturdy and resistant to *Vata* disorders. It brings smoothness (*Mardava*) in the body. It depletes morbid *Vata* and *Kapha* and replenishes all *Dhatu*s. After 300 *Matras* from *Abhyanga* commenced oil reaches up to *Romakupa* (hair follicles) and then progressively reaches into the most deeply situated tissues. By the time of 500, 600, 700 and 800 *Matras* *Sneha* penetrates *Rakta*, *Mansa*, *Meda* and *Asthi-Majja*, respectively. It reduces *Kharatva* of *Mansa*, *Snayu* and *Asthi*, and improves their strength. It mainly acts on *Rasa*, *Mansa* and *Meda*. Overall, it keeps the continuity of *Sneha* (*Dhatu Sneha Parampara*) and hence promotes *Dhatu*s. *Taila Abhyanga* removes *Doshas* accumulated in micro channels by virtue of its *Sukshma*, *Ushna*, *Vyavayi Guna* and *Kashaya Rasa* of *Taila*. This effect of *Abhyanga* promotes *Agni*, *Medha* (intellect) and *Bala*. *Pratiloma* type of *Abhyanga* renders *Vyana* and *Udana* to normal functional state and thus, all *Srotas* fill with the applied *Sneha*, which nourishes the body after digestion by *Bhrajaka Pitta*. *Abhyanga*, which is purposely performed on *Marma* region, can help to cure even complicated diseases.

Thus, apart from exerting local effects, *Abhyanga* also affects the whole body systems in a gross manner. It provides nutrition to various *dhatu*s.

- Slow movements are soothing.
- Rapid movements are stimulating or irritating.
- Slow, deep *Abhyanga* usually results in a slowing and strengthening of the pulse.

Briefly stated that the objects to be obtained by the use of *Abhyanga* are as follows:

1. To increase arterial, venous and lymphatic flow.
2. To improve skin function.
3. To soothe or stimulate the nerves.
4. To eliminate waste products.
5. To break down adhesions.
6. To reduce swollen tissues.
7. To improve nutrition by stabilizing *Agni*.

DISCUSSION

Abhyanga and its methods are applied vividly in day to day life for treatment of various ailments—*Vata Vyadhis* being the major one. There are many reasons for *Abhyanga*. One general reason is to improve or maintain physical well being. Other reason could be to prepare for an upcoming athletic event, to relieve anxiety, to build up strength, to slim down or simply to enjoy the social interaction with others who also exercise. Whatever the reason, it is important to choose an *Abhyanga* with exercise program that best meets the needs of the individual, the intended purpose or goals for the program need to be identified.

CONTRAINDICATED

Abhyanga is contraindicated in *Ama avastha*, after completion of *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Niruha Basti*, *Santarpanajanya Vyadhi* and *Taruna jwara*. If *Abhyanga* is done in above mentioned conditions then it leads to *Agnimandya*, thus deteriorating the condition.

Usually *Abhyanga* is contra-indicated in febrile conditions. In cases of pus formation, malignant growths and where infective pathology is present.

Abdominal *Abhyanga* should be avoided in cases with gastric or duodenal ulcers, in cases of aneurysm, severe varicose veins and in any condition with serious weakness of the blood vessel walls.

In most cases resulting from injury or perverted metabolism, best therapeutic results are obtained through the use of *Abhyanga* in conjunction with one or more of the various other forms of physiotherapy treatment, such as active, passive and resistive exercises; static, high frequency, galvanic or sinusoidal

electricity; radiant light and heat; the use of quartz mercury vapors lamp.

CONCLUSION

Vata Vyadhis are a set of diseases affecting the normal life style of the patient.

Abhyanga ensures proper muscle strength by stimulating the nerve trunk and also stimulates the under lying tissue structures.

Abhyanga may be used as adjuvant therapy along with internal medicines in the management of *Vata Vyadhis*.

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