



OVERVIEW OF 'GERIATRICS' AND THE TWO-FOLD ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN 'GRACEFUL AGING'

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ABSTRACT

Geriatrics medicine is a specialty that focuses on the health care of the elderly people. It aims to promote health by preventing and treating diseases and disabilities in the older adults. Ayurveda has mentioned eight branches of medicine, one of them is the "Jara" chikitsa. It is also referred to as the "Rasayana Chikitsa" it is the preventive aspect of the aging process and has described various procedures for achieving and maintaining the quality of life. This article is an overview of ageing process through the lens of Ayurveda, and discusses the two-fold concrete approach of Ayurveda i.e. 1. prevention and 2. treatment / management of Jara vyadhis.

KEYWORDS: Geriatrics, Ayurveda, Rasayana Chikitsa.

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is the time of innocence and discovery, youth is the phase of excitement and adventure, middle age is the period of career, family responsibilities.

Old age means time to relax and slow down, this is life as would like it to roll itself out.

But not everybody is blessed with the pleasures of a perfectly balanced life. Very often the over enthusiasm and over exertion of youthful days, takes a toll on the body and the mind.

In the autumn of his life, health can be a senior citizen's only wealth!!

Jara or the old age is also referred to as "swabhavaja vyadhi".

Understanding the aging process: each and every particle in this universe undergoes three transformations namely.

1. utpatti - means birth and growth till maturity, integration of cells, anabolism.
2. sthiti - maintenance of this mature state, conversion, metabolism.
3. laya - disintegration of cells / downfall. catabolism.

According to the basic principle of Ayurveda, "whatever constitutes the universe exists in our body and vice versa. Therefore, our body also undergoes the above mentioned three transformations.

In practical life, if we assume the average life span to be 75 yrs.'

1. utpatti is right from the fertilised egg- embryo- foetus- new born – till maturity, around age 25 yrs.
2. sthiti is the youth period from 25 – 50 yrs.', maintenance of optimally grown dhatus till they reach the stage of "laya".
3. laya will be the stage around age 50- 75 yrs.' In this stage all the dhatus start to degenerate.

Although this stage is inevitable, and the process unstoppable, as well as irreversible, the youth stage can be prolonged, and the "laya" process can be "quality controlled", by following various norms and regimes mentioned in 'din charya' and 'ritu charya'.

Basic concepts of Ayurveda which aid in understanding the aging process

1. **Tri dosha siddhanta** – vata, pitta, kapha are the three doshas.
2. **Sapta dhatu siddhanta** – rasa, rakta, mansa, meda, asthi, majja, shukra.
3. **Tri mala siddhanta** – pureesha, mutra, sweda.

Balanced state of the doshas, dhatus, and malas, constitute the well-being of a person, disturbance or imbalance causes vikaar- diseases.

Childhood is the period of 'kapha' pre dominance. Youth is the period of 'pitta' predominance and Jara is the period of predominance of 'vata'

Let us see what are the signs of prakupit vata.

Karshya – slimming down of the body.

karshnya – hyper pigmentation of the skin.

Ushna kamitwa – liking for the warmth.

Kampa -tremors.

Anaha – flatulence.

Shakrut graha – constipation.

Bala nasha – weakness.

Nidra nasha – insomnia.

Indriya nasha – loss of the grasping powers of the sensory organs, memory, sight, hearing, taste.

Pralap – talkativeness.

Bhrama – vertigo.

Deenata – debility.

The more the old age, the more visible are these signs in our body.

4. The concept of Agni

The diminished Agni causes diseases. The Agni transforms the food we eat into elements which are beneficial to the body i.e. the dhatus, dhatu malas, malas.

This transformation takes place at two levels.

1. Macro level 2. Micro level.

The macro level transformation can be easily felt, but the micro level transformation goes unnoticed. This transformation is a continuous process and stops only when we die.

The main agni is the 'jatharagni' situated in the duodenum (grahani). This is the place where the common bile duct opens. Agni paachan prakriya.

- process 1- jathar agni • food • rasa dhatu • rasa dhatu agni • rakta dhatu • rakta dhatu agni • mansa dhatu • so on and so forth.
- process 2 - rasa dhatu, next dhatu in series: rakta dhatu, upa-dhatu 1. raja (menstrual blood) 2. stanya – lactation, mala 1. kapha dosha.
- process 3 - wherein all dhatu agni transform food into their own dhatu directly- rasa dhatu, rakta dhatu and so on. The ultimate transformed element is the "Ojas", it's the super product. It is stored in the body at 2 levels: 1. sarvadehik and 2. shad bindu oja is in the heart.

5. The concept of "vega-avarodh"

There are 13 vega or urges, e.g.: urge to defecate, urinate, hunger, thirst, sneeze, yawn etc. controlling the vegas is harmful and leads to diseases.

eg: not defecating at the time of urge causes constipation at a later stage.

6. The Concept of "Aam"

Aam is the undigested food material which remains in the system and causes various diseases. Very known disease is the "aam-vata" commonly known as Rheumatoid Arthritis.

7. The concept of "Prakruti"

Every individual is different, unique. this uniqueness is achieved by various combinations of 'tri doshas' at the time of fertilisation of egg in the womb. This is called as 'prakruti' of a particular person.

Vata prakruti individuals are more prone to vata diseases, pitta prakruti are more prone to pitta diseases, kapha prakruti are more prone to kapha diseases.

It's very clear by now, that vata prakruti individuals will wear out faster than kapha prakruti individuals.

❖ The preventive aspect of Ayurveda in Geriatrics.

There are 8 branches of Ayurveda: Kaya, Baal, Graha, Urdhwanga, Shalya, Danshtra, Jara, Vrushaan.

Geriatrics or Jara chikitsa or Rasayana in Ayurveda is a method to control / slow down / arrest the aging process in the human being during the degenerative phase of one's life. Rasayana is normally advised during this degenerative phase which starts from around 50 yrs. in both male and female.

Benefits of rejuvenation therapy.

- ✓ It improves the overall health of the person undergoing the treatment.
- ✓ 2. It increases the concentration and memory power.
- ✓ 3. The skin looks youthful and radiates a natural glow, after the person undergoes the rejuvenation therapy.
- ✓ 4. It brings calmness and de-stresses the mind, relieving it from anxiety, depression and stress related problems.
- ✓ 5. There is a higher resistance to diseases- optimum strength of the body is assured by the Rasayana therapy.

After all it is the quality of life which matters and it is measured by health in old age.

▪ Two methods of Rayana Therapy 1. Kuti - Praveshik 2. Vata-Tapik.

- The Kuti-Praveshik: it is a 3-4-month duration of a rigorous and organized process, whereby the whole metabolic process of the body is recharged by eliminating the toxins from the system.

However, this process is seldom practiced due to the extreme intricacy of the physiological process involved and the need for utmost care to be taken by the physician and subject including the environment where the treatment is done. Hence this 'kutipraveshika' remains as a textual marvel of Ayurveda than a practical process of contemporary relevance.

- The Vata-tapik Rasayana therapy

The second approach of Ayurveda, which is quite popular today, is called Vata-Tapik Rasayana –which can go along with the normal day to day life. This type of

Rasayana is particularly important in the current scenario as it has a relatively easy mode of administration without any restrictive preconditions.

➤ **Classification of Rasayana** - Rasayana are specially formulated herbal preparations, which have to be consumed at the Rasayana kaal, i.e.: before sunrise.

According to the formulation they can be classified as.

- 1. **Kamya rasayan**: therapy for a particular dhatu, srotas, eg:
 - a. Medhya rasayan: specially formulated for enhancing the mental aspects. herbs like bramhi, shankhapushpi, guduchi, are used in such rasayan.
 - b. Loha kalpa rasayan for increasing the rakta dhatu in anaemia.
- 2. **Naimitik rasayan**: for a stipulated time: after jwara we give guduchi rasayan therapy
- 3. **Aajasrik rasayan**: which has to be consumed daily: ghee, milk.
- 3. **Vardhamana rasayan**: rasayan given in a gradual step-up dosage from a minimum to a maximum dose followed by a tapering back, eg: vardhamana pippali rasayana. •

Two more types of rasayana

- 4. **Droni-praveshika rasayana**: a very spectacular form of rasayana, where in a person is made to consume stomach full of the juice of 38 rare herbs and made to lie down in a wooden casket for a period of 6 months (unconscious). this again has no known history of being performed anywhere in the near past, although finds a mention in the text as being one that will enable an old person to completely regain his youth.

- 5. **Aachaar rasayana**: it's a 'adravya' type of rasayan: no herb is used, it includes: 'Sadvaratanam' - good behaviour. Moral values, do play a role in mental, emotional, spiritual wellbeing of a person.

❖ Diseases and Treatments aspect

1. Arthritis/ Sandhigata vata

a. Snehabhyangam: local application of medicinal oils eg: Mahanarayan oil, Chandanbalalaxadi oil, Mahamaash oil, Bala oil, Dhanvantar oil, Pind oil, Nirgundi oil etc. All the joints should be massaged in circular movements. A single joint should be massaged 5 minutes in clockwise and 5 minutes in anticlockwise direction. Massage followed by swedanam: hot fomentation yields maximum benefits. Fomentation in form of steam, locally or whole body, or dry fomentation in form of valuka pottali, hot water bag etc. Exposure to the sunlight after massage is also very helpful especially in osteo-porosis.

Pancha-karma aspect

- Knee arthritis: Janu basti. It's a 45 min long procedure, wherein warm oil is put in a circular enclosure made of urad dough, this enclosure covers the affected area.

2. Lumbar Spondylosis, Sciatica, Disc Prolapse

1.Kati basti 2. Yoga basti kram (enema)

3. Insomnia: Sleeplessness

1. Taking a hot water bath before going to bed induces sleep 2. Applying warm oil to scalp as well as feet 3. Drinking a hot cup of milk 4. Internal medicines like nidrodaya vati, jayaphal churna, ashwagandha churna, ahifenasav, shankhodhar ras, jatamansi churna. 5. Pleasing environment, relaxing music aid in a good sleep.

Pancha-karma aspect

1. procedures like "nasya" and "shirodhara" help in treating this disorder.

4. Constipation 1. moderate fibre intake, green leafy vegetables. 2. Suran or elephant's foot, this vegetable must be boiled and consumed at breakfast with buttermilk. 3. dry fig, black grapes 8-10 must be soaked in warm water and taken empty stomach 4. avoid black gram, beans.

Medicinal aspect: 1. mild laxatives like isabgol, harade tab, castor oil, abhayarishtha, 2. mild purgative: gandharva haritaki, aarogyavardhini, aragvadhkapila vati.

Panchakarma aspect

1. yoga basti kram: oil and decoction enemas administered alternatively.

6. Loss of appetite, Indigestion

- 1. eating ripe papaya ½ hr before lunch time, stimulates appetite, eating ripe papaya after lunch aides in digestion. • 2. drinking sips of buttermilk during meals. • 3. avoiding fried foods, stale foods, cold foods. • 4. including spices, coriander-pudina chutney in meals. • 5. do yogic posture of vajrasana after meals • 6. keeping hot water bag over abdomen region for 15 mins after meals. • 7. do not sleep after lunch.

Medicinal aspect

- 1. agnitundi vati, hingwashtak churna, lavanbhaskar churna, shankha vati, kumari asav, takrarishtha, panchakolasav, aampachak vati, ajamodadi churna etc.

7. Memory loss -Depression

- 1. Soaking 2 dry almonds overnight and consuming them in morning after peeling skin.

• sarasvatarishta, bramhi rasayan, smrutisagar rasa.

Panchakarma aspect- 1. Pichu dharana – keeping oil or ghee-soaked cotton pad on the crown region. 2. Nasya – Putting 2 to 4 drops of ghee or siddha oils in each nostril on a daily basis.

Other therapeutics include.

- following the daily routines • early to bed, early to rise! • regular exercise, yogasanas, pranayama. • oleation: massage the body with simple til oil. • attending calls of nature on time • indulgence in hobbies like

listening to music, playing games like cards, chess, solving cross words, gardening, chatting with friends. • avoid stressful situations. • avoid intoxicating beverages • avoid nonvegetarian predominant diet. • practise wholesome food and regimen • never try to interfere with natural body processes. • avoid immunosuppressants drugs and treatment.

CONCLUSION

From the above references its evident that Ayurveda truly and in totality understands the life process and gives hope and assurance for a graceful ageing process as well as well-maintained health status even in the old age. Practising the various preventive methods / procedures or the timely application of the remedial measures can benefit one and all to a large extent. Taking into consideration the significant proportion of human population on this planet comprising of senior citizens, this branch of Ayurveda needs to be explored and researched undoubtedly.

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