

HOLISTIC APPROACH OF AYURVEDA IN GERIATRICS: REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In present era medical science deals exclusively with the problem of ageing and diseases occur due to ageing. Geriatrics is emerging as a main challenging specialty because of ever growing population of aged people all over the world. Ayurveda is the science of life and longevity. Jara (geriatrics) is one of the part of ashtang ayurved. According to ayurveda ageing is outcome of kala and is described under swabhavbalapravritta vyadhi, which is caused by the time naturally. Vatadosha the most important factor in the patho-physiology of ageing obviously because of its natural dominance at that stage of life. Ayurveda has a power to prolonging life with promotion of health

and prevention of diseases occur due to ageing with a number of measures like proper diet, rasayana sevan, achara rasayana, yoga practice, proper panchkarma and some herbal drugs. Practice of all these measures increase the quality of life in old age.

KEYWORDS: geriatrics, proper diet, rasayana, yoga practice.

INTRODUCTION

In present scenario due to improper dietary habits, defective life style, excessive stress and lack of exercise, the process of ageing starts very earlier. These factors produce various degenerative changes as well as metabolic disorder in our body. Some disease and condition that are common in old age are osteoarthritis, hypertension, urinary incontinence, diabetes mellitus, arthritis, atherosclerosis, cardiovascular accidents, respiratory disease, senile dementia, delirium, confusion etc. Modern system of medicine has nothing much to recommend in geriatrics care except the medical management of some disease of old age with limited success. On the other hand ayurveda, the science of life has jara chikitsa (geriatrics)

being an integral part of ashtang ayurveda incorporates various techniques for promotion of health and prevention of diseases in old age. So there is need to generate awareness among the mass about the increase in the number and proportion of older people in society and about the potential of ayurveda in geriatrics.

Characteristics of ageing

Ageing is a process of gradual, progressive and generalised impairment of functions resulting in the loss of adaptive response to stress and in increasing the risk of age-related disease.

According to Acharya Charaka age (vaya) is divided in three parts. Bala (young age), Madhya (middle age) and jirna (old age). Person above sixty years of age considered as “old”. In old age there is progressive diminution of dhatu (body constituents), indriya (sense organ), bala (strength), virya (semen), paurush (masculinity), parakrama (bravery), grahan (power of understanding), dharana (power of retention), smarana (memorizing), vachana (speech), vidnyan (analyzing facts) and also dhatuguna (qualities of dhatu). In old age there is prominence of Vayu dosha and dhatu which has a property to undergo gradual degeneration.^[1]

Acharya Sushruta has described that after seventy years of age one is called as old in whom the dhatus, sensory and motor organs, strength vigour and enthusiasm decline gradually, he gets wrinkles in the skin, grey hairs and baldness and other complaints, is incapable of doing anything and is like a worn out house in the rain.^[2]

Acharya vagbhata follows sushruta in describing age of old one and explains the features of old age as diminution of all dhatus, indriyas (sensory organs) and oja i.e. bala (immunity).^[3]

Since birth to death the moment of conception Right into extreme old age, the human body undergoes considerable change in shape, size and composition. Acharya Sharangdhara describes the sequential bio-loss occurring during different decades of life due to process of ageing. Declining of these bioloss at various decades of life areas are mentioned in table 1.^[4]

Table 1: Bio-Losses at Various Decades.

Decade of life	Loss mentioned
1	Balyam (childhood)
2	Vridhhi (growth)
3	Chhavi (complexion)
4	Medha (intellect)
5	Twaka (skin)
6	Drishti (vision)
7	Shukra (virility)
8	Vikram (strength)
9	Buddhi (memory)
10	Karmendriya (functions of all the indriyas)

Factors Responsible for Ageing

Jara, the old age is an unavoidable phase of life which ultimately ends into death. The factors responsible for ageing is mentioned as follows:-

Kala (time factor)

All the things in the universe undergo various changes before it is destroyed completely. In Ayurveda, this sequence of change is known as “parinama”. Which take place under the influence of “kala”. Thus it can be concluded that parinama bring the Jara, is the sequential events of balyavastha, yuvavastha, jaravastha etc. Are all the consequences of kala. Jara is the phase of life that occurs by the effect of time.^[5]

“kalasyaparinamena jaramrutyunimittajah|”

Swabhav-bala (strength of nature)

Acharya Sushruta mentioned Jara (ageing) as one of the swabhavabalapravitta vyadhi. It means strength of nature is responsible for ageing also Charaka has explained in his theory of swabhavoparamvada that “ there is a causative factors for the manifestation of being but no causative factors as such exists for their deterioration.^[6] That means the process of deterioration occurs naturally. Thus swabhava can be considered as a responsible factor in the causation of Jara.

Tridosha

Tridosha (Vata, pitta and kapha) plays an important role in ageing. Tridosha maintain good health when they are with their quality and quantity and also produce diseases when their qualities and quantity will be disturbed. These doshas exists in the body all the time but it varies as per age, day or night period and after taking meals. During childhood kapha dosha

predominant, in the middle age pitta dosha and in the older age vata dosha is said to be dominant. The properties of vata dosha are described as ruksha, laghu, sheeta, khara, and vashada. So vata dosha by nature decreases lustre of skin, lessens body strength, dries and decay the body and accelerate ageing process.

Agni

Agni is a medium responsible for the conversion of dietary substance into tissue elements. In old age, predominance of vata dosha occurs which is responsible for vishamagni which affects the digestion and creating under nourishment of the tissue enhance the process of ageing.

Ayurvedic managements of old age

Ayurveda gives primary importance to prevention and promotion of health care and the maintenance of positive health. The major preventive approaches for maintaining and improving the quality of life include individualised specific measures like dinacharya, ratricharya, ritucharya, hitakara and matravata ahara, sadvritta-palana etc. And also yoga practices, panchakarma, rasayana sevana. These measures can retard the process of ageing.

Rasayana therapy

Ayurvedic system of medicines specially incorporates rasayana tantra as one of the eight disciplines of ashtanga ayurveda, which is exclusively devoted to geriatrics health care. Rasayana is specialized procedure practiced in the form of rejuvenation measure, dietary regimen and health promoting methods. Rasayana therapy aims ultimately at the attainment of most excellent rasadi dhatu. Acharya charaka describes that a person undergoing rasayana therapy attains longevity, improved memory, intelligence, freedom from diseases, youth, excellence of lustre, complexion and voice, optimum strength of physique and senses, command over language, respectability and brilliance.^[7]

Types of Rasayana

On the basis of the utility-

- 1) kama rasayana:- which is used in healthy person for further promotion of health. It is again of three subtypes.
 - a) pranakama to promote longevity.
 - b) srikama to promote body lustere.
 - c) medhakama to promote mental competence.

- 2) naimittika rasayana:- which is used specially in the treatment of specific diseases ex. Shilajatu (asphaltum punjabinum) in prameha, arjuna (terminalia arjuna) in hridroga.
- 3) ajasrika rasayana:- which is used as a part of diet as milk, ghrita (ghee), madhu (honey) etc.

On the basis of method of use-

- a) vatatapika rasayana i.e. outdoor regimen.
- b) kutipravesika rasayana i.e. intensive indoor regimen.

Yoga practices in old age

Yoga is one of anti-ageing practices, keeping the whole-being young-mid, body and soul. Unfortunately some people mistakenly think that yoga is something only practiced by those genetically blessed with flexibility or a dancer's body. The truth is yoga can be practiced by everyone, of any age, condition or body type and the benefits go above and beyond flexibility, bringing health, calm, beauty and learning into your life.

Some of the psychophysical practices of yoga including some asanas (body postures), pranayama (breath control) and meditation has been proven very effective method for improving health and spiritual wellbeing in the elderly people. A regular practice of yama and niyama will lead to complete refraining from all the evil course and tendencies of life.^[8]

By concentrating on the breath, releasing tension, focusing on only the present and disengaging from the thoughts, yoga provides an ideal opportunities for informal mindfulness practice. Yoga elongates and provides nourishments to the muscles which stimulating bone regeneration. Bone mass loss is an ageing issue. Yoga helps prevent osteoporosis by activating muscles to pull on the bones, stimulating them to regenerates without putting stress on the joints. Yoga can help to regulate parasympathetic nervous system suppressing stress-response, modulating the sympathetic tone, stimulating and digestive circulation and promoting healthy endocrine function. Yoga can control diabetes and also help to decrease risk of heart disease which is common in old age. The inner aspects of dharana and dhyana help to normalize the higher function and modulate the individual perspectives, thus cultivating a positive and proper attitude towards life.

Panchakarma in old age

Panchakarma is a purification method comprising of five main procedure that facilitates better bioavailability of the pharmacological therapies, helps to bring about homeostasis of body-humours, cleansing of channels, eliminates the doshas from the body and stop the recurrence and progression of diseases. The five-fold measures comprehended in this therapy are vamana (emesis), virechana (purgation), asthapana basti (decoction enema), anuvasana basti (oil enema), nasya karma (nasal administration of medicaments). Pre-purification therapies i.e. snehana and swedana are the first ones applied to loosen the toxins, open up the circulation channels and get the body ready for discarding these wastes. These methods are highly relaxing for the body and mind. Vamana-is also known as therapeutic vomiting. It is a treatment that eliminates the vitiated doshas (waste products) through the upper gastrointestinal track. It expels and cleanses undigested food, kapha and pitta. Virechana-is intake of safe herbal medicines which eliminate the poisonous wastes through the anal route. This cleansing of the mid zone benefits the entire body system. Nasya-is instillation of medicated oil through the nose. The excess humours accumulated in the human body are eliminated through nasya. It improves blood circulation and reduces nerve stretching and inflammatory pains in the head. In old age there is dominancy of vata dosha and main treatment of vata dosha is basti which is ace amongst all panchakarma treatment. In simple terms, basti means medicated enema. It washes out all toxins of body through the digestive track. As a rejuvenating health treatment, basti imparts high immunity and longevity, reduces degeneration of tissues and prevents ageing also the yapana basti, bruhana basti, shirobasti, shirodhara, pindasweda have effects in many neurodegenerative conditions which is common in old age.^[9]

Herbal drugs for diseases of old age

Some of the most common diseases of old age include arthritis, cataract, diabetes, dementia, depression, asthma, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, liver and kidney disease etc. Moreover impaired body function, delayed wound healing and susceptibility to infection are frequently observed in old age. Common medicinal plants used for these ailments are as follows-

1. Arjuna (*terminalia arjuna*), karveera (*nerium indicum*) as cardio protective in cases of ischemic heart disease.
2. Methika (*trigonella foenum-graecum*), haridra (*curcuma longa*) and karvellaka (*momordia charantia*) in diabetes.

3. Guduchi (*tinospora cordifolia*), shunthi (*zigiber officinale*) and lashun (*allium sativum*) in arthritis.
4. Brahmi (*bacopa monnieri*), shankhapushpi (*convolvulus pluricaulis*) and madhuyashti (*glycyrrhiza glabra*) in the treatment of senile dementias.
5. Varun (*crataeva nurvala*), gokshura (*tribulus terrestris*) in treatment of senile enlargement of prostate. Triphala (*emblica officinalis*, *terminalia bellirica* and *terminalia chebula*) in senile visual disorder.
6. Kapikachchu (*mucuna prurita*) in Parkinson's disease.

CONCLUSION

Old age is an undesirable and inevitable phase of life. The life science of ayurveda explains that, process of ageing begins naturally (*swabhavoparamavada*) under the influence of time (*kala*). There is dominance of dominance of vata dosha in this age. Ancient ayurvedic scholars have clearly mentioned that during old age quantity and quality of all the dhatu decreases. To overcome these various degenerative changes and process of decay in the body, rasayana sevana as per diseases which provide rejuvenating effects, acts primarily at the level of rasa dhatu, wholesome diet, dincharya, ritucharya, sadvritta palana, yoga practices which balance psychophysical state of mind and body in old age and time to time panchakarma all these measures prolongs life and maintain good health in old age.

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