



Review Article

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THERAPEUTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SHIROABHYANGA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Shiroabhyanga is to be considered in Snehana therapy. As it nourishes the senses of mind and gives the strength. If done on full body then it is termed as abhyanga 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.

Keywords: Head massage, Murdha taila, Snehana, oleation, Nidrajanya Bhava

INTRODUCTION

The Shiroabhyanga is coming under the classification of the Murdha Taila.¹ Oleation or Snehana is told as Purva Karma of Panchakarma. Snehana is further divided into Bahya and Abhyantara types, obviously Shiroabhyanga comes under the former type Bahya. In Charak Samhita it is mentioned that Shiroabhyanga helps to promote Nidra i.e. daily practice of Shiroabhyanga prevents headache, balding greying, hairfall and it also gives strength to skull, strengthens hair root and makes the hair black and long. It helps in maintaining the health. It also nourishes the sense organs, softens the skin and provides lustre to face and one gets good sleep after Shiroabhyanga.² Abhyanga is one of the Nidrajanya bhava's are mentioned in Charak samhita.³

Etiology of Shiroabhyanga

'Abhi' upsarga is added to 'Anga' dhatu makes this word Abhyanga (Amar kosha) which means to induce specific and special movements. In this way; abhyanga (massage) indicates some movement done on the body by using of Taila, Ghrita etc.

Definition

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

Paribhasha

The oil (taila); which is applied to the Shirah Pradesha i.e. head; Head Massage (shiro abhyanga) nourishes all the Indriya, Srotas and body parts like Bahu etc. such a procedure is called 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 lyut pratyaya which means to smear or to Anoint (Shabda kalpa druma). The word Abhyanjana means applying oil all over body including Shirah (Head).

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
- Utsadana⁴

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 Mardana⁵

Basis of Classification of Massage

By character of techniques

- Stroking
- Pressure

- Percussion
- Vibration

By which; depth of tissue approached

- Light massage
- Deep massage

By which; part of body used

- General Massage
- Local massage

By the means of application of pressure

- Manual massage
- Mechanical massage

By which; the basis of nature of drug 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 - is a touch with movement with one/both palms slowly.
- Friction - is grasping the part and move with little amount of pressure.
- Kneading - is alternative compression of the tissues by grasping them against the underlined body surfaces; Muscle mixing.
- Vibration - is fine vibratory/Shaking movements communicated to the body through the hands.
- Percussion - is administered in various ways with varying degrees of force.
- Joint movements – in this; Both assisted and resisted movements are given.⁶

Indications of Abhyanga

- Shiro abhyanga is indicated in dry scalp associated with itching sensation.⁷
- Taila Abhyanga (oil massage) indicated in Bala, Vriddha, Krusha and Rogi.
- Indicated in all types of Vata Roga, Vishama Jvara and all Tvak Vikara.
- Indicated in disease of hairs like Darunaka, Khalitya, Palitya etc.
- Indicated in daily routine for maintenance of the health of the body.

Contra Indication of Abhyanga

- It is contra-indicated in Ajeerna and Nava or Taruna Jvara because if performed in this condition becomes Krucchra Sadhya or Asadhya.
- It is contra-indicated after Samshodhana i.e. immediate after Vamana, Virechana and Niruha Basti; as it causes Agnimandya.
- It is contra-indicated in person suffering from Netra Roga, Karna Roga, Atisara, Adhmana, Peenasa, Agnimandya and other Saamadosha conditions.

- It is contra-indicated in person suffering from Pitta Roga, Trishna, Rakta Pitta, Prameha and Ati Kshudhita.
- It is contra-indicated in Kaphaja Roga and Santarpita Roga if done then it gets aggravated.
- It is contra-indicated immediately after consumption of food, accustomed to Ruksha and Abhishyandhi Ahara.
- It is contra-indicated immediately after Snehapana and Tarpana Kriya.
- It is contra-indicated after Snana, Vyayama, Divasvapna, Vegadharana, Prajagarana, Sheeta Vayu Sevana.^{8,9}

Prerequisites to perform Abhyanga

Abhyanga (massage) should be performed only when person has digested the previous food taken and when he is Kshudhita (hungry) and Trusha (thirsty).¹⁰

Time of Abhyanga

Abhyanga (massage) is advised to practice once in a day or once in two days or once in three days regularly as it does not vitiate any Dosha.¹¹ Daily Abhyanga is advised in children during night time.

Direction of Abhyanga

According to Chikitsa Manjari and Chikitsa Sangraha; it is mentioned that generally Abhyanga should be performed in Anuloma Gati (same direction). They have also explained the specific direction of movement depending on different involvement of Dosha as, one must follow the movement as Anuloma Gati in Vata Dushti, Pratiloma Gati in Kapha Dushti and alternate Anuloma and Pratiloma Gati in Pitta Dushti.

Abhyanga Dravya

Abhyanga (massage) should be performed with lukewarm medicated oil (taila or ghee) or 'Vasa' prepared with 'Doshaghna' drugs. Generally; oil (taila) is used for Abhyanga. The oil (taila) should be lukewarm in general condition but cold oil may be used in Shirobhyanga. In winter season warm oil and in summer season cold oil is indicated to massage.

Method of Abhyanga

Abhyanga should be performed gently and in the direction of the hair (Anulomana gati). Shiro abhyanga (Head massage) should be followed with cold or lukewarm oil because the head is the place of all senses and it is explained as the most vital part. Shiro abhyanga should be performed gently with finger-tips because forceful massage may damage the hair. Seven positions are to be adopted for proper massage of each and every part of body; but in shiro abhyanga; sitting position must be adopted.

Method of Shiro abhyanga

Requirements

- Comfortable knee high chair.
- Bowl of 100 ml capacity to take oil.
- Oil for application.

Poorvakarma

The patient is made to sit on a knee high chair. The body of the patient is wrapped with a cloth below the neck then the procedure should be followed by standing behind the patient; it is the ideal position to perform Shiroabhyanga.

Pradhanakarma

The technique includes smearing the oil to the portions of the scalp above the neck and placing specific strokes. The oil is first heated on a water bath approximately up to 40°C, to make it lukewarm. Then the oil is applied in to the head of the patient and spread all over the head including the neck and ear pinna. To spread the oil on the scalp has short trimmed hair; moving the palms from before backwards is enough. If the patient has long hair then the fingers have to be poked between the hairs to smear the oil to the scalp.

Gharshana hasta (Massage from before backwards)

After smearing the oil; massage the whole head by moving the palmar surface of the hand from before backwards applying the oil gentle as well as with firm pressure. Thus one should massage the complete area of the scalp that includes vertex, temporal and occipital portions of the head. This procedure is continued for a desired period.

Mridvanguli Tadana (Picking strokes)

Fingers of the both hands are to be moved as if picking up tuft of hair. The fingers are partially approximated and then gently and firmly placed on the scalp. This procedure is followed by withdrawing of fingers to approximate the fingers, simultaneously effecting rubbing of the scalp. This method should be gentle producing mild traction effect on the hair. By this way; each area of the head is similarly treated. This method should effect a pleasant sensation to the patient and should not cause any sort of discomfort or pain also.

Dvihasta tadana (Flat palm strokes)

In this step; gentle strokes are placed with the palmar surface on the scalp by both hands either simultaneously. Strokes are followed on the vertex, occipital and temporal region.

Taranga hasta (Rocking strokes)

In this step; gentle strokes are placed on the patients head by rapid movement of both the palms simultaneously. While placing the strokes; the base of the little finger and thumb must be in contact with the patients head.

Anguli kridana hasta (Finger strokes)

In this step; the gentle strokes placed on the patients head by making rocking movements of both the palms with its fingers stretched; while stoking only the palmar aspect of the little finger and thumb should touch the scalp

Mridu mushhti tadana (Fist stroke)

In this method; gentle strokes placed on all areas of the head with the closed fist through the ulnar border. First; the strokes placed with both the hands simultaneously and followed by placing the strokes alternatively with right and left fist.

Ghatita hasta (Pressing)

In this step; flat of the palm is placed on the patients head and is moulded in to the shape of the scalp so that every

portion of the palmar aspect of the palm and fingers should be in contact with the head. This method is followed by exerting gentle and firm pressure on the head. Every part of the head is treated by the same method.

Squeeze strokes

This step refers to grasping tuft of hair with hands followed by gentle squeeze and producing comfortable traction on the hair. Every part of the scalp is treated by the similar manner.

Karna-abyanga (Ear massage)

In this step; ear pinna is grasped between the thumb anteriorly and the other fingers posteriorly. The pinna is rubbed between the fingers. Further, followed by supporting the pinna with the fingers posteriorly and then thumb is firmly moved above downwards in the anterior of the ear pinna.

Duration

Each form of stroke and each step are continued for about 4 to 5 minutes and in this way the whole process of head massage takes about 30 to 40 minutes.

Paschathkarma

After following this procedure; the patient is asked to rest on the chair for about 15 minutes and then advised to take head bath with hot water. Instead of soap, herbal products may be used.



Figure 1: Method to follow Shiro Abhyanga

Effect of Abhyanga on Various Dhatu

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

- When the Abhyanga is done for 300 Matras (1 Matra = 19/60 seconds so, 300 Matra means 95 seconds); the oil reaches to hair root
- When done for 400 matras (133 seconds); the oil reaches in skin.
- When done for 500 matras (160 seconds); it reaches in Rakta dhatu.
- The oil reaches in Mamsa dhatu in 600 matras (190 seconds), in the Meda dhatu in 700 matras (228 seconds), in the Asthi dhatu in 800 matras (240 seconds) and in reaches to the Majja dhatu when the Abhyanga is performed up to 900 matra (280 seconds).¹²

Table 1: Shiro abhyanga matra as per dhatus

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

Benefits of Shiro Abhyanga

- It is useful in diseases of the central nervous system and head.
- It helps in preventing headache and induces sleep.
- It gives strength to all the sense and motor organs.
- It improves vision.
- If performed daily then all senses of that person become healthy.
- It prevents dryness and itching of scalp
- It helps in prevention of early greying and falling of hair,
- It helps in improving complexion of hair on the face.
- Facial massage with oil and application of cosmetics done to the face to improve the skin of the face, preventing wrinkles and skin diseases such as pimples and strengthen the eyes and cheeks also.
- It helps in the growth of hair on the scalp; which grows strong, long and black
- A person who performs Shiro abhyanga daily; is never affected with headache, hair falling.
- A person who performs Shiro abhyanga daily; his facial skin becomes soft, shiny and gets a good sleep.^{13,14}

On virtue of such good properties, Shiro abhyanga has been included and explained in the chapter of Dinacharya.

Mode of Action of Abhyanga

Dalhana has described the absorption of Sneha used in Abhyanga procedure in detail; the oil used in Abhyanga reaches up to the different Dhatus when it is applied for the sufficient time.

Thus, the drug used in the Abhyanga gets absorbed by the skin. Dalhana explains that when Snehana drug reaches to the particular Dhatu then it subsides the diseases of that particular Dhatu.

Charaka has mentioned that Vayu dominates in the Sparshanendriya and its Adhishthana is Tvacha i.e. skin. The Abhyanga is beneficial to the skin, so one should follow it regularly.¹⁵ 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

This is explained as the main property of Snehana drug. Snigdha Guna acts by its Vata hara, Kapha kara and Vrishya gunas. This guna is responsible for the action like Snehana, Kledana and Vishyandana at cellular level of the body.

Guru Guna

This increases the body strength and Kapha. Hemadri has mentioned it as nutritious for the body. According to Bhava prakasha; Guru Guna is having the properties like Vata hara, Kapha kara and Pushti kara. 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.

Pichhila Guna

Pichhila 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

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.

Effect of Shiroabhyanga

The abhyanga is followed in two parts of 400 matra kala each. The first part consists of shiro abhyanga of right and left parietal regions and the second part consists of shiro abhyanga of frontal, vertex and occipital regions.

The procedure of the shiro abhyanga gives the meaning of gentle massage of the scalp by patients own finger tips. With the help of this procedure the friction and hair loss is

reduced. It also helps in explaining to do the massage for 400 matra kala.

Along with all these benefits, it also reduces abhyanga dwesha and helps in inducing sleep. The advantages and benefits of Shiro abhyanga are self practicable, easy procedure, economic and effective.

The gentle massage improves blood circulation to the kapala pradesha. The oiliness present in the oil reduces dryness so preventing the sleeplessness. Thus Shiro abhyanga is achieving the samprapthi vighatana and thus alleviates the disease. Abhyanga provides comfort due to temperature created in this procedure. The heat provokes the blood vessels to dilate; which increases blood circulation and promotes healing.

The effect of pressure and the effect of heat produced by this method enhance the absorption of the medicine through the skin. In this procedure the oil is applied over the head and massage is done for duration.

Marmas and Shiroabhyanga

Marmas or life centres may be considered as vital points in the body where the Prana is regulated and stored for use by the gross body and mind. They are the sites of the Tridosha (Vata, Pitta and Kapha). Totally; there are 108 Marmas in the body and among which 12 from these are classified as Padu Marmas or Vital life centres. Among those; 6 from the 12 vital life centres are located in the head and neck region. This explains how very critical and vital the head and neck region is in relation to the whole of our physiological function.

Obstruction of Prana or Life energy, due to accidents, injuries and also psychological disturbances etc, may be felt in the Marmas. The Marmas are invisible but their state is understood among other things by means of touch. We often suffer discomfort and pain in certain parts of our body and not able to understand the reason. So it could be due to knocking accidentally a Marma.

It is also experienced that Ayurvedic Shiro abhyanga is especially useful in treating the following health conditions: anxiety, chronic fatigue syndrome, coeliac disease, constipation, crohn's disease, depression, headaches, high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, indigestion, insomnia, peptic ulcers, stress.¹⁶

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 mylenated sheet in which lipids are the chief ingredients. Na 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The advantages and benefits of Shiroabhyanga are self practicable, easy procedure, economic and effective. It improves arterial, venous and lymphatic flow and in this way nourishes skin and local tissues. Results of the Shiroabhyanga are mentioned as; this is a beneficial programme for de-stressing the whole body, strengthening the nervous system, Improves blood circulation in previously congested muscles and helps oxygenate the brain, stimulates lymphatic drainage and induce sleep, removes the toxins and side effects caused by the dyes etc., nourishes the hair roots and prevents excessive hair loss, beneficial for the immune system, it helps in reduction of swelling, it gives general relaxation, it provides overall improvement in physical health and the quality of life. For both men and women, old and young, head massage may be the most relaxing treatment and if combined with neck and shoulder treatments it will leave the client feeling wonderful.

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