



# Maharishi Ayurveda

## Ayurvedic Massage - *Abhyanga* and *Garshan*.

Ayurveda, the ancient science of perfect health, comes from the highly developed Vedic civilization and has been practised in India for thousands of years. The Ayurvedic texts describe a wealth of treatments for maintaining and promoting good health by creating inner balance and re-establishing connection with the body's inner intelligence. *Abhyanga*, a whole-body oil massage done before the morning shower or bath, is regarded as one of the most important one of these procedures.

### ABHYANGA

*Abhyanga* is not very complicate to perform and easy to integrate into ones daily routine. It produces so many positive effects that soon you will not want to miss it. Charak Samhita, a major Ayurvedic text says: 'By oil massage the human body becomes strong and smooth-skinned; it gains resistance to exhaustion and exertion.'; 'One who applies til (sesame) oil on his head regularly does not suffer from headache, baldness, greying of hair, ..... , his sense organs work properly; the skin of his face becomes brightened; applying til oil on the head produces sound sleep and happiness'; traditions also maintains that muscles, tissues and joints are lubricated and flexibility increased.

An oil massage has a very soothing effect on the nervous system, which is governed by *Vata* dosha - one of 3 basic principles in Nature. Therefore, it is especially recommended for people who have a tendency to be nervous or who are always under the influence of stress or who travel a lot.

The *abhyanga* can be done standing or sitting. The method is as follows:

1. Begin each morning's massage by heating a quarter-cup of the cured oil to slightly warmer than body temperature (38°C, 100°F, for example). This is typically done by placing the container the oil is kept in - a plastic squeeze bottle works well - in hot water for a short while.
2. Start by massaging the head. Place a small amount of oil on the scalp and massage the scalp vigorously. Use the open palms of the hands and the flat surfaces of the fingers rather than the fingertips for the whole massage. The stroke should be circular, describing small circles. Spend more time on the head than on other parts of the body, because it has marma points which influences all the other parts.
3. Massage the face and outer part of the ears, using the fingers. Massaging the ears is also said to influence the whole body, so give them some extra time, too, but don't massage them vigorously. At this point, you may want to smear oil over the rest of the body: This will give the maximum time for the oil to penetrate the skin.
4. Massage the front and back of the neck, and the upper part of the back. Remember to use the

open palm and flat surfaces of the fingers, not the fingertips.

5. Next, massage the arms vigorously. For the joints use a circular motion, and for the long bones a straight motion.

6. Now do the chest and stomach. Be less vigorous here. Use a circular motion over the pectoral areas, and a very gentle, vertical motion over the breastbone and solar plexus. Use a very gentle circular motion over the abdomen, moving clockwise, the direction the large intestine moves in (top, to the left, bottom, to the right).

7. Massage the back and spine - or what you can reach of it - vigorously.

8. Vigorously massage the legs in the same way you did the arms: straight on the bones, circular on the joints.

9. Last but not least, massage the feet. The soles of the feet are said to have marma points that connect to the rest of the body, so give extra time and attention to them. Once again use the palm or the open flat of the hand, and massage vigorously.

10. The ideal length of a daily abhyanga is 10 to 20 minutes, but even only 2 or 3 minutes is very beneficial (priorities are head and feet).

Be careful about getting oil over your bathroom floor. If your bathroom is carpeted, we suggest that you protect it with an inexpensive floor mat, or some disposable covering.

If you have a cold or flu or problems with digestion *abhyanga* is not recommended.

After your massage take a shower or bath. A range of holistic Maharishi Ayurveda body-care products using precious herbal extracts in millennia-old formulae is available to further clean, protect and nourish the skin.

Selecting the best oil for you.

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Sesame oil is best for most people, because it settles all three doshas and nourishes the body. However, for those with a *Pitta* constitution, or if the weather is very hot, coconut oil, which cools down *Pitta*, might give better results. If sesame does not agree with you (e.g. if it causes acne), you may use olive oil in the cooler months.

*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* Massage Oils and *Vata* and *Pitta* Hair Oils are special herbalised sesame oils that are recommended for abhyanga according to your skin and hair types. See our products and cosmetics catalogues for further information and guidance in determining your skin and hair type.

Sesame oil has a unique value even from the standpoint of modern science, since its chemical structure gives it a unique ability to penetrate most surfaces. This is an important element of the oil massage. The ancient Ayurvedic texts make it clear that much of the benefit derives from the oil being absorbed through the skin. (Research in the last 30 years has confirmed that the skin can indeed ingest oily substances.) Sesame oil also contains unusually large amounts of linoleic

acid (compared to coconut, olive, and other vegetable oils, which have fairly small amounts). Linoleic acid is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent and is known to inhibit pathogenic bacteria.

Sesame oil should first be 'cured' to make it more absorbable. This is accomplished by heating it to 220°F (use a cooking thermometer). Since any oil is flammable, a few common-sense procedures should be followed to avoid fire: (a) always heat oil on a low heat; (b) never leave oil unattended, not even for a moment, while heating; (c) remove oil from the heat as soon as it reaches the proper temperature, and set it in a safe place (well out of reach of children) to let it cool gradually. Do not refrigerate it at any point.

Cure about ½ litre of sesame oil at a time, an amount that will cover about 3 weeks worth of *abhyangas*. Do not cure the oil more than once and use it preferably within 1 month (max 6 months) of curing. Coconut and olive oils do not need to be cured.

### *Abhyanga* for babies

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Babies love receiving *abhyangas*. It relaxes them, gives deeper sleep, and strengthens the bond between parents and child. Ideally the special baby *abhyanga* should be learned from a trained technician. The following books can also be consulted: *Contemporary Ayurveda* by Dr Hari Sharma, MD, and *For a Blissful Baby* by Kumuda Reddy, MD.

### GARSHAN

*Garshan* is a traditional Ayurvedic dry massage with a special silk glove that can be done as an alternative to an oil massage. It is especially recommended for those trying to lose weight and those with *Kapha* predominance. By stimulating the connective tissues, metabolism and blood circulation are improved and impurities are removed more quickly and easily. It also helps in the prevention and reduction of cellulite.

Perform *Garshan* massage before bathing for about five minutes. Massage with the whole hand using fairly vigorous strokes with the cupped hand (thumb parallel to the fingers). Use circular strokes on the joints (shoulders, elbows, knees, wrists, hips, and ankles), and back and forth strokes on the arms and legs. Do not massage face, chest and heart.

Start with the neck, next massage the arms and then move slowly from the shoulders downwards moving back and forth above the chest area. Massage stomach and back horizontally and diagonally. Use circular strokes on hips and abdomen and end with the legs and feet. Repeat the cycle several times.

*Garshan* can be performed daily for up to 5 minutes, or alternate it with *abhyanga*. Ayurveda recommends that the gloves be made from high quality Bourrette silk. We recommend washing the gloves before use with a mild washing detergent - also wash regularly when in use. Rinse well after washing.

After your massage take a shower or bath. A range of holistic Maharishi Ayurveda body-care products using precious herbal extracts in millennia-old formulae is available to further clean,

protect and nourish the skin.

## GARGLE

Sesame oil has a beneficial effect on oral hygiene and the health of the mouth, gums and tongue.

Each morning take about 1 –2 teaspoons of cured sesame oil into the mouth, massage the gums and base of the teeth with it using the forefinger, and then gargle for ½ minute. Spit the oil out and rinse the mouth with warm water.

### **Important Additional Advice!**

1. Use liquid soap to shower after abhyanga to prevent drains from clogging. Clean the drains periodically with soda crystals.
2. Buy inexpensive towels to be used after showering and wash them separately with extra detergent (up to 2-3 times normal for very oily materials) at a high temperature. Pre-soaking with enzyme detergents, soda crystals or other oil removing preparations helps.
3. Oil left in cloth may catch fire spontaneously. This is most likely to happen if oil is not completely removed from clothes and if after drying the clothes are left in the dryer in a hot tight ball. Therefore dry the towels at a lower heat in your dryer, remove them from the dryer as soon as the cycle finishes and hang them up to cool.
4. The danger of spontaneous ignition posed by different oils and fats is measured by their Iodine Numbers – the lower the number the more saturated the fat and the less the danger - linseed 190, corn 120, sesame 110, sunflower 100, almond 100, castor 85, olive 85, coconut 10.

*DISCLAIMER: The information in this document is presented for the sole purpose of imparting education on Maharishi Ayurveda and neither the information nor the products are intended to diagnose, treat, mitigate, cure or prevent any disease. If you have a medical condition, or are pregnant or lactating, please consult a health professional and it is recommended that you speak with your physician before making significant changes to your diet or routine.*