

Morning self oil massage guidelines

Self massage with warm oil, known as “abhyanga” in Ayurveda, is a nourishing part of a morning self-care routine. It protects the skin from the drying effects of bathing, helps with lymphatic drainage, and can be instrumental in moderating the wind element in the body and mind, soothing the nervous system. It is a nice way to become more familiar with the body and offer yourself love and care. The word “sneha” means both oil and love in Sanskrit!

Always use a good quality organic oil. Sesame oil is traditional and particularly good in the winter. It can be a bit heavy and heating for those with a lot of fire in their constitutions or in the summer. Alternatives include sunflower oil, olive oil, and coconut oil.

Before your shower or bath:

If it does not seem like over-stimulation (such as in the fall/winter) begin with dry-brushing of the whole body using a natural bristle brush or silk “garshana” gloves. Use long strokes over the long bones and circular clockwise strokes over joints and abdomen. Be very gentle on face and neck.

Warm the oil you will use (I put my bottle into a basin of hot water while I do the dry brushing.)

Using the same long strokes and circular motions for long bone areas and joints, respectively, massage the oil into the skin, starting with the head and paying particular attention to the hairline. It is useful to rub a small amount of oil into each nostril, the ears, and anus. Massage the body all the way to the feet, being very careful to not slip if applying oil to the soles of the feet.

Let the oil soak in for a few minutes if possible before bathing.

Do not use soap to wash off the oil; most of it will rinse off in the shower. Oil has a cleansing action on its own, and much of the purpose of the massage is to nourish the skin and protect it from the water. Small amounts of soap in armpits and the genital area are all that are really necessary.

Don't leave oil in your hair; using shampoo before wetting the hair can help wash the oil out.

Don't practice oil massage if you are sick, or have broken skin, or any infection.

Oil massage is not recommended during menstruation or pregnancy.

On a related note, warm oil rubbed into the soles of the feet at night, with special attention to the ball of the foot between the big and second toes, can be helpful for supporting sleep. I like to put cotton socks on after applying the oil.