

**VARIOUS METHODS OF PAIN MANAGEMENT IN AYURVEDA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Pain is a sensory and emotional experience. The emotional component is variable from person to person and in the same person from time to time. No matter however mild pain is anywhere in the body it causes a state of discomfort and affects the routine activities of a person. Pain can present in various ways like throbbing pain in toothache, radiating pain in sciatica, burning pain in acid peptic disorders, muscular pain as in sprain, strain & spot injury and joint pain is due to inflammatory condition and many more. Pain is also categorized as acute and chronic on the basis of duration. In spite of advanced researches in modern science, pain still remains as the major cause of suffering affecting the

huge number of population in the world. Since all the current trends in the management of pain have lots of adverse side effects. Ayurveda explains the root cause of pain is vitiated *vata dosha* and once *vata dosha* is treated efficiently the pain subsides automatically. In this article, review of the various types of treatment modalities for pain management such as *agnikarma*, *rakthamokshana*, *marma chikitsa*, *lepa*, *snehana*, *swedana*, *basti*, *sthanika basti*, *shirodhara* has been discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Pain, *agnikarma*, *rakthamokshana*, *marma chikitsa*, *lepa*, *snehana*, *swedana*, *basti*,

**INTRODUCTION**

The international association for study of pain(IASP) defines pain is “ an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage or described in terms of such damage”<sup>[1]</sup> Pain is a major symptom in many medical conditions and is the

most common reason for physician consultation. It interferes with person's quality of life in day today activities. The pain not only interferes with physical functioning but also causes impairment in attention control, working memory, mental flexibility, problem solving and information processing speed. Chronic pain may also cause increased depression or anxiety. To relieve this pain every person seeks such a treatment which has minimum side effect and maximum benefit. On this parameter treatment procedures which are explained in Indian system of medicine so called Ayurveda seem to be more efficient and effective.

In Ayurvedic classical text Sushruta samhita we found terms such as *shoola*, *ruja*, *vedana*, and *ruk* for revealing the condition of pain. Vitiated *vata* is the main causative factor for all pains in the body. This vitiation occurs in two ways such as *Dhatukshayajanya vata prakopa* and *margavarodhajanya vata prakopa*.<sup>[2]</sup> *Ruksha* and *chala gunas*(characters) of *vata* are mainly involved in the manifestation of pain.

This article elaborates various treatment modalities mentioned in Ayurveda in context to pain management *Agnikarma* (Heat burn therapy), *Jaloukavacharana*(leech therapy), *Viddha karma*(needle puncturing) *lepa* (medicated paste), *snehana*(oleation), *swedana*, *bastikarma*(enema), *marma chikitsa* are discussed.

### **Agnikarma**

In Ayurveda treatment with heat burns is called as "*Agni Karma*". It is also called as "*Dahan Karma*". Various painful conditions like joint pain, head ache, pain due to cervical spondylitis, frozen shoulder, sciatica, heel pain etc can be treated with this intentional heat burn therapy. The process of *Dahan karma* is normally done by using gold, silver, *Pancha Dhatu*, Iron *shalaka* or even with metal coins, ring or with seeds of *bhallatak*, *pippali* etc. According the *sushrut samhita*, patients treated with *Agni karma* procedure never suffers from the same disease again, i.e it never reoccurs. Thus *Agni karama* cures the disease completely, Hence *Agni Karma* is said to be superior then other therapeutic procedure like oral medicine, *kshar karma* or even surgery.<sup>[3]</sup> In modern terminology, "*Agni Karma*" therapy can be termed as "Intentional therapeutic heat burns".

*Agnikarma* works through "Gate Control Theory" according to modern research to prevent the sensation of pain to reach the brain and hence provides immediate relief. It was proposed in 1965 by Ronald Melzack & Patrick Wall. The gate control theory of pain asserts that non-painful input closes the "gates" to painful input, which prevents pain sensation from

travelling to the central nervous system. Therefore stimulation by non- noxious input is able to suppress the pain.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ayurveda believes that being *ushna* treatment it acts against the qualities of *vata* and *kapha doshas* and hence *Agni karma* cures all the *vataja* and *kaphaja* disorders Pain cause any where in the body is due to *vata*, *Agni karma* being *ushna chikitsa* pacifies *vata*, thus the pain is relieved immediately after *Agnikarma*. Due to increased local metabolism, the waste products (metabolites) which are produced gets excreted, which normalize the blood circulation thus resulting in reduction in intensity of pain.



*Agnikarma* for back pain



*Agnikarma* for Heel pain

#### ***Jalaukavacharana (leech therapy)***

*Jalaukaavcharana* (Leech therapy) involves application of *Jalauka* (Leeches) for removal of vitiated blood at the site of pain. It is proved by various researches that the sensory stimulus caused by the pain and burning sensation of the leech bite can alleviate the symptoms of the patient through the “gate theory”. The main components of Medicinal Leech saliva is Hirudin which inhibits blood coagulation by binding to thrombin, Bdelins acts as anti-inflammatory and inhibits trypsin, Eglins acts as anti-inflammatory and inhibit activity of cathepsin G, Carboxy- peptidase A inhibitors increases the inflow of blood at the bite site, Histamine like substance, acetylcholine acts as vasodilator and Anesthetic substance which causes anesthesia at the bite site.<sup>[5]</sup>



**Leech application for joint pain.**

### ***Viddha Karma***

*It's a form of Vedhan karma, one of the eight Shastrakarma (surgical measures) mentioned in Sushrut Samhita. In Viddha karma the tender points are pierced with special hollow needles which leads to painful mechanical stimulus which causes release of endorphins thereby, causing immediate pain relief.*

Few Ayurveda experts are practicing a modified *Agnikarma* procedure named- *Viddhagni*, by clubbing *Agnikarma* & *Viddha karma* together. This treatment involves acupuncture along with heat therapy.



**Viddagnikarma.**

### ***Marma Chikitsa***

It is an effective, non invasive and handy method of wholesome healing. The concept of *marma* in *Ayurveda*, *chakras* in *Yoga* and meridian system in Acupressure or Acupuncture resemble each other closely. *Marma* can be viewed as the meridian point system of *Ayurveda*, corresponding to organs, nerves, and bodily systems. Through stimulation of *marma* by means of *Abhyanga* (massage), *Mardana* (Acupressure), Aroma therapy, *Pranic* healing, medicated herbal paste application (*lepa*), *Raktamokshan* (bloodletting), *Agni karma* and *suchi vedha*(acupuncture) the *Prana* (vital energy) existing in *marmas* can be directed to

remove blockages (even in remotely connected areas) and stimulate energy flow, thus resulting in a state of healthy body, mind and spirit.<sup>[6]</sup> It may be used independently or as a hands-on adjunct to the standard therapies recommended for a particular health issue which directly or indirectly work by influencing *marmas*, but all of them basically require application of some kind of pressure or / and appropriate medications over the different *marma* points. *Marma chikitsa* may help to treat following pathological conditions like Muscular pain,, Joint pain, Respiratory obstructions, Nervous system disorders, Headaches & migraines, Mental stress, Fatigue, *Vata vyadhi*, Paralysis, Cervical or Lumber Spondylosis etc.



*Marma chikitsa.*

### *Lepana Chikitsa*

This is application of medicated paste over the painful body parts. Sushruta has described *Lepan* in *Twakgata vata*, *Mansagata Vata* and in management of pain due to *Vranshophya*.<sup>[7]</sup> The mechanism of action of *lepan* can be explained with the Mechanism of transduction of cold thermoreceptors as for example Menthol sensation is perceived via TRPM8 channel; whereas role of *Pradeha* can be explained with TRPV1 channels and furthermore certain Warm receptors also being sensitive to painful stimuli function as nociceptors.<sup>[7,8]</sup>



*Lepana.*



### ***Snehana karma***

*Snehana* (oleation) is *Purvakarma* and practiced before all *Panchkarma* procedures. using medicated taila or grita both internally as well as externally. Due to *Sneha* (oleation) *Vata Dosha* gets pacified. *Bahya Snehana* or *Abhyanga* is application of oil on the skin which is again divided into *Sarvanga Snehana* (whole body massage) or *SthanikSnehan* (application of oil over local affected part).

As per the modern perspective, the Neuro- hormonal effects of *Bahya Snehana* has been established, stating that massage increases levels of Dopamine, increases availability of serotonin, may elevate epinephrine (adrenaline) and release of endorphins. (Research conducted at TOUCH Research Institute at the University of Miami). All these neuro-hormones alter brain chemistry which in turn reduces response to pain sensation.



***Pada Abhyanga (Foot Massage)***

### ***Swedana Karma***

*Swedan* (steam therapy) is also the *Poorvakarma* to *Panchkarma* which helps in inducing sweating. *Swedan* is divided into *sarvanga sweda*(steaming for whole body) and *sthanika sweda*(locally). Heat allows the skin and blood (outer disease pathway) to be cleansed. This relieves and reduces fat tissue and muscle tension. Heat also restores balance to *Váyu* and *Kapha* (i.e., relieving pain and stiffness) and reduces the *ama* by increasing *dhatwagni*. The role of *Swedana* can be explained with Transient Receptor Potential Channels which are mainly found in nociceptive neurons of peripheral nervous system. Role of *Swedan* in management of pain can be explained through TRPV1 channels which are responsible for perception of heat and pain.<sup>[7,10]</sup>

### ***Basti Karma***

In Ayurveda vata is the main causative factor in many pain related disorders. Basti treatment is considered as best treatment for degenerated *Vata*. To show the importance of *Basti Chikitsa* Acharya Charaka has called it as “*Ardha Chikitsa*” of Ayurveda.<sup>[11]</sup> In this treatment medicated *dravyas* are administered through rectal route.

It is hypothesized that *Basti karma* has a feature to regulate sympathetic activity, thereby, balancing the autonomic nervous system. Hypothalamus- Pituitary-Adrenal axis (HPA) gets activated with the visceral afferent stimulation, involving the release of neurotransmitters from adrenal gland called cortisol, a neuroendocrine hormone, acts as a potent anti-inflammatory systemically.

### ***Sthanika Basti***

It is soaking a affected painfull body part with lukewarm medicated oil placed in a dam made from dough of *Urad* (black gram), such as *Shiro Basti* (Head as in headache), *Greeva Basti* (Cervical area as in cervical spondylitis), *Kati Basti* (Lumbosacral area as in back ache), *Janu Basti* (Knee as in knee joint pain).<sup>12</sup> It produces cumulative effect of *Snehan* and *Svedhana* at the area of application by the reduction of pain occurs.



**Janu basti for knee joint pain**

### ***Aushadha Yoga***

The main aim of palliative treatment is to correct the vitiated *Vata Dosha* which is responsible for pain. For that purpose usage of many single herbal drugs can be done such as *Guggulu*, *Aswagandha*, *Rasna*, *Nirgundi*, *Langali*, *Kuchala*, *Guduchi*, *Eranda*, *Bala*, *Atibala*, *Shunthi*, *Nagarmotha*, *Ajmoda* etc.

Drug formulations such as *Rasa* preparations like *Mahavatvidvansaka Rasa*, *Brihatvatchintamani Rasa*, *Ekgaveera Rasa*, *Rasasindoor*, *Shirashoolharavajra Rasa* etc. *Churnas* like *Trikatu Churna*, *Panchakol Churna*, *Ajmoodadi Churna*, *Hingvastaka Churna* etc. *Guggulus* like *Amrita Guggulu*, *Kaishoor Guggulu*, *Kaishoor Guggulu*, *Trayadashanga Guggulu*, *Abha guggulu*, *Lakshadi guggulu* etc. *Kwatas* such as *Dashmool Kwath*, *Rasnasaptak Kwath* etc. *Asava-aristas* like *Balarista*, *Dashamoolarista*, *Aswagandharista* etc. *Tailas* like *Panchguna Taila*, *Mahanarayana Tail*, *Prasarani Tail*, *Vishgarbha Tail*, *Mash Tail*, *Mahamash Tail*, *Bala Tail*, *Balalakshadi Tail*, *Ksheerbala Taila*, *Pinda Tail* etc.

## CONCLUSION

- *Agnikarma* is an important parasurgical technique in Ayurveda for quick relief of pain without any recurrence. And it is indicated in *vata* and *kapha* predominant conditions.
- Chemicals present in leech saliva are helpful in relieving the pain by blocking the receptors responsible for producing the pain.
- *Viddagnikarma* is a combine effect of acupuncture and heat therapy in reducing the pain by blocking pain causing cells in cutaneous skin.
- In *Marma Chikitsa Abhyanga* (massage), *Mardana* (Acupressure), Aroma therapy, *Pranic* healing, medicated herbal paste application etc procedures can be utilised for the reduction of pain by concentrating the vital structures.
- *Vata dosha* is causative factor for occurrence of pain and to mitigate *vata dosha* *Bastikarma* is the choice of treatment in Ayurveda.

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