

Role of Pādābhyāṅga in the Health of Human Beings

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Abstract

Āyurveda is considered to be the mother of all forms of modern medicine. *Pañcakarma* is based on central concepts of *Āyurveda*, and used in *Āyurvedika* medicine to treat almost all diseases. Our skin is the largest organ of our body though we do not aware of it. It is also the most important and rich source of healing substances. It is very sensitive to the touch therapy, particularly to the *Abhyāṅga* with powder, oil, aromas or just to the gentle touch. *Abhyāṅga* is one type of external oleation therapy. Literary meaning of the *Abhyāṅga* is to produce some motions. Rubbing or stroking after applying *ghṛta*, *Taila*, etc. on the skin, helps in their absorption. A person should resort to *Abhyāṅga* every day if he wants to keep himself healthy. In classics, *Abhyāṅga* has been mentioned as the part of *dinacaryā* i.e. daily routine. It is very useful before performing physical exercise. It promotes healthy growth in the young, helps adults maintain health and vigour, and is an aid in preventing the onset of degenerative diseases in the aged. The *Āyurvedika* approach to health and wellbeing involves balancing the energies in the polarities (head and feet). *Pādābhyāṅga* has a very special place within *Āyurvedika* tradition. *Pādābhyāṅga* is considered most helpful in the prevention and treatment of illness. It is suggested that *Pādābhyāṅga* is practiced as a daily ritual, especially before going to sleep at night.

Keywords

Āyurveda, *Pañcakarma*, *Abhyāṅga*, *Pādābhyāṅga*



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INTRODUCTION

Health according to *Āyurveda* is not merely the freedom from diseases. A person having the equilibrium of *Doṣa* (*Vāta*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* which are responsible for the functioning and mal-functioning of different organs of the body), *Agni* (enzymes responsible for the digestion and metabolism), *Dhātu* (tissue elements constituting the structures of the individual's body) and *Mala* (waste products which are eliminated from the body) and happiness of the soul, senses and the mind, is to be treated as “*Svastha* (healthy)”.¹

Pañcakarma means five actions or five procedures, is based on central concepts of *Āyurveda*. *Pañcakarma* which state that disease is caused by the build-up of toxic substances in the body and by imbalances in the body and mind. *Pañcakarma* procedures intended to intensively cleanse and restore balance to the body, mind, and emotions. *Pañcakarma* is the purification therapy and used to treat almost all diseases, particularly those that are chronic, metabolic or stress-related in origin and may be used alongside intensive conventional treatments including chemotherapy and surgery, to support healing and recovery. *Pañcakarma*

procedure is safe and non-toxic, and can be used as to increase general well-being and prevention.

According to *Āyurveda*, physical and emotional traits are classified as three *Doṣa* — *Vāta*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. All three *Doṣa* are present in each individual with one predominating. If anyone *Doṣa* imbalance occurs, diseases appear. *Pañcakarma* rebalances the imbalance *Doṣa*, bringing them back to equilibrium and the individual back to good health.

Pañcakarma – It includes two parts namely: *Pūrvakarma*² (Preparatory Methods), which includes:

Pācana (Digestion)

Snehana (Internal and external oleation)

Svedana (Fomentation)

*Pradhāna Karma*³ (Main methods), which includes:

Vamana

Virecana

Vasti (*Anuvāsana* and *Āsthāpana*)

Raktamokṣaṇa

Nasya

Importance of *Snehana*

Snehana karma also called oleation therapy is administered in two different ways, viz. *Bāhya Snehana* (externally) and *Ābhyāntara*

Snehana (internally). *Bāhya Snehana* is given through many types of *Abhyāṅga*. Usually *Bāhya Snehana* is done with the help of ordinary or medicated oil but sometimes powders and pastes of medicinal plants, animal products and metallic preparations are also used.⁴ *Abhyāṅga* should be done every day either over the whole body or over different specific parts of the body to keep the body healthy and to prevent as well as cure manifested diseases. Some special *Abhyāṅga* therapies have been developed in *Āyurveda* e.g. *Śīrobhyāṅga*, *Karṇa Pūraṇa*, and *Pādābhyāṅga* etc. these special *Abhyāṅga* therapies cause *Snehana* and fomentation of the body.⁵ Apart from curing some of the obstinate and otherwise incurable diseases, these special *Abhyāṅga* help in rejuvenating the body.

A person should use massage therapy every day for preserving and promoting his positive health and preventing and curing diseases. Regular massage should be performed over the whole body including head for the prevention of diseases, promotion of positive health, rejuvenation of the individuals and cure of diseases. But massage in specific parts of the body has some special effects.⁶

Pādābhyāṅga* - As part of *Pañcakarma

In India feet have a particular significance. "In India, people touch the feet of elderly persons to obtain their blessings and to receive the loving energy transmitted through their feet. In *Āyurveda* tradition *Pādābhyāṅga* has a very special place. It is very useful to have a massage over the soles of feet (*Pādābhyāṅga*) before going to bed. *Pādābhyāṅga* is considered most helpful in the prevention and treatment of illness. *Pādābhyāṅga* is practised as a daily ritual, especially before retiring at night.

Description about feet

According to the Indian scriptures-

"Diseases do not go near one who massages his legs and feet from knee to toes before sleeping, just as snakes do not approach eagles".

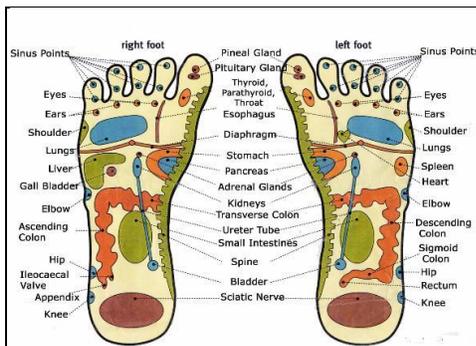
Our feet are often out of sight and out of mind - until they begin to hurt.

By DOUG KELLER

Feet are referred to as "organs of action" and they support the body's weight and provide a mobile platform in a variety of terrains. Just imagine: the entire structure of house begins to creak and buckle, if the foundation is weak. In the same way problems are occur in our legs, knees, hips, back, shoulders, and neck, causing muscle tension, postural

imbalances, and fatigue if the foundation in our feet are weak.

Our feet are mirrors for the rest of the body according to *Āyurveda*, reflexology, and other ancient healing systems. If we are holding tension in our feet, we are probably holding tension in other parts of our body, too. And our entire body is tired, when our feet are tired. Our feet also affect the flow of energy through the entire body. Just as a tree draws nourishment from its roots to fortify all its limbs, we can use our feet to draw energy upward from the earth.



Four important *Sirā* (nerves) present in the soles of the feet that are connected with the

head. These nerves get afflicted due to heat, friction and excessive pressure on the soles of the feet, as a result of which, eye-sights of a person get reduced. If at the root of these nerves i.e. in the soles of the feet, massage is done regularly, then the person never suffers from any eye diseases.⁷

Applied part of feet

Āyurveda recognizes power points in the body called *Marma*. *Marma* points are vital energy centers that are located at the junctures of the five organic principles that relate to muscles, ligaments (tendons), bones, joints and vessels (arteries, veins, nerves and lymphatics). They have considerable impact on our health and wellbeing. So powerful are these points, that surgeons will not incise them. The *Marma* points directly influence the function of the internal organs of the body.

The body contains 107 major (primary) *Marma*. There are five *Marma* points occurring in each foot⁸-

Marma	Location	Sign of injury	Benefits of massage
1. <i>Kṣipra –Marma</i>	Space between first & second metatarsals.	Quick loss of function of adduction- flexion of great toe. Severe bleeding leads tremors of the foot.	Stimulates heart, lung function and the lymphatic system, firm massage aids the flow of <i>Prāṇa</i> in the lower limbs.
2. <i>Talahṛdaya-Marma</i>	Distal to the centre of the sole of the foot, faces the root of middle finger	Loss of function of flexion and extension of 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th phalanges and severe bleeding may lead to severe pain, shock, or gangrene of the fingers.	Stimulates heart and lung function, promotes circulation in lower abdomen and legs, is very calming, can release negative energy; firm

			massage helps strengthen the immune system. It controls the feet as a motor organ, and the earth element for the whole body.
3. <i>kūrca-Marma</i>	1 inch distal from the ankle joint at the root of the thumb above <i>Kṣipra Marma</i> .	Incoordination among the tarsals and metatarsals joints, impairment of the functions of extension and abduction of the ankle and may cause disfigurement of the foot.	Promotes visual acuity, stimulates overall sensory acuity, aids digestive processes by improving <i>Agni</i> , firm massage aids mental acuity and helps relieve stress.
4. <i>kūrcaśira –Marma</i>	At the joining point of <i>kūrca</i> below ankle joint.	Impairment of the function of the flexion and abduction of the ankle joint, severe bleeding from the tibial artery and severe pain due to injury to the tibial nerve.	Promotes a healthy muscular system and aids body posture, helpful for digestion and reproductive function due to its connection with the endocrine system.
5. <i>Gulpha-Marma</i>	Immediately inferior to the medial & lateral malleoli, over the subtalar joint.	Swelling with impairment of the functions of flexion, extension, etc. of foot.	Stimulates the reproductive system, promotes healthy joints, bone growth and foot movement.

DISCUSSION

Āyurveda emphasizes preventative and healing therapies along with various methods of purification and rejuvenation. *Āyurveda* is more than a mere healing system; it is a science and an art

of appropriate living that helps to achieve longevity.

Pañcakarma is one of the important *Āyurvedika* tools used to restore balance to

the body. *Pañcakarma* therapy primarily aims at cleansing the body of its accumulated impurities and nourishing the

tissues. Once this is achieved, it becomes very easy to rejuvenate these tissues and prevent the process of ageing.

Abhyāṅga is an integral part of the *Āyurvedika* system of healing. It improves the flow of *Prāṇa* within the body. It promotes healthy growth in the young, helps adults maintain health and vigour, and is an aid in preventing the onset of degenerative diseases in the aged.

Pādābhyāṅga is primarily a standalone therapy used for maintenance and prophylaxis. The massage techniques used in *Pādābhyāṅga* are predominately friction movements such as rubbing and

stroking. They are usually applied vigorously to stimulate local circulation and energy flow.

Massage strokes on the foot are usually firmer in the direction of the toes. This adheres to the principle that leg energy circulates in a downward direction towards the earth.

Soles of the feet are very closely connected with eyes and ears. Therefore, massage over the soles of the feet promotes eye-sights and proper functioning of the auditory organs of the body.

It also cures sciatica, cramps and contraction of the ligaments, vessels and muscles of the lower limbs.

It prevents and cures and dryness, numbness, roughness, fatigue, lack of sensation and cracking in the soles of feet.

It promotes strength for walking and running, and gives sturdiness to the limbs.

Marmas are ‘control points’, through which *Prāṇa* and the various organs of the body can be worked on. Each *Marma* point has various organs, systems, senses, *nāḍī* and *cakra* that it rules over. We can control our *Prāṇa* through working on *Marma* points and after controlling *Prāṇa* we can control our sensory and motor organs, and eventually our entire mind-body complex.

The *Marmas* interact with the *cakra* via the *nāḍī*, and with the internal organs via the *srotas*. The specific influence on body function, and individual relationships with the internal organs, varies between *Marma* points.

The most important *Marma* in the feet is *Talahṛdaya*. Through this *Marma* point *Prāṇa* passes to and from the earth, so this point is our ‘earthing’ or ‘grounding’ point.

According to *Atreya* Smith - *Marmas* are similar to the pressure points used in reflexology and acupressure. In fact, it is the system of *Marmas* that is the origins of these systems and acupuncture. Their use in the context of the *Āyurvedika* system greatly enhances their results.

Seven thousand nerve end points are located in each foot which corresponds to every organ and system within our body. In these points by applying pressure, the nerves related to points are stimulated to release energy blocks and enhance the flow of healing energy to the corresponding organs of the body.

An individual’s health and sleep pattern is improved by the using of *Pādābhyāṅga*.

Pādābhyāṅga is safe therapeutic procedure without any adverse effect with minimal expense.

CONCLUSION

Thus, *Pādābhyāṅga* is recommended either alone or combined with other *Pañcakarma* procedure or certain *Āyurvedika* medications for the better management of various diseases in view of non-availability of suitable treatment modalities in the modern system of medicine.

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