

Dr. Berkowsky's Vital Chi Skin-Brushing System

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By Bruce Berkowsky, N.M.D., M.H., NCTMB

INTRODUCTION

Vital Chi Skin-Brushing can sustain or reestablish the skin's functional integrity and youthful glow. The skin is as major an organ as the heart, lungs and kidneys. Its primary functions include: respiration, excretion, blood and lymph circulation, immunity and the conduction of vital chi. However, unlike other vital organs, the skin can be non-invasively accessed and mediate systemic rejuvenation by a variety of therapeutic techniques, including proper skin-brushing. Vital Chi Skin-Brushing is a particularly powerful therapy which can positively impact the entire body.

Variations of skin-brushing have been practiced for thousands of years. For many centuries, the Japanese employed vigorous skin-brushing with loofa sponges as a prelude to their traditional hot bath. Prior to bathing (following a hard training session or physical competition) ancient Greek athletes used strigiles: specialized spoon-like skin scrapers to remove the grime of exertion and encourage circulation. Among the Cherokee Indians, skin-brushing with dried corn cobs to enhance skin beauty and durability was once a traditional practice. The Comanche Indians scrubbed their skin using sand from the Texas river bottoms; the Texas Rangers followed their example.

Adolph Just in his Nature-Cure classic: Back To Nature tells that he learned the importance of skin-rubbing by observing wild animals: "Higher land animals, especially wild boars and deer, in free nature, are in the habit of lying down in small muddy swamps and pools and rubbing to and fro in the mud. After awhile they rub themselves against the earth, trees and other objects. The birds go to brooks or springs, and, by immersing their necks, throw water over their

bodies. . .then they rub or scrub the body using their head, bill and wing elbows."

INTRODUCTION: The Skin's Vital Functions

FUNCTIONS OF THE SKIN

Excretion:

No other organ is more actively engaged in discharging impurities from the body than the skin; it is a close relative of both the lungs and kidneys. Like the lungs, it absorbs oxygen and expels carbon dioxide and water vapor; and, like the kidneys, it excretes organic and saline matter in solution. The entire surface of the skin is impregnated with millions of sweat glands which constitute a vast drainage system whereby the blood, via perspiration, purifies itself of poisonous waste it has collected from the cells.

Blood Circulation:

There are approximately 17 sq. feet of skin surface; when its capillaries are fully dilated, it presents 6-times the capillary surface area of the lungs. This vast blood vessel network is required for: 1) nutrition and oxygenation of skin tissue; 2) regulation of body heat (the blood is cooled when it moves through the surface capillaries); 3) distillation of waste matter from the blood; 4) the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between blood and atmosphere. The skin's blood vessel network is as crucial as the heart for normal circulation. The vast storage capacity of the skin's blood vessels enable them to act as blood reservoirs which release or store blood as needed.

Lymph Circulation:

The lymph vessels transport excess, waste-charged fluid away from the intercellular spaces and return it to the bloodstream. Lymph acts as a go-between medium for the transfer of vital materials from the blood to the cells, and for cellular debris away from the intercellular environment into the blood. Thus, the blood feeds the lymph, and the lymph feeds the cells, making the drainage of intercellular lymph one of the most crucial of all bodily functions. The superficial lymph

vessels terminate just below the outer layer of skin and interjoin freely with the deeper lymphatic vessels. Any blockage at the superficial lymphatic level will result in congestion throughout the whole lymphatic system. Skin-brushing is an excellent way to stimulate the activity of the entire lymphatic system.

Bioenergy Conduction:

"Aliveness" derives from the presence of high-vibratory, vital energy within an organism. This energy, or natural force, which fills the universe is referred to in traditional naturopathy and homeopathy as Vital Force and in Chinese medicine as Chi. Hence, I have coined the term Vital Chi.

Vital Chi is the fundamental energy which sustains life and is present in the vibratory, biological processes of every cell. Vital Chi is not synonymous with the metabolically generated energy derived from the oxidation of glucose. Rather, it is the force that animates the metabolic processes which ultimately yield caloric energy. Vital Chi differentiates life from death; it circulates through channels, or meridians, throughout the body. Being an essential matrix for the Vital Chi channels, the skin is a crucial medium for Vital Chi movement. The places at which the various channels and vessels reach the skin's surface are the "acupoints" used in acupuncture and acupressure. Aside from the Vital Chi which courses through the channels, a superficial portion of Vital Chi (which the Chinese refer to as Wei Chi or Guardian Chi) flows outside the channels in a non-differentiated layer beneath the skin. The Wei Chi serves as a defensive perimeter protecting against environmental influences such as varying weather conditions, pathogenic microorganisms, pollutants, emotional stresses derived from human interaction and other external challenges.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF VITAL CHI SKIN-BRUSHING

Assists Exfoliation:

The outermost layer of skin cells which serve to protect the underlying skin layers are not living cells, thus, they are continuously

shed and replaced via the multiplication and upward movement of living skin cells. Inactive aging skin does not shed dead cells as easily as does youthful skin, so it is susceptible to cellular build-up which accounts, in part, for the dry, thick, leathery-look of older skin. The most obvious mechanical effect of skin-brushing is the detachment of dead skin cells.

Excites Physiological Functions:

Proper skin-brushing supports lymphatic drainage of the skin by: 1) accelerating filtration from the intercellular spaces into the lymph vessels; 2) the emptying of the smaller vessels into the larger lymph vessels; 3) assisting the flow of lymph through the lymph nodes. Skin-brushing similarly increases venous blood flow. The veins carry the blood back to the heart. Return blood-flow through the veins is not propelled as much by direct heart action as by muscular contraction and vein constriction. Skin-brushing excites and tonifies the muscles and nerves of the skin, thus, it improves venous circulation. These same mechanical effects directly enhance capillary circulation as evidenced by the skin-flush and feeling of warmth that skin-brushing imparts.

The skin is impregnated with nerve end-fibers which play an indispensable role in nervous system activity. This explains the remarkable relaxing effect, including decreased muscular tension, elicited by skin-brushing. Decreased muscular tension affords better lung capacity, digestion, bowel movements, blood circulation, lymph drainage as well as clearer thinking.

Strengthens the Bioenergy System:

Unimpeded Vital Chi flow is essential to the prevention and cure of disease. Since the Vital Chi meridians course through the skin, they are readily accessible to the ministrations of skin-brushing. When these channels are massaged, the movement of energy along their length is stimulated and the delivery of Vital Chi to their associated organs greatly improved. Proper skin-brushing can also exert a profound influence upon the Wei Chi: the undifferentiated layer of Vital Chi which hovers near the skin's surface.

Benefits Mature Skin:

Decreased sweat- and oil gland functions are features of aging. The oil secreted by the sebaceous glands coats the surface of the skin and prevents excessive water-loss through evaporation. Proper skin-brushing stimulates both the sweat- and oil glands, and in this way, contributes to the restoration of moist, supple skin. Also, it strengthens the skin pores through which the skin is moisturized and cleansed, and oxygen and CO₂ are exchanged. Aging and devitalization of the skin often results in pore-enlargement and flaccidity due to loss of skin tone and depleted Wei Chi.

Promotes Skin Beauty:

Skin-brushing makes a strong impression upon the dermis (the skin layer that contains an abundance of blood and lymph vessels), nerves, glands and elastin and collagen fibers. The dermis provides nutrients and moisture to all the skin layers and lends contour and flexibility. When the dermis ages, its connective tissue fibers reduce, rigidify, lose resilience and even break into pieces, causing the skin's support muscles to lose tone and volume and the skin to dehydrate and collapse into sags, wrinkles and lines.

Healthy connective tissue and muscles are products of efficient nutrient support and oxygenation, a waste-free milieu, optimal water balance and moderate exercise, all of which are promoted by regular skin-brushing. The gentle stretching of connective tissues, afforded by proper skin-brushing, helps to increase and regenerate the production of collagen and elastin fibers.

Cellulite is a structural disturbance of fat tissue. The fat content of cellulite-containing tissue is normal, but fibrous nodules surrounding the fat cells give affected skin areas their typical orange-peel appearance. Cellulite formation is related, in part, to local vein and lymph congestion. Proper skin-brushing can help to alleviate this condition.

VITAL CHI SKIN-BRUSHING SYSTEM: Guidelines And Technique

(Excerpted from Dr. Berkowsky's Vital Chi Skin-Brushing System book)

My Vital Chi Skin-Brushing System which required hundreds of hours of research and experimentation to develop, evolved from my training and experience in anatomy and physiology and various bodywork disciplines as well as the Oriental healing arts. I designed this system to support blood- and lymph circulation, the immune system, the movement of Vital Chi along the acupuncture channels, all the major physiological functions of the skin as well as to enhance skin beauty and encourage the breakdown of cellulite. Yet, my system is quick, concise and user-friendly. The following excerpts from my book will provide some insight regarding associated guidelines and technique.

Selected Guidelines

- 1) Always treat the major lymph gland drainage site of a given body region before brushing said region, thus allowing for more effective regional lymphatic clearance. For instance: brush armpit (site of axillary nodes which drain chest) before brushing chest.
- 2) The body should be brushed in a strategic sequential pattern to allow for maximum drainage. For Instance: as the neck and head drains into the venous system in the upper chest, and to a small extent, into the axillary nodes, the chest and armpit regions should be brushed before neck and head regions.
- 3) Brush-stroke direction always conforms to the route of lymphatic drainage. Example: The chest region drains into the armpit. Hence, the chest on each side is brushed from breastbone to armpit.

Selected Technique

My Vital Chi Skin-Brushing System addresses the entire skin surface (with the exception of the breasts and genitals). The following excerpts from my book focus on the armpit and chest regions.

Brush Armpit Region (but not full armpit area) as follows:

Using circular strokes, exert firm pressure only when moving through headward arc of circle. Remainder of circle is executed as a very light

stroke. (See Picture) Perform 7 clockwise, then counterclockwise, circles, each side.

Note: The axillary (armpit) nodes are the drainage center for a vast region, including: nape of neck, skin of chest, breasts, back, shoulder blades, arms, hands and parts of the ribcage. Hence, the armpit region should be activated first to facilitate better drainage from all the regions it services.

Brush Chest Region (up to, but not including, armpit) as follows:

1) Above Breast (See Picture): Brush 7 times each side of chest from breastbone to armpit.

Note: The two major lymphatic ducts empty into the venous system in the left and right chest just below the collar bone. Puffiness above or below the collarbone is indicative of congestion in these ducts. Reducing lymphatic tension in the chest enhances tissue drainage of the entire body.

2) Below Breast (See Picture): Using upward curving stroke (under breast), brush 7 times on each side from sternum to armpit.

3) Sides of Upper Torso (See Picture): Brush upward 7 times along each side (in line with the armpit), from waist up to armpit.

FOLLOW-UP HYDROTHERAPY

Having studied and practiced classical naturopathy, or Nature-Cure, for 25-years, I have come to appreciate the great value of many of the traditional hydrotherapies and their particular synergy with my skin-brushing system. Hence, I instruct that a skin-brushing session should always be followed by an appropriate hydrotherapy. In addition to the Salt-Glow, described below, some of the other hydrotherapies which may prove of good service in this regard include: alternating hot and cold shower; full cold bath; blitz guss; epsom salt bath; cold ablution.

The Salt-Glow is a wonderful circulation-enhancing treatment. In Lectures to Naturopathic Hydrotherapy, Wade Boyle, N.D. and Andre Saine, N.D. list the following indications for salt-glow therapy: "... chronic conditions with inactive skin, including chronic indigestion,

kidney disease, diabetes [if there are no skin lesions], sluggish circulation [especially in those who do not react well to hot or cold weather], low vital force, poor resistance, frequent colds, general weakness, neurasthenia, epilepsy, cancer [but not over a palpable tumor], joint problems [especially if followed by oil rub].”

The Salt-Glow

1) Wet a goodly amount of epsom salt (in unbreakable bowl) with sufficient water to create the consistency of wet snow. (Vigorous individuals may wish to opt for moistening the salt with ice water for extra stimulation.) 2) Add a few inches of warm water – 98o F. to 100o F. – to bathtub, then sit in tub and hand-rub or washcloth-rub body thoroughly using this warm water. 3) Stand up in tub (on non-slip mat) and apply moistened salt as follows: a) Begin with each arm, starting with fingers: rub vigorously until skin turns pink, or to-tolerance, whichever occurs first. b) Then, rub each leg similarly, beginning with toes, working up to hips. c) Rub salt into the rest of the body in the following order: chest, abdomen, back, hips and buttocks. 4) Follow with a cool shower spray of 1- to 2-minutes duration, being sure to hand-rub the skin throughout. 5) Finish with vigorous towel-rub by an open window in private area. 6) Rest for at least 1/2-hour to 1-hour before initiating activity.

INTERFACING AROMATHERAPY With SKIN-BRUSHING And HYDROTHERAPY

I have found that the application of a few drops of the appropriate essential oils can have a profound effect. Bear in mind that the absorption of only a few molecules of an essential oil may be sufficient to elicit both a physiological and emotional response. Homeopathy sets a precedent in this reference; it utilizes medicinal preparations which are essentially matterless. Through serial dilution, an ultramolecular entity is extracted which is an isolate of the original substance's vital vibratory essence. This non-physical force field is considered to be the active, curative principle contained within this original substance. Biochemic cell salt therapy, a branch of

homeopathy, utilizes mineral salts in minute quantities; cell salt tablets contain only a few molecules of the given mineral. In this way, the dose is provided in amounts approximating actual cellular need. Too, microdosing in this manner avoids the side effects associated with macromolecular doses. Similarly, 3 or 4 molecules of the essential components of an aroma oil, taken up by the blood, may not only be sufficient, but best suited (in conjunction with skin-brushing and hydrotherapy) to elicit a cellular response in a given individual. In fact, for hypersensitive individuals, this may be the most judicious course.

Suggested Aromatherapy Protocol To Enhance The Salt-Glow

I learned about using fresh lemon juice as a skin-application by studying the writings of Dr. John T. Richter, a popular naturopath who practiced in the early- to mid-part of the 20th-century. Richter writes in his book, *Nature-The Healer*: “The morning cold shower or cold water rub-down may be taken without the use of soap, and lemon juice applied over the body with the hands, either before or after washing. The juice will smooth the skin, is a good dirt chaser, disinfectant, and also will act as a mild astringent. Soaps often contain caustics; even those made of vegetable oils have a tendency to dry the skin, but lemon juice has no harmful effects...After shampooing the hair, lemon juice mixed with the last rinsing water will soften both the water and the hair. After the shower or bath, rub your body down with the juice of half a lemon while the skin is still moist. Massage until perfectly dry-otherwise the skin will have a tendency to be somewhat sticky. This massage will dislodge outworn skin. With the slightly astringent effect, you will feel clean and be clean. Only a few minutes are required.”

Base for rub: lemon juice Add to the juice of 1 lemon, 1 to 2 drops of each oil listed below. Add 1 to 2 drops each of the same oils to bath water. Note: As a general rule to avoid potential skin-irritation, do not exceed a total of 7 drops of essential oils in either lemon juice rub or bath water.

Essential Oils, Relevant Properties & Indications

- 1) carrot seed-body purifier; reduces fluid retention; eases muscular tension; increases red blood cells; stimulates lymphatic system and immune system; supports cardiovascular system; beneficial for arthritis; rheumatism; abscesses; boils; skin ulcers and necrotic tissues.
- 2) peppermint-reduces muscular soreness, neuralgia, sciatica and arthritis; detoxifies connective tissue and skin; activates lymphatic drainage; supports kidney and cardiovascular functions; warming; soothes aching feet; increases white blood cells; useful in treating: itching, dermatitis, fungal infections, blackheads, colds, fevers, upper respiratory disorders, numbness of limbs.
- 3) rosemary-general detoxification; cardiovascular tonic; increases arterial and peripheral circulation; aids degenerative tissue; eases fluid retention; beneficial for: muscle pains, cramps, sprains, contractures, arthritis and myalgia; stimulates repair of damaged skin; reduces cellulite; stimulates circulation and metabolism of skin layers; helpful for obesity and varicose veins; counteracts debility and physical exhaustion.
- 4) thyme-increases excretion function of all glands; supports metabolism and fluid balance; strengthens circulation; increases joint mobility; useful for arthritis, sciatica and rheumatism; reduces swelling; beneficial for sports injuries; respiratory detoxifier.
- 5) yarrow-relieves sinus congestion and respiratory congestion; vascular tonic; stimulates blood renewal; reduces varicose veins; beneficial for backache and rheumatism; lymphatic stimulant.

Written by Dr. Bruce Berkowsky, N.M.D., M.H., NCTMB

www.NaturalHealthScience.com

Dr. Berkowsky, a registered naturopath, master herbalist and classical homeopath--is President of Joseph Ben Hil-Meyer Research, Inc. He is the founder/teacher of both Spiritual PhytoEssencing and the Natural Health Science System which he designed following many years of research and clinical practice, and includes herbology, nutrition, homeopathy, aromatherapy, exercise, traditional nature-

cure as well as East/West healing arts/bodywork. Dr. Berkowsky teaches in-depth seminars/teleseminars/workshops to health-care professionals and spiritually aware individuals.

Important Note: This article is for informational purposes only and is not meant as a prescription. Each person is unique and advised to seek the advice of a qualified health-care practitioner to determine relevance in a given case. *Never skin-brush during an active metastatic cancer state.* Cancer patients are advised to consult on oncologist if considering a skin-brushing regimen.

Disclaimer: This publication is intended as an educational tool, and not as a prescription. Seek the advice of your health-care provider before discontinuing any medication and/or trying any new remedy or technique.