

Abyangha - Ayurvedic self massage

By Amber Lynn Vitse
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There is a tradition in Ayurvedic health practices that goes back thousands of years and is a foundation for health maintenance and disease prevention. The reasons why it is so beneficial and so important are many, but center around the idea that it is about paying attention to oneself, giving time and love to oneself, and directing positive energy to oneself. This is the practice of Abyangha, massaging healing oils into one's own skin from head to toe.

Many of us would love to receive a massage daily, no? But only the very wealthy seem to have that privilege. Therefore, it is up to us to give ourselves that treatment daily, because the benefits of daily massage cannot be denied. Massage imparts firmness and tone to the tissues by literally "squeezing" toxins out and assisting in the skin's normal eliminative processes. On a deeper level



it improves overall circulation of both blood and lymph, and can even affect the health of internal organs with proper attention. By giving yourself daily massage you also maintain the strength and flexibility of your body well into

the aging years. Abyangha is a primary balancing therapy for all the doshas, though each dosha benefits from a slightly different approach and the use of different oils, as will be explained later.

What you will need:

- A towel or blanket, or you may stand if you prefer
- A private place, warm and draft free
- A soft body brush or loofah pad or mitt
- An appropriate oil blend for your doshic type

When to perform Abyangha:

- Morning or night, depending upon your waking patterns
- If sluggish in the morning, perform then
- If hyperactive at night, perform then
- Before bathing if you are concerned about oiliness on clothing
- After bathing if you are not concerned or are going straight to bed
- Perform daily as a part of your routine for best lifetime results

Appropriate Oils:

- You can purchase medicated oils designed for Vata, Pitta, or Kapha
- You can purchase base oils with essential oils added for specific doshas as well
- You can use just a base oil if you choose with no aroma
- You can make your own oils at home as well with guidance
- Vata calming and warming base oils: Sesame, hazelnut, peanut
- Pitta cooling and soothing base oils: Coconut, sunflower, olive
- Kapha warming and stimulating base oils: Mustard or almond

If your skin all over is really very oily naturally, you can use

corn starch, arrowroot powder, or chick pea flour to promote a smooth massage without the oiliness; but you may also find that massaging with oil before bathing actually helps balance your skin.

The Technique:

Plan ahead by warming your oil in a pot or glass of warm water - not boiling hot! You can start this while you are performing exfoliation. Using a soft brush or even washcloth if you are Vata dominant, and a firmer brush or loofah for Pitta or Kapha dominant individuals, begin by gentle exfoliation. Start with the ends of the extremities, the hands or feet, and stroke gently towards the



center of the body. Kapha types may be more vigorous if the skin is not too sensitive. Make long sweeping movements all the way up the arms and the legs, covering all aspects of each limb, brushing towards the armpits and the groin area. Perform clockwise circles on the abdomen. Stroke up the



center of the torso toward the base of the neck. Stroke gently from the jaw line down to below the collarbone. If you have an extension for you exfoliating pad or are flexible enough, pay atten-

tion to the back as well, stroking from the buttocks up. Don't miss the sides of the thighs and back of the buttocks as these areas get much less circulation. The point of the directional strokes is to follow the lines of lymphatic flow to assist in the movement of lymph through the body. At this point you can bathe if you will leave the oil on for the day or overnight. Otherwise, bathe after the massage.

Now that your oil is warmed let's massage! Just a couple notes on dosha-appropriate massage: Kaphas need the most deep and vigorous massage. If you are sensitive in the beginning or lack the strength, work your way up to a more vigorous pace gradually. Pittas need consistent flow, firmness, and organization to the massage. Pressure requirements may vary, but the "efficient" massage is the most appreciated by the Pitta individual. Vatas are the most neurologically sensitive and require gentle pressure, smoothness, lots of oil, and a grounding focus. Be sure to end with the feet here. I prefer always to begin at the head and end at the feet, because most of us need grounding in this Vata/Pitta imbalanced world. As a massage therapist I have always ended my massage with some attention to the feet to bring the recipient back into the body, firmly rooted in the physical being. This is a part of cultivating "presence"—being here now.

Though it may seem strange to many of us sold on daily shampooing, massaging oils into your scalp is an excellent way to maintain the health of the skin, hair follicles, and thus, the hair itself. Of course you would want to do this before showering or before

bed. Starting from the head, take a little of your personal oil blend, rub it between your two hands, and begin to massage it thoroughly into the scalp. You are not concerned about your hair itself, but focusing on the skin of the scalp. This can be especially good for the “hot headed” Pitta type, using coconut oil for its cooling qualities, and can even help after excess sun exposure. The oils also help with Vata type dandruff.

Work the oil down the forehead and around the face. Be gentle on the face applying light pressure and working in small

posite hand, continue down the arm either with an open hand or with a squeezing motion to compress all the tissue of the arm, upper and lower. Spend some time massaging the palm of the hand and in between the bones on the backs of the hands. Take each finger in your hand and compress it as you slide off the finger tip. Repeat on the other arm. Make a smooth transition with a long stroke up the arm toward the shoulder, sweep under the armpit, and across the top of the chest.

With an open hand and broad strokes move down the sternum,

sage as firmly as is comfortable in a clockwise direction over the whole abdomen. One technique is to start in small circles around the navel, gradually spiraling into increasingly larger circles until you are covering the edges of the abdomen. The colon eliminates in a clockwise direction so you are facilitating healthy elimination with this type of massage and encouraging belly fat to be carried away with better circulation.

Move around to the low back and as far up as you can reach comfortably, massaging in broad circles, squeezing and rolling the tissue as you are able. You can even use a fist to get deeper into the buttock tissue as you move across them and down to the thighs. This is a common problem area, for many women at least, so the more circulation you can bring to this area, the more toxins you eliminate, allowing your body to eliminate the unneeded fat. Use both hands on one thigh pulling and pushing, squeezing and rolling the tissue between the hands like making bread dough. Again, you can use a fist to stroke vertically up and down the upper leg if the pressure is comfortable for you. Use the fingers of both hands to make tiny circles around the kneecap. Do not exert any pressure behind the knee. Continue down the shin and the calf, squeezing the calf muscle between both hands. Again using your fingertips, make small circles around the ankle bones and down over the tops of the feet.

Now take one foot in both hands like you are holding a book. Massage the sole of the foot using your thumbs. Use as

much pressure as is comfortable and as you are able. This is the winding down portion of your massage and one of the most important parts, so take your time. When you are not able to do the whole massage, at least do this part. Cover all parts of the sole, from the fat pad at the base of the toes to the heel. Massage between the toes and take each toe in your hand one at a time like you did with the fingers. You can continue massaging with your thumbs on the top of the foot as well, following the line between the bones where tension develops. Repeat on the other foot.

Now take a moment to sit quietly, grateful for your body and all it does for you, enjoying your mind at peace. At this point you will take a bath or shower, go to bed, or go on with your day! If you plan to leave the oil on your body, you can buff off the excess with a towel, remembering that the oil has therapeutic qualities and will be acting on your tissue long after your massage.

Blessings to you on your way to a healthier, more balanced body, mind, and spirit. Enjoy your massage!

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circles, especially focusing on the tension spots on the forehead, temples, eyebrows, and jawline. Pour extra oil in your hand whenever needed for a smooth flow.

Continue down the neck, spending some time squeezing and rolling the tense tissue at the back of the neck and on the tops of the shoulders. Using the op-

posite hand, continue down the arm either with an open hand or with a squeezing motion to compress all the tissue of the arm, upper and lower. Spend some time massaging the palm of the hand and in between the bones on the backs of the hands. Take each finger in your hand and compress it as you slide off the finger tip. Repeat on the other arm. Make a smooth transition with a long stroke up the arm toward the shoulder, sweep under the armpit, and across the top of the chest.

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