



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON PADABHYANGA (FOOT MASSAGE): A UNIQUE PROCEDURE TO HEAL THE BODY AND MIND

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of natural healing and science of prevention and natural cure for various health conditions. It treasures beneficial information and tips to live longer and healthier. Ayurvedic daily routine helps maintain balance and harmony in our body and nature by regulating our biological clock and advocating a healthy lifestyle. These daily routines are known as “Dinacharya”, or a list of daily wellness practices. Padabhyanga (foot massage) therapy holds a special place of importance in Ayurveda due to its soothing, revitalizing, calming and balancing of various disturbances of the peripheral nervous system. It is one of the most suggested solutions for people suffering from frequent cramps, chronic fatigue, and various sleeping disorders, including insomnia. Applying the proper foot massage technique relieves the body of its ailments and restores health through our feet.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Dinacharya, Padabhyanga, marmas, Vata, Sparshanendriya, Dhamanis

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is an indispensable way of living that uses methodically crafted therapies to ensure smooth bodily functions and restore wellness. The Ayurvedic scriptures enumerate specific daily routines for maintaining good health, known as "Dinacharya". Adherence to these practices is believed to promote better health, equilibrium, and overall wellness. One of the most potent dinacharya practices is abhyanga or oil massage. The Ayurvedic literature highlights the advantages of Padabhyanga, which is the application of oil to the feet, in particular.¹

It is a well-known fact that a short foot massage now and then can help us relax, particularly after a long day of standing up and walking around. Padabhyangam can be translated as “foot massage “or “foot therapy”. 'Pada' in Sanskrit means 'foot', and 'Abhyanga' – means massage with medicated oils. Padabhyanga is a holistic therapy and part of traditional Ayurvedic treatment. This therapy is important in Ayurveda because our feet connect our body with the earth. Foot care is holistic and involves massaging the pressure points with medicated oils. In Ayurveda, 'Pada' is a vital motor organ (Karmendriya).

Padabhyanga is one of the unique procedures among bahirparimarjana chikitsa (therapies applied to the skin). It is soothing, revitalizing, calming and balancing various disturbances of the peripheral nervous system. It is explained as a daily ritual, especially before retiring at night. As per Ayurveda, five marmas (vital points located on the body where two or more types of tissue meet, such as muscles, veins, ligaments, bones or joints) out of 107 marmas are located in each foot.²

These marma points get stimulated by proper massage and, in turn, tone up the surrounding muscles and nerves and the negative energy gets released from these *marmas*. Sesame oil is most commonly used for foot massage. Sesame oil is a powerful antioxidant, easily absorbed, and very nourishing for the skin.

Depending on the condition of the person, medicated oil or medicated ghee can also be used.

Procedure of Padabhyanga

Padabhyanga is one of the easiest and simplest Ayurvedic wellness rituals to fit into one's schedule. Padabhyanga foot massage is practised at night before going to bed. Classical Ayurvedic oils like Dhanwantara tailam, Pinda tailam, Mahanarayana tailam can be used for Padabhyanga. The duration of the therapy must be 25-30 minutes. The foot massage technique is as follows:³

- The individual is asked to lie on their back.
- Using both his hands, the masseur should begin massaging from the soles of the feet. Medicated oil should be applied to the soles and feet and rubbed downward.
- The masseur should hold the ankle joint of the individual with the thumb and other fingers of his left hand.
- Using both hands, the muscles of the feet should be tapped and kneaded. All the pressure points of the sole should be pressed, including the tips of the toes.
- The right foot should be massaged in a clockwise direction, and the left in an anti-clockwise direction.
- Feet should be rubbed, and toes should be pressed and pulled.
- The whole foot should be squeezed with both hands and lastly, each toe should be twisted and pulled.

Benefits of Padabhyanga

The benefits of padabhyanga before retiring to bed are numerous, and this ritual positively impacts the quality and timing of one's sleep cycle. It also has many eye benefits, so it is worth the effort. Doing this daily is said to provide an array of health benefits. As per Acharya Sushruta:⁴

Nidrakaro dehasukhashchakshushyaha shramasuptinut.
Paadatwangmrudukaari cha padabhyangaha sada hitaha.
Su.Sutra 24/70.

As per Acharya Charaka

Kharatwa stabdhata raukshyam shramaha suptishcha padayoho.
Sadya evopashaamyanti padabhyanga nishevanaat..
Jaayate saukumaaryam cha balam sthairyam cha paadayoho.
Drushtihi prasadam labhate maarutashchopashaamyathi.
Na cha syaat grudhrasi vataha paadayoho sphutanam na cha.
Na sira snaayu sankochaha padabhyangena paadayoho.
Ch. Su. 5/90-92.⁵

- Alleviates roughness, stiffness, dryness, fatigue and numbness of feet.
- Imparts softness, strength and firmness in feet.
- Clarity of vision.
- Pacifies Vata dosha.
- Prevents sciatica, cracks in the sole and constriction of sira (ligaments) and snayu (tendons).
- Induces sound sleep.
- Reduces stress and anxiety.
- Promotes sleep and cures insomnia.
- Improves blood circulation.
- It relaxes the body and calms the mind.
- Enhance joint mobility and tone up the muscles and ligaments in the lower limbs.
- Help to relieve eyestrain and tired eyes.
- Restores and balances the body's innate energy.

Mode of Action

The inability to fall asleep is linked to unbalanced Vata dosha. Vata dosha is flexible, subtle, quick, energetic, and restless, and when unbalanced, we feel anxious, nervous, and restless. Ayurveda recommends using specifically formulated oils to soothe the body and mind and pacify Vata dosha to bring calmness. This process is known as "abhyanga". A particular type of abhyanga is pada abhyanga, which involves applying oil to the feet, around the ankles and the Achilles tendon. Pada abhyanga can be included as a part of an overall body abhyanga or performed exclusively at night. When done as a separate activity at night, an Ayurvedic foot massage enhances sleep quality, relaxes the body, reduces fatigue and stiffness in the legs, and supports high-quality sleep. It also helps to balance aggravated Pitta and nourishes and soothes eye strain. It gently balances disturbed Pitta dosha, thereby aiding in regulating sleep cycles.

As per the science of Ayurveda, Vayu mahabhuta is predominant in the sparshanendriya (sense organ for touch perception) located in the twacha (skin). Hence abhyanga with taila (oil) is considered the most beneficial for the skin.⁶ Twacha is the seat for Bhrajaka Pitta (a type of Pitta dosha). The transformation and transport of dravyas (medicaments) used in various karmas (procedures) like abhyanga (oil massage), swedana (fomentation), lepana (application of medicated pastes), etc. and imparting lustre and temperature regulation of the body is performed by Bhrajaka Pitta.

Acharya Sushruta opines that on the skin, there are very minute endings of dhamanis (arteries and veins) which are portals/openings through which the veerya (potency) of external medications like abhyanga, seka, avagaha, aalepa (different types of external application of medicaments), etc. enter into the body after transformation in the skin and these openings are related with cutaneous sensations and circulation.⁷

The word "Dhamani" is usually interpreted as an artery. But at times, the term also stands for veins and nerves. Sushruta has explained the course of dhamanis starting from shirogata hrudaya (brain/CNS). Thus, these repeatedly branched ramifications of dhamanis suggest nerve endings. The statement that mukhas (openings) of these endings are connected with hair follicles is also worth contemplation. Both capillaries and nerve endings are connected with hair follicles. The term mukha need not always mean an opening. These can be symbolic and functional, as in the case of receptors. The connection with hair follicles may be an approximation. The mention of touch, both pleasurable and disagreeable, being perceived through these endings prompts one to think that the endings here are nerve endings.

It is also worth noting that Sushruta has mentioned that the veerya (potency) of externally applied medicine enters the endings of dhamanis. It suggests that the drug need not directly enter the tract, but it can act by its presence on the exterior of the receptor.⁸

Padabhyanga is helpful in the following conditions

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Diabetic neuropathy
- Insomnia
- Epilepsy
- Hypertension
- Hemiplegia and paraplegia
- Sprains, cramps, numbness of the feet and legs
- Roughness and cracking of feet

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda is one of the most sought-after preventive and alternative healing techniques of the modern era. Ayurveda stresses the importance of foot massage as it is essential to strengthen the nerves and restore vitality. It is also one of the most suggested solutions for people suffering from frequent cramps, chronic fatigue, and various sleeping disorders, including insomnia.

The Ayurvedic wellness practices are meticulously examined and recommended by the Acharyas to maintain robust health, concord, and equilibrium in our existence. As stress and anxiety levels are escalating due to diverse factors, embracing an uncomplicated wellness regimen such as an Ayurvedic foot massage can facilitate unwinding, easing the body, and enhancing sleep. Our feet are more than just an essential part of our body. It is important to take good care of them. Applying the proper foot massage technique relieves the body of its ailments and restores health through our feet.

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