

Mindfulness Handout

Self-Care: Abhyanga

Abhyanga

Ayurvedic Self – Massage

Abhyanga is one of many massage routines established by Ayurveda, the four thousand year old health system from India. Ayurveda says that a daily full-body massage (self or from another) is an important part of maintaining good health.

When stimulated through therapeutic touch or massage, the skin releases a pharmacy of healing chemicals that have health-promoting effects on the physiology. In addition to feeling good, regular massage and loving touch detoxifies the body's tissues, increases circulation, calms the mind, enhances immune function, and promotes well-being.

It is said that the effects of Abhyanga are similar to the effects of being deeply loved. Abhyanga is an opportunity to love and feel affection and gratitude for your own body, and when you appreciate it and pay loving attention to it, it just functions better. Remember the aphorism "Where attention goes, energy flows?" Wherever attention goes, some change occurs.

The practice takes about 15 minutes and is typically done in the morning before your daily shower. If you find this is not a convenient time of day, then try it before bed. It's a sublime preparation for sleep.

There is no real healing without awareness, so remember to bring a quality of self love and self nurturing to the practice. Give yourself affirmations like, "I love myself, I'm beautiful, I'm blissful, I'm healthy, I appreciate my body, I'm grateful for my arms, my legs, my fingers, toes, etc."

Here are some suggestions to get the most from this life-giving ritual:

If you are using oil, Ayurveda recommends choosing an unrefined, or cold-pressed organic sesame oil in cooler months and coconut oil can be used for a more cooling effect in warmer months. After the massage, wait a few minutes before showering or bathing to allow the oil to penetrate your skin. Some people like to practice Abhyanga after a bath or shower when the skin is warm and towel dry off the excess oil.

On the long limbs and open areas, the strokes are long. Over joints and marma points (body locations identical to acupuncture points) the rubbing is circular to stimulate and align body energy.

Mindfulness Handout

Self-Care: Abhyanga

Step by Step

1. If you are using oil, begin by running some hot water over the bottle to gently warm the oil.
2. The massage is performed with the ball and palm of the hand and not with the fingers whenever possible. Use circular strokes over joints and up-and-down strokes over long bones. Use a moderate amount of pressure so that heat is generated from the strokes except over the heart and abdomen where gentler strokes are used. Start with the head and work systematically down the body, for a grounding and relaxing effect.
3. Using your fingertips, vigorously massage your head and scalp with small circular strokes, as if you are shampooing.
4. Massaging more gently, move to your face and ears, which are massaged by kneading between the thumb and forefinger
5. Using an open hand to create friction, massage both the front and back of the neck.
6. Massage your arms, from each shoulder down to the finger tips. Use a circular motion at the shoulders, long strokes down the upper arms, circular motion on elbows, long strokes down the forearms, and circular motion on the wrists. Give thumb presses over the palm of the hand and “pinch and pull” from the base of each finger to the tips.
7. When massaging your chest, use a gentle circular motion and a straight up-and-down motion over the breastbone. Give ‘heart open like book’ gentle strokes across the front of the chest.
8. The abdomen is done in about the same manner, using gentle, circular clockwise strokes. Some people like to massage the abdomen with only one hand, others place one hand on top of the other and use two hands--see which techniques you prefer.
9. Gently reach around to the back and spine and massage them in a downward motion as well as you can without straining.
10. The buttocks can be massaged using a combination of circular and straight strokes.
11. Massage your legs as you did your arms, using circular motions at the hips, knees, and ankles and long strokes on the upper and lower legs. Also thumb presses on the soles of the feet, and “pinch and pull” from the base of the toes to the tips.