

## Abhyanga or Ayurvedic massage

What is an Abhyanga?

Abhyanga literally means, “oil massage” in Sanskrit. Abhyanga is an external oleation Ayurvedic treatment that can be used daily (recommended) or as a precursor to Panchakarma therapies.

The goal of an Abhyanga is to profoundly relax the body and mind, improve the flow of energy by opening the srotas (channels of circulation), and prepare the body to eliminate excess doshas (vata, pitta, kapha) or toxins (ama) on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. After a few days of these treatments, the doshas have settled in their sites of origin, and are ready to be flushed from the system. Self-Abhyangas are recommended at part of one’s Dinacharya (daily routine). Doing a daily practice of self-massage nourishes and soothes the nervous system, boosts lymphatic detoxification, improves circulation, nourishes the skin, and promotes overall mind-body balance.

So what’s the difference between an Abhyanga and a “massage”?

In Western massage therapy clients enjoy kneading and manipulation of the muscles and/or connective tissue for the sake of releasing tension, fostering relaxation, and stress relief. In other words, we tie ourselves up in knots throughout the week, and then rely on the therapy to undo what has been done. Clients feel when they get their muscles “massaged” they will then feel “relaxed”

In an Abhyanga unlike western massage, this bodywork is generally not very deep but characterized by their rhythmic fast strokes that aid in calming the mind. The goal is to let the mind go and allow yourself to fall into a “meditative” state. Hence, this allows the whole body to let go and relax.

Ayurvedic bodywork is not focused on muscle work but the approach is cellular. Warm oils deeply penetrate cells and release physical, mental and spiritual buildup; hence it is detoxifying treatment. Essentially, Western massage is intended to reverse damage done to the body through a detrimental lifestyle, and abhyanga is prescribed as a specific modality for strengthening the body’s overall functionality and aid in preventive care. Some other benefits of an Abhyanga include:

- Helps mental focus and concentration
- Improves the sensitivity of five senses
- Reduces/relieves migraines
- Improves sleep patterns
- Relieves stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia
- Detoxification of toxins in the tissues

- Slows down the central nervous system
- Provides tissues of the body nourishment
- Lymphatic drainage
- Stimulate blood flow

What oils are typically used in an Abhyanga?

Oils can be chosen for a client based on their Dosha type (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) or based on the season by their Ayurvedic Practitioner. Commonly used oils include sesame, coconut, mustard and almond. The key to remember is that your skin is the largest organ of your body and is permeable so you want to use oil that you would ingest! I can't stress this enough this means to make sure that your using a brand that is organic.

I scheduled an Abhyanga- what should I expect?

In an Abhyanga, copious amounts of medicated oil is will be used for those who experience severe dryness in the body as a result of an Vata imbalance with symptoms such as constipation, osteoarthritis, and/or worry from the mind from anxiety, stress. An Abhyanga is normally carried out unclothed with the exception of a disposable tangas (paper panty). Women's breast will be expose during this treatment but will not be massaged. This treatment in India is typically done with two practitioners working in unison in a synchronistic pattern with their strokes. It is also possible to have one therapist doing an abhyanga in seated, side-lying or supine position. The client should come to the visit with no make-up on, wearing old clothing they wouldn't mind any access oil getting on them and an open mind and heart. In my practice, clients do have the option to shower the access oil off their bodies. It is best to schedule this treatment in the late afternoon, or early evening so that you can go home and and relax for the remainder of the day and set the tone for a good night's rest.

“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  
(One of the Great ancient texts of Ayurveda)

Stephanie Krishnan, LMT, BA, Ayurvedic body worker  
4 Dexter Row, Charlestown, MA 02129  
617.657.9882  
Stephanie@samsaraa.com  
[www.samsaraa.com](http://www.samsaraa.com)

Note - Information provided in this article is solely to provide education on Ayurveda, and is not meant to diagnose, treat, cure or mitigate any disease. If you have a medical condition, please consult a health professional.