



Anatomical explanation of *Abhyanga* (An Ayurvedic massage)

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ABSTRACT:

INTRODUCTION- *Acharya Sushruta* defines health it follows the *Doshas* must be in equilibrium, the digestive fire must be in a balanced state & the tissue (*Dhatus*) & *Malas* (waste) must work in normal state. The sensory & motor organs & mind, *atma* must be also in a pleasant state. Such person is called a healthy person or *Sawastha*. so it is clear that maintain a good health was for the longevity of life. *Maharishi Charaka* has used term 'Samhanan' to denotes the compactness of body. A compact body is characterized by symmetrical & well divided bones, joint, muscles, bloods. An individual having a compact body is very strong otherwise he is weak. *Aabhyanga* is the therapeutic intervention of *panchkarma* in which the body is treated with simple or medicated oil on particular body part according to need. Whenever there is a discomfort or uneasiness over the body we unknowingly try to soothe it through massage

AIM: To Study Anatomical Explanation Of *Abhyanga* (An Ayurvedic Massage)

OBJECTIVE:

1. Detail Study of *Abhyanga*
2. Study about *Shatang Sharir*

RESULT: *Aabhyanga* a procedure of *panchkarma* in which the body is treated with simple or medicated oil on particular body part according to need.

CONCLUSION: Thus we can conclude that Anatomical knowledge of *Shatang Sharir* is quite beneficial while attempting the process of *Abhyanga*.

KEYWORD: *AYURVEDA, PANCHKARMA, SAMHANANA, ABHYANGA, SHATANG SHARIR*

INTRODUCTION

In the ancient ages *Abhyanga* or oil massage was the inseparable part of daily life because of the huge benefits it provides to the human body to make it strong and free of disease⁽¹⁾ It is also a subtype of *Bahya Snehan* (external massage), which is a part of *Panchakarma* therapy. In both therapeutic as well as preventive purpose it has been used with great results. But with the time changing fast, *Abhyanga* has got the worldwide popularity as Ayurvedic massage. In the present era life is running very fast and to cope up with its ups and downs man has to run faster than his capacity. At present we are reaching a point where we are becoming increasingly more conscious of our bodies and the need to keep them in the best possible condition. All the stress

and tension of modern people attract them towards the easily accessible massage therapy centers for a time being relief. *Ayurveda* has its own stand on the importance of *Abhyanga*. Though we find with ease in the internet or in many books various types of methods for *ayurvedic* massage which have been named as *Abhyanga*, there are rare descriptions of actual method of *Abhyanga* in the classical texts. It has been said that *Abhyanga* should be done in *Anuloma* direction i.e. towards the growth of hair. We have to keep the point in mind that knowledge of anatomical structures of the body is a must to give a relaxing and fruitful massage. For this purpose massaging procedures along with its anatomical explanation should be explained.

Need of study: Our *Ayurveda* classics have sufficient descriptions about *Abhyanga* and its benefits. But there are no such details about its techniques as they are described in *Shloka* form. For the present stressful life pattern and for the urban people who hate the ancient practice of daily oil massage, the need for getting easy relaxation through some massage therapist has been highly increasing. So for the purpose of giving view about what the *Abhyanga* or *Ayurvedic* oil massage is and how it benefits us, is to be studied. Proper knowledge of *Shadanga Sharir* and its components like *Peshi*, *Asthi*, *Sira*, *Dhamani Kandara*, *Twacha Marma* etc. are of great importance. As their knowledge is the base of any successful treatment. Although there are several kinds of massage procedures, the basic knowledge of anatomy is needed for all fruitful therapies. There is no explanation of mode of action of *Abhyanga*, hence it has to be explained properly that how does

our body react to the therapy of oil massage.

CONCEPT OF SHADANG SHARIR

According to *Ayurveda*, *Sharir* is the human body that keeps on degenerating with time due to some digestion process going on it continuously. *Sharir* is the one who destroys itself due to its constant motion. The human body is composed of six main parts, namely the four *Shakha* (upper and lower Extremities), *Madhya Sharir* (Trunk or middle body) and *Shira* (Head and Neck).⁽²⁾ There are fifty six subsidiary members attached to these six main members of the body. Now we shall describe the *Pratyangas* of the body. The head, the belly, the back, the navel, the bladder and the throat (neck) occur singly. The ears, the eyes, the nostrils, the eyebrows, the armpits, the breasts, the testis, the sides, the knee joints etc. occurs in pairs. The fingers and toes which number twenty in all and the *Srotas* of the body to be presently described are likewise included within the *Pratyanga*.⁽³⁾

The knowledge of *Shadanga Sharir* is very important for a physician. For this purpose the physician must have to acquire the knowledge of anatomy. In *Sushrut Samhita* we can find the different parts or members of the body as mentioned before including even the skin cannot be correctly described by anyone who is not versed in anatomy. For a thorough knowledge can only be acquired by comparing the accounts given in the *Shashtra* (books on the subject) by direct personal observation. Thus we can say that the knowledge of *Shadanga Sharir* is very important to apply any kind of

therapy to it. *Abhyanga* is a rejuvenating procedure and to perform it properly one must have the knowledge of detailed anatomy, so that no harmful effect is offered by applying it in an improper way.

CONCEPT OF ABHYANGA IN AYURVEDA

Abhyanga means applying oil and lightly massaging the body. Often medicated and usually warm, the oil is massaged into the entire body before bathing. It can be beneficial for maintaining health and used as a medicine for certain disorders *Abhyanga*⁴. Application of oil to the skin followed by massage in specific directions is well known by the name *Abhyanga* in *Ayurveda*. Massage in specific direction improves blood circulation, facilitates removal of the toxins from the tissues, relieves physical and mental fatigue, improves the functioning of musculoskeletal system, clears stiffness and heaviness of the body and leads to feeling of lightness. It assists development of healthy body, helps in improvement of body figure, recuperates the body tissues and reduces body weight as well as fat. The Sanskrit word *Sneha* means both “oil” and “love,” and the effects of *Abhyanga* are similar to the effect of saturation with love. Both experiences can give a deep feeling of stability, warmth and comfort. All the *Ayurvedic* classics have described the various benefits of *Abhyanga* along with its contra indications.

There is no such description about the procedure of *Abhyanga* except the commentary of *Dalhana*, who mentioned that *Abhyanga* should be applied in *Anuloma* (downward) direction. Again in later period, Shri Kasture has described the

specific movements of *Abhyanga* in limbs and joints. He told that in the limbs *Abhyanga* should be practiced in the direction of hair growth. This is probably because, if *Abhyanga* is applied in opposite direction of the hair growth, then it may cause breaking of the hairs as well as it will do discomfort to the receivers. In the promotion and maintenance of health in the healthy, as well as cure of illness in diseased, this procedure has gained importance in the clinical practice. This process of manipulating skin and muscles is highly recommended in *Ayurveda* for routine practice even for a healthy person who has the conscious of happy healthy life. *Acharya sushrut* similes the human body as a wooden wheel which becomes much stronger by proper application of oil and thus prevents the wear and tear, in the same manner the *Abhyanga* process prevents the wear and tear or we can say prevents the degenerative changes of the body.⁽⁵⁾

SEQUENCE OF ABHYANGA

The patient is undressed to minimum clothes and asked to sit in the *Dhara* table upright and oil is applied to the whole body from scalp to soles. He/she is then made to lie on his/her back and this position is ideal for applying oil to the chest and abdomen as well as anterior aspect of the limbs. Face is also best manipulated in the same position. Then the patient is asked to rest on his/her left side. Right side of the back, trunk, right shoulder, right arm and outer side of the right hip and lower limb are easily accessible in this position. Right lateral position is just opposite of left lateral position. In prone position the patient is made to rest on his/her abdomen. The back, buttocks, posterior aspect of the

limbs and sole are easily treated with oil in this position.

INDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA

1. *Abhyanga* in daily routine: *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.

2. *Abhyanga* in different seasons: *Abhyanga* is advised to protect the body from the biting cold of *Hemant rutu*.and *sharad rutu*⁽⁶⁾ Similarly extreme cold as well as dry weather is characteristic of *Shishira ritu*. *Abhyanga* is beneficial in this season to counteract the detrimental effect of the cold weather.

3. *Abhyanga* in different diseases: *Sneha* used for *Paana*, *Nasya*, *Anuvasana* and *Abhyanga* at the proper time, quickly brings down the aggravated *Vata*. *Abhyanga* is indicated mainly in *Vata* predominant states of diseases. Oleation along with sudation brings down the disfigured and painful body parts due to aggravated *Vata* .The analogy given by *Vagbhata* about *Abhyanga* is worth explaining here. *Vagbhata* says that proper *Snehana* and *Swedana* given to an inanimate dry stick will help to regain its original condition, then what to say about the living body. Some of the diseases in which *Abhyanga* is indicated in *Ayurveda* are as follows:

1. *Vata Vyadhi* 2. *Shwayathu* 3. *Kushta*, *Vata Rakta* 4. *Switra Sidma* 5. *Rajayakshma* 6. *Jeernajwar* 7. *Dahajwar* *Madatyaya* (*Vatika*) 8. *Mutrakricha* (*Vatika*) 9. *Vridhhi* (*Vatika*) 10. *Gulma*

(*Vatika*) 11. *Vatika kasa* 12. *Kshataj kasa*, *Shwasa* 13. *Sheetajwar* 14. *Rakta pitta*⁽⁷⁾

BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF ABHYANGA

Abhyanga is not a simple procedure of oil application; rather it maintains the excellence of body tissues, if the oil applied is suitable for the *Prakriti* of the patient. Hence it is recommended in normal persons for routine daily practice. Further, when the oil is selected according to the illness in the diseased, it cures the diseases also.

CONTRAINDICATIONS OF ABHYANGA

Abhyanga is an efficient therapeutic as well as health promoting procedure. In spite of these therapeutic benefits *Abhyanga* is not ideal to practice in the following conditions like – *Kaphagrastha* (suffering from *Kaphaja* disorders), *Ajeerna* (suffering from indigestion), *Krita samsudha* (who are just subjected to *shodhana* Procedure), *Aama* (suffering from *Aama* condition), *Saamadosha* (having vitiated *dosha* in *Aama* state), *Navajwara* (Suffering from fever of short duration), *Santarpana Samutha Roga* (diseases caused by over nourishment), *Agnimaandya* (suffering from impaired digestive activity).⁽⁸⁾

ABSORPTION OF SNEHA

The oil applied to the body surface in different procedures of *Abhyanga*, were absorbed and distributed to the whole body and show systemic or generalized effect. The absorption as well as distribution of the oil with the herbal ingredients

impregnated in it takes specific duration and the same is detailed in the following lines (**Table 1**).

Sr. NO	Name of the <i>Dhatu</i> (body part or tissue)	Penetrating time of oil
1	<i>Roma kupa</i>	300 <i>Maatra</i>
2	<i>Twak</i>	400 <i>Maatra</i>
3	<i>Rakta</i>	500 <i>Maatra</i>
4	<i>Mamsa</i>	600 <i>Maatra</i>
5	<i>Meda</i>	700 <i>Maatra</i>
6	<i>Asthi</i>	800 <i>Maatra</i>
7	<i>Majja</i>	900 <i>Maatra</i>

Table 1: Shows the *Abhanga Kaala* (Penetrating time of oil) of different *Dhatu* (body part or tissue) of the body.

ABHYANGA KAAL (PENETRATING TIME OF OIL)

Preparation of the patient: Early morning hours are ideal for *Abhyanga Karma*. The patient should be in empty stomach and the food that is consumed in the previous day should be digested properly.

Different postures of *Abhyanga*: Commonly employed postures for *Abhyanga* are as follows:

1. Sitting upright with knees extended
2. Supine position
3. Left lateral position
4. Prone position

5. Right lateral position

After smearing the oil, each part of the body is massaged one after the other. Therapist moves his palms on the surface of the patient's body in a direction similar to the orientation of hair in these parts. This is the general principle of *Abhyanga* technique.

Absorption through skin:

In man, subcutaneous absorption probably occurs mainly from the surface. Absorption through the hair follicles .Absorption through the sweat gland and sebaceous glands generally appears to be minor. When the medicament is rubbed on vigorously, the amount of the preparation that is forced into the hair follicles and glands is increased. In this way we can say that massaging the skin with some oil may help in the absorption of it through skin layers.

ROLE OF *BHRAJAKA PITTA* IN ACTION OF *ABHYANGA*:

Bhrajaka Pitta is located in the skin. It imparts the characteristics of color and luster, so it is termed as *Bhrajaka*. The variations in the colour of the skin are the functions of the *Bhrajaka Pitta* which is located in the skin.⁽⁹⁾ Arunadutta the Commentator of Ashtanga Hridaya has described the *Bhrajaka Pitta* and its functions like *Deepana* and *Pachana*. The substances applied on the skin by *Abhyanga*, *Lepana* and *Parisheka* are being digested by the *Bhrajaka Pitta*. So from this point of view we can say that *Abhyanga* helps to improve the quality of skin by getting digested by the *Bhrajaka Pitta*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acharya Charaka described 107 points (*Marmas*) in the *Sharir Sthana* 6th chapter. It is said that touching these vital points can have both positive and negative results. Proper massage of these points helps dissolve stresses or remove blocks accumulated there. *Sushruta* described the effects of rubbing with characteristic emphasis upon the *Pitta* value that rubbing and friction tend to dilate the orifice of the (superficial) ducts and increase the temperature of the skin..

Thus *Abhyanga* also contributes to a qualitatively better life by promoting many side-benefits. Massage therapy which is popularly practiced in the western countries has been summarized to the part wise massage techniques of the body using the anatomical explanation. The anatomical landmarks are mentioned along with the structures which are directly related with massage. So it is mandatory for a clinician to know the anatomical structures related to that part, as this prevents from damaging any structures by inappropriate technique. Modern pharmacology describes that body rubbing improves the absorption through skin layers. This increase in circulation also aids the removal of toxins and waste products from the muscle. It relieves muscular tightness, fatigue, stiffness and spasms.

CONCLUSION

Anatomical knowledge of *Shadanga Sharir* is quite beneficial while attempting the process of *Abhyanga*. The various kinds of *Abhyanga* (massage) therapies has been practiced today following the single

rule of increase the circulation of vital fluid in the applied part, as well as to stimulate the nervous system to provide a soothing and relaxing effect to the patient. *Abhyanga* should be done in *Anuloma* (to the direction of hair growth) to prevent any damage to the hair roots. All the benefits of *Abhyanga* are directly or indirectly related with the stimulation of autonomic nervous system and central nervous system.

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Conflict of Interest: Non

Source of funding: Nil

Cite this article:

Anatomical explanation of Abhyanga (An Ayurvedic massage)

Mohini D. Deshpande, Vinod M. Choudhari

Ayurlog: National Journal of Research in Ayurved Science- 2020; (8) (2): 01-07