

Warm black sesame oil ... the secret of one of the most relaxing treatments you can experience. Karen Fittall reports



SHIRODHARA

THE PRACTICALITIES

Shirodhara is generally available wherever Ayurvedic treatments are offered. One session costs about \$110 for 45 to 60 minutes. Some people will feel like a different person after the first session, but others may need to come back a few times. It all depends on the person and what their practitioner has recommended. For more information,

visit www.yatan-ayur.com.au
or telephone (02) 9499 7164
to contact the Yatan
Holistic Ayurvedic
Centre in
Sydney.

real, tangible
benefits for the
health of the body."

Because it works to
balance the mind, body
and the spirit, it's useful for
treating ailments stemming from
stress or anxiety – two conditions
Ayurveda sees as an imbalance.

"Shirodhara is meant for eliminating
diseases of the head, things such as
insomnia, depression, anger and even
chronic headaches – and, of course,
just plain stress," explains Mahatyagi.

"Some people even claim that they
have experienced improved memory
after a treatment."

And then there's the external benefit.
Your skin will feel fantastic. "Because
the oil penetrates the skin, it's able to
provide much needed moisture from
the inside out," says Mahatyagi.

"In hot countries – such as India,
where the treatment originated, and
here in Australia – this is especially
important because our skin can easily
become very dehydrated.

"When you finish a treatment you
can instantly feel the difference in the
skin on your face – it's literally glowing,"
says Mahatyagi. "As the hours wear on,
this feeling spreads all over the body."

BEATING BALDNESS

Some practitioners even promote using
shirodhara as a useful weapon in the
fight against baldness.

The theory behind this is that the oil
nourishes the scalp, stimulating the
blood circulation to encourage healthy
and continued hair growth. ☉

Detoxifying, hydrating and mind-clearing,
as well as a relaxing. Sound too good to
be true? Well, Ayurvedic shirodhara
provides all of those things – and all it
takes is a single session to become a
convert. "It's incredible how relaxing it
is," says Raman Das Mahatyagi, who is
a practitioner at Sydney's Yatan Holistic
Ayurvedic Centre. "It's so calming and
cooling. People feel entirely different
after just one session."

THE TREATMENT

Shirodhara is one of many treatments
Ayurveda – the ancient Indian healing
system – offers. Taken literally, 'shiro'
means head and 'dhara' means flow.

"In a session the patient lies face up
on a massage table, while a copper pot
is filled with warm, black sesame oil,"
explains Mahatyagi. "The pot is then
hooked to a specially designed stand
so it hangs above the person's forehead.
A valve in the bottom of the pot is
unplugged, and the oil starts to drip in
a slow, steady flow onto the forehead,
right at the spot where the 'third-eye'
is thought to be.

"The eyes and ears are covered to
prevent any oil causing discomfort, and
you're left to 'soak' for 45 minutes to
an hour, depending on what you're
having the treatment for. We may also
include a head and hand massage."

FINDING A BALANCE

Shirodhara is just one of the treatments
used in Ayurvedic medicine to help
rebalance a person's dosha – their
personality and body type. Ayurvedic
practitioners believe that any illness or

problem that
people suffer is
due to an imbalance
in the body's dosha.
There are three types of
dosha (vata, pitta and kapha),
and while we have components
of each in our make-up, the mix
varies from person to person, with one
or two of the doshas dominating. Pitta
types are likely to be confident and
competitive, vata will be nervous and
creative, and kaphas are usually patient
and calm. A trained eye can spot the
predominant dosha and how it mixes
with the other two by looking at the
eyes, nails, tongue and skin. Imbalances
can be caused by something as simple
as a small change in diet or lifestyle.

BLACK SESAME OIL

How does shirodhara help rebalance
the doshas? According to Mahatyagi,
the most important element is the oil.
"The sesame oil is a crucial part of
shirodhara. We only use black sesame
oil because it has very pure properties.
It's capable of penetrating the skin
through the pores and being absorbed
by the body.

"When this happens the oil becomes
a source of moisture for the skin, as
well as working to draw impurities and
toxins out of the body.

"It's such a relaxing, simple thing to
experience. People step off the bed
after the treatment feeling so calm just
because they've been focusing on the
flow of the oil on their forehead.

"However, unlike many other spa
treatments, shirodhara also has some

THERAPY

FOR A STRESS FREE LIFE