

— HAVE YOU TRIED —

AYURVEDIC MASSAGE

AYURVEDIC MASSAGE IS PART OF INDIA'S TRADITIONAL MEDICINE SYSTEM AND CAN HELP TO RESTORE BALANCE IN THE MIND AND BODY

Words: Karen Young

Ayurveda, the traditional medicine system of India, is the art of harmonious, healthy living. Dating back thousands of years, its name is derived from two Sanskrit words – *ayur*, meaning life and *veda*, meaning knowledge or science. Ayurveda views each person as unique, with no single diet or lifestyle routine working for everyone. Prevention is paramount and Ayurveda focuses on maintaining physical, emotional and spiritual balance. This is achieved through a combination of nutrition, herbal remedies, yoga, meditation and massage.

“Central to Ayurveda is the idea that everything in the universe is made up of five basic elements – space, air, fire, water and earth,” explains Mary Dalgleish, Vice President of the Federation of Holistic Therapists, who teaches and practices different Ayurvedic techniques. “These come together in the body to form three life forces, or *doshas*, called *vata* (space and air), *pitta* (fire and water) and *kapha* (water and earth). While everyone has a unique combination of all three, one is usually more dominant, and it’s the balance of these *doshas* in the body that determines our overall health.”

Some Ayurvedic massages involve treating the whole body, such as *abhyanga* and *vishesh*, while others focus on a specific area, such as the head (*shiro abhyanga*), face (*mukabhyanga*) or feet (*padabhyanga*). “What all Ayurvedic massages have in common is that they help to balance the *doshas* by working vital energy, or *marma*, points on the body,” explains Mary. “To do this, the therapist may apply a special,



herb-infused oil, along with a variety of different massage techniques, including tapping, kneading and squeezing, as well as stroking, or ‘effleurage’, movements.”

An Ayurvedic session will begin with a full consultation, during which you will be asked a range of questions to help the therapist determine your *dosha* type. A massage treatment, tailored to your individual needs, will then be carried out, using herb-infused oils, compresses, pastes or special massage tools to complement the treatment. Where oils are used, your therapist is likely to encourage you to keep this on the skin for as long as possible, to maximise the benefits of treatment.

Sessions can last from 30 to 90 minutes and cost between £25 and £100, depending on the length and type of treatment, location and therapist. Many people feel relaxed, peaceful and balanced after treatment. ☺

The Federation of Holistic Therapists (www.fht.org.uk) is the UK and Ireland's leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists.

Five benefits of Ayurvedic massage

1 A pilot study in 2011 showed that a one-hour Ayurvedic *abhyanga* massage significantly reduced subjective stress experience and could lower heart rate.

2 The herb-infused oils applied in a number of Ayurvedic massages are said to help nourish, purify and rejuvenate the skin and body.

3 During the full-body massage, all the major muscles and joints are massaged – usually with warm oil – which can help to soothe aches and pains.

4 *Shiro abhyanga* involves massaging oil into the head, neck and shoulders. Benefits include easing tension-type headaches, calming the mind, improving sleep and nourishing the hair and scalp.

5 Tired, dry or rough feet? *Padabhyanga* is an oil-based Ayurvedic foot massage, which can help to address dry skin, stiff foot and ankle joints, as well as calm the nervous system.

BEFORE YOU GO
Ayurvedic massage should be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Consult your GP or other health professional for medical attention and advice.