

Marmas in Paadabhyanga - A Conceptual Overview

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ABSTRACT

Soles are one among special sites mentioned in ayurvedic *Samhitas* for *Abyanga*. Application of oil on the feet followed by massage is known as *Paadabhyanga*. Generally this *Paadabhyanga* is performed as a part of *Sharirabhyanga*. It is done in healthy person as a daily regimen to promote the health. The effect of *Paadabhyanga* is mentioned in all three treaties of *Brihatrayee* have commonly mentioned in maintenance of ocular health. Charaka described *Paadabhyanga* as *Dristiprasadaka* and according to Susruta it is *Chakshushya*. By doing *Paadabhyanga*, *marma* points in the feet get stimulated. *Marma* signifies the points where important anatomical structures converge in differential propositions. The concept of *Marma sharir* highlights the intricate relationship between anatomical structures, energetic pathways, and overall well-being. It emphasizes the holistic understanding of the human body, integrating physical, energetic, and psychological aspects. The *Marma* points in the feet that are massaged during the *Paadabhyanga* procedure are *kshipra*, *kurcha*, *Talahridaya*, *kurchasirah*, and *Gulpha*. The body's *Prana* lives in the *Marma*. Thus *Marmas* are stimulated to ensure the flow of energy in all channels of *Prana*.

KEYWORDS: *Paadabhyanga*, *Marma*, *Ayurveda*, *Abyanga*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the science of life that has been around for thousands of years. It has given more importance to preventive aspects than curative aspects. All those preventive aspects are included under *Dinacharya*. *Abyanga* is a part of *Dinacharya*. It is the application of oil to the skin followed by massage. Daily application of oil on head, ear and feet is encouraged in *Ayurveda*.

Paadabhyanga is a therapeutic intervention which comes under subtype of *Bahya Snehana*. *Paada* means feet and *Abyanga* means application of oil. So *Paadabhyanga* is application of oil to the feet. It combines the power of therapeutic touch along with medicinal properties of oil. It has numerous benefits including enhanced circulation, increased flexibility, and nourishment of body. Additionally, our *Acharya* described that it helps to improve vision. There are 9 steps in *Paadabhyanga*. The oil is selected based on *Prakriti* of the individual. If individual has any complaints, specific oils are used for *Abyanga*. By doing *Paadabhyanga* roughness, stiffness, numbness of *Paada* get relieved and strength, stability get

improved. It also prevent sciatica, constriction of veins and crackness of feet. The 5 *Marma* points get stimulated by proper massage and in turn tone up the surrounding muscles and nerves.

General effect of *Abyanga*

Daily application of oil retard ageing, overcomes fatigue and annihilates effect of aggravated *vata*. It improves clarity of vision, renders nourishment, longevity, good sleep, good skin tone and sturdy physique^[1]

Benefits of *Paadabhyanga*

By massaging of oil in feet, coarseness, stiffness, roughness, fatigue and numbness of feet are relieved. Further, delicacy, strength, firmness in feet, clarity of vision is attained and vitiated *Vata dosha* get pacified. Some diseases like sciatica, constriction of veins and crackness of feet can be prevented by *Paadabhyanga*^[2]

Paadabhyanga also helps to induce sleep, beneficial for the eyes, makes the skin of the feet smooth^[3]

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Contraindications

Specific contraindications of *Paadabhyanga* are not mentioned in any of the classical textbooks. It is however not to be practiced by those suffering from vitiated of *kapha dosha*, those have undergone either of the five therapeutic procedures and those suffering from *Ajirna*^[4].

METHODOLOGY

1. Classical text books of Ayurveda with *brihatrayee* as the base and published articles were reviewed.
2. Literature regarding *Marmas* on *paada* from *Brihatrayees* were analysed and an attempt has been made to correlate these *Marma* with modern anatomy along with self drawn diagrams.

For procedure of *Paadabhyanga*, table for *Abyanga*, medicated oil, water bath for heating oil are required. The oil is selected based on prakriti of the individual.

Table 1 Showing taila yoga for Paadabhyanga ^[5]

Vata prakriti	Himasagara taila
Pitta prakriti	Chandanadi taila
Kapha prakriti	Triphaladi taila
Sama prakriti	Asanabilwadi taila

While it is performed for disease, selection of oil based on disease can be made.

Table 2 showing selection of oil based on disease condition ^[5]

Crack foot	<i>Vipadikahara taila, madhuchchhishta taila.</i>
Eczema feet	<i>Marichadi taila.</i>
Fungal infection	<i>Chakramarda taila</i>
Peripheral vascular disease	<i>Pinda taila.</i>
Degenerative joint disease	<i>Karpooradi taila.</i>
Plantar fasciitis	<i>Vishagarbha taila, Karpooradi taila</i>
Calcaneal spur	<i>Vishagarbha taila, Karpooradi taila</i>

Preparation of client

Morning time is the ideal time for *Paadabhyanga*. If the clients are suffering from dermatological manifestation of feet, *Paadabhyanga* is preferred after cleaning the lesion. If there is tenderness, application of oil is not followed by any form of massage. If patient is suffering from insomnia, *Paadabhyanga* is preferred at night. Specific precaution must be taken if the clients have any type of communicable disorders.

Position of client:

Client is asked to lie down on the *Abyanga* table. *Abyanga* is carried out in three positions

1. Supine Position
2. Lateral Position
3. Prone position

Paadabhyanga is performed with lukewarm oil. Oil is applied to the feet both in its plantar and dorsal aspects up to ankle. Details of the manipulation to be done in the form of massage are given below.

1. Linear manoeuvre on the foot: Client is in the supine position, therapist stands at the foot end of the table facing the head end. The leg is grasped just above the ankle with both the hands. Then the foot is massaged with hands by applying firm pressure. Do the same in the prone position.
2. Linear manoeuvre on the sides of foot: Client is in the lateral position. Leg is flexed at the knee and the foot placed on the other leg resting on the ankle. Then just below the ankle the pulp of both the thumbs are placed. Then massage distally towards the little toe by applying firm pressure with the thumb.
3. Linear manoeuvre on dorsum of foot: This step is done in supine position. Therapist grasps the foot of the client in one hand are the ankle, and firmly places the thumb of the other hand on one of the soft spaces between the bones on the dorsum of the foot. Then move the thumb towards the toes applying firm pressure. Thus the soft space between the bones on the dorsum of the foot is massaged.
4. Thumb poking on the soles: This manoeuvre is done in supine position of the client. The foot of the client is stabilized by grasping with both the hands with thumbs on the soles and fingers on the dorsum of foot. Thumbs are then poked on the soles gently and firmly. By this procedure whole of the sole is massaged.
5. Linear manoeuvre on the soles: This manipulation is done in the prone position of the client. Heel of the client is hold by both hands of the therapist with thumbs approximating on the heel and the other fingers at the dorsum of the foot. Foot of the client is massaged from soles to the tip of the toes. With the pulp of thumb, firm pressure is placed on the sole.
6. Circular manoeuvre on the pads
This manipulation is done in the supine position. Client's foot is grasped by the therapist with his fingers at the dorsum of the foot and the thumb at the soles. Then move the thumb in circular fashion by applying firm pressure over the sole.
7. To and fro manoeuvre on the soles
This manoeuvre is done in supine position. Client's leg is grasped by the therapist at the ankle with one

hand. Rub the sole along its length with the palmar aspects of the other hand in both the directions.

8. Linear and circular massage on toes

Client's leg is held firmly at the ankle with one hand. And client's toe is grasped between the thumb and index finger and then each toe is separately massaged with the other hand. And then apply linear movement between the joints and circular movement on the joints of the toes.

9. Linear massage on web spaces

Foot is grasped with one hand to stabilize and then the index finger of the other hand is inserted into the web space between the big toe and second toe. Then

move the index finger to and fro manner in several times exerting firm pressure on the floor of the web space. Then massage the other web spaces in the same way.

Duration: 900 *Maatrakala* is the time mentioned for *Abyanga* by Acharya Susruta, which comes approximately 5 minutes. In 300 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Romkupa*, 400 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Twak*, 500 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Rakta*, 600 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Mamsa*, in 700 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Meda*, in 800 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Asthi*, and in 900 *Maatrakala taila* enters *Majja* ^[6]

Table 3 showing steps in Paadabhyanga

Steps	Manoeuver	Time taken
1.	Linear Manoeuver on the foot	1 minute
2.	Linear manoeuver on the sides of foot	1 minute
3.	Linear manoeuver on dorsum of foot	1 minute
4.	Thumb poking on the soles	1 minute
5.	Linear manoeuver on the soles	1 minute
6.	Circular manoeuver on the pads	1 minute
7.	To and fro manoeuver on the soles	1 minute
8.	Linear and circular massage on toes	1 minute
9.	Linear massage on web spaces	1 minute

After care: The patient is allowed to take rest for 15 to 30 minutes. Then wash the feet with hot water.

Marmas on Paada

Marmas are areas where the muscles, ligaments, bones and joints meet together by virtue of their nature are special seat of life ^[7]. *Paadabhyanga* including these area require special attention. Among 107 *marmas* in body 5 of them are present in *Paada*.

Table 4 showing Marmas on Paada ^[8]

Marmas	Anguli pramana	Morbidity	Structure
<i>Talahrdaya</i>	$\frac{1}{2}$ angula	<i>Kaalaantara praanahara</i>	<i>Mamsa Marma</i>
<i>Kshipra</i>	$\frac{1}{2}$ angula	<i>Kaalaantara praanahara</i>	<i>Snayu Marma</i>
<i>Kurcha</i>	4 angula	<i>Vaikalyakara</i>	<i>Snayu Marma</i>
<i>Kurchasirah</i>	1 angula	<i>Rujaakara</i>	<i>Snayu Marma</i>
<i>Gulpha</i>	2 angula	<i>Rujaakara</i>	<i>Sandhi Marma</i>

Talahrdaya marma: This *Marma* is located in the middle of sole of foot and can be on a straight line drawn from root of *Madhyamanguli* having size of $\frac{1}{2}$ Angula. Considering its structure it is a *Mamsa Marma*. Injury to these *Marma* cause death in long run and it is included in category of *Kalaantara praanahara marma*.

In the foot muscles at centre of plantar surface is flexor digitorum brevis. The tendon of flexor digitorum longus branch is at about the middle of sole. This branching point may also be included in the vital area but the total size of area is only half finger. Moreover vital area is identified as muscular not of tendon. ^[9]

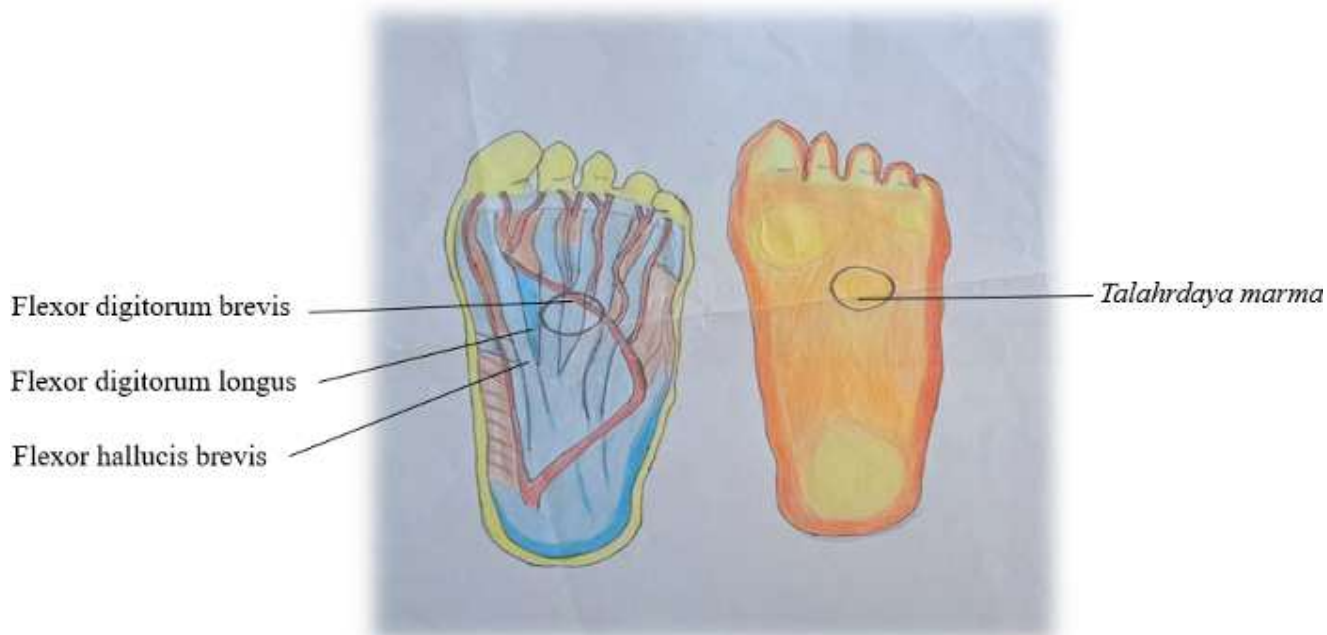


Figure 1 showing Talahrdaya marma and anatomical correlation

Kshipra marma: *Kshipra marma* is located in between greater toe and index toe of feet and having a size of half finger. It is included in *Kalaantara pranahara marma*. Since the *Marma* is considered as *Snayu marma* the deep structures involved could be a ligament or nerve. But convulsion is hall mark of injury it could be nerve or artery.

In the foot deep peroneal nerve branches in between first intermetatarsal space supplies the greater toe and index toe. First dorsal metatarsal artery and deep peroneal nerve to be the underlying structures. And also combined tendon of abductor hallucis and flexor hallucis brevis muscles, bifurcation of first common digital nerve, bifurcation of first dorsal metatarsal artery, medial plantar nerve and artery and first dorsal interosseus muscle can also be considered as this *Marma*.

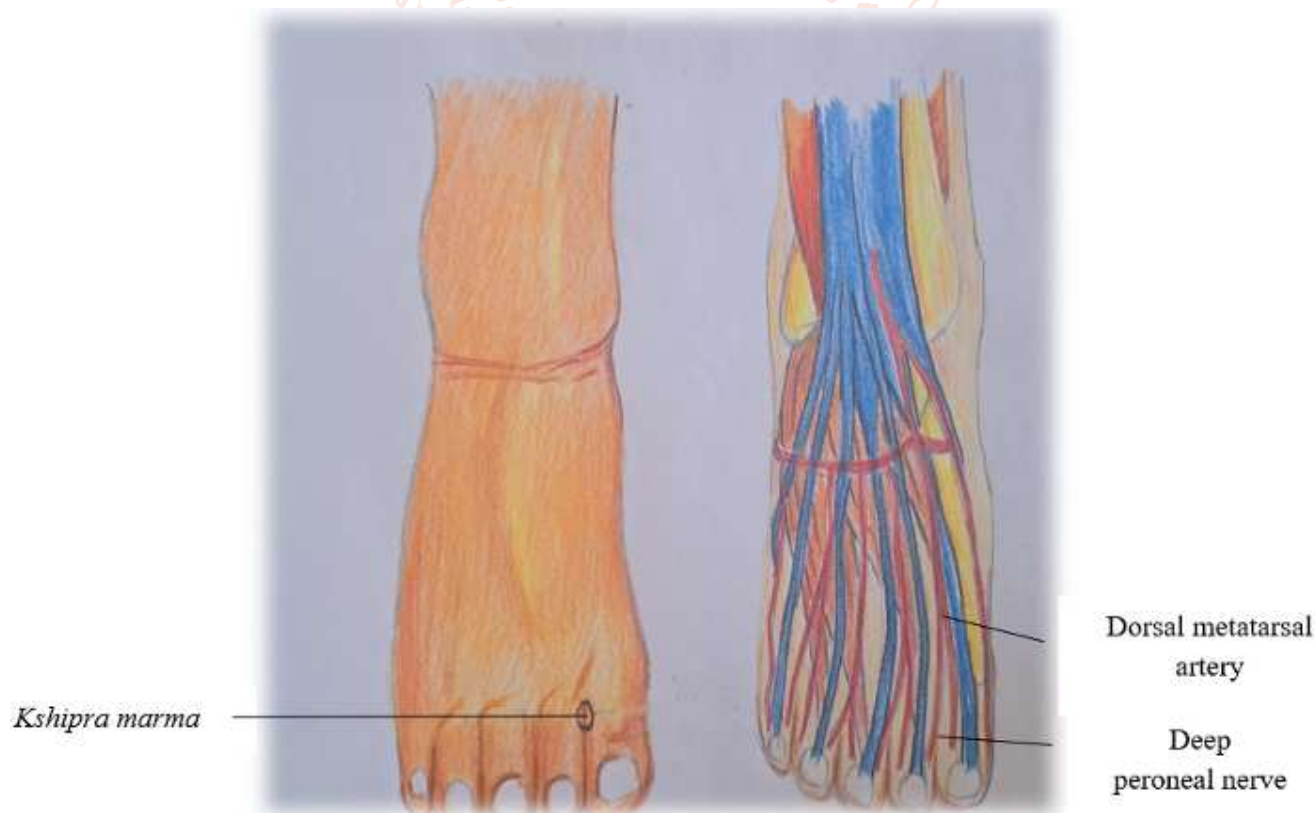


Figure 2 showing Kshipra Marma and anatomical correlation

Kurcha Marma: It is located two fingers above *Kshipra*. The size of this vital area is of a folded palm and this a *Snyu marma*. As this is a *Vaikalyakara* marma the effect of trauma may cause torsion and tremor of concerned foot. The likely structures could be dorsalis pedis artery, dorsal intertarsal artery or extensor hallucis longus muscle.

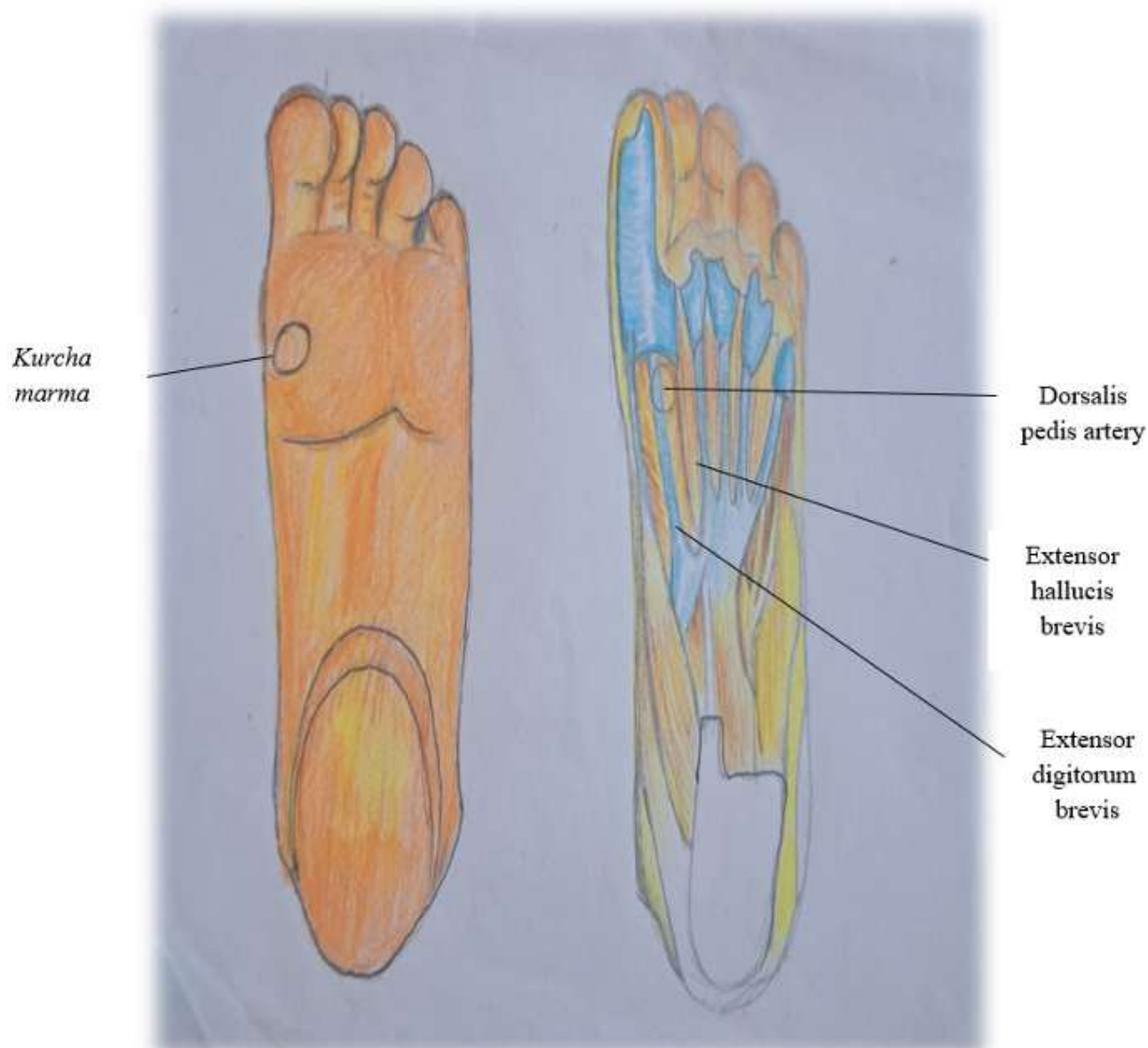


Figure 3 showing *kurcha Marma* and anatomical correlation

Kurchasirah Marma: *Kurchasirah Marma* is just below the ankle joint having a size of 1 Angula. Structurally this is a *Sanyu Marma* and injury to this *Marma* cause severe pain. This vital area correlates with lateral ligament of ankle joint in foot. Tendon of tibialis anterior muscle, annular ligament, extensor digitorum longus and hallucis longus are also helping in structuring this vital area.

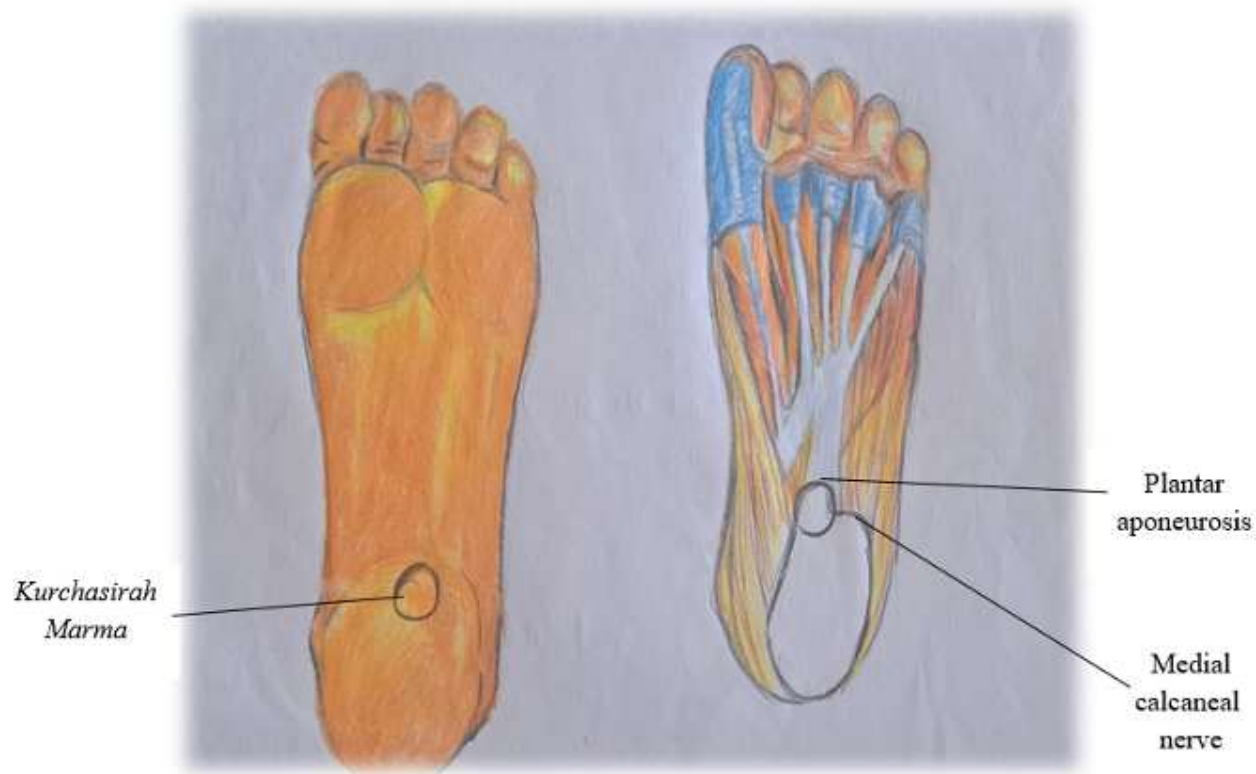


Figure 4 showing *Kurchasirah Marma* with anatomical correlation

Gulpha marma: It is located at junction of foot and shank. Ankle joint is identified as *Gulpha Marma*. *Gulpha marma* is having the size of 2 *Angula* and it is a type of *Sandhi marma*. Once this is hurt it will cause pain, rigidity of joint and lameness.

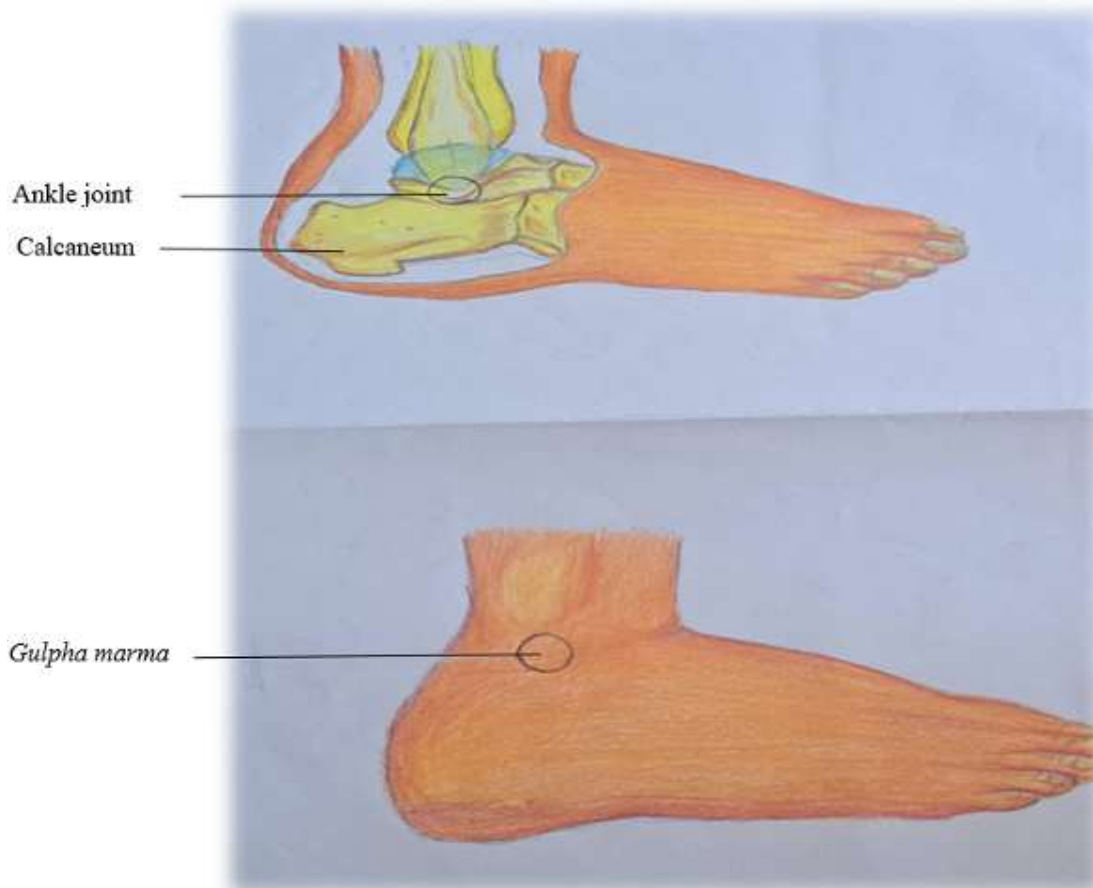


Figure 5 showing *Gulpha Marma* with its anatomical correlation

Pressure variation and Precaution on various *Marmas*

Talahridaya Marma and *kshipra Marma* are having size of ½ Angula. So these *Marmas* are massaged with very mild pressure. *Kurchasirah Marma* and *Gulpha Marma* are having size of 1 angula and 2 angula respectively so these points have to be massaged with mild to moderate pressure. While *kurcha Marma* which is of 4 angula have to be massaged with above moderate pressure to get the maximum effect. Apart from the *Anguli Pramana* of the *Marma*, structure of *Marma* also has to be considered. The *Marma* which are considered as soft tissues, arteries mild to moderate pressure is permissible. On the other hand, *Marma* which are considered as muscles, tendons, bony structures above moderate pressure is required. So, the *kshipra Marma* which is considered as dorsalis pedis artery or deep peroneal nerve is given mild pressure. Where *Kurchasirah Marma* which is considered as tendon of tibialis anterior muscle is massaged with mild to moderate pressure.

Probable mode of action of *Paadabhyanga*

According to *Vagbhata*, in the centre of two feet, there are two *siras* which are connected to eyes. These transmit the medicines applied over feet in the form of bathing, massage, external application. If these *Siras* get vitiated by accumulation of *Mala* (dirt), *Sanghatana* (assault) and *Peedana* (squeezing), will bring about abnormalities to the eyes. Thus *Paadabhyanga* helps in the maintenance of ocular health^[10]

According to *Charaka*, *vata dosha* is predominant in the tactile sense organ which is embedded in the skin. As *Abyanga* is *vata shamaka*, it is extremely helpful for the skin^[11]

Paadabhyanga induces natural sleep and relaxation by two important neurotransmitters serotonin and norepinephrine which regulate many neuropsychological process including sleep^[12]

RESULTS

The oil applied to the skin get absorbed to get the systemic effect. Considering the duration taken for the absorption of oil and the medicaments present in it, it has been said that as the time passes the oil enters into deeper and deeper structures. Each foot is treated for 5 minutes at least to get the maximum effect.

DISCUSSION

Among *Doshas*, *Dhatu*s and *Malas*, *Vatadosha* is related to *Asthi Dhatu*^[13]. When *Vata* increases *Asthi Dhatu* decreases. For nourishment of *Asthi dhatu* and subsidence of *Vata*, *Abyanga* is preferable. By doing

Paadabhyanga, *Marmas* are stimulated so also the *Gulpha Marma*. *Charaka* while describing about *Saara lakshana* have quoted that *Asthi saara Purusha* are characterised by prominence of *Gulpha Marma*. Those persons are highly enthusiastic, active and have good longevity^[14]

As per the American Podiatric Medical Association states 'such condition as arthritis, diabetes, nerves and circulatory disorders show their initial symptoms in feet. So foot ailments can be first sign of many serious medical problems'. By administering Ayurvedic procedure like *Paadabhyanga* we can prevent these types of ailments.

CONCLUSION

Vitality enhancing technique which is incorporated in massage of feet is called *Paadabhyanga*. Detailed description of *Paadabhyanga* and its explanations are not available in any of the classics. This procedure is mentioned for two purposes. One for the maintenance of health in healthy person and other as a treatment modality in some diseases like sciatica. As lukewarm oil is used for procedure, *swedavaha srotas* get stimulated which helps in improved blood circulation. It also facilitates the removal of the toxins from the tissues, relieves physical and mental fatigue, improve the functioning of the musculo-skeletal system. Though this procedure has gained much popularity very little is known about the mechanism of therapy. Knowledge about *Marma* points in *Paada* is essential for the effectiveness of the *Paadabhyanga*. Among the five *Marma* points there are certain *Marma* which has to be given mild pressure and moderate pressure while massaging which depends upon their structure as well as their *Anguli pramana*. When *Paadabhyanga* alone is done, each step has to be performed for 1 minute. At least 5 minutes of *Abyanga* of each feet is necessary for the benefit as 900 *Maatrakala* is the time taken by *Sneha dravya* to reach *Majja Dhatu*.

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