Chapter 5

Therapeutic Approaches

Ideal treatment according to Ayurveda is one which cures the disease without causing complications. The three classical therapeutic modes advocated by Ayurveda are (1) daivavyapāśraya cikitsā (spiritual therapy) (2) yuktivyapāśraya cikitsā (rational treatment) and (3) sattvāvajaya cikitsā (psycho-behavioral therapy). The Ayurvedic treatment methods can be grossly divided into three methods saṁśodhana (bio-cleansing therapy), saṁśamana (palliative therapy) and nidāna parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors). Anupāna is usually water, honey, ghee, jaggery, milk, butter milk and herbal decoction, which is given along with main drug to help in absorption and drug delivery to the target organ in the body. Bheṣaja kāla exemplifies the administration of medicines with regard to specific time and frequency in the management of disease. It decides the extent and rate of its digestion, absorption, biotransformation and excretion. The type of therapy to be administered to the patient is planned out on the basis of stage of disease and state of patient which are ascertained by using manifold methods of examination. The due importance is given for a thorough clinical examination and proper understanding of the disease before planning for a treatment. Different principles like śaṭkriyākāla, nidāna paṅcaka are employed for this purpose.

Specialized Therapeutic Procedures

Ayurveda advocates preventive and curative therapies along with specialized techniques of paṅcakarma (purification) and rasāyana (rejuvenation). Various scientific studies and clinical experiences have validated the efficacy and acceptability of these procedures.

5.1 Paṅcakarma

Paṅcakarma literally means "five types of bio-cleansing therapies". These five therapies of eliminating toxins from the body are vamana (therapeutic induction of vomiting), virecana (therapeutic induction of purgation), śirovirecana/nasya (nasal instillations), nirūha basti (therapeutic enema predominantly with medicated decoctions) and anuvāsana basti (therapeutic enema with medicated oils) according to Ātreyya school and considering both types of basti as one, Dhanvantari school of thought mentions raktamokṣaṇa (bloodletting) as a
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procedure of pañcakarma. This five fold therapy is aimed at śodhana i.e., the eradication of the basic cause of disease and later to achieve śamana, mitigation of the disease.

Pañcakarma is essentially applicable in a wide range of preventive, curative and promotive conditions. These therapies are advocated even in a healthy person to combat seasonal imbalance of doṣa. Ayurveda quotes that the disorders treated with this mode of therapy do not recur while those treated with palliative methods do have ample chances of recurrence. These measures are preceded by snehana (internal or external administration of medicated oils or fats), svedana (induction of sweating) and followed by saṃsārjana karma (restorative regimen after pañcakarma).

Vamana has been claimed as the best treatment for diseases of kapha, virecana for diseases of pitta and basti for diseases of vāta. Classically pañcakarma therapy is prescribed and practiced through following schedule viz. (1) pūrva karma (preparatory procedures), (2) pradhāna karma (main procedures) and (3) Paścāt karma (post procedure measures).

5.1.1 Pūrva karma

Before the administration of pañcakarma therapy, the patient is prepared suitably with snehana and svedana as preparatory measures. Pañcakarma therapy should not be undertaken without pūrva karma as it otherwise fails to eliminate the doṣa located in the tissues. The administration of oil/fat in snehana renders the body soft, liquefies doṣa so that they become amenable to disintegration and detachment from the tissues. Svedana therapy dislodges the vitiated doṣa stagnated in the suble channels of circulation thus facilitating the pradhāna karma to easily eliminate the doṣa through respective pathways. Some times snehana and svedana are also used as independent therapies.

i. Snehana: Administration of mostly medicated preparations containing oil, ghee or fat to a patient for a limited period to get the desired clinical effect is called snehana. Sneha pacifies abnormal vāta, renders the body soft and clears the accumulated wastes which have obstructed the body channels. Further, the regular and rational use of fats has been considered beneficial for the proper digestion, cleansing of the bowel, the promotion of body strength and integrity of senses besides several other beneficial effects of oleation. Oil, ghee or fat based preparations can be administered through different kinds of foods, massage etc. according to the feasibility. The ghee or oil may either be used singly or in medicated form or may be mixed with other drugs.
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ii. Svedana: Making a person to perspire, with or without using heat generated by fire is called svedana. Generally the svedana should be undertaken after snehana therapy. It is considered that the sweating dissolves the waste products of metabolism, stagnated in the body channels which have been softened by snehana therapy. Two types of measures are employed for sweating, (1) by using heat generated through fire (sāgni sveda) and (2) without use of fire (niragni sveda) i.e. by exposure to sun, physical exercise, staying in a closed room, administration of different kinds of alcoholic beverages, covering the body with thick clothes, walking etc. Care should be taken while performing svedana at certain parts of the body such as eyes, testis and pre-cordial region.

5.1.2 Pradhana Karma

After preparing the patient with snehana and svedana the patient is subjected to the main measures of pañcakarma - vanama, virecana, nasya, basti and raktamokṣaṇa as per requirement.

i. Vamana: The therapeutic procedure of eliminating morbid kapha through the oral route is called as vanama. It is the therapy of choice in diseases of kapha predominance. It is specially indicated in cough, cold, bronchial asthma, elephantiasis, diabetes mellitus, nausea, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, poisoning, stomatitis, anemia, mental diseases, epilepsy, psoriasis, erysipelas, lymphadenopathy etc. Emesis therapy is contraindicated in children, very old, debilitated and also injuries of lungs, sprue, bleeding, anuria, enlargement of spleen, abdominal tumors and some abdominal diseases etc. Subjective feeling of clarity of the heart, chest, head etc., lightness in the body, timely passing of urine, stool etc. are the features of well administered emesis therapy.

ii. Virecana: Virecana therapy is induction of purgation for the management of pitta doṣa predominate disorders. Purgation therapy is indicated in diseases of skin, fever, diabetes mellitus, diseases of gastrointestinal tract, abdominal tumor, enlargement of spleen, helmenthiasis, erysipelas, gout, reproductive diseases, fistula-in-ano, glandular swelling, anemia, jaundice, loss of appetite etc. It is contraindicated in children and old patients and also in pregnancy, fever of recent origin, indigestion, lymphadenitis, debility, diarrhea etc. Feeling of cleanliness in the channels and sense organs, lightness in the body, increase of appetite etc. are the symptoms of well administered virecana.
iii. Basti: Medication administered through anal route to get desired therapeutic effects is known as basti. According to Ayurveda vāta is the main factor in the causation of many diseases and basti therapy is the best treatment for deranged vāta. This therapy is also very useful as a health promoting measure. It is beneficial for old as well as for the young and there are no notable hazards in this therapy. It is helpful in all kinds of diseases due to its varied pharmaco-dynamics and kinds of drugs used in its preparations. Basti can be classified mainly into two types viz. anuvāsana basti and nirūha basti which are mentioned as separate procedures of pañcakarma in Caraka Saṃhitā. These two types of basti are given in specified schedule. Nirūha basti is always preceded and succeeded by anuvāsana basti for proper elimination of morbid vāta without causing any complications.

iv. Śirovirecana: Also called nasya is a procedure by which drug (oil, liquids, fumes or powders etc.) is administered through the nasal route. It is useful in all the diseases manifesting above the neck line (ūrdhva-jatragata) because it eliminates toxins through the nostril. On the basis of its therapeutic action and the way of administration it is classified into many types like virecana nasya (cleansing), bṛmhaṇa nasya (nutritive) śamana nasya (pacifying), nāvana nasya (decoction nasya) marśa nasya (ghee or oil nasya) and pratimārśa (daily usable nasya) etc.

v. Raktamokṣaṇa: Raktamokṣaṇa or bloodletting is one of the pañcakarma developed by Suśruta as a specialized technique. Here the prescribed amount of venous blood is extracted by using either sharp instrument or specialized equipment or leech. It is helpful in relieving diseases of pitta origin and chronic skin diseases.

5.1.3 Paścāt Karma

In order to bring back the agni and stamina to normal state after undergoing rigorous procedures, some specific diet patterns and lifestyle known as saṃsārjana karma are adopted. In this process, initially easily digestible liquid dominant diet is given with gradual introduction of routine diet.

5.1.4 Some Allied Pañcakarma procedures

Apart from the main pañcakarma therapy certain procedures especially of snehana and svedana have been devised in the later period by different regions of the country with slight modifications to classical pañcakarma described in ancient texts. Some of these procedures are described below:
i. *Abhyaṅga*: *Abhyaṅga* is the procedure of application of oil over the body with mild pressure. *Abhyaṅga* is invariably followed by *svedana*.

ii. *Sarvāṅga Dhārā* or *Pizhichil*: Developed as a specialty of Kerala, *Pizhichil* is a *snigdhasveda* (combination of *snehana* and *svedana*) in which the warmed medicated oil is poured and massaged all over the body or specific part for a stipulated period, in a specific manner. It has the advantage of producing *snehana* and *svedana* simultaneously.

iii. *Śirodhāra*: In this process medicated oil/liquid is continuously poured over the forehead and then allowed to flow over the scalp from a specific height for a certain period of time. It is widely used all over the world for stress adaptation and to get good sleep.

iv. *Nāḍī Sveda* - In this technique fomentation is done to body parts with the vapors generated out of medicated decoction through a tube in conditions like osteoarthritis, sprain or to relieve pain. Proper oleation of the affected part is done prior to *nāḍī sveda*.

v. *Patrapīṇḍa Sveda* - Bolus prepared from medicinal plants along with oil etc. is tied in cotton cloth for application over the affected part.

![Patrapīṇḍa Sveda](image)

**Fig. 10- Patrapīṇḍa Sveda**

vi. *Śaṣṭikaśāli Piṇḍa sveda* - It is a procedure in which the whole body or any specific part is made to perspire by the application of warm medicated rice puddings externally in the form of boluses tied up in a cotton cloth.
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vii. **Udavartaṇa** - It is a procedure in which herbal powders are used for massage mainly for weight reduction or to resolve skin diseases.

viii. **Kaṭi Basti** - It is a procedure in which comfortably warm medicated oil is kept over the lumbosacral area or any adjacent part for a certain period of time with the help of a boundary made from dough of black gram. Depending upon the area of use it is called as grīvā basti (cervical), jānu basti (knee), śīro basti (head) etc.

ix. **Uttara Basti** - The enema which is administered through urethra or vagina is termed as uttara basti.

x. **Tarpaṇa** - This treatment aims to provide optimum rejuvenation to eyes. Thick paste of black gram is put around the eye ball. Then medicated oil or ghee is put in this groove to lubricate eye and surrounding areas.

xi. **Upanāha** - In upanāha the medicinal paste with or without heating is applied over a specific area. It has to be covered with some leaves and tied with thick cloth. If upanāha is done during day, it is removed at night and if done during night, it is removed in the morning.

xii. **Pādhbhyaṅga** - It is a specialized feet massage which is very good for the eyes, alleviates tiredness and stress, and induces deep sleep.

xiii. **Kriyākalpa** - Kriyākalpa are the specialized treatment procedures meant for the treatment of diseases of eyes. The treatment procedures can be used as preventive measures to maintain the functional integrity of sense organ and also to overcome age related problems.

**5.1.5 Safety of Pañcakarma**

When employed skillfully and appropriately, pañcakarma procedures are safe and effective for the prevention and management of a number of health problems. The scientific evidence on clinical safety and efficacy of pañcakarma was re-validated through a number of clinical studies by adopting the classical Ayurvedic notations and contemporary clinical, bio-chemical and pathological parameters. These parameters have shown substantial evidences towards regression of many chronic disease. The assessment of parameters including hepatic, renal function and lipid profiles have also established clinical safety. In the current scenario, the pañcakarma regimen, a unique contribution of Ayurveda may be adopted in the management of chronic and refractory illnessess.
5.2 *Kṣārasūtra*

*Kṣārasūtra*, a specially processed medicated thread is applied for ano rectal disorders. This is a minimal invasive para-surgical procedure is widely cited in ancient medical literatures for its safety and efficacy. It is being successfully practiced as promising therapy mainly for ano-rectal disorders since ancient time by Indian surgeons. This technique was first practiced by Suśruta, the renowned ancient Indian surgeon. This technique of treatment was re-established in the Department of Śalya tantra at Banaras Hindu University, Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences and Indian Council of Medical Research. The therapy is very effective even in the management of complex and post-surgical recurrent fistula-in-ano.

Duration of treatment depends upon the condition of disease and status of patient. Usually in simple cases of fistula-in-ano, *kṣārasūtra* can cut and heal 1 cm of tract per week. Duration of treatment may increases in following conditions:

- Fistula which has been operated earlier
- Fistula with many branches
- Fistula with curved tract
- Fistula extended to deeper structures
- Fistula in patients with diabetes mellitus, malnutrition, tuberculosis, anemia and those who are obese.

5.2.1 **Advantages of *kṣārasūtra* therapy** - Merit of this therapy is based on the data of more than 30,000 patients who have been treated successfully by this method of treatment

- 100% cure can be obtained in simple low anal fistulae whereas 93 to 97% cure rate can be achieved in difficult, complex and recurrent fistulae.
- It is an ambulatory form of treatment where hospital stay is minimal.
- Patient can continue routine activity during the course of treatment.
- Damage of tissue is minimal therefore chances of incontinence and strictures are practically nil.
- Cost of treatment is much less, compared to other modalities of treatment.
- Recurrence rate is fairly less in comparison to conventional surgery.
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5.3 Rasāyana

Rasāyana is therapeutic procedure used to replenish and rejuvenate structural entities of the body. Literally, rasāyana means the augmentation of the quality of rasa, the vital fluid produced at the end of digestion of food. The aim of rasāyana is not only to improve the quality of rasa; but to provide the optimum quantity to all the body tissues. It is the rasa flowing in the body which sustains life. Rasāyana is a specialized branch of clinical medicine meant for preventing the effect of ageing and to improve memory, intelligence, complexion, sensory and motor functions. Numerous rasāyana medicines are reported for possessing diversified actions like immuno-modulation, free radical scavenging, adaptogenic or antistress and nutritive effect. From the therapeutic point of view rasāyana may be of two types: kāmya rasāyana and naimittika rasāyana. kāmya rasāyana has been advocated for healthy individuals desirous to improve their health and vitality. Depending upon the mode of administration the rasāyana therapy is broadly classified in to vātātapika and kuṭāprāveśika. In vātātapika rasāyana, individual is allowed to attend to his routine work and also undergo the rasāyana treatment. In contrary to this, in kuṭāprāveśika rasāyana the individual has to be confined to indoor and not allowed to move in open air and sunlight and also to undergo rasāyana therapy. The ācāra rasāyana is a type of non-drug management in which by practicing specified code of conduct one can get the desired effects of rasāyana.

Note to the readers: Ayurveda adopts diversified therapeutic approaches. Some of them are originally prescribed in Ayurvedic classics and some are modified approaches developed later by the traditional practitioners. These therapies again have regional diversifications in the country. Some of the most commonly used therapies are mentioned in this chapter and other varieties and details like their indications, procedures, complications etc. are available in books like: