



STEP 1: Pancha Karma begins by increasing agni (the fire of digestion). This can be done by taking simple digestive herbs along with a light, cooked and easily digestible diet for a few days. Once agni has been kindled, it immediately begins to digest toxins and by sipping hot ginger tea you can help flush these toxins from the system.

STEP 2: Next is internal oleation. This usually consists of drinking small amounts of melted ghee for a few consecutive days. The amount and duration depends upon the power of your digestion. The ghee is taken first thing in the morning on an empty stomach and you do not eat until it has been thoroughly digested. The purpose of drinking ghee is to soften the internal tissues and to help them release any excess doshas and toxins that have lodged there.

STEP 3: External oleation or abhyanga. Abhyanga is warm oil massage, usually with sesame oil at this time of year. From the top of the head to the tips of the toes a generous amount of warm oil is massaged into the skin. Abhyanga is one of the very best ways to pacify vata in the nervous system and as some of the oil permeates the skin and enters the circulation, it also helps to release further toxins. Immediately after abhyanga, a full body steam treatment is given which helps the oil permeate further and to dissolve excess doshas which naturally move into the gastrointestinal tract.

STEP 4: Now the toxins and excess doshas have moved out of the tissues and into the gastrointestinal tract and the next step is to eliminate them from the body in a process of purgation (virechana). A suitable purgative is taken orally on an empty stomach first thing in the morning and then you rest. After a few hours, the bowel movements begin and usually continue for a few hours. A very light meal may be eaten after the purgation has ended.

STEP 5: The last step is known as basti, which some people liken to an enema. In Ayurveda, basti is used to administer medicine into the colon usually with the intent of removing excess vata and

to nourish and lubricate the lining of the colon. The liquid given mainly consists of herbal decoction and some kind of oil. Different types of basti are given for different periods of time depending upon your constitution and condition.

Steps 4 & 5 May sound a little tough but a skilled practitioner makes sure that the process is administered gently and as sensitively as possible within timescales that best suit the patients' needs. Also, following Pancha Karma, it is usually necessary to take some rejuvenate herbal formulas and to eat a particularly nutritive diet to nourish the tissues and to renew any loss of strength.

At the end of this process, your body is much lighter and brighter. Your senses are sharper, your mind is alert and you experience a pronounced sense of well-being and an increased flow of energy. You literally feel like you have shrugged off the coverings that the long dark winter put on you. Because your diet has been light throughout, your eating habits have become healthier and the usual cravings simply fall away. Now you are renewed, invigorated and ready to face the spring. Caraka, the father of Ayurveda puts it like this:

'By the administration of these therapies the vitiated doshas are eliminated from the body through the alimentary tract, the power of digestion and metabolism is enhanced, diseases are cured and normal health is restored; the sense faculties, mind, intelligence, and complexion become clear; he gains strength, plumpness, offsprings and virility; he is not affected by old age and lives long without any disease. Therefore, one should take proper elimination therapy in time.'

(Caraka Samhita, Sutrasthana Ch.16, 17-19).

Some practitioners get great results from giving just 7 days of Pancha Karma treatments and others feel it is necessary to go up to 30 days, it is a very individual matter. Which ever programme feels right for you, Pancha Karma should only be administered by a qualified Ayurvedic Practitioner; please see the website of the Ayurvedic Practitioners Association at apa.uk.com for details of your nearest qualified practitioner.

