

Ayurveda and Massage

Ayurveda^{i[1]}, the ancient science of healing from India has always utilized massage as a part of its regimens for healing. From an Ayurvedic perspective, different forms of massage are useful to different people. The form of massage utilized is based upon a person's constitution^{i[2]} and imbalance.

One's constitution is the inborn or inherent balance of energies in his or her body and mind. In Ayurveda these are quantified in the understanding of the Doshas. There are three Doshas known as Vata, Pitta and Kapha. These three energies control the formation and functions of the body on the physical and emotional levels. In harmony the body is healthy but as the doshas move out of harmony the body expresses itself in the form of disease. Each individual has his/her own unique balance of these energies. As a result each individual expresses himself differently in the world. Each person has a different type of body frame, degree of oiliness in the skin, sensitivity to pain and many more characteristics that can be understood by knowing a person's unique constitution. This is why Ayurveda sees all people as individuals recognizing that one person's elixirs is another person's poison.

As an example, people of Kapha nature have skin which is naturally oily, soft, and supple. They also tend toward being heavy, feeling cool and moving slowly. If these individuals use cooling oils like coconut, the cool and heavy quality of the oil will sedate them even more and may cause oozing skin conditions. On the other hand warm, lighter oils like safflower can be added to another warm oil like almond to make a much more balancing massage oil for Kapha individuals. In addition other warm, stimulating essential oils could be added. While other people of Kapha nature can do well with warm, stimulating oils, they also thrive with dry massage using powders.

In addition to the science of choosing or making oils for massage, Ayurveda recommends different forms of massage for different people. These principles can help a person understand why some people are drawn to polarity when others are drawn to deep tissue therapy and Rolfing. If a person is receiving the wrong form of massage for them, it can lead to greater imbalance physically and emotionally. Following our example above, people of Kapha nature who tend to be stocky, muscular, carry a little more weight and tend toward lethargy benefit from deep tissue massage which is more stimulating while gentle massage strokes like effleurage or polarity can add to their already sedate nature.

Massage is also used in the Ayurvedic therapy known as Pancha Karma^{i[3]}. This is a therapy, which aids in detoxification. While massage with appropriate oils is only one part of this therapy, the knowledge of its role helps a person understand the effects of massage on their individual body type. During this form of massage called abhyanga, two practitioners participate in a rhythmic massage, which in conjunction with the oils used, liquefies toxins in the body so they can be easily expelled through other processes.

Finally, another area Ayurveda includes which is related to massage is the art of "Marma Point Therapy." Marmas are special energetic points in the body with relationships to organ function, metabolism and emotional states. They bare similarities to Acupuncture points and many scholars hold to the view that Ayurveda is the foundation of Chinese medicine. Marma points are typically stimulated by hand pressure, massed with special oils or stimulated with medicated steam.

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