

JARA CHIKITSA IN AYURVEDA



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Ayurveda is basically the science of life and longevity. Ageing is a process of physical, psychological and social change in multi-dimensional aspects. Ayurveda advocates an excellent approach for promotion of health, prevention of diseases and delaying the process of ageing with number of measures. Jarachikitsa or Rasayana in Ayurveda is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self-dependent for their daily activities to maximum possible extent. So Ayurveda gives top priority to geriatrics. The term geriatrics is derived **Greek word, Geri - old age** and **iatric - care**. It is the branch of medicine concerned with the care and treatment of elderly. The word geriatric has also a close link with the Sanskrit word 'jiryadi' which means degenerated. The dhatus get degenerated due to the body's prolonged structural changes. During old age we cannot enhance the capacity of dhatus, but it can be protected and rejuvenated.

“Healthy Aging” was the theme of World Health Day in 2012. This is decadal research mission for Ayurveda. Advancements in agriculture, science, technology, and biomedicine have increased human life expectancy, while the same have also contributed to the fall in the birth rates. As a result, for the first time in human history we will soon have more geriatric population as compared to the young. Elderly population of India is expected to share about 12.4% of the total population by 2026. India needs to be prepared to handle this demographic shift, especially the healthcare issues of the elderly, otherwise long life without health will certainly be an agony for them. Against this background, the World Health Day aphorism for this in 2012 was – “Good health adds life to years” was pretty consequential and evocative. It is especially challenging for the Ayurveda community because geriatrics is one of its core strengths.

The aim of Ayurveda, the Mother of all healing systems, is not just to cure disease, but to achieve total good health. Of the eight branches of this 5000-year-old science of life, Jara Chikitsa or Rasayana Chikitsa as it is also known, is a positive expression of this philosophy. “Jara” actually means wrinkles, but this Ayurvedic specialty is not confined to geriatric treatment or old age. Jara Chikitsa or Rasayana Chikitsa is a rejuvenating therapy that repairs wear and tear along with perpetual phenomenon of the body, and revitalizes body tissues. It arrests ageing, gives luster to the skin, nourishes the blood and tissues, energizes and boosts the immune system. Rasayana Chikitsa ensures a longer life with good physical and mental health- and actually goes a step further, to provide spiritual solace as well, for an individual's total wellbeing. In short, Rasayana Chikitsa boosts the vital force of life, known as ‘ojas’ in Ayurveda.

Ageing is a process of physical, psychological and social change in multi-dimensional aspects. Regeneration and degeneration go simultaneously right from the neonatal life to young age where growth and development occurs, after wards this process is altered and degeneration takes upper hand. As the age advances body becomes fragile, digestion and metabolism gets weakened and the body succumbs to various diseases. Ayurveda says ageing is outcome of kala or parinama. Vata dosha is the most important factor in the pathophysiology of ageing obviously because of its natural predominance at that stage of life. Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self-dependent for

their daily activities to maximum possible extent. Ayurveda has broad spectrum of preventing measures for combating the ageing process.

Ayurveda divides lifespan of an individual is divided into three parts known as Vaya. These are Balavastha (childhood), which lasts up to the age of 16 years; Madhyavastha (young and middle age), which lasts from the age of 16 years to 60–70 years; and Vriddhavastha or Jirnavastha (old age), which refers to the period after 60 or 70 years. Thus, every person will pass through a period when various decaying changes will take place, and this time period is known as Vriddhavastha. This stage is characterized by decay in the body, Dhatu (various bodily tissues), perception power of the Indriya (sensory and motor organs), potency, strength, speech, various mental and cognitive functions (e.g., memory, intellect, reception, retention, analytic ability, etc.). The major physical changes seen at this time are wrinkling of skin, graying of hair, baldness, and a diminishing ability to do physical work. The diseases that complicate this stage are Kasa (cough), shvasa (asthma), and so on.

Vriddhavastha may be of two types: Kalaja jara (if it manifests after the age of 60 – 70 years) or untimely. Akalaja jara may result due to aggravation of vata and pitta dosha. Therefore, excessive utilization of all the causes of vata–pitta aggravation may lead to untimely aging. Some instances are causes of rajyakshma, carelessness regarding prescribed regimen of tryopstambha (diet, sleep, and coitus), and causes of ojo-kshaya (deficient immunity), excessive and single use of Amla, lavana, katu, tikta, and kashaya rasa in diet.

The concept of *Vayasthapana* in Ayurveda deals with preserving the youthfulness of a body irrespective of its age and restricting progression towards senescence, along with enhancement of longevity, intellect, physical and mental strengths, and prevention from diseases. If one invests adequately in the creative design and implementation of a long-term Indian research program for the elderly based on Ayurveda principles, a definite output will be that elderly population not only in our society but also globally can remain healthier and require lesser need of curative interventions.

“*Achar Rasayana*” is another Ayurvedic strategy for regulating the behavioral social conduct, which ensures a healthy life in a healthy society. In modern times when individuals are exposed to different types of societies in their life time, the ability to adapt to the behavioral modes of that society alone can ensure social health of the individual. In fact, “*Achar Rasayana*” is of greater relevance in today's highly mobile society than it was when first proposed. Life should be like a Banyan tree giving shade and shelter to others, and send out its aerial roots earthwards to propagate the philosophy of providing shade and shelter. We cannot do away with ageing, but we can make it healthy and comfortable.

Ayurveda classic *Sharnghadhara Samhita* quotes that we naturally deplete with each decade of life. Ayurveda observes natural dominance of *vata dosha* in old individuals and *vata* dominant diseases are expected more in this age group. Thus degenerative and debilitating diseases like osteoarthritis, Alzheimer's disease, dementia, stroke are commonly seen in older populations. Contemporary medicine has not yet been able to either prevent or retard the progress of these age-related disorders, and that is the reason why elderly people look toward Ayurveda with hope.

Ageing is a deleterious, progressive, universal and thus far irreversible. Constant efforts have been made to understand the process of ageing and slow the process of ageing. The strategies mentioned in *svastha catuṣka* and *Rasayanadhyaya* of *Charakasamhita* can achieve and maintain *arogya* and *tāruṇya*, ruling out the principle of ‘**shiryate iti shariram**’

1. Daily regimen (Dinacharya): The Ayurvedic regimen of right living is designed for maintenance of health achievement of a long, healthy active life, providing relief from pain and disease thereby achieving satisfactory enjoyment of life and attainment of self-realization.

Time to wake up, Acamana, Danta dhavana, Jihva nirlekhana, Ushahpana, Elimination of urine and faecal matter on time, Gandusha, Kavala, Dhumapana, Nasya, Eye Care, Tambula Sevana, Abhyaṅga, Karṇatarpaṇa, Udvartana, Samvahana, Vyayama, Snana, etc should be followed as per Dinacharya.

Psychological Effects - Regular physical activity can improve mood and the way one feels about himself/herself. Researchers also have found that exercise is likely to reduce depression and anxiety and help to manage stress. Bath with lukewarm water is advised after physical exercise for cleaning of the body and by doing so, tiredness, sweating, drowsiness and thirst vanishes whereas appetite and strength increase.

The Dinacharya makes one lead a healthy and disciplined life. According to the latest studies in the field of medical science, people who stick to the daily routine are more fit than those who do not have a particular time to perform their everyday activities. It is said that Dinacharya reduces the stress level to a great extent. In addition to this, the person's body is purified and detoxified.

2. Sadvritta: It comes from two words "Sad" which means good and vṛtta which means solution. It aims to develop the right balance between one's mind and body for the growth of a person. People need specific codes that are gained by doing Sadvritta in increasing sattvika mind quality. A sound mental health is not just the absence of any mental disorders, but also the ability to keep up with the challenges one is encountering in the late phase of his/her life. Mental health is as important as physical health in elderly persons.

3. Dhyana and Yoga therapy: Means an attempt to unite individual consciousness with the cosmic divine or supreme consciousness. This is a strategy to totally integrate physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of human personality. Dhyana helps in "chitta vritti nirodha". Both attempts ensure arogya to achieve the goal of life i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Pranayama has a salutary effect on general health and vitality. Pranayama helps to procure oxygenated blood to various organs, body tissues and elimination of waste product in form of carbon dioxide along with improving bio-energy and proper conjugation of respiratory and nervous systems.

4. Ritucharya: This word is the combination of two words i.e. ritu meaning seasons and charya meaning routine thus complete term meaning is routine which is to be followed in different seasons. Ayurveda focuses on living in tune with nature. It recognizes the intimate relationship between the individual and the environment. The existence and wellbeing of a person depends largely on the continuous adjustments and interactions with the external and internal factors of the environment. Ayurveda recognizes that seasonal changes have a profound effect on our health, and recommends many helpful suggestions for how one can adapt lifestyle to stay balanced in each season. Ayurveda made the personified specific suggestions because one lifestyle or diet cannot suit everybody as people have different constitutional make up. It maintains the climatic homology in form of dosha samya (equilibrium) in different seasons to promote svasthavritta (preventive and social medicine) on which Ayurveda has laid a great stress since prevention is better than cure.

5. Tripods of life (Trayopastambha): In Ayurveda, Ahara (food), Nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya (Controlled sex) are regarded as the three pillars or tripods of healthy living. It is important for our body to be adjusted to timely intake of good quality and proper food, regular sleeping habits and controlled indulgence in sex in order to ensure long and healthy life. It is thus vital to have a regular systematic food and sleeping habit so that the body has a regularized automatic system of maintenance. It is even mandatory to maintain a balanced sex life and avoid extra indulgence in worldly life. This practice of celibacy along with a proper daily regimen only promotes life and preserves health but also gives enrichment to the soul and other cognitive organs along with the mind which can prevent various ailments of old age.

Ahara (Dietetics / Ageing and Nutrition) - Elderly people have different nutritional requirements compared to the normal adult population. With increasing age, people become more vulnerable to malnutrition for many reasons including anorexia (anorexia) due to ageing, medication, disease like smritinasha (dementia), manovasada (depression), stroke, kampadosha (Parkinson disease) and other neurological disorders, poor dentition, delayed gastric emptying, ill-fitting dentures, swallowing problems, oral infections, taste changes and

diminished smell sensation. Older individuals tend to respond to thirst much less than the younger ones, predisposing to dehydration particularly in case of fever and diarrhea. Therefore, fluid intake is necessary to replace physiological losses, better digestion and intestinal function and for renal clearance. There is no change in absorption of fats and carbohydrates, whereas vitamin D and calcium absorption is impaired, which leads to their deficiency. Calcium intake along with vitamin D is necessary to prevent bone mineral loss in elderly. Diet containing dairy products, fish, legumes, nuts, eggs, etc. are full of vitamin D and calcium. In addition, organic calcium like pravala pishti, pravala pancamrita, kukkutandatvak bhasma and karpada bhasma etc. may be given as medication. Folic acid deficiency is more common in elderly.

Diet containing Fruits, roasted cereals like gram, peanuts, pulses etc. Sprouted cereals, puffed rice, butter milk (mattha) are considered as healthy food items should be given to the elderly. It is needed to change our style of food as: Consume a diet rich in vegetables and fruits (all colored), avoid eating more high calorie fruits (mango, banana, jack fruit etc.), whole fruit is better than fruit juice because it contains fiber. Vegetables which are green, reduces fat and blood sugar level. Stop or minimize alcohol intake, because alcohol is hollow calorie drink. And have sufficient water such as 3 to 3.5 lit/day. Prepare food by boiling, roasting, steaming, baking and avoid frying.

Nishacarya (Night Regimen)- Nidra is one of the most important pillar of life. Sleeping is essential for us to live a balanced life. As we recognize sleeping when we charge our batteries. It is the physiological condition of the body, sensory, motor organs and mind. When the brain is tired and exhausted, our sense organs get distracted and lose focus in what one is doing. Before going to sleep, relax and feel comfortable about self. Think of a religious message before going to sleep. Since sleeping is also a way to repair damaged cells.

6. Panchakarma: Ayurveda heals through purification and rejuvenation therapies. These therapies aim at promoting longevity in life by guiding the individual in the prevention of disease. Panchakarma therapy, which is effective in cleansing of body toxins, plays a pivotal role in this. The detoxification process is necessary for eliminating the toxic waste from the organic system and thereby assuring smooth and natural organic function. It takes the responsibility of the purification and balancing the complete organic system that can ensure natural wellbeing as well as health. So the benefits that one experience through Panchakarma should not be considered in regard to treatment of some particular diseases or disorders, but rather in regard to rendering total health benefits that would naturally combat any disorder or disease.

7. Rasayana: Rasayana provides spiritual aid to the body as well, thereby bringing the body out of its state of natural or man-made loss. It also claims at holding back the process of aging. Rasayana-chikitsa basically boosts the ojas (vital force of life) and the immune system. Rasayana chikitsa helps a person to maintain good health or to establish impaired or lost physical or mental health. The Jara chikitsa regime comprises of a very strict diet. Amalaki, haritaki, trifala, brungaraj, ashwagandha, punarnava, chitraka are few out of the long list of herbs that are called rasayanakar. The Rasayana medicines are believed to have aphrodisiac qualities as well. In short Rasayana chikitsa is rejuvenation of the soul. It provides a long, disease free and vigorous life to the person, who undergoes this therapy seriously, as it helps to bring life back to normal. Rasayana basically promotes the nutrition through three modes. They are:

By directly enriching the nutritional intake of the body through increasing the consumption of satavarai, milk, ghee, etc.

By improving agni i.e. digestion and metabolism through bhallataka, pippali etc. thereby promoting nutrition.

By promoting the capability of srotas or microcirculatory channels in the body, through herbs like guggulu, tulsi, and so on.

Even though it is impossible to adopt all the things certain changes in life style like practice of rejuvenating diet, medicine, yoga will certainly help to prevent many diseases as well as to overcome many problems related to ageing. Some drugs like Ashvagandha and Shiljatu nullify the effects of stress and drugs like

Gambhari improve nitrogen balance and promote tissue building. Guggulu clears the channels and enhances the nutrition to all tissues and cells. Amalaki and Bala contain antioxidants which help in the scavenging of free radicals released. Achara Rasayana acts as psycho immune modulator reduces stress and thus prevents the release of free radicals. It is high time that our sweet dreams revolving round the installation of some well – equipped KUTIS (buildings for rehabilitation) exclusively for **Rasayana treatment** at appropriate centers blessed with picturesque scenery and salubrious climate free from the humdrum multicolored be wildering stream of life in various parts of the country, take a definite shape and get concretely materialized. Now a day's prevention of the diseases is achieved by immunization specifically against each disease but the number of the diseases is so much that practically it is not possible to immunize a person against all the diseases. On the other hand, the concept of Rasayana seems to increase the general immunity so that one can live a long span of youthful life free from the diseases. It may provide an umbrella against the diseases and ageing by promoting the physical and mental health. All these points generate an idea about the Ayurveda believes in promoting the general immunity of a person so that he can fight out any type of disease.

Ayurveda also emphasizes on an ideal method of healthy living. A special section of Ayurveda, Svasthavritta deals with the science of health and the code for a healthy conduct. 'Svasthavritta' which literally means 'the regime of abiding in one 'sown nature' is an individual's guide to the path of healthy and long life. In Ayurveda, one's body is regarded as a temple and thus, several ways are prescribed for keeping it healthy and young life long. The principles of maintaining a proper wellbeing of the body and mind are in corporate in Ayurveda in form of Dinacharya, ritucharya, balanced diet and the observance of personal, moral, seasonal and spiritual conduct. These ways of living help in healthy functioning of five sensory organs, nervous system along with other vital organs of the body. Other than this Ayurveda also prescribes Sadvritta. The right ways of living i.e. following good mental, social, religious, personal and moral conduct which may help to overcome the feeling of stress and fatigue in fast pace life. The stress is a major factor responsible for various ailments of old age. The process of ageing and process of disease are not only because of somatic changes but also due to psycho neuro-humoral changes. The Rasayana therapy bestows human kind by proving them disease free long life and helps in uplifting the quality of their life, by manipulating ageing process and disease process. Remarkably modern pharmacology and clinical medicine are actively conducting series of studies on anti-ageing drugs, disorder of senile stage of human body and aging process, the vast knowledge of Indian medicine, the science of life itself, is competent source of potentials in regard to the concepts, principles, drugs and medicine including the management of ageing disorders, preservation of health, comprehensive fitness of body and mind and rejuvenation of life with longevity. Thus the anti-ageing herbal drugs have wide prospects in the world prospective.

A healthy mind is as important as healthy body. Sattvika ahara is considered to be the best hitakara (wholesome), pathyakara (compatible) diet. It is a vegetarian diet containing non-oily, non-spicy articles which are easily assimilable (satmya) e.g. milk, rice, green vegetables, certain fruits etc. Old age is an undesirable and inevitable phase of human life. The life science of Ayurveda explains that, process of senescence begins naturally (svabhavoparamavada) under the influence of time (kala). Ancient Ayurvedic scholars have clearly mentioned that during old age quantity and quality of all the Dhatu decreases. The combination of dominant state of Vata dosha and deterioration of rasadi dhatu, srotas and agni are responsible for the various degenerative changes and process of decay in the body. Ayurveda holds that there is no magical remedy or short cut for healthy living. Instead, strict and staunch regulation of the Acharyas, the principles of healthy lifestyle which include a proper routine regarding ahara, vihara and Acharas based on hetu (Material cause), kala (Season) and desha (Habitat) are the only ways for healthy living. Ayurveda defines the healthy state as: 'A person, whose somatic and psychic humors are in equilibrium, digestion is uniformly healthy, with normal functioning of the fundamental tissues of the body and body wastes, accompanied by the processes of the soul, cognitive organs and the mind, is said to be a healthy person.' Hence geriatric care warrants management of Agni, Ama and Oja (the essence of all Dhatus) at biological level. Rasayana drugs which compensates the age related bio-losses in the body and provide rejuvenating effect, act primarily at the level of Rasa Dhatu, Agni and

Srotas. In nutshell we can say that by combining Rasayana therapy, wholesome diet, Dinacharya, ritucharya, Sadvritta, yoga and time to time panchakarma are likely to develop an effective package for geriatric care today.

Therefore, these strategies indicated by Ayurveda in respect of health care of people in all phase of life especially ageing population should be religiously followed by letter and spirit. All these strategies can contribute in a big way for healthy and happy old age.