

AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF MENOPAUSE AND ITS MANAGEMENT BY
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ABSTRACT

Menopause is a marker of ageing in women. It is a normal physiological process of women's life. In this particular stage of life, some symptoms are experienced by the females which can affect their routine life and thus management of those becomes necessary. *Rasayana* therapy is one of the most important branches of *ayurveda* which deals with ageing factors and their symptoms by enhancing longevity and quality of life. The present paper reviews menopause and managing of various postmenopausal symptoms by use of *rasayana* therapy.

KEYWORDS: Menopause, *Rajonivritti*, *Rasayana* therapy.**INTRODUCTION**

The menopause is the inevitable cessation and exhaustion of the supply of ovarian follicles and can be regarded as physiological form of ovarian failure. It is defined as the cessation of ovarian function, resulting in permanent amenorrhea. The diagnosis of menopause is retrospective following a period of amenorrhea for 12 months or 6 months. The average age of menopause is usually around 50 years, with limits between 45 and 55. The life expectancy for women has increased and approximately 90% of women reach the age of 65 whereas 35% of women reach 80 years. Hence most women spend one third of their lifetime as a post-menopausal individual and one in every two women will experience about 30 years of post-menopausal life.

In clinical practice, the term menopause indicates the period of time during which spontaneous menstruation normally ceases. It is characterized endocrinologically by evidence of decreasing ovarian activity, biologically by decreasing fertility and clinically by alterations in menstrual cycles and by a variety of symptoms.

Menopause occurs at a time variable from individual to individual. It is genetically predetermined. The age of menopause is not related to age of menarche, or age of last pregnancy. Nutritional status, Cigarette smoking and other risk factors like parity, socio-economic class, educational status and use of oral contraceptives are some factors affecting menopausal age.

In modern science the treatment of menopause is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). In this therapy

estrogen is given from outside to overcome the symptoms generated due to estrogen deficiency. But this estrogen replacement is not sufficient because there are so many hormones like DHEA, melatonin and other systems are also affected. HRT can provide relief in menopausal symptoms for some time but is not recommended for long term use. It may cause much adverse reaction like malignancy and cardiovascular diseases. So to overcome all these problems there is a need to search for an alternative treatment. *Ayurveda* can serve better in this condition.

In Ayurveda menopause is denoted by the term *rajonivritti*. *Rajonivritti* is not mentioned as disease in classical texts of ayurveda. Yet, it can be considered under *swabhava bala pravritta vyadhi* (natural diseases), which occurs during *jarawastha* (old age). *Jarawastha* is a span of life, which is dominated by *vata dosha*. *Vata dosha* is responsible for *kshaya* of all *dhatu*s. *Kala* or time is a factor responsible for *kshaya* and *vriddhi*^[1] as well as it is a cause of *balya*, *taruna* and *vriddhavastha*. *Rajonivritti* is categorized under *swabhavika vyadhi* and 'swabhavo nishpratikriyaha' i.e. by nature they are incurable. These diseases cannot be managed with any treatment other than *rasayana*.^[2]

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the concept of patho-physiology of menopause in perspective of *ayurveda*.
2. To evaluate the scope of *rasayana* therapy in its management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A comprehensive study of relevant classical and contemporary literature was done followed by a critical analysis of the concept and treatment of menopause by rasayana.

MODERN REVIEW

The menopause is a consequence of estrogen deficiency due to the depletion, or relative absence of primordial follicles responsive to the rising levels of gonadotropins.

Menopause is classified as follows according to the cause:

1. Physiological menopause- Menopause apparently occurs because of two processes. First, oocytes responsive to gonadotropins disappear from the ovary, and second, the few remaining oocytes do not respond to gonadotropins. Spontaneous cessation of menstruation before the age of 40 years is called premature menopause or premature ovarian failure.

2. Artificial menopause- The permanent cessation of ovarian function brought about by surgical removal of the ovaries or by radiation therapy is called an artificial menopause.

It can be characterized by three terms; perimenopause, menopause and post menopause period.

Characteristics of perimenopausal, menopausal and post-menopausal period

Perimenopause (2-8 years before LMP and One year after)	Menopause	Post menopause
Decreased fertility	Cessation of ovulation	Raised Cholesterol
Irregular periods	Thinning and drying Membranes	Brittle bones
Increased PMS	Insomnia	Muscle tone decreases
Heavy bleeding		Increased risk of heart Disease
Decreased estrogen levels		Increased risk of cancer
Decreased sex drive Hot flushes Night sweats		

Symptoms of menopause

Hot flushes; night sweats ;irritability; mood swings; trouble sleeping through the night; loss of libido; dryness of vagina; anxiety; feeling ill at ease; aching and sore joints, muscles and tendons; increased tension in muscles; breast tenderness; gastrointestinal distress; indigestion; flatulence, gas, pain, nausea; sudden bouts of bloat; depression; weight gain; hair loss or thinning on head, pubic, or whole body; increase in facial hair; dizziness and light-headedness are the main symptoms of menopause.

Osteoporosis, atherosclerosis, ischemic heart diseases, myocardial infarction and stroke are the later consequences of estrogen deficiency.

AYURVEDA REVIEW

In *ayurveda* classics, it is known by the term of *rajonivritti* and is mentioned under normal physiology. The term '*rajonivritti*' is derived from *rajah* + *nivritti*, meaning cessation of menstrual bleeding. The age of cessation of menstruation is mentioned as 50 years when there is *kshaya* of *artava* due to *kshaya* of all *dhatu*s in *jaravastha*. This age of *rajonivritti* is classified between *praudhawastha* and *vridhdhavastha* in the division of life span of women.^[3]

Types of rajonivritti

1. *Kalaja*
2. *Akalaja*

Rajonivritti, which occurs as per *swabhava* and *kala*, is timely, at probable age of 50, is *kalaja rajonivritti*. Generalized *dhatu kshaya* causes *kshaya* of all *upadhatu*s, hence leading to *rajonivritti*. *Karma* and *Abhigata* can lead to *Akalaja rajonivritti*. Certain dietary factors and life styles causing vitiation of *vata dosha* can lead to *akala jara* and in turn *akalaja rajonivritti*.

Samprapti (Pathogenesis) of Rajonivritti

Rajonivritti occurs at *sandhi kala* of *praudhawastha* and *jaravastha*, where *vata* starts overpowering *pitta dosha* and leads to *kshaya* of all *dhatu*s.^[4] Gradual decline in all *dhatu*s occurring in *jaravastha* is a natural process. *Vata dosha* is the major factor contributing in *kshaya* of all *dhatu*s. *Vata dosha* manifests all the symptoms by its *ruksha*, *khara*, *chala* etc. properties.

During *praudhawastha*, *pitta dosha* is also provoked along with *vata*; hence symptoms of *pitta vridhhi* are also present along with *vata*.

Lakshana (symptoms) of rajonivritti

Doshaja lakshana

Because of increased *ruksha*, *laghu*, *khara* etc. *guna* of *vata dosha*, it manifests certain symptoms of *vata vridhhi* along with *kapha kshaya lakshanas*, because of its decreased *guru*, *snigdha* and *drava guna*. *Pitta* is also increased by vitiated *vata* in early stage of *rajonivritti*.

Few of this *doshaja lakshanas* as observed in a women undergoing *rajonivritti* and beyond *rajonivritti* are as follows.

<i>Vataja</i>	<i>Pittaja</i>	<i>Kaphaja</i>
<i>Lakshana</i>	<i>Lakshana</i>	<i>Lakshana</i>
- <i>Balakshaya</i>	- <i>Daha</i>	- <i>Hrida dravatva</i>
- <i>Sandhivedana</i>	- <i>Trisha</i>	- <i>Dhamani pratichaya</i>
- <i>Katishula</i>	- <i>Mutradaha</i>	
- <i>Adhmana</i>	- <i>Ushna anubhuti</i>	
- <i>Atopa</i>	- <i>Sweda adhikyata</i>	
- <i>Vibandha</i>	- <i>Glani</i>	
- <i>Anidra</i>	- <i>Yonivedana</i>	

- *Sirah shula*
- *Hasta pada supti*
- *Hrida spandana adhikya*

Dhatukshayaja lakshana

Decline in quality and quantity of all *dhatu* is a major event of aging and is mentioned by all *acharyas*.

Period of old age is marked with day-by-day decrease in *dhatu*.^[5]

There is successive reduction in qualities and quantities of all *dhatu*.^[6,7]

Some specific *dhatu kshaya lakshana* are found in menopause which requires medical attention are as follows *hrid dravata*, *shula*, *shram*, *shosha* (*rasakshaya lakshana*), *twak rukshata*, *sita prarthna* (*rakta kshaya lakshana*), *sandhivedana* (*mamsa kshaya lakshana*), *asthi sushirya*, *asthi toda*, (*asthi kshaya lakshana*) *daurbalya*, *bhrama*, *tamodarshana* (*majja kshaya lakshana*).

Scope of Rasayana in Menopause

Rasayana is a measure of attainment of complete health either physical or mental. The major type of rasayana like *ajasrika*, *kamya* and *naimittika* prove very good effects on female in perimenopausal period. The major goal of the treatment is to reduce symptoms and discomfort as well as to enhance well-being and prevent cardiovascular changes or osteoporosis. No drastic cleansing procedures are advised to menopausal women. *Shirodhara*^[8] (continuous flow of medicated oil, decoctions, or buttermilk on the head) and gentle a body massage are advised, as these treatments relieve muscle spasms, pains, burning, and restlessness. Internally, *candanasava*,^[9] *ushirasavam*,^[10] and *drakshasava*^[11] are some of the drugs that reduce hot flashes, burning, and urinary incontinence. *Shatavari*,^[12] *vidari*,^[13] and *kumara*^[14] are the herbs that reduce fatigue and vaginal dryness and give a rasayana effect.^[20,21] For psychological symptoms, like irritability, anxiety, or depression, there are very effective drugs like *brahmi*,^[15] *jyotishmati*,^[16] and *Shankhapushpi*^[17] or formulas such as *kalyanaka ghrita*.^[18] All the above mentioned rasayana are *naimittika* which are taken to cure symptoms produced in the body. The *kamya rasayana* like *cyavanprasha*,^[19] *brahmrasayanacan* be given taking into consideration the need of the woman and for prevention of many after effects of menopause.

The *ajasrika rasayana* in the form of nutritious diet is of most significance. To balance the hormones and reduce the symptoms diet should include plenty of essential minerals and healthy fats. Milk, butter is essential for calcium supplementation. Organic food and vegetables rich in dietary fibers, antioxidants and phytoestrogens should be used. Phytoestrogens are plant based estrogen that can mimic the effect of natural estrogen. A large number of studies had proved that dietary estrogen actually help women by reducing cancer risk, hot flashes

and protecting the heart. High fiber diet is associated with less weight gain, lowering cholesterol level and reducing constipation.

Managing stress is one important way to reduce symptoms like fatigue, poor sleep etc. Effective way to relieve stress is to follow *achara rasayana*. Exercise has also got a role in normal menopause.

DISCUSSION

In *ayurveda* classics, it is mentioned under normal physiology and no regimen or diets have been particularly given in this context. It can be placed under *swabhavika vyadhi* (natural diseases) which can be best treated by *rasayana* therapy.

All the three *doshas* are imbalanced during menopause. Symptoms of menopause can be correlated to change in *dosha* dynamics. Among the three *doshas*, *vata* is of prime importance. There is not a single disorder of the reproductive system which occurs without aggravated *vata*. Women generally reach menopause after the age of 45, when *vata* is dominant in the body. Pelvic region is a seat of *vata*. It usually becomes vitiated when monthly flow ceases. All pains, roughness of skin, etc. during menopausal age can be attributed to aggravated *vata*. Finally, *vata* can also provoke *kapha* and *pitta*. Symptoms such as heaviness of body, fluid retention, and hot flashes are some of the symptoms attributed to an imbalance in *kapha* and *pitta* during menopause. *Ajasrika*, *agnivardhaka rasayana* and *achara rasayana* play a role here. Most important is nutritious diet including mental calmness. The ignorance of changes during menopause and not taking care of nutrition leads to disease like osteoporosis, cardio-vascular diseases and many other. So *rasayana* therapy is must in this phase.

In premenopausal stage in case of irregular periods, increased PMS and heavy bleeding, hot flushes, night sweats, *pittashamaka rasayana* eg. *madhuyashti* and *amalaki* play a role.

Many psychological changes can be combated by use of *medhya rasayana*. In post menopausal stage, low cholesterol diet, high in calcium is mandatory as there increased chances of risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. *Ajasrika rasayana* such as milk, curd, butter, milk and healthy fiber rich diet should be taken. In perimenopausal period *shatavari*, *ashwagandha*, *amalaki*, *madhuyashti*, *ashoka* and *muktashukti* etc. should be used to combat irregularity in periods, psychological symptoms and meet nutritional needs.

CONCLUSION

Menopause is a phase characterized by a cluster of physical and psychological changes. Sometimes the menopausal symptoms are so vigorous that can affect the routine life and requires treatment. The postmenopausal period is associated with significant increase in the

incidence of age related medical conditions like cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis. *Rasayana* therapy can be proved efficacious in perimenopausal stage providing symptomatic cure and preventive as well.

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