

Unit 2: Base Oils and Their Therapeutic Properties

PAPER 7 — Herbal Preparations & Oils

Unit 2: Base Oils and Their Therapeutic Properties

(Sesame • Coconut • Castor • Mustard • Extraction & prep • Doṣa selection • Seasonal use • Carrier vs. medicated oils)

1) Overview of commonly used base oils (what they feel like and what they do)

Sesame (Tila taila). The classical workhorse for external therapy. Naturally warm, moderately viscous, and deeply penetrating when gently heated. Under the hands it feels **silky-grippy** (good tissue purchase without drag), making it ideal for **Vāta** states—cold, dry, twitchy tissues that need unction and steadiness. Excellent vehicle for **warming**, **mobilising** formulas (e.g., spice-aromatic blends).

Coconut (Nārikela taila). Cool, smooth, and softening, with a light initial slip that quickly becomes **even and calm**. Favoured for **Pitta** presentations—heat, redness, irritability, reactive skin—or hot climates and summer sessions. Straight coconut can feel a little “still”; therapists often pair it with slow, even pacing rather than brisk friction.

Castor (Eraṇḍa taila). Heavy, highly viscous, strongly unctuous. Feels **dense and anchoring**; excellent to **disperse deep congestion** and hold heat in cooler tissues, but too occlusive for full-body use. Best for **local** applications (peri-joint rings, chronic adhesions) or as a **10-25% blend** into sesame for short regions. Avoid on infected or macerated skin.

Mustard (Sarṣapa taila). Warm-pungent, lighter than castor but more stimulating than sesame. Creates a **tingling mobilising feel**; useful with **Kapha heaviness** and cold, puffy tissues in winter. It can irritate reactive skin; keep doses short, avoid face/neck, and never apply over hot inflamed joints.

Therapist's rule of thumb:

Sesame = warm & deep; **Coconut** = cool & calming; **Castor** = heavy & anchoring (local); **Mustard** = warm & mobilising (short, selective).

2) Extraction and preparation techniques of base oils (how to get clean, potent, stable oils)

Traditional/low-heat pressing (ghani / cold-pressed). Seeds are crushed without external heat; yields retain more native antioxidants and aroma. Best base for medicated oils (taila) because they tolerate gentle **water-bath warming** and herbal processing without premature rancidity.

Expeller-pressed (warm mechanical). Slightly higher heat/pressure increases yield; still acceptable if **acid value** and **peroxide value** are low at purchase. Suits routine external use.

Solvent-extracted / refined. Maximises yield and removes odour/colour, but may strip beneficial companions (tocopherols, sterols). If used, choose reputable suppliers and reserve for **non-therapeutic** applications; not ideal for classical medicated taila.

Clinic preparation & handling (repeatable workflow):

1. **Inspect & log:** date, supplier, batch; check clarity and aroma (no painty/waxy notes).
2. **Settle & decant:** let particulates drop; decant to amber glass.
3. **Optional mūrchna (pre-purification):** gentle warming with detox herbs (traditional step) to improve stability and skin feel.
4. **Warm to use: 38-40 °C** via water bath; never direct flame.

5. **Post-session care:** strain any debris; top up bottles to minimise air headspace; store cool, dark.
6. **Shelf life:** fresh, unrefined oils perform best within **3-6 months** of clinic opening; smaller bottles reduce repeated heating-cooling cycles.

Do not: microwave, leave pumps uncapped, reheat the same bowl all day, or store oils in clear plastic exposed to light.

3) Selecting base oils for different body constitutions (Doṣa lens)

Vāta (cold, dry, variable, easily over-aroused).

- **Primary: Sesame** (warm, steady).
- **Adjunct:** add **10-25% castor** for dense adhesions; switch to **Kṣīra-processed sesame** (milk-processed) when Vāta mixes with Pitta irritability.
- **Technique pairing:** slow cadence, traction > compression, longer holds.

Pitta (hot, irritable, reactive).

- **Primary: Coconut** (cooling, softening).
- **Adjunct:** blend **coconut : sesame 2:1** if tissue is cool but guarded; finish with extra-light film to avoid occlusive heat.
- **Technique pairing:** even tempo, no friction heat, feather over head/parasternal fields.

Kapha (heavy, cool-damp, puffy, sluggish).

- **Primary: Sesame light film or mustard short-dose** for mobilising starts.
- **Adjunct:** brief **dry/steam primers** before oil; avoid castor except for tiny, stubborn foci.
- **Technique pairing:** brisk-light strokes, seated finishes.

Mixed states (the norm): treat **vikṛti** (current imbalance) first, then support **prakṛti** (constitution). Example: Pitta prakṛti with Vāta aggravation → use **warm sesame** for two or three sessions to settle Vāta, then return to **coconut-leaning** maintenance.

4) Seasonal considerations in oil usage (ṛtucaryā translated to the table)

- **Hemanta/Śīśira (late autumn-winter):** Cold, dry winds lift Vāta. Choose **sesame**; allow gentle heat; add a touch of **castor** for stubborn stiffness. Mustard may be used **briefly** for Kapha heaviness—watch skin reactivity.
- **Vasanta (spring):** Kapha melts: swelling, heaviness. Use **lighter sesame films**, short **mustard primers**, or brief **dry fomentation** before oil.
- **Grīṣma (summer):** Heat rises with Pitta. Switch to **coconut** or **coconut-forward blends**; reduce heat and friction; schedule sessions earlier in the day.
- **Varṣā (monsoon):** Agni dips; tissues feel damp-cool but reactive. Keep **oil thin and warm**, prioritise **sesame**, avoid heavy occlusion; impeccable hygiene to prevent folliculitis.

Practical guardrail: adjust **one** of the four dose levers at a time—**concentration × area × time × temperature**—and reassess.

5) Carrier oils vs. medicated oils: application and absorption (how they behave on skin)

Carrier (base) oils. Pure sesame, coconut, castor, mustard, etc. They determine **temperature feel, slip, viscosity, and penetration rate**. Best for **baseline tissue goals** (warmth/cool, glide/grip) and for clients with sensitivities.

Absorption depends on **fatty-acid profile** (shorter chains absorb faster), **skin hydration, temperature, and massage duration**.

Medicated oils (taila). Base oil **cooked with herbal decoctions and pastes** until water is driven off and lipid-soluble actives bond to the oil. They add **specific actions**: decongesting, cooling, nourishing, wound-soothing, etc. Absorb **deeper or more purposefully** than the base alone when skin is warm and the oil is fresh. In practice:

- Use **carrier oil** to test tolerance and set global tissue state.
- Layer or switch to **medicated taila** for **targeted** regions once tissues accept touch.
- Keep medicated oils **thin** over **sūkṣma** (neurovascular) and **agni** fields so tactile detail is preserved.

Fractionated coconut (MCT) & light blends (modern clinic note). These are stable, non-staining carriers with fast slip; they lack the “heft” of traditional bases. Use for **sensitive skin** or **head/neck** where minimal residue is desired, but recognise they deliver less “body” than classical oils.

Summary Tables (LMS quick-reference)

A) Base oils at a glance

Base oil	Thermal feel	Viscosity/Grip	Best for	Use sparingly/avoid for
Sesame	Warm	Medium, good purchase	Vāta dryness/cold; general use	High-heat climates without Pitta control
Coconut	Cool	Light-medium, smooth	Pitta heat/reactive skin; summer	Very cold tissues needing deep warmth
Castor	Warm-neutral (holds heat)	Heavy , anchoring	Local adhesions, peri-joint rings	Full-body use; infected/macerated skin
Mustard	Warm-pungent	Light-medium, stimulating	Kapha heaviness, winter primers	Face/neck; inflamed/hot joints; eczema-prone skin

B) Doṣa-guided selection

Doṣa tilt	Primary base	Optional blend	Technique cues
Vāta↑	Sesame (warm)	+10-25% castor for density	Slow, traction, longer holds
Pitta↑	Coconut (cool)	2:1 coconut:sesame if guarded	Even tempo, minimal friction
Kapha↑	Sesame (thin film)	Short-dose mustard start	Brisk-light strokes, seated finish

C) Season-wise oil guide

Season	Tissue tendency	Base choice	Notes
Winter	Cold, dry, stiff	Sesame; tiny castor for foci	Gentle heat OK
Spring	Heavy, puffy	Light sesame; brief mustard	Add dry/steam primer
Summer	Hot, reactive	Coconut or coconut-forward blend	Avoid heat/friction
Monsoon	Damp-cool, reactive	Warm thin sesame	Extra hygiene; thin films

D) Extraction & prep checklist

Step	Standard
Source & log	Batch, supplier, date; inspect aroma/clarity
Decant & store	Amber glass; cool, dark; minimal headspace
Warm to use	38-40 °C water bath; never direct flame
Aftercare	Strain, recap, date; discard oxidised oil
Shelf life	3-6 months after opening (unrefined)

E) Carrier vs. medicated oils

Type	What it's best for	When to switch
Carrier	Setting global thermal/viscosity feel; sensitivity testing	Once tissue accepts touch and you need specificity
Medicated taila	Targeted effects (decongest, soothe heat, nourish)	After warm-up; keep thin over sūkṣma/agni fields

F) Safety & dosing (do this every time)

Item	Guardrail
Patch-test new oils 24 h inner forearm	
Heat + pressure	Never stack over Hṛdaya, Nābhi, Basti, Ādhipati
Mustard	Short, selective; avoid reactive skin & face/neck
Castor	Local only; very thin film
Session dose	Adjust one : concentration / area / time / temperature
Exit check	No dizziness; skin comfortable; give simple after-care

Key take-aways

1. Choose your **base** for **temperature feel and grip**, not habit: sesame warms and penetrates; coconut cools and calms; castor anchors locally; mustard mobilises briefly.
2. Think **dose** as a system: concentration \times area \times time \times temperature. Change one lever at a time.
3. Treat the **current state (vikṛti)** first; let **prakṛti** and **season** guide maintenance.
4. Use **carrier oils** to set the field; bring in **medicated taila** for precise aims—always thin and fresh, with impeccable safety around high-risk regions.