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Abhyanga : Different contemporary massage technique and its importance in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a 'science of life' which provides not only curative but also preventive principles for healthy and long life. Ayurveda is a life style, a science and an art of appropriate living that ensures health and longevity of human being. *Abhyanga* (oil massage) which is one among the *Dinacharya*, is also a part of pre therapeutic procedures of *Panchakarma*. *Abhyanga* is to be considered in *Snehana* therapy. As it nourishes the senses of mind and gives the strength. but if done in any region like localised in head, neck, legs etc then it is termed as *Shiroabhyanga*, *Padabhyanga* etc. Full body massage gives strength to whole body but localised massage gives strength to that particular part of the body. Localised massage can be practised by oneself. Thus it is easy to practise. But for *Abhyanga* one need to be dependent on massage trainer. The instructions to be followed under localised massage also. It gives its benefits; when it is done in right manner only.

Key words: *Abhyanga*, *massage*, *Snehana*, *oleation*.

INTRODUCTION

Abhyanga (oil massage) which is one among the *Dinacharya*, is also a part of pre therapeutic procedures of *Panchakarma*. *Abhyanga* comes under the classification of the *Bahya Snehana*.^[1] Oleation or *Snehana* is told as *Purva Karma* of *Panchakarma*. *Snehana* is further divided into *Bahya* and *Abhyantara* types, obviously *Abhyanga* comes under the former type *Bahya*. In the classics of Ayurveda there are different types of Massages mentioned according to the need and method. *Abhyanga* word is derived from the Sanskrit root *Anga* meaning movement and the

prefix *Abhi* meaning different against or contrary. Those who need positive health and preventing and curing his diseases should use *Abhyanga* every day. *Abhyanga* retards ageing, overcomes fatigue and annihilates effects of aggravated vata. It improves clarity of vision, nourishes the body. It promotes longevity, good sleep, good skin and a sturdy physique. Regular massage should be performed over whole body including head ear and soles.

Definition

Massage of the body with the help of *Taila*, *Ghrita* etc. in the same direction of the body (*Anulomana Gati*) is called as *Abhyanga*.

Paryaya

The two synonyms of *Abhyanga* are *Abhyanjana* and *Snehana*.

Abhyanjana

The word *Abhyanjana* derived from the root *Anj* by adding of *Abhi* *Upsarga* with *Lyt* *Pratyaya* which means to smear or to Anoint (Shabda Kalpa Druma). The word *Abhyanjana* means applying oil all over body including *Shirah* (Head).

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Snehana

The word *Snehana* derived from root *Snih* which means to be adhesive or to be attached to. (Vachaspathyam)

Bheda

Vatsyayana Kamasutra explained the three types of massage are as follow;

- *Samvahana*
- *Kesha-mardana*
- *Utsadana*^[2]

According to *Tiruka* (Author of textbook of *Anga-mardana*), there are 5 types of massage as;

- *Shushkanga Mardana*
- *Tailanga Mardana*
- *Ksheeranga Mardana*
- *Svayamanga Mardana*
- *Yamalanga Mardana*^[3]

Concept of Modern Massage

Etymology

In Arabic word 'massa' means "to touch, feel or handle". In Latin 'massa' means "mass, dough". An older etymology may even have been the Hebrew 'me-sakj' "to anoint with oil". Initially there was a dispute regarding the origin of this word. Few authors claimed it derived from the Arab word - Mass (to touch) others said it was from the Greek word - Massein (to knead) - The Hebrew word - Mashesh (to touch, to feel, to grasp). The Arabic and Greek origin proposed by Savery in 1785 and Piory in 1819 respectively and has been considered more authentic due to widespread use of massage in East and ancient Rome.

Definitions

No uniform definition seems to exist for massage.

Acc to Graham - massage signifies a group of procedures which are usually done with hand on the external tissue of the body in a variety of ways either with a curative, palliative or hygienic point of view.

These are some of the definitions given by some leading persons in the field of massage. And it can be simply defined as "Massage is the practice of soft tissue manipulation with physical, functional and in some cases psychological purposes and goals".

Classification of Massage^[4]

According to the nature of character of technique classical/manual massage technique are classified into following 4 basic groups. Each group has more than one subgroup,

1. By character of techniques

- Stroking
- Pressure
- Percussion
- Vibration

2. By which; depth of tissue approached

- Light massage
- Deep massage

3. By which; part of body used

- General massage
- Local massage

4. By the means of application of pressure

- Manual massage
- Mechanical massage

5. Types of massage according to movements

- Touch
- Stroke
- Friction
- Kneading
- Vibration
- Percussion
- Joint movements

A. Massage classification on the basis of character of technique

1. Stroking manipulation
 - a. Superficial stroking
 - b. Deep stroking or Effleurage
2. Pressure manipulation
 - a. Kneading
 - Palmar kneading
 - Digital kneading
 - Ironing
 - b. Petrissage
 - Picking up
 - Wringing
 - Skin rolling
 - c. Friction
 - Circular friction
 - Transverse friction
3. Percussion/ Tapotement manipulation
 - Clapping
 - Hacking
 - Pounding
 - Beating
 - Tending
 - Contact heel percussion
 - Tapping
4. Vibratory manipulation
 - Vibration
 - Shaking

1. Stroke Manipulation

The technique of this group consists a linear movement of relaxed hand along with the whole length of a segment is known as stroke. Which usually cover one aspect of the entire segment of the body at a time. An even pressure is applied throughout the

strokes. Stimulates deep tissue performed with the palm of hand, Stimulates sensory nerve, performed with the fingertip. According to the amount and direction of applied pressure, it is divided into two.

a. Superficial stroking

Which is rhythmical linear movement of hand over the skin without any pressure? Contours the body and relates to direction muscle.

b. Deep stroking

It is linear movement of hand, over the external surface of the body, with moderate pressure. Follows course of vein and lymph vessels.

2. Pressure Manipulation

In the group of technique, the hand of the therapist and skin of the patient move together as one and fairly deep localized pressure is applied to the body. A Deep localised pressure is applied on the body where, the hand of the therapist and the skin of the patient move together. Based on the type and the direction of pressure applied, it is of 3 major types-

a. Kneading

In this group of technique, The tissue are pressed down to the underlying firm structure and intermittent pressure is applied in circular direction, parallel to the long axis of a bone. The applied pressure increases and decreases in a gradual manner but the contact of the therapist's hand with the patient body is never interrupted. Different technique of this group is:

- **Digital kneading:** Digital pressure is applied with fingers or thumb
- **Palmar kneading:** Palmar pressure is applied with the palm
- **Ironing kneading:** Both the hands, placed over one other, are used to apply pressure. The lower hand, which is in contact with the patient's skin receives reinforcement from the other hand.

b. Petrissage

In this category of massage the tissues are grasped and lifted away from the underlying structures and

intermittent pressure is applied to the tissue in the direction that is perpendicular to the long axis of bone. Different techniques of this group are;

- **Picking up:** Tissues are lifted away from underlying structures, squeezed and then released using one or both the hands
- **Wringing:** Using both the hands, tissues are lifted away from the underlying structures, squeezed, twisted and then released.
- **Skin rolling:** The skin and fascia are lifted up with both the hands and moved over the subcutaneous tissues by keeping a roll of lifted tissue continuously ahead of the moving thumb.

c. Friction

In this group of technique the tissues are subjected to small range of to and fro movement performed with constant deep pressure of the finger or thumb. Different techniques of this group are;

- **Circular friction:** Direction of movement is circular.
- **Transverse friction:** To and fro movement is performed across the length of structure. It is also called cross- fiber massage.

3. Vibratory Manipulation

Vibrations are a massage technique in which tissues of the body are pressed and released in an "up and down" movement. The vibration technique is mainly directed towards the lungs and hollow structure. This often takes the form of a fine trembling movement applied using the palmar surfaces or just some of the finger tips of either or both hands. It is of two subtypes;

- a. Vibration
- b. Shaking

4. Percussion/Tapotement Manipulation

In this group of technique a succession of soft gentle blows are applied over the body, which produce a characteristic sound. The striking hands are not in constant contact with the skin and strike the body part at regular interval. This results in the application

of an intermittent touch and pressure to the body during these manipulations.

The different parts of hand are used to strike the subject's skin and accordingly the techniques are named;

- a. Clapping - Cupped palm
- b. Hacking - Ulnar border of the 5th, 4th and 3th digits.
- c. Beating - Anterior aspect of the clenched fist
- d. Tapping - Pulp of the fingers
- e. Pounding - Medial aspect of the clenched fist

B. On the basis of depth of tissue approached

Depending upon the depth of tissue approached during manipulations, massage techniques can be classified as:

- **Light massage techniques:** The force applied during the massage are light, so that the effect of massage techniques to the superficial tissue only. e.g. stoking, tapping etc.
- **Deep massage techniques:** The force applied during the massage are moderate to deep so that the effect of massage reaches to the deeper tissues like muscle. e.g. friction, kneading.

C. On the basis of region massage

Massage can also be classified as below, according to the region to which it is given.

- **General massage:** Massage applied to the entire body is usually termed as general massage. However, massage administered to a large body segment like the back, lower limb, etc. can also be included in this category.
- **Local massage:** When massage is administered in a particular area of the body segment it is termed as local massage. This is used in the treatment of the local pathological conditions. For example, massage of wrist in tenosynovitis, friction to lateral ligament of ankle following sprain, etc. can be considered as local massage.

D. On the basis of means of administration of technique

On this basis the massage can be classified in to the following two categories.

- **Manual massage:** The word “manual” refers to the ‘lying on’ of hand over the subject’s body. The massage administered with the hand or other body part of the therapist is called manual massage. e.g. technique of classical massage, connective tissue massage, trigger point massage, acupressure massage, etc.
- **Mechanical Massage:** When the mechanical device based on the principals of massage, administer the mechanical energy to the patient’s body, in order to manipulate soft tissue it may be termed as mechanical massage. E.g. vibrator, compression devices, pneumatic massage, etc.

Mode of action of *Abhyanga*

Dalhana has explained in detail about the absorption of *Sneha* if *Abhyanga* is done for sufficient time, the oil reaches to the different *Dhatu* hence, it is clear that the potency of drug used in oil is absorbed into the skin. *Dalhana* also mentions that when *Snehana* drug reaches to the particular *Dhatu* it subsides the diseases of that particular *Dhatu*.^[5]

Charaka has mentioned that *Vayu* dominates in the *Sparshanendriya* and its *Adhishtana* is *Tvacha* i.e. skin. The *Abhyanga* is beneficial to the skin, so one should follow it regularly.^[6] *Indriyas* are in close contact of mind, so when *Indriyas* remain healthy then mind automatically remains healthy. In this way; *Abhyanga* (massage) keeps body and mind healthy.

The mode of action of *Abhyanga* can be understood by the properties of *Snehana* drugs that are used for *Abhyanga* in the following way;

Snigdha Guna:

It acts by its *Vatahara*, *Kaphakara* and *Vrishya Gunas*. This *Guna* is responsible for the action like *Snehana*, *Kledana* and *Vishyandana* at cellular level of the body.

Guru Guna:

Are having the property like *Vatahara*, *Kaphakara* and *Pushtikara*. Because of these properties it alleviates the morbid *Vata*, increases the decreased *Kapha* and nourishes the body.

Sheeta Guna:

It helps to keep the mind healthy by increasing pleasure and enthusiasm. *Sheeta Guna* prevents fainting and decreases the perspiration. It helps in stabilizing the muscles and organs.

Mridu Guna:

Mridu Guna means softness. This is the opposite feature of *Kathina Guna*. By the help of this property *Abhyanga* reduces the stiffness.

Drava Guna:

Drava Guna means liquid, humidity. By this *Drava Guna*; the drug propagates swiftly all over the body. It liquefies the *Doshas* and mobilizes the *Doshas* by increasing their flowing capacity.

Picchila Guna:

Picchila Guna means slimy. It gives longevity, increases body strength. It aggravates *Kapha* and produces heaviness.

Sara Guna:

The meaning of *Sara* is mobility. *Sara Guna* mobilizes the *Doshas* and *Malas* i.e. waste products by this property.

Manda Guna:

It means sluggishness. The drug diffuses slowly by this property and it remains in the contact of *Doshas*, *Dhatus* and *Malas* for longer time.

Sukshma Guna:

Sukshma Guna means subtle, minute and it helps the drug to enter in the fine channels.

In this way *Abhyanga* acts through the above properties of *Sneha*. Because all the properties are opposite to the *Vata*, *Abhyanga* is considered useful treatment in the diseases occurred by aggravated

Vata. The different views pertaining to *Abhyanga* have been explained while dealing with the review of literature of texts.

Mode of action of *Abhyanga* in modern view

The internal fluids of the skin are subjected to movement in the massage because of osmotic pressure. Here massage is causing mechanical hydrostatic pressure in the extra cellular compartment. A forceful expulsion from peripheral vessels causes splanchnic pooling of the body. Massage helps fluid enter into viscera, tissues and dilute the accumulated toxins.

After the completion of procedure; when it refills the peripheral vessels, the diluted toxins are brought into general circulation and during the course; they are expelled out via elimination procedures. *Abhyanga* acts on skin (*Twacha*), which is the seat for both *Vata* and *Lasika*. In this way; the lymphatic drainage will be the prime effect of *Abhyanga*. Lymph exhibits large amount of amino acid tryptophan. Hypothetically, after massage; amino acids like tryptophan increase in blood. It causes a parallel increase in the neuron transmitter serotonin; which is made from tryptophan at motor ends plates. The piezoelectricity is derived from pressure. While utilizing a medium of unctuous substance to reduce the friction, a good amount of rhythm is used and creates magnetic field and electricity in the body. By this charging the conductivity of nerves will be increased which may go up to 100 metres per second. Electricity is discharged in nerve fibre at regular intervals and moves in circular pattern. Interruption to the momentum is resulting into the state of disease, which may be pacified by doing massage with specific pressure. Acetylcholine acts as transmitter at motor end in the presence of calcium ion and facilitates synaptic action potential.

The nerve fibre has a militated sheet in which lipids are the chief ingredients and K-ions are responsible for repolarisation in the nerve fibre. This action with the association of melatonin; a by-product of serotonin and a neuro chemical is causing pleasant and calming effects by the massage.

With the concentrated form of the drug; the absorption rate increases. Percutaneous absorption is observed in the inflammatory condition due to the presence of substances like serotonin.^[7]

Health benefits of massage

The following are the key effects of massage; Reduces muscle tension, massage affects the muscles in the body. It affects the muscles and other soft tissues in the body. Massage loosens contracted shortened, hardened muscles. It may stimulate flaccid muscles. Chronic muscle tension is causing in reduction of the circulation of the blood and movement of lymph in an area.

Improves Blood Circulation

The oxygen capacity of the blood can increase 10-15% by the procedure of massage. With the help of indirectly or directly stimulating nerves that supply internal organs, blood vessels of these organs dilate and allow more blood supply to them.

Induces Better Lymph Movement

Lymph is a milky white fluid that helps in draining of impurities and waste away from the tissue cells. A component of these wastes is called as toxins which are the by-products of metabolism. That's why; it is a vital to our health. Muscular contraction is having a pumping effect that moves lymph. Massage helps to move lymph.

Results in Increased Mobility and Range of Motion of Joints

Massage provides a gentle stretching action to both the muscles and connective tissues which support the muscles and many other parts of the body and which help to keep these tissues elastic.

Stimulates or Soothes Nervous System

Massage balances the nervous system by stimulating it, depending on which effect is needed by the individual at the time of the massage procedure.

Enhances Skin Condition

Massage enhances the skin condition by improving the function of the sebaceous and sweat glands, which keep the skin lubricated, clean.

Results in Better Digestion and Intestinal Function

Massage procedure increases the body's secretions and excretions. It also increases the production of gastric juices, saliva and urine. There is an increased excretion of nitrogen, inorganic phosphorus and salt also. Thus results in increasing of metabolic rate.

Relieves of Acute and Chronic pain

Massage may promote recovery from the fatigue and from aches and pains.^[8]

CONCLUSION

Abhyanga is one of the procedures to be practiced routinely in the system of once living. Different type of massage explained in Ayurveda and modern helps man to prevent the common health hazards. These will helps to lead healthy life. Massage has been used for centuries for both therapeutic and preventing purposes. Massage may also stimulate the release of endorphins and reducing level of certain stress hormones. Massage heals damaged muscle, stimulate circulation, clear waste product via lymphatic system, boost immune system, reduce pain and tension and induce a calming effect. *Abhyanga, Udwaratana, Samvahana*, nourishes *Dhatus*, pacifies the *Doshas*, relives fatigue, provide stamina pleasure and perfect sleep, nourishes all parts of the body. So everyone should do different massage technique explained in modern and Ayurveda.

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