



# Abhyanga

*"Abhyanga should be resorted to daily. It wards off old age, exertion, and aggravation of vata."*

**Ashtanga Hridayam: Sutrasthana: II: 8-9**

## **What is Abhyanga?**

Abhyanga is a broad term that means any kind of ayurvedic massage. Self abhyanga is done daily to soothe and support the nervous system, especially for people who have more Vata (air and ether) in their constitution. Some of the benefits include;

- Smoother more lustrous skin
- Provides relief from stress, tension & low energy
- Supports musculoskeletal and nervous system health
- Tones the muscles & body's tissues
- Enhances circulation
- Improves sleep patterns
- Stimulates organ function

Self-abhyanga is a tool of self love and respect.

## **Top tips for maximum benefit**

- Use gentle strokes, without being too deep or strong
- Use a medicated oil suitable for your constitution (Vata, Pitta or Kapha). Otherwise use cold-pressed black sesame oil. If you are allergic or have a skin irritation, use cold-pressed coconut oil. Generally sesame oil is better in the winter as it is warming, and coconut oil is good for summer as it is cooling.
- You can do self-abhyanga before exercise and leave on the oil to amplify the release of toxins during your workout, just make sure you shower afterwards!
- Women start on the left limbs, men on the right
- Cover yourself in oil before starting to massage. The whole body is at the party that way

## **Contraindications of Abhyanga**

- Abhyanga is contraindicated immediately after eating, when experiencing a strong headache or migraine, those with excessive mucus or congestion, suffering severe constipation or early stages of fever or directly after having surgery. Abhyanga is also contraindicated during the first three days or during heavy flow of menstruating women.

# Oily Love

## Self-abhyanga



### For both short and full method

Set up your space and warm the oil

Warm the room, especially in the winter. Make sure you have everything you need - a towel or yoga mat to sit on, clothes to put on after if you are going to marinate in the oil (NB: keep a set or two of post abhyanga clothes!). If desired, play some music or light a candle.

Warm the oil.

Boil the kettle and put hot water in a larger bowl. In a smaller bowl, add your oil and rest it into the hot water (double boiler style) or if you have an oil burner you can use a ramekin and tea light, or place the ramekin on the heater (if you have an oil column heater). The oil should be warm, not hot.

Cover yourself from top to toe in oil.

### Short Method

- Starting at the head and using long strokes on the arms, legs and back, clockwise circular motion on joints, organs and vital points give yourself a light massage

### Massage in this order:

- Head, face, neck, chest, stomach, back, arms, hands, thigh, calves, foot, toes.
- If time is very limited massage the crown of the head, ears, hands and soles of your feet.
- Leave the oil on your skin for a minimum of 8 mins and maximum of 45 mins.



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To fall in love with themselves, embrace their divinity; reshaping themselves and humanity in the process. Because as **'we let your own light shine, we give permission for others to do the same.'**

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## Self-abhyanga Full Body

### 1. The crown and head

The head is the most important part of the massage, make sure there is a generous amount of oil on the crown of head.

Don't want too oily hair? Apply just a few drops to the crown. Massage the whole scalp from the centre and towards the ears, like washing your hair. Be vigorous and adjust to your comfort level. Use different strokes these can include:

- Scrubbing with your finger pads
- Doing large hand circles with the palm of hands
- Doing smaller circles with fingers
- Gently pulling the hair at the roots

Strokes can be circular or straight (back and forth), or both ways.

### 2. The face

Starting at the third eye (between your eyebrows), massage clockwise then move to:

- The forehead sideways using the whole hand (starting with the index fingers at the midline of the forehead and moving outward to the temples)
- Playing the index fingers along the nose, move the hands in a down and out direction to the ears
- Massage into the temples in a circular motion
- Place the thumbs under chin and index fingers bent pull along the jawline
- After dipping a finger of each hand into the oil place into the ears then massage the ear lobes and behind ears, the home to essential marma (energy) points and nerve endings.

### 3. The neck

Massage in an upward direction on all surfaces of neck and throat. With finger pads, massage the cervical spine up and down and then across the collar bone toward the shoulders.



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## Self-abhyanga Full Body

### 4. Upper chest and breast

Use circular motions on the chest. Using circular motions around the sternum (heart space), and then massage your whole chest sideways with your palm. Massage the solar plexus in clockwise circles.

### 5. The arms and shoulders

*(Left arm first for ladies, right arm first for men).*

Massage your shoulder joint in circular motions, then into and around the armpit a key lymphatic site.

Arms: Using long strokes massage up & down the upper arm and lower arm. Massage in circles around the elbow joint and around the wrist joint (with thumb and index/middle finger).

**NB:** With all long strokes there should be stronger pressure on the downward movement.

### 6. Hands

Starting with the palms massage in circles with the thumb before moving to the back of the hand. Next massage into the finger webs and down in between the top of the hand bones (metacarpals). Finish with gently pulling the fingers (from base to tip).

Repeat the sequence for the other arm and hand.

### 7. The abdomen

Insert massage oil directly into belly button. With the fingers, gently massage the area clockwise. Switch to the whole hand and make circles increasingly larger until the whole abdominal area has been massaged. Reverse the whole process (maintaining a clockwise direction) back to belly. Relax the abdomen and gently push the belly in with your hands.



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## Self-abhyanga Full Body

### 8. Back

Massage up and down the spine as much as possible without straining, including the shoulders and upper back. Using circular motions massage into the lower back and hips.

### 9 - 12. Legs (thighs and calves), feet and toes

*(Left leg first for ladies, right leg first for men)*

**Hips:** Massage around the hip joint and groin with both hands.

**Thighs:** Use long strokes up and down the thigh, again with stronger pressure on downward strokes.

**Knees:** Use circles to massage around the whole kneecap and firm strokes with the finger pads around the circumference of the knee joint. Behind the knee use gentle strokes.

**Calves:** Use long strokes up & down on lower leg (calf) with emphasis on the downward strokes.

**Ankles:** Massage with circular motions on the ankle joint with both palms and fingertips.

**Feet:** Massage in-between the toe bones (metatarsals) on top of the foot. Massage the sole of foot with more pressure, making sure to reach the heel, sides of the foot, ball of the foot, under the toes, and in between the webs of the toes. Pull each toe from base to tip. Repeat the sequence for the other leg and foot.

### Why is there so much oil?

The word in Sanskrit for both 'oil' and 'love' is Sneha. There is an inherent connection between enveloping the body in oil and enveloping it in love. Both experiences can give a deep feeling of stability, warmth, and comfort. Sneha—oil and love—is sukshma, or "subtle." This allows penetration into the minute channels in the body and penetrate deep layers of tissue (dhatus).

Much Aroha

Cat ♡♡

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