

Shiroabhyanga: A Review

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Abstract:

Ayurved has holistic approaches in a particular way to prevent & promote a healthy life by following certain methods & therapies in a day- today activities (Dincharya) which could be considered as a part of a health. To fulfil the aim of Ayurveda in today's scenario, promotion among the fast moving people & stressful life of this 21st century. So to take care of health, Abhyanga i.e., Oil massage, which is one among the Dincharya. It is an ancient Indian approach adopted for healing relaxation & treating various diseases.

Shiroabhyanga is mentioned in many samhitas as a part of Dincharya (daily regime of personal hygiene) & part of treatment for Shiroroga.

तत्रभ्यंगःप्रयोक्तव्योरौक्ष्यकन्दुमलादिषु। च. सू.

Shiroabhyanga means applying oil to head, all over the scalp & doing mild massage, Shiroabhyanga everyday reduces dryness, itching & dirt. It is a part of Snehana therapy. As it nourishes the senses of mind and gives strength. Shiroabhyanga is the most ideal form of 'Indian head massage' smearing the herbal medicated oil by specific manoeuvres & strokes on the head, neck, shoulders. Depending on the desired results, the oils are selected which includes releasing the stress from the upper body, improvement of circulation of the blood to the brain, vision enhancement, migraine reduction, headaches, insomnia, chronic depression, anxiety occipital neuralgia & scalp related diseases. It improves memory & concentration.

Introduction:

The 'Shiroabhyanga' comes under the classification of the "Murdha Taila". Oleation or Snehana is told as Purva Karma of Panchakarma. Snehana is divided into 'Bahya' and 'Abhyantara' types. Shiroabhyanga is the former i.e., 'Bahya' Snehana. According to Charaksamhita, 'Shiroabhyanga' helps to promote Nidra i.e., good sleep. Daily practice of Shiroabhyanga prevents headache, balding, greying, hair fall & it also gives strength to skull, strengthens hair root & makes the hair black & long. It helps in maintaining the health. It also nourishes the sense organs, softens the skin & provides lustre to face. In Charaksamhita, Abhyanga is mentioned as one of the 'bhava'.

Etymology of Shiroabhyanga:

According to Amarkosha, 'Abhi' upsarga and 'Anga' dhatu together makes the word "Abhyanga". It means to induce specific & special movements.

Defination:

Massage of the body with the help of Taila, Ghrita etc. In the same direction of the body hair i.e. Anuloma gati is called as Abhyanga.

Paribhasha:

The oil (taila) is applied to the shira pradesha i.e., head region. The head massage (Shiroabhyanga) nourishes all the Indriyas, Strotas & body parts. Such a procedure is mentioned as Abhyanga.

Paryaya or Synonymes:

'Abhyanjana' & 'Snehana' are the synonymes of Abhyanga.

Abhyanjana - The word Abhyanjana is derived by addition of the root word 'Anj' and the upasarga 'Abhi' with lyut pratyaya having meaning to smear or to 'anoint' (Shabdakalpadruma).

The word Abhyanjana means applying oil all over body including shira i.e., head.

Snehana- The word is derived from root 'Snih' which means to be adhesive or to be attached to (Vachaspatyam).

Sthana of Abhyanga:

शिरःश्रवणपादेषु विशेषणशीलयेत् | अ. ह. सू.2/8.

Special places like shir (head), shraavan (karna) or ear and pada i.e., legs are explained for Abhyanga.

Bheda:

- Samvahana,
- Kesh - mardana
- Utsadana, are the 3 types explained by Vatsyayana Kamsutra.

According to Tiruka, 5 types are as following,

- Shushkanga Mardana,
- Tailanga Mardana,
- Kshiranga Mardana,
- Svayamanga Mardana,
- Yamalanga Mardana.

Basis of classification of Massage....

- By character of techniques ▪ stroking
 - Pressure
 - Percussion
 - Vibration
- By which, depth of tissue approved ▪ Light massage
 - Dry massage
- By which, parts of body used ▪ General Massage
 - Local Massage
- By means of application of pressure
 - Manual Massage
 - Mechanical Massage
- By which, the basis of nature of drugs used
 - Dry Massage
 - Powder Massage
 - Oil Massage

On the basis of Swedish massage,**According to movements-**

- Touch- A sensation which is carried through brain.
- Stroke- It is a touch, which is movement with one/both palms.
- Friction- It is grasping the part & move with little amount of pressure.
- Kneading- It is alternative compression of the tissues by grasping them against the underlined body surfaces, Muscle mixing.

- Vibration- It is fine vibratory/ shaking movements communicated to the body through the hands.
- Percussion- It is administered in various ways with varying degrees of force.
- Joint movements- In this, both assisted & resisted movements are given.

Indication of Abhyanga:

- Shiroabhyanga is indicated on dry scalp associated with itching sensation.
- Taila Abhyanga (Oil Massage) indicated in Bal (children), Vrudha, Krusha & Rogi.
- Indicated in all types of Vat Roga, Visham Jwara & all Twak Vikara.
- Indicated in disease of hair like Darunaka, Khalitya, Palitya.
- Indicated in daily routine for maintainance of the health of the body.

Contraindication of Abhyanga:

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- It is contraindicated in Ajeerna, Nav/Taruna Jwara because if performed in this condition, becomes Krucchra Sadhya or Asadhya.
- It is contra indicated after Samshodhana i.e., immediate after Vamana, Virechana & Niruhabasti, as it causes Agnimandya.
- It is contra indicated in person suffering from Netra, Karna Roga, Atisara, Adhmana, Peenasa, Agnimandya & other Saama-dosha condition.
- It is contra indicated in person suffering from Pittaroga, Trishna, Raktapitta, Prameha & Atikshudhita.
- It is contra indicated in Kaphaja Roga & Santerpita Roga if done, gets aggravated.
- It is contra indicated immediately after consumption of food, accustomed to ruksha & Abhishyandi Ahara.
- It is contra indicated immediately after Snehapana & Tarpana kriya.
- It is contra indicated after Snana, Vyayama, Divaswapna, Vegdharana, Prajagarrana, Sheet vayusevana.

Prerequisites for Abhyanga procedure:

When the person is Kshudhita (hungry) & trushna (thirsty) and when the previous food taken is

digested, then only the procedure of Abhyanga should be performed.

Time of Abhyanga:

Abhyanga should be practiced once a day or once in 2 days or once in 3 days regularly as it does not vitiate any dosha. Daily Abhyanga is advised in children during night time.

Direction of Abhyanga:

According to Chikitsa Manjiri & Chikitsa Sangraha, it is mentioned that generally Abhyanga should be performed in Anuloma gati i.e., same direction. The specific direction of movement depending on different 'dosha' involvement is also explained like

- Anulomagati in Vatadushti,
- Pratilomagati in Kaphadushti &
- alternate Anuloma & Pratiloma gati in Pittadushti.

Abhyangadravya:

Lukewarm medicated oil (taila or ghee) or 'Vasa' prepared with 'Doshghna' drugs should be used for Abhyanga. Usually, the lukewarm oil or taila is used for Abhyanga in general condition. In shiroabhyanga, cold oil is used.

In winter season, warm oil and in summer, cold oil is indicated.

Methods of Abhyanga:

Abhyanga should be performed gently & in direction of hair i.e. Anuloma gati. As the Shira (head region) is the centre of all the senses & the most vital part, Shiroabhyanga mean the head massage should be performed with cold or lukewarm oil. As the forceful massage may damage the hair, so it should be done gently with fingertips. For proper massage of each & every part of the body, seven positions are adopted but sitting position is preferred most for Shiroabhyanga.

Methods of Shiroabhyanga:

Comfortable knee high chair, 100ml oil capacity bowl, lukewarm oil is the requirements for Shiroabhyanga.

Purvakarma:

The patient is asked to sit on the knee high chair. The body of the patient is wrapped with the cloth below the neck. Afterwards, stand behind the patient to start the procedure.

Pradhankarma:

The preheat the oil in water bath (lukewarm) approximately up to 40°C & smeared it to the portion of the scalp above the neck, placing the specific strokes. After applying the oil on the head, it is spread all over the scalp including the neck, ear pinna. To spread the oil all over the scalp, the hair should be short trimmed and then move the palms from before backwards. The fingers have to be poked between the long hairs of the patient to smear the oil on the scalp.

Gharshanahasta (Massage from before backwards):

After smearing the oil, massage the whole head & then neck by moving the palmer surface of the hand from before backwards applying the oil gentle as well as with firm pressure. The vertex, temporal & occipital area of the scalp should be massaged for desired time.

Mridvanguli Tadana (Picking strokes):

This method gives pleasant sensation & do not cause any sort of discomfort or pain to the patient. The fingers of both hands are to be moved as if picking up tuft of hair. The fingers are partially approximated & then gently, firmly placed on the scalp. This procedure is followed by withdrawing of fingers, simultaneously effective rubbing of the scalp. This method should be done gently & every area of the head producing mild traction effect on the hair.

Dvihasta Tadana (Flat palm strokes):

Gentle strokes are placed with the palmar surface on all parts like vertex, occipital, temporal regions by both hands simultaneously.

Tarangahasta (Rocking strokes):

Gentle strokes are given on the patients head by rapid movements of both the palms simultaneously. The contact should be kept between patients head and the base of the little finger & the thumb while giving strokes.

Angulikridanahasta (Finger strokes):

Gentle strokes are given on the patients head by making rocking movements of both the palms with fingers stretched. The contact should be kept between the patients scalp and the palmer aspect of the little finger & the thumb.

Mrudumushtheadana (Fist strokes):

Gentle strokes are given on all areas of the head with the closed fist through the ulnar border. First, the strokes are placed with both the hands simultaneously & followed by placing the strokes alternatively with right & left fist.

Ghatithasta (Pressing):

The flat surface of the palm is placed on the patients head & is moulded into the shape of the scalp so that the portion of the palmer aspect of the palm and fingers should be kept in contact with the head. This method exerts gentle and firm pressure on the head.

Squeeze strokes:

Grasping tuft of hair with hands followed by gentle squeeze & producing comfortable traction on the hair. The strokes are given on all regions of the head.

Karna Abhyanga(Ear massage):

The ear pinna is grasped between the thumb anteriorly & other fingers posteriorly. The pinna is rubbed between the fingers. Further, followed by supporting the pinna with the fingers posteriorly & the thumb is firmly moved above downwards in the anterior of the ear pinna.

Duration:

Each form of the strokes & each step are continued for about 4 to 5 minutes and the whole process takes about 30 to 40 minutes.

Paschat karma:

After completing the process, the patient is asked to rest on the chair for 15 minutes and take a hot water bath afterwards using herbal products instead of soap.

Effects of Abhyanga on various 'Dhatu':

The effect of Abhyanga (massage) is described according to its duration in the Sushruta commentry.

- When the Abhyanga is done for 300 matras, the oil reaches to hair root.
(1 matra= 19/60 seconds,so 300 matras means 95 seconds).
- When done for 400 matras (133 seconds), the oil reaches the skin.
- When done for 500 matras (160 seconds), reaches in RaktaDhatu.
- The oil reaches in Mansa Dhatu when done for 600 matras (190 seconds), in MedaDhatu when

done for 700 matras (228 seconds), in AsthiDhatu when done for 800 matras (240 seconds) and it reaches to the MajjaDhatu when Abhyanga is performed upto 900 matras (280 seconds).

●●●Shiroabhyangamatra as per Dhatu●●●

Tissue.	Matra.	Seconds
Hair follicles.	300.	95
Skin.	400.	127
Blood.	500.	159
Muscular tissue.	600.	190
Fat.	700.	220
Bones.	800.	254
Nervous system/ Bone marrow-	900.	285

Benefits of Shiroabhyanga:

- 1.It is useful in diseases of the central nervous system & head.
- 2.It helps in preventing headach& induces sleep.
- 3.It gives strength to all the sense & motor organs.
- 4.It improves vision.
- 5.All the senses of the person become healthy when performed daily.
- 6.It prevents dryness & itching of the scalp.
- 7.It helps in prevenion of early greying & falling of hair.
8. It helps in improving complexion of the hair on the face.
- 9.Facial massage with oil & application of cosmetics done to the face to improve the skin of the face preventing wrinkles & skin diseases such as pimples & strengthens the eyes & cheeks also.
- 10.It helps in long, black & strong growth of hair.
- 11.A person never suffers from hair fall who does Shiroabhyanga as daily regime.
- 12.With daily Shiroabhyanga, facial skin becomes soft, shiny,glowy.

Massage works on the body at both levels:

1.Physical,2.Psychological

- 1.**Physical** - Rubbing the body produces heat & increase blood circulation. It affects the lymphatic system & supplies more nourishment to the blood.
- 2.**Psychological**- Through touch, massage works on the nervous system & affects the circulation of growth hormones.

Modes of action of Abhyanga:

An absorption of Abhyangasneha or oil is described by Acharya Dalhana. The sneha or oil for Abhyanga reaches upto different Dhatus when Abhyanga done for a sufficient time. Acharya Dalhana also explains how Abhyanga subsides the diseases of the particular Dhatu when the sneha/oil reaches to the particular Dhatu.

Acharya Charaka explains that Abhyanga is beneficial to the skin if done regularly because Vayu/Vatdosh works in Sparshanendriya & its adhishtana is skin/ Twacha. Indriyas are closely related to the mind, so the Indriyas become healthy keeping the mind healthy automatically. This is how Abhyanga keeps the body & mind both healthy.

The mode of action of Abhyanga works according to the properties of snehan dravyas/ drugs.

1. Snigdha guna- This is main property of snehan dravyas & responsible for actions like snehana, kledana, vishyandana at cellular level of the body. Snigdha guna acts as vatahara, kaphakara, vrishya.

2. Guru guna: This guna increases the body strength & kapha. It is nutritive for the body according to Hemadri, vatahara, kaphakara & pushtikara according to Bhavaprakasha. These properties cause to alleviate the morbid Vata, increase the reduced kapha and nourishes the body

3. Sheeta guna: It increases pleasure & enthusiasm to keep the mind healthy. It decreases perspiration & also prevents fainting, stabilizes the muscles and organs.

4. Mruduguna: means softness & opposite to kathina. It reduces the stiffness.

5. Drava guna: means liquid/ humidity. The drug propagates swiftly all over the body because of Drava guna. It liquifies the doshas & mobilizes them by increasing their flowing capacity.

6. Pichhila guna: It means slimy & gives longevity, increases body strength. It aggravates kapha & produces heaviness.

7. Sara guna: Sara guna mobilizes the doshas & malas i.e. waste products.

8. Manda guna: The drug diffuses slowly or sluggishly and remains in the contact of doshas, dhatus & mala for longer time.

9. Sukshma guna: Means subtle, minute and the drug enters in the fine channels because of sukshma guna.

Abhyanga acts through all these guna or properties of snehan dravyas. All of above properties are opposite to Vat vatdosh, hence, Abhyanga is very useful treatment for Vat vitiated diseases.

Effect of Shiroabhyanga:

The Abhyanga is followed in 2 parts of 400 matra kala each

The 1st part consists of Shiroabhyanga of right & left parietal regions and the 2nd part consists of Shiroabhyanga of frontal, vertex & occipital regions.

The procedure of the Shiroabhyanga gives a gentle massage to the scalp by patient's own fingertips without any friction and hair loss. It helps to do massage for 400 matrakala.

Along with all these benefits, it also reduces abhyanga dwesha & helps in inducing sleep. The gentle massage improves blood circulation to kapala pradesha. The oiliness of the oil reduces the dryness & prevents sleeplessness. Thus Shiroabhyanga achieves the samprapti vighatana & thus alleviates the disease. The temperature created in the process makes patient to feel comfort. This heat causes the blood vessels to dilate to increase the blood circulation and promotes healing.

The effect of pressure & the effect of heat produced, enhances the absorption of medicines through the skin.

Marma and Shiroabhyanga:

Marma or the vital points in the body where the Prana is regulated & stored for the use of body and mind. They are 108 in number and the sites of Tridoshas. Out of them 6 are located in head & neck region. The most important Marmas for the head massage are.... 1. Adhipati Marma: The soft spot located 8 fingers width above the eyebrows in the center of the skull. 2. Simantaka Marma: It is located 12 fingers width above the eyebrows on the skull where the hair gather in a swirl. 3. Krikatika Marma: The 2 points located on either side of the 1st cervical vertebrae behind the head where the neck meets the skull (occipito-cervical joint). 4. Vidhurum Marma: The depression behind both ears, just behind the earlobes. 5. Shankh Marma: The depression on both

sides of the forehead between the ends of the eyebrows & the hairline(temples).

This explains how critical & vital, the head & neck region in relation with physiopsychological function. Obstruction of prana or life energy, due to accidents, injuries & also psychological disturbances may be felt in the marmas. The marmas are invisible but their state is understood by touch. There may be discomfort or pain without any cause but it could be due to knocking accidentally a marma. It is experienced that Ayurvedic Shiroabhyanga is useful in treating some health conditions like anxiety, chronic fatigue, coeliac disease, headach, depression, stress, insomnia, indigestion, Crohn's disease, peptic ulcer etc.

Massage works on the body on both levels.....

1. Physical, 2. Psychological,
 1. Physical- rubbing the body , produces heat & increases blood circulation. It affects the lymphatic system & supplies more nourishment to the blood.
 2. Psychological- Through touch, massage works on the nervous system & affects the circulation of growth hormones.

Mode of action of Abhyanga in Modern view:

Because of osmotic pressure ,the internal fluids in the skin are subjected to move in the massage. The massage causes the mechanical hydrostatic pressure in the extracellular compartments. The forceful expulsion from peripheral vessels causes splanchnic pooling of the body. Massage helps the fluid to enter into viscera, tissues & dilute the accumulated toxins.

After massage, when it refills the peripheral vessels, the diluted toxins are brought into general circulation & expelled out via elimination procedures or Shodhana. Abhyanga acts on the skin/ twacha, as the skin is site of Vata & Lasika. Thus it affects on lymphatic drainage. Lymph exhibits large amount of amino acids tryptophan. Hypothetically, tryptophan (amino acids) increases in the blood & it causes a parallel increase in serotonin, a neuron transmitter made from tryptophan at in the body. This charges the conductivity of the nerves & it increases upto 100 meters/ second. The circular pattern of electricity is discharged in nerve fibres at regular intervals.

The momentum interruption in the state of disease pacified by a specific pressure massage. In

presence of calcium ions and at motor end, as a transmitter, Acetylcholin facilitates synaptic action potential.

The myelinated sheet of nerve fibre is rich in lipids. Also, sodium & potassium ions repolarises the nerve fibres with association of melatonin, a byproduct of serotonin & a neurochemical causes pleasant & calming effects by massage.

The absorption rate increases with concentrated drugs. Because of presence of substance like serotonin, percutaneous absorption observed in inflammatory conditions.

Health Benefits of Massage:

1. It affects the muscles & other soft tissues in the body. Massage loosens the contracted, shortened, hardened muscles. Also, a dispersion of toxins from tense & knotted muscles, improvement of blood circulation in previously congested muscles and helps in oxygenate the brain.
2. 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, the blood vessels of these organs dilate & allow more blood supply to them.
3. Stimulates or soothes nervous system- it balances the nervous system by stimulating it depending on which effect is needed by the individual at the time of massage.
4. It gives nourishment to all sense organs like eyes, ears, nose, tongue & skin. It is helpful against eyestrain, tinnitus, jawache & sinusitis, stimulates lymphatic drainage, aids sleep, reduces insomnia.
5. Enhances the skin condition- Massage enhances the skin condition by improving the function of the sebaceous glands which keep the skin lubricated, clean. It increases complexion of the face & becomes beautiful, shining.
6. It reduces or relieves migraine, chronic depression, occipital neuralgia, scalp related diseases. It improves blood circulation to brain ,relieves stress, psychosomatic disorders.
7. The head massage induces a state of calm, peace & tranquillity & promotes high levels of alertness, memory, concentration. It makes to feel refreshed, awake. It relieves headache &

tension, anxiety. The head feels lighter & mind feels clearer.

8. Head massage has the effect of nourishment of hair roots, straightens the hair roots, hair & prevents excess hair loss & thickens the hair. It decreases dandruff, greying of hair.

9. It helps to remove the toxins & other side effects caused by the use of dyes etc.

Conclusion:

The advantage & benefits of Shiroabhyanga are self-practicable, easy procedure, economic & very effective. It improves arterial, venous, lymphatic flow & nourishes skin, local tissues. This is very beneficial procedure for distressing the whole body. It strengthens the nervous system & increases the blood flow to brain & helps on oxygenating the brain. It improves the constricted muscles condition by increasing blood circulation to them. It stimulates the lymphatic drainage & induces sleep. It also removes toxins & side effects caused by dyes etc. It nourishes the hair, hair roots and prevents excess hair loss. It benefits the immune system. It reduces the swelling & gives relaxation. It provides overall improvement in physical health and quality of life to both men & women, old-youngs. The head massage or the Shiroabhyanga becomes most effective treatment for the neck & shoulder. It gives the wonderful feeling to the patient.

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