

Review Article on Mode of Action of Shiroabhyanga

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ABSTRACT

Shiroabhyanga is explained in many *Samhitas* as a part of *Dinacharya* (daily regimen of personal hygiene) and part of treatment for *Shirorogas*. *Shiroabhyanga* is considered under *snehana* therapy that is *Murdni taila*. As it nourishes the senses of mind and gives strength. If done on full body then it is termed as *Sarvangabhyanga* & if done in local regions like *Shira*, *Pada* then it is termed as *Shiroabhyanga*, *Padabhyanga*. *Shiroabhyanga* done everyday reduces dryness, itching and dirt. *Shiroabhyanga* is the most ideal form of 'Indian head massage' smearing the medicated oil by specific manoeuvre & strokes on the head, neck, shoulders. Depending on the desired results, the oils are selected which includes releasing the stress from the upper body, improvement of circulation of the blood to the brain, vision enhancement, migraine reduction, headaches, insomnia, chronic depression, anxiety, scalp related diseases. It improves memory & concentration. This review article deals with *nirukti* (Origin) *paribhasha* (definition), classification, benefits, procedure and mode of action of *Shiroabhyanga*.

KEYWORDS: *Shiroabhyanga*, *Murdni taila*, *snehana*

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda* various *aacharya* has explained *dinacharya* as a preventive aspect for various diseases. *Shiroabhyanga* is one of the major *upakrama* described in *Dinacharya*. *Shiroabhyanga* comes under *Murdha Taila* which is type of *Bahya Snehana*¹. *Snehana* is told as *poorva karma* in *Panchakarma*. *Snehanais* further divided in to *bahya* and *abhyantara* types, *Shiroabhyanga* comes under *bahyasneha*. In *Charak samhita* it is mentioned that *Shiroabhyanga* helps to promote *Nidra* and Daily practice of *Shiroabhyanga* prevents headache, greying of hair, hair fall and it also gives strength to skull, strengthen hairroot 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 helps to get good sleep after *Shiroabhyanga*².

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Concept of *Shiroabhyanga*
2. Procedure of *Shiroabhyanga*
3. Mode of action of *Shiroabhyanga*

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Different *Ayurveda samhitas* with their commentaries by different authors.
2. Different text books, journals, dissertations, web search and peer review journals were revised to acquire the present content of this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Etymology of *Shiroabhyanga*:

According to *Amarakosha*, 'Abhi' *upasarga* and 'Anga' *dhatu* makes the word *Abhyanga*. Which means to induce specific movements on the body.

Paribhasha: The oil (*taila*) which is applied to the *Shirah pradesha* i.e. head to help and cure diseases of head the process is called *Shiroabhyanga*. Massage of the body with the help of *Taila*, *Ghruta* in the same direction of the body hair (*anuloma gati*) is called as *Abhyanga*.

Paryaya:

Synonyms of *Abhyanga* is *Abhyanjana*

Abhyanjana: The word *Abhyanjana* derived from the root word 'Anj' by adding *upasarga* 'Abhi' with

'lyut' *pratyay* means to smear or to anoint (*shabdakalpadruma*). The word *Abhyangan* means applying oil all over the body including *Shirah* (head).

Sthana of Abhyanga:

Vishesh sthana mentioned in classical texts are as follows-

- *Shirah* (Head)
- *Shravana* (Ear)
- *Pada* (Foot)

Bheda:

Vatsyayana Kamasutra explained the 3 types of *Shiroabhyanga* as follows:

- *Samvahana*
- *Kesha-mardana*
- *Utsadana*

Indications of Abhyang:

- *Shiro abhyanga* is indicated in dry scalp associated with itching sensation.⁵
- *Taila Abhyanga* is indicated in *Bala, Vruddha, Krusha* and *Rogi*.
- Indicated in all types of *Vata Roga, Vishama Jvara* and all types of *Tvak Vikara*.
- Indicated in complaints of hairs like *Darunaka, Khalitya, Palitya* etc.
- Indicated in day to day routine for conservation 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. immediately 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*.
- 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 it gets worsened.
- It is contra-indicated directly after consumption of food, *Snehapana* and *Tarpana Kriya*, habituated to *Ruksha* and *Abhishyandha Ahara*.
- It is contra-indicated after *Snana, Vyayama, Divasvapna, Vegadharana, Prajagarana, Sheeta Vayu Sevana*.^{6,7}

Time of Abhyanga:

Abhyanga is advised to exercise one time in a day or one time in two days or one time in three days regularly as it does not vitiate *Dosha*⁸. Daily *Abhyanga* is advised in children during night time.

Direction of Abhyanga:

According to *Chikitsa Manjari* and *Chikitsa Sangraha*; it is said that generally *Abhyanga* should be performed in *Anuloma Gati* (in the direction of hair). They have also explained the specific direction of movement depending on 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 luke warm medicated *taila* (oil) or *ghrita* (ghee) or '*Vasa*' prepared with '*Doshaghna*' medicines. Generally *taila* is used for *Abhyanga*. The oil should be lukewarm in general for *Shiroabhyanga*.

Method of Abhyanga:

Abhyanga should be performed gently and in the direction of the hair (*Anulomana gati*). *Shiroabhyanga* should be done with lukewarm oil because the head is the place of all senses and it is explained as the most vital part. *Shiroabhyanga* should be performed gently with finger tips as forceful massage may damage the hair. Sitting position is to be adopted in *shiro abhyanga*.

Requirements

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

Poorvakarma:

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

Pradhanakarma:

Smearing the oil: The oil for application is first heated on a water bath to make it lukewarm. and the oil is spread all over the head including the neck and ear pinna with palmar aspect of the palm moving the palms from before backwards is enough⁹.

Gharshana hasta (Massage from before backwards): After smearing the oil massage the whole head and neck by moving the palmar face 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.

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 also gently and firmly placed on scalp. This method should be gentle producing mild traction effect on the hair. By this way; each area of the head is similarly treated.

Dvihasta tadana (Flat palm strokes): Gentle strokes are placed with the palmar face on the scalp by both hands. Strokes are followed on the vertex, occipital and temporal region.

Taranga hasta (Rocking strokes): 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): Gentle strokes placed on the patients head by making rocking movements of both the palms with fingers stretched while stroking only the palmar aspect of the little finger and thumb should touch the scalp.

Mridu mushti tadana (Fist stroke): Gentle strokes placed on all areas of the head with the closed fist through the ulnar border.

Ghatita hasta (Pressing): Flat of the palm is placed on the patient's head and is moulded in to the shape of the scalp so that every portion of the palmar aspect of the palm and fingers comes in contact with the head.

Karnabyanga (Ear massage): Ear pinna is grasped between the thumb anteriorly and the other fingers posteriorly and rubbed between the fingers, 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 strokes are continued for about 4 to 5 minutes and in this way the whole process of *Shiroabhyanga* 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 *Aristaka, Shikakai*, Bengal gram flour may be used.

Marmas in Shiras

Name of the marma	Number	Type
Neela	2	Vaikalyakara
Manya	2	Vaikalyakara
Siramatruka	8	Sadhyopranahara
Phana	2	Vaikalyakara
Apanga	2	Vaikalyakara
Vidhura	2	Vaikalyakara
Krukatika	2	Vaikalyakara
Shankha	2	Sadhyopranahara
Uthkshepa	2	Vishalyagna
Avartha	2	Vaikalyakara
Shrungataka	4	Sadhyopranahara
Adhipathi	1	Sadhyopranahara
Sthapani	2	Vishalyagna
Seemantha	5	Kalantharapranahara

Effect of Abhyanga on different Dhatu¹⁰:

Dalhana Acharya has described the effect of *abhyanga* according to its duration.

1. When the *abhyanga* is done for 300 Matras the oil reaches to hair root.
2. When done for 400 Matras the oil reaches the skin.
3. When done for 500 Matras it reaches in Rakta Dhatu.
4. The oil reaches in Mamsa dhatu in 600 Matras, Meda Dhatu in 700 Matras, Asthi Dhatu in 800 Matras and it reaches Majja Dhatu when the *Abhyanga* is performed up to 900 Matra.

Tissue	Time	
	Matra	Second
Hair Follicle	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

The mode of action of Abhyanga can be understood by the properties of Snehadravya¹²:

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*. 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 easily all over the body. It liquefies the *Doshas* and mobilizes the *Doshas*.

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 dullness. The drug diffuses slowly by this property and it remains in the contact of *Doshas*, *Dhatu* and *Malas* for longer time.

Sukshma: *Sukshma Guna* means fineness, minute and it helps the drug to enter in the minute 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*.

Mode of Action of *Abhyanga* in Modern View

The fluids of skin are drained to different parts of the body while doing *abhyanga* due to the osmotic pressure. *Abhyanga* causes hydrostatic pressure in the extracellular compartment of the skin. This pressure increases the blood circulation to a part where massage is done, causing splanchnic pooling of the blood to that surface, which leads to the absorption of the medicated oil/ghee and allows the passive entrance of the phytonutrients into the systemic circulation and then to the target structure.

Very good lymph drainage may occur during *abhyanga*. During and after massage amino acids like tryptophan may increase in the blood which may lead to increase in the production of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is made from tryptophan at motor end plates. Massage may also cause increased acetylcholine production due to the action potential

generated from the massage due to friction and pressure which are inserted during massage. The myelinated nerve fiber sheets are chiefly made up of lipids. This action potential with the association of serotonin is responsible for the pleasant and calming effect during massage¹³.

Health benefits of Head Massage:

Following are the key effects of massage –

- Relieves stress and reduces tension
- It eases headache and Migraine.
- Improves blood circulation to head and neck
- Induces better Lymph movements
- Stimulates nervous system
- Enhances skin condition¹⁴

Discussion

Dalhana has described the absorption of *sneha* used in *abhyanga* procedure in detail, the oil used in *abhyanga* reaches up to different *dhatu* 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 dravya* reaches to the particular *dhatu* then it subsides the disease of that *dhatu*. Charaka has mentioned that *vayu* dominates in the *sparshanendriya* and its *adhishtana* is *twacha* i.e. skin, so one should follow it regularly¹¹. *Indriyas* are in close contact with mind so when *Indriyas* remain healthy then mind automatically remains healthy. In this way *Abhyanga* keeps body and mind healthy.

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 the skin and local tissues. It is beneficial for de-stressing the whole body, strengthening the nervous system and inducing sleep. It also removes toxins & side effects caused by dyes etc. It nourishes the hair, hair roots and prevents excessive hair loss. It benefits the immune system. It gives relaxation. It provides overall enhancement in physical health and quality of life to both men & women, old & young. *Shiroabhyanga* is the most effective treatment for the head, neck & shoulder. It gives good feeling so one must practice *Shiroabhyanga* in day today life on a regular base.

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