Abhyanga self-massage

‘Abhyanga (Abhi =all over, anga=body) snana (bath) is an Ayurveda ritual massage therapy to warm up muscles, loosen trapped endogenous toxins, and improve circulation. Abhyanga oils maybe **edible grade plain or made from a recipe for deeper healing. Shiro Abhyanga, massaging the head, is part of Abhyanga.** In Shiro Abhyanga we massage the scalp with herbal oils for improved circulation and lymphatic drainage. Abhyanga massage maybe professionally offered at an Ayurveda center where skilled masseuses offer this as a healing therapy or followers of an Ayurveda lifestyle practice this as part of their daily bathing ritual.’

<https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/2020/9/3/abhyanga-oil-massage-benefits>

Abhyanga is an ancient Ayurvedic technique that involves massage of the body using oils. With Abhyanga massage it can be done by a practitioner, or it's something a person can do as a self-massage technique. However, as integrative somatic practitioners you will learn and be able to practice (through guidance and instruction) within a session and to also teach your clients to perform a self- Abhyanga massage technique. As integrative somatic practitioners we do not perform a hands-on Abhyanga massage with clients.

The Chopra Center shared that ‘There is no greater expression of self-love than anointing ourselves from head to toe with warm oil—this practice is called Abhyanga. A daily Abhyanga practice restores the balance of the doshas and enhances well-being and longevity. The Sanskrit word Sneha can be translated as both “oil” and “love.” It is believed that the effects of Abhyanga are similar to those received when one is saturated with love. Like the experience of being loved, Abhyanga can give a deep feeling of stability and warmth.

A daily Abhyanga practice restores the balance of the doshas and enhances well-being and longevity. Regular Abhyanga is especially grounding and relaxing for Vata dosha imbalances, but everyone can benefit from this practice.’ -  <https://chopra.com/articles/the-benefits-of-ayurveda-self-massage-abhyanga>

Below are instructions on how to practice Abhyanga massage. You will either guide a client through the practice virtually WITHOUT the use of video (phone or zoom audio only for example – this is to honor boundaries) or you can provide them with the Abhyanga massage handout (in the handouts section) and explain to them how they can do this practice on their own.

The Things You Will Need:

* 1. Towel
  2. Yoga mat or extra towel
  3. Oil

Recipes for Abhyanga massage oils -

‘A royal recipe for Abhyanga oil is a tablespoon of equal parts of crushed cardamom, clove, bay leaf and cinnamon warmed up in a cup of Sesame oil and allowed to cool. A few strands of Saffron and a gold coin can be added to this recipe for glowing vibrant skin. This is a good recipe for a Vata body type. A few strands of Saffron and a gold coin can be added to this recipe for glowing vibrant skin.

This is a good recipe for a [Vata body type](https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/2020/9/17/vata-dosha-body-type-imbalance).

If you are a [Pitta body type](https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/2020/5/16/ayurveda-body-type-quiz), use coconut oil as a base oil.

If you are a [Kapha body type](https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/kapha-body-type-dosha-imbalance-diet) use almond oil as a base.’

<https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/2020/9/3/abhyanga-oil-massage-benefits>

If your client does not know their dosha type they can access free dosha quizzes on the internet. Here is one I recommend: <https://www.ayurgamaya.com/blog/2020/5/16/ayurveda-body-type-quiz-vata-pitta-kapha-dosha-imbalance-test>

Some additional things to infuse into your oils, are essential oils like lavender which helps with relaxation or arnica oil which helps with inflammation and muscle tension.

With traditional Abhyanga massage, your oil would be warm, and it would be infused with different types of herbs or even essential oils that have some medicinal properties. However plain oil can be used if preferred. When you or your clients practice Abhyanga massage in the future, you can warm up your oils on a stove top. I don't recommend microwaving them or putting them in the oven, but you can put them into a saucepan and just warm them up on low heat until warm. A little bit warmer than room temperature is ideal. You don't want the oil to be burning hot. Always test the oil temperature before putting it on the body. Also try to make sure that all oils and ingredients are pure, free from perfumes and are organic.

So how do we do the actual Abhyanga massage? Most people are familiar with massage and kind of can get an idea in their mind about the concept of self-massage, but with Abhyanga it's a more vigorous movement. The amount of tension that you're using in your hands, you want it to be slightly intense and moving swiftly in upwards moving circular motions. It's almost as if you are rolling dough. Moving at a swift pace is stimulating and increases the blood flow.

First, I invite you to experience this technique by practicing it and then go back and read the handout of the instructions for how to do Abhyanga. So go ahead and take a few minutes now to gather the items you will need to practice this technique…

With Abhyanga we start from the feet, and we go all the way up to the top of the head. Now, just because we're doing this in a vigorous manner, it doesn't mean that we are rushing. So if you're doing Abhyanga you don't want it to only take two minutes to do your entire body. Ideally to work through the entire body it will typically take 15-30 minutes. Although you're vigorous and moving somewhat quickly, you're really going to spend a lot of time in each of the areas really getting into the nooks and crevices… like in between the toes and around the joints. You're not just working with the muscles, but also on the bones and joints. You want to make sure that the pressure that you're applying is comfortable and also firm/deep.

The first step is to set your extra towel and your bowl of warm oil down within reach. Next, sit down comfortably on your yoga mat or your towel and go ahead and close the eyes. Begin you Abhyanga practice by taking a few deep breaths, just deeply inhaling through the nose, really filling in a chest, filling the belly all the way up with air, and then exhaling out through the mouth.

As you enter your Abhyanga self-massage practice, I'd like to invite you to set an intention of reconnecting with your body. As you are moving from place to place in the body, I invite you to really focus your mind on listening and discovering when you are massaging each area. Listening and discovering what feels tight, what feels tense, what feels neglected. Really notice what comes up for you as you're performing this. You might also have some emotional releases that come out of the muscles. These emotions may be stored the muscles, or it might be an emotional experience of just reconnecting with your body. Whatever you feel emotionally is completely fine. Abhyanga massage is a safe space. You can stop any time you want. Give yourself the permission and grace to just experience the self-massage.

Next, open your eyes and grab your oil and move to a comfortable seated in a position where you can reach your oil. Start working on one side of the body and then move to the other side and do your head last. You're going to cup your hand and pour some oil in so that the palm of your hand is full (about 1 ounce of oil). And then you're going to rub your hands together and just begin warming up that oil even more so that when it touches your body, it feels warm and soothing. The Abhyanga oil is going to spill and be a bit messy, don’t worry, you can rinse off your yoga mat in the shower afterwards (or wash your towel). Please do not try to be neat and tidy, get messy!

Start massaging with your toes on your left foot. Massage the entire foot in upwards circular motions. Get in-between all your toes. Work the oil into the joints and the whole foot.

Get more oil and warm it up by rubbing your hands together. Move up the leg, continue in upwards circular motions, work all the oil into your entire leg, the front, and the back. Get more oil as needed. More is better than less. Make sure to spend extra time working the knee and behind the knee. Then move up to your thigh, all the way around both front and back.

Next work the left hip, you can stand or roll to the side. Spend a lot of time and attention really massaging the oil into the front and side of the hip.

Next, move to the right foot. Start massaging with your toes on your right foot. Massage the entire foot in upwards circular motions. Get in-between all your toes. Work the oil into the joints and the whole foot.

Get more oil and warm it up by rubbing your hands together. Move up the leg, continue in upwards circular motions, work all the oil into your entire leg, the front, and the back. Get more oil as needed. More is better than less. Make sure to spend extra time working the knee and behind the knee. Then move up to your thigh, all the way around both front and back.

Next work the right hip, you can stand or roll to the side. Spend a lot of time and attention really massaging the oil into the front and side of the hip.

For this next part make sure you use plenty of oil. You will massage your belly. Move in large circular motions clockwise. Then move up the torso, to the chest.

Next, move to the left armpit, spend extra time here. You have a lot of lymph nodes and stimulating them is excellent for your health. Then move to the right armpit.

Now begin working on your left hand, get into all the joints, between the fingers and massage the whole hand, move up to the wrist, the entire arm, all the way up to your shoulder. Massage the shoulder and then move to the right fingers and hand.

Begin working on your right hand, get into all the joints, between the fingers and massage the whole hand, move up to the wrist, the entire arm, all the way up to your shoulder. Massage the shoulder.

Next, massage your neck in upwards circular motions, next your face (unless your skin is sensitive to breakouts) and all the way up into your scalp and your whole head.

Once you have finished your Abhyanga self-massage and are covered in oil, what do we do? Your first thought might be let's go wash this all off. And yes, you are going to do that. But here's the big butt, do not use soap… even with your hair. What you're going to do is you're going to, get into a nice warm shower, and you're going to stand under the water and rinse your entire body. You're going to rinse your hair, you're going to rinse all the excess oil off, and then you're going to get out of the shower without washing with soap and you're going to pat your skin dry. This is going to really allow the body to deeply hydrate and rejuvenate all the skin tissue. Tomorrow you will see the most magical skin you have probably ever experienced.