



How to Perform an Abhyanga Self-Massage (Oil Massage)

Abhyanga is an Ayurvedic oil massage that soothes the two master systems of the body: the nervous system and the endocrine system. Ayurveda recommends a daily morning massage to help you begin your day feeling relaxed. People who approach the day feeling calm have the best chance of staying balanced and healthy. The entire process only takes 5 to 10 minutes*.

- Since this is a light massage, you will need no more than a quarter cup of oil. Choose an oil that balances your dosha type (see suggestions below).
- Lay an old towel on the floor so you don't slip (use an old towel because oil can be staining). Begin by massaging your scalp, using small, circular strokes as if shampooing your hair.
- Using gentle strokes, apply the oil to your forehead, cheeks, and chin, and then move to your ears. Slowly massage the back of your ears and your temples, which has a soothing effect.
- Massage a small amount of oil onto the front and back of your neck and then move to your shoulders. When massaging your arms, use circular motions at the shoulders and elbows, and long back-and-forth motions on the upper arms and forearms.
- Using large, gentle, circular motions, massage your chest, stomach, and abdomen. Use an up-and-down motion over your breast bone. Applying a bit of oil to both hands, gently reach around to massage your back and spine as best you can.
- Massage your legs with a circular motion at the ankles and knees, using a straight back-and-forth motion on the long parts. Use whatever oil remains to massage your feet, paying extra attention to your toes. Sit quietly for a few moments to let the oil soak into your body, and then take your shower or bath.
- You can shower your hair as usual, but only use soap where necessary, leaving a layer of oil on most of your skin.

*General contraindications:

- Abhyanga *should not be done* when there is a thick white coating of ama on the tongue, while experiencing any kind of indigestion, or during menses.
- Skip abhyanga if you have a fever, cold, or feel ill.

Doing abhyanga during high ama conditions, indigestion, or acute illness can end up slowing agni and nourishing the already accumulated ama, making symptoms worse. It is best to strengthen Agni first so ama directed toward the GI tract can be managed. During menses, the body is going through a natural detoxification process, and doing abhyanga during this time might disturb the flow of apana vayu.

Mini Massage

If you don't have time to do a full-body massage, a short one is still much better than none at all. The head and the feet are the most important parts of the body to cover, and you can massage those in a very short time. The mini-massage requires only about two tablespoons of oil.

- Rub one tablespoon of warm oil into your scalp, using the small, circular motions described above. Massage your forehead from side to side using the palm of your hand. Gently massage your temples, using circular motions, then lightly rub your ears. Spend a few moments massaging the back and front of your neck.
- With a second tablespoon of oil, massage both feet using the flats of your hands. Work the oil around the toes with your fingertips, then vigorously massage the soles of your feet with brisk back-and-forth motions of the palms.

Choose a Dosha-Balancing Oil

Perform your massage with an oil that balances your mind-body type.

- To balance Vata: Favor heavier, warming oils such as sesame or almond oil.
- To balance Pitta: Favor cooling, soothing oils such as coconut or olive oil.
- To balance Kapha: Favor light, warming oils such as sunflower or safflower oil.

Tip: If your Vata dosha is out of balance, your massage should use gentle strokes. For those with an excess of Pitta, a deeper massage is beneficial. When you want to balance Kapha, perform a stimulating, vigorous massage.