



Review Article

A REVIEW ON ABHYANGA: A HEALTHY HABIT FOR PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF HEALTH

Amitabha Mapdar ^{1*}, Ramavtar Sharma ², Joydip Tripathi ³, Dipanjan Jana ⁴, Swarup De ⁵, Nisith Kumar Mandal ⁶, Suman Kundu ⁷

¹Assistant Professor in the department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

²Research Officer, Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Science, New Delhi, India

³Assistant Professor in the department of Kaumarbhritya, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

⁴Assistant Professor in the department of Panchakarma, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

⁵Assistant Professor in the department of Maulik Siddhanta, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

⁶Assistant Professor in the department of Kriya Sharir, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

⁷Assistant Professor in the department of Kayachikitsa, Raghunath Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya and Hospital, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

*Corresponding Author Email: dramapdar@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

With advancement of time people became avid to less physical activity and adapted unhealthy food habit. As a result, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are much higher in the society, as the above mentioned two factors along with some other are the main causative factors for the NCDs. Due to practice of healthy lifestyle the number of NCDs were negligible in ancient time. Physical activity in the form of vyayama, abhyanga, udvartana etc. were incorporated in daily life. In abhyanga oil or ghee is used whereas in udvartana dry powder or herbal paste is used, but in both body parts are manipulated manually and hence can be considered as passive exercise. Abhyanga stave age related changes in the body by maintenance of skin and muscle health. Oil or ghee used for abhyanga is beneficial for skin as well as helps to penetrate specific medicine and fat-soluble vitamins. It facilitates sweat excretion and hence wash out morbid toxic products from the body. It helps in maintenance of body temperature also. Padabhyanga bestow more blood in active circulation which contributes positive effects on general health. Abhyanga as well as udvartana pacify kapha dosha and minify meda which further helps to prevent such diseases in which kapha and meda acts as an aetiological factor. Further udvartana strengthen the body parts. As a whole physical activity in the form of udvartana as well as abhyanga helps to prevents some diseases as well as responsible for maintains of positive health.

Keywords: abhyanga, udvartana, Ayurveda, physical activity

INTRODUCTION

Aahar as well as physical activity plays huge role for prevention of diseases as well as for preservation and promotion of health. In Ayurveda classics physical exercise has been described under the heading of vyayama, abhyanga etc. Beneficial effect of all these are similar to some extent although specific beneficial effects, indication and contraindication are mentioned separately. All these are related to nourishment and body strength improvement, enhancement of endurance power and work ability. It also helps in purification of the body, removal of excessive medadhatu and caused delayed ageing¹. As a part of healthy lifestyle abhyanga should be practiced daily. Although Ayurveda advocated for whole body abhyanga, but special attention should be given for shira (head), karna (ear) and padaabhyanga (leg). Considering the dosha dominancy, place, diseases etc. oil or ghee may be used but in general mustard oil or mustard oil prepared with fragrant substances, infused with fragrant flowers or medicated herbs are used². The term udvartana is used for rubbing or kneading the

body or rubbing and cleansing it with fragrant unguents³ and it is very similar with abhyanga, hence benefit like diminishing of kapha and meda etc. also obtained through this procedure. Here an attempt has been made to prevail the effect of daily practice of abhyanga. Exploration regarding the role of abhyanga in disease prevention, health preservation and health promotion is the main aim of this article.

TIME AND DURATION

Prior to ablution oil should be massaged all over the body. After absorption by the skin it spreads throughout the body and provides nutrition and strength to the body⁴. Specific time periods are mentioned for nourishment of twak and other specific dhatus. It provides nourishment to twak after contact period of 400 matrakala and thereafter it provides nourishment to next dhatu with additional contact period of 100 matrakala and lastly nourished to the majja dhatu after contact period of 900 matrakala⁵.

BENEFIT

Daily massage stashes the old age-related changes, pacify exertion and vata dosha, beneficial for eye health, provides nourishment to the body, helps in long life, good sleep and healthy skin⁶. Massage softens the body, pacifies kapha-vatadosha, provides cleanliness, complexion and strength⁷ also. Body massage with the help of dry powder which is termed as *udvartana*, provides stability of various body parts, it calms vata dosha, liquifies kapha and meda and provides brilliance to skin. *Udgharshana* and *utsadana*, almost similar procedure but dry substances and paste are used respectively, causes widening of the opening of *sira* (blood vessel) and stimulates the *agni* of *twach*. *Utsadana* promotes cheerfulness, fortune, cleanliness and lightness of body; moreover, it is especially beneficial for women as it increases lustre. It alleviates itching, patches and *vatadosha*⁸.

Besides whole-body massage three specific body parts namely *shira*, *karna* and *pada* should be massaged regularly. Regular oil application on head prevents *shirashula* (headache). *Kesha* (hair) becomes black, strong and long and deep rooted hence prevents *khalitya* (baldness) and *palitya* (premature greying of hair). It provides strength to the *shira* and *shirakapala* (forehead), brightness of the skin of face, better sleep, and happiness. It also helps the sense organ to work properly⁹.

Karna is another body part which is subjected for daily massage. It prevents *karnaroga* caused by *vatadosha*, stiffness of *manya* (*torticollis*) and *hanu* (lock jaw) and *badhirya*¹⁰(deafness).

Regular *pada abhyanga* prevents *gridhrasi*, *padasphutana* (cracking of feet), and constriction of *shira* and *snayu* of *pada*, provides *bala* (strength) and *sthairya* (steadiness) to the *pada*. It strengthens the eye sight. *Kharatwa* (roughness), *stabdhat*a (immobility), *roukshata* (dryness), *shrama* (fatigue) and *supti*¹¹ (numbness) relived immediately by *padabhyanga*.

CONTRAINDICATION

Abhyanga should be avoided by the persons suffering from aggravation of *kapha*, who have just undergone *sodhana* therapies, suffering from *ajeerna*¹² and also patients of *navajvar*¹³.

DISCUSSION

The skin acts as a blood reservoir as the dermis has widespread network of blood vessels that carry about 8 to 10 percent of the total blood flow in resting adult. The blood vessels of skin become dilated and the skin pores open up during body massage which consequently wash out several metabolic wastes from the body through increment of sweat excretion. The dryness of skin either prevents or subsides by the application of oily substance. Further skin allows penetration of some lipid soluble substances including fat soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K and also certain drugs¹⁴. The materials used for *abhyanga* as mentioned in *Ayurveda* classics are mainly based on oil hence the active ingredients easily penetrates and asserts beneficial effects to the body.

Age related changes¹⁵ mostly occurs in the proteins of the dermis, collagen fibres in the dermis begin to decrease in number, becomes stiff, break apart and disorganize into shapeless mangle. Elastic fibres lose their elasticity to some extent. Wrinkles appears in the skin as fibroblast, which produces collagen and elastic fibre decreases. Further with the increasing age, *Langerhans* cell diminishes and macrophages become less efficient and hence skin immunity power decreases. Moreover, sebaceous glands decrease in size and as a results skin becomes dry, fragile and susceptible to infection. Less sweat production causes difficulties in heat regulation. As age increases, skin

becomes thinner than young. There are several anti-ageing treatment procedures are available which diminishes the effects of ageing. Application of some topical products helps to tone down the skin and decreases fine wrinkles. For *microdermabrasion*, tiny crystals are used under pressure to remove and vacuum the skin surface cell to improve skin texture and reduce blemishes. Further mild acid like glycolic are used to remove surface cell and to improve skin texture. In addition of these *Laser resurfacing* to decreases fine wrinkles, *Dermal fillers* to smooth out wrinkles and fill in furrows, *Botulinum toxin* to paralyze skeletal muscle that causes the skin to wrinkle also used¹⁶. All these process are adopted to diminish the already changed skin. But regular massage tones up the muscle, improves circulation, excrete the waste products through skin and removes dead skin tissue regularly. More oxygen and blood supply help to maintain skin health. As the size of the sebaceous glands decreases, so skin becomes dry and fragile, but external application of oil used for massage helps to prevents dryness and maintain skin integrity. In addition of this *udvartana* with the help of various medicated paste or powder also helps to maintain and improve skin health. So regular massage obviously delay the age-related changes in the skin and maintain skin health.

Due to decreased of physical activity, muscle bulk, strength, reflex and flexibility also decreases between 30 to 50 years of age. Age-related decline in muscle performance can slow or even reverse through aerobic activity and stretch training¹⁷. Increment of bone strength and slow down their loss in later life are possible by stretch training¹⁸. Skeletal muscles are also stretched manually in massage, so this benefit also can be obtained through massage although the intensity of benefit may vary.

Vayu dominates in the tactile sensory organ, and this sensory organ is lodged in the skin. The massage is exceedingly beneficial to the skin; so daily practice of *abhyanga* is essential, but special attention should be given towards *shira*, *karna* and *padaabhyanga*. Massage of leg muscle removes fatigue and numbness of leg¹⁹. In an average adult, in erect posture the weight of blood column present from heart to feet increases 25 mm Hg to 105 mm Hg. This increases pressure effects the circulation in several ways. Leg veins distended markedly as increased hydrostatic pressure in the legs pushes the vein wall outward. As a results fluid accumulates more in the interstitial space, in turns foot swells. This combined effect of venous pooling and increased capillary filtration reduces the effective circulation. These effects can be compensated by contraction of skeletal muscle of leg even without movement by intermittent and complete emptying of leg veins so that more blood comes in active circulation²⁰.

Further, vasoconstrictor activity due to temperature change of the skin is controlled by the hypothalamus. The excited temperature receptors of the skin also cause excitement of lateral spinothalamic tract. As the heat load rises gradually by massage, first the A-V anastomoses of the hands, ears and feet dilated due to reduction of their regional sympathetic discharge and later rest of the skin vessels dilates. Later when the rise of temperature is not under control even after maximum dilatation of A-V anastomosis and other skin vessels, then sweat gland become activated²¹. In *Ayurveda* classics, advice has been given for massage of head, ear and foot specially. The probable cause is along with other beneficial effects, it helps better temperature control as temperature rises during whole body massage and uncontrolled temperature has several bad consequences.

Besides beneficial effects some contraindication for practice of *abhyanga* are there also. *Abhyanga* during *navajvar* and *ajeerna* makes the disease difficult to accomplish whereas *abhyanga* after *sodhanais* responsible for *agnimandya*²².

CONCLUSION

Body parts are manipulated during massage and udvartana hence benefit of passive exercise can be obtained through this procedure although intensity of the benefit may vary. Daily practice of abhyanga conceal the age related change specially maintaining the skin and muscle health. It removes waste material from the body by facilitating sweat excretion as well as by improve circulation. Improve circulation further associated with improve nutrition of the body, excretion of morbid matter from the tissue, hence it removes srama (tiredness), improves body strength and endurance power. Further blighted kapha and meda helps to prevents several disease specifically non-communicable diseases and over all it can be concluded that abhyanga effectively helps in disease prevention, health preservation as well as health promotion.

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