



Abhyanga

Abhyanga is the term used to describe Ayurvedic massage and means “anointing the body with oil.” In abhyanga a warmed oil, usually sesame oil, is used to nourishingly massage the body and left on for 10-15 minutes. It is then rinsed off in the shower.

According to one of the Vedic texts, the Charaka Samhita, “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 helps balance all 3 doshas, particularly Vata dosha.

Vata is a Sanskrit term that roughly translates into “wind”. This name is given to the energy of movement in our physical and mental bodies. Its qualities are cold, dry, light and mobile, and the more we do that increases coldness, dryness, lightness and mobility in our bodies and our minds, the more we will experience the negative effects of Vata dosha. When Vata is out of balance we experience worry, fear and anxiety in our minds and dryness and pain in our physical bodies. This may manifest as insomnia and digestive irregularities, which are common complaints. Vata goes out of balance most easily in the fall and winter, so these are particularly good seasons for daily abhyanga.

In addition, the time around menopause is the Vata time of life, so practices like Abhyanga may bring more balance to this natural time of transition.

Additional benefits of abhyanga include pacification to the nervous system, increased lymphatic flow, improved circulation, and softer, suppler skin. Improved sleep is often reported along with increased mental alertness, well-being, mood stability and tolerance to daily stressors.

To practice abhyanga, you will need to use a good quality sesame oil that has been “cured” (heated to 100 degrees celsius, then cooled back down to room temperature). Cured oil can be stored for 6 months. You can find cured sesame oils, or other Ayurvedic massage oils that are prepared on Amazon or other Ayurvedic retailers like Banyan Botanicals.

You will also need a non-slip mat in the tub, and you can use baking soda afterwards in the tub to soak up any oil.

Begin by placing your oil in hot water until it becomes a pleasant temperature. Lovingly massage oil into body for 10-15 minutes, beginning at extremities & working towards center of body.

- Vigorously massage feet & hands using back-and-forth motions with the open part of your hand.
- Massage arms & legs with circular strokes on joints, & long, back-and-forth strokes on limbs.
- Massage abdomen using clockwise motion, following the direction of large intestine & colon.
- Massage chest with small, upward, circular motions, starting on bottom of breastbone & making way up to collarbone & also around outside of breasts.
- Massage back as well as you can. You can use a downward stroke on lower back to help increase downward flow of energy.
- Once you have massaged your entire body, let oil penetrate into skin for as long as you can (you can tend to other things like brushing teeth or shaving).
- Rinse the oil off in the shower. There is no need to use soap on the oiled areas as sesame oil is naturally cleansing.

Abhyanga is an excellent example of self-care and I highly recommend it to any of my clients who suffer from a vata imbalance and/or are in the vata season of life, which is our post-menopausal, wisdom years. The more you do it, the more benefits you get from this practice.

Namasté,

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