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Preventive and Social Medicine in Ayurveda



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ABSTRACT

Thousands of years ago the Indian sages described a healthy way of lifestyle for a human being. It is an ancient system of medicine and stresses on holistic health. It not only provides palliative and curative medicine but also plays an effective role in the prevention of recurring diseases. Here treatment of ailment is personalized and depends on the psycho-physiologic makeup of the body. Ayurvedic preventive medicine is called *swasthavritta* i.e. establishing oneself in good habits to stay healthy and fit. To prevent illness ayurvedic medicine emphasizes exercise, herbs and yoga. There are therapeutic procedures also used as preventive medicine like *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana* therapy. Ayurveda believes that every human being is a replica of this cosmos. So there is a relation between a person and its environment. In ayurveda, there is an elaborate description of different regimens according to seasonal and diurnal variation to stay healthy. Prevention is better than cure, keeping this philosophy in mind here are some lifestyle management and regimens for a person to live happy and healthy life.

INTRODUCTION

The very objective of Ayurveda is 'swasthasya swasthya rakshanam' i.e. to protect and maintain the health of a healthy person (preventive medicine) & 'aturasya vikara prashamanam' i.e. to treat the disease and giving relief to a sick person (therapeutics).¹ These two aspects reflect the unique approach of ayurveda. Therapeutics is not strictly related to treatment with medicine but also as the treatment without medicine in the form of good conducts both personal as well as social.

Charaka says that *arogya* (disease free state) is the main key to four objects of human pursuit viz. *dharma* (righteousness, moral values), *artha* (prosperity), *kama* (pleasure, psychological values) and *moksha* (salvation, spiritual values).² To achieve a state of *arogya*, daily and seasonal regimens as well as for mental health *sadvritta* and *achara rasayana* are described.

DISCUSSION

Dincharya (daily regimen):^{3,4,5}

It is a daily ritual of self-care. There is daily routine designed to maintain and reconnect us to the natural circadian rhythm. Those are daily practices and personal hygiene to be followed to promote health & optimal use of our faculties. Vagbhata has described dincharya very elaborately in *Astanga Samgraha*. Some excerpts are:

- The healthy person, in order to protect his life, should get up from his sleep in the *Brahma Muhurta* (anytime from 3.00 AM to 6.00 AM), after considering the condition of digestion of food taken in previous night whether properly done or not.
- After getting the urge of urine and feces naturally, (of their own accord) the person should eliminate them.
- For cleaning the teeth twigs of roots of *Vata* (*Ficus bengalensis*), *arka* (*Calotropis*), *khadira* (*Acacia catechu*) or such other known trees which possess astringent, bitter and pungent tastes should be used. The twig should be the thickness of the little finger, straight, devoid of knots and obtained from the trees grown in a good place; it should be of twelve fingers in length. It's one

end is made of a brush by chewing & the teeth cleaned with it in the morning and after meals, twice daily.

- Twigs of those trees which have sweet, sour and salty tastes, which are very dry, hollow, having a bad smell and gummy should not be used.
- The lower row of teeth should be brushed first. Keeping the mouth filled with water for gargling the eyes are to be splashed with water every morning with cold water in summer and autumn season.
- Sauviranjana (collyrium) is good for the eyes so should be applied to the eyes daily. By this eyes become beautiful, capable of seeing even minute objects. The eyelashes become smooth and firm.
- Anutaila (medicated oil) should be put in the nose and then *gandusha* was done (filling the mouth with liquids to its full capacity and holding it for a few minutes). Persons who use *nasya* (nasal medication) daily will have their skin, shoulders, neck face and chest strong and good looking. Their mouth having a pleasant smell, voice also pleasant. Sense organs clean and efficient and they become devoid of wrinkles, grey hairs, and black patches.
- Next comes, inhalation of medicated smoke. By the use of inhalation, diseases of organs located above the shoulders and arising from the Vata & Kapha will not develop.
- Use of perfumes garlands etc acts as aphrodisiacs, dispels inauspiciousness and improves one's appearance.
- The desirous of good taste, cleanliness and the good smell of mouth may keep in tender leaves of betel along with lavanga, jatiphala, catechu etc. This is also good for the heart.
- A person should take daily *abhyanga* (oil-bath or oiling). It promotes strength, sleep, growth and firmness of the hairs. Useful in pains, tiredness, debility and old age. *Abhyanga* by oil is best for the skin and it should be done daily.

- Everyone should do exercise daily. It manifests lightness of the body, increased capacity to work, keen appetite, and reduction of body fat. By exercise parts of the body become distinct and firm.
- *Udvaartana* (massaging) mitigates Kapha, liquefies the fat, makes the body parts firm & is best for the skin.
- Bath improves appetite, sexual vigour, a span of life, valour and strength; removes itching, dirt, exertion, sweat, stupor, thirst and burning sensation.
- A man should take food observing the prescribed regimen, without any hurry; after offering prayers to god and with a pleasant mind to the god of fire and to the poor & destitute as charity along with drinking water, asking them to eat happily sitting in a secluded place.

Ritucharya (seasonal regimen):^{6,7,8}

‘Ritu’ means season and ‘charya’ meaning follow a routine. It is a description of the seasonal regimen in ayurveda. A year is divided into two parts based on the movement of the sun- *adanakala* (‘uttarayana’ or northern solstice) & *visargakala* (‘dakshinayana’ or southern solstice).

The northern solstice is hot and having a predominance of heat. The sun takes away the strength of people and cooling quality of the earth by its very hot rays. The dryness caused thereby, makes the bitter, astringent and pungent tastes more active and brings about debility in human beings. The seasons come under this period are- *shishir* (cold), *vasanta* (spring) and *grishma* (summer).

The southern solstice is mild and cool. In this period moon is more powerful. Earth becomes cooled due to clouds rain and cold wind. The atmosphere is pleasant, helped by the cool rain which makes the sour, salty and sweet tastes more active in successive order and brings about increase of strength in humans. The seasons are - *varsha* (rain), *sharada* (autumn) and *hemanta* (winter). Each season has its own regimen according to changes in body and nature.

- In the winter season, digestive fire is strong so foods which are fatty, having sweet, sour and salt taste predominantly should be taken; flesh of animals which live in burrows, water, and marshy places should be taken. Fresh liquors prepared with treacle and flour, products of black gram, sugarcane and milk, muscle-fat, oil and freshly harvested grains should be consumed. Exercises, massage, oil bath, sudation, inhalation of smoke, basking in sun, warm water for bathing and washing; residing in houses which are under the ground or equipped with ovens, bedding made of thick cotton and woolen blankets should be used.
- During the cold season, the cold gets increased still more by the clouds, breeze, and rain; dryness is also found. All the regimens described for winter should be adopted more rigorously and in greater measure.
- In the spring season, use of digestive emetics, inhalations, mouth gargles, nasal medication, exercise, massage; honey, barley, wheat and soup of meat of animals of the desert-like regions should resort. Daytime should be spent in airy spaces. Fresh mango juice different kinds of alcoholic beverages like *asava*, *arishta*, *sidhu*, *mardvika* and *madhava* should be administered. Foods which are heavy and more in quantity and cold, sleeping during the day, materials which are fatty, sour and sweet should be avoided.
- In summer season sun rays appear very hot. All the animals feel like suffering from fever by the effect of the hot wind, the sun and consequent sweating. During this season people should avoid exercise, basking in the sun, substances which are pungent, sour and salty tastes and hot; alcoholic drinks should not be taken. Syrups, thin gruels prepared with corn flour and sugar which are very sweet in taste & smell, kept in fresh mud pots are the ideal drinks. The food should be sweet, cold and liquid. The meat of animals and birds living in desert like region, rice, milk, ghee, grapes, coconut water, and sugar are to be made use of. It is best to sleep in an apartment equipped with water fountains during day and during nights in an open area with sweet smelling flowers all around.
- In the rainy season the strength of men being reduced by the effect of the season, digestive capacity becomes less and food materials undergo sour digestion. Basti (enema) should be done after proper purificatory procedures. Old rice, wheat, and barley, soup of pulses processed with ginger, oil etc. water should be used after boiling. When it is cloudy, substances which are dry,

easy to digest, fatty, hot, sour and salt should be used as food and drink along with honey. Massaging of the body, bath, inhalation of smoke, scents such as of sandal should be used.

- In autumn season, pitta is accumulated and get aggravated in the body; hence it is ideal to have a drink of medicated ghee having bitter in taste, resort to purgatives and blood letting frequently. The foods and drinks should be cold, easy to digest, less in quantity with astringent, sweet and bitter tastes. Rice, wheat, barley, green gram, sugar, honey, patola, amalaka and meat of animals of the desert-like regions are good foods. Over satiation, curds, sunlight, alkaline substance, muscle-fat, oils, strong alcoholic drinks, sleeping during day should be avoided.

Sadvritta^{9,10}

Sadvritta is the good conduct of a person towards one's surrounding, society, and oneself as well. *Sad* means good, *vritta* means conduct. It is ethical regimen or code of conduct for keeping the good or balanced condition of body and mind. It enhances the personality of the man which is an important aspect of human being's life. It includes ethical, social, mental, moral and physical rules:

- One should always speak truth, do not get addicted to sensory pleasure, don't harm anyone, speak pleasant & sweet word, don't lose self-control, one should be jealous in cause and not in effect.
- One should be devoted to teachers and elders should worship god, cows, brahmanas, and preceptors.
- One should not go through keeping the respectable and the auspicious on left and others on right side.
- One should not excrete sputum faeces and urine in front of wind, fire, water moon, sun, elders and neither preceptor nor should urinate on the road, in crowded places & while taking food.
- One should always look at the qualities of peaceful life and should alleviate the cause of attachments and aversion.
- Everyone should respect women and should not desire for other women.

- The one who behaves nicely as mentioned in sadvritta becomes more divine. Being kind to others, giving donations to charity, controlling actions of body, mind, and speech & treating everybody like oneself is good conduct. If one follows these rules and regulations, he gets long and healthy as well as wealthy life.

Achara rasayana¹¹

It is the moral conduct and behavior which helps the rejuvenation of a person who follow it regularly. It particularly described in Charaka Samhita. Achara rasayana is the means to acquire *rasayana* effect through social and personal conducts. It acts in many dimensions like personality development, improving social relationship, physical and spiritual well-being. Some highlights of achara rasayana are:

- Truthfulness, free from anger, devoid of alcohol and indulgence in sexual activity, nonviolence, peacefulness, maintaining cleanliness, compassionate, free from ego, believing the existence of god, regularly studying scriptures.
- Sleeping and waking up at regular time, regularly consuming milk and ghee, avoiding unwholesome food, having fair knowledge of place and time.

These moral and ethical conducts act at the neuro-hormonal level and increase hormones like melatonin which acts as antioxidants. Antioxidants check growth of free radicals and improve immunity in human body.

Dharaniya & Adharaniya vega¹²

There are some urges which should be restrained (*dharaniya*) and some should not be restrained (*adharaniya*). Restrainable urges are related to mental hygiene. A person should control impulses of emotional factors like greed, grief, fear, anger, vanity, impudence, jealousy, excessive attachment, and malice. *Adharaniya vegas* are related to the normal physiological process which should be voided if occurs otherwise it may lead to different types of disease. These urges are 13 in number viz. urine, stool, semen, flatus, vomiting, sneezing, belching, yawning, thirst, hunger, tear, sleep, and breathlessness due to exertion.

Rasayana therapy^{13,14}

Rasayana means the therapy which is beneficial to body tissues. It enhances the natural immunity, strengthens body tissue, and removes free radical thus keeping the signs of early aging at bay.

It rejuvenates the body tissues. It also promotes longevity in the healthy and cures diseases in sick. Sharangdhara has described rasayana according to age as there is a loss of growth in first decade of life, luster in third decade, intellect in fourth decade, strength in fifties and so on. Some examples of rasayana drugs are- amalaki, ashwagandha, guduchi, pippali, shankhapushpi, yashtimadhu, jyotishmati, kapikachhu, swarna, shilajatu etc. Daily use of milk and cow ghee also act as rasayana.

Panchakarma therapy

Panchakarma is a set of five biopurificatory procedures viz. vaamana, virechana, anuvasana, asthapana basti and nasya. These are also used as preventive measures to remove accumulated doshas due to seasonal effect. For example, vamana (emesis) is done in the spring season to remove accumulated kapha. So to stay healthy and rejuvenated one should undergo these procedures according to season and strength of body.

CONCLUSION

The modern medical system has eliminated the threat of death and disability from most infectious diseases through improved sanitation, vaccination, and antibiotics. But death from lifestyle diseases is now the primary concern. Altered lifestyle has many implications on human health which are potentially preventable. Ayurveda has explained personal and social health under preventive, curative and promotive aspects. Being a holistic health care system, Ayurveda considers both man & its environment. To maintain homeostasis between man and environment ayurveda has described daily and seasonal regimens according to diurnal and climatic variations. To maintain mental & social health sadvritta and achara rasayan has been described. Apart from these regimens, there are also so many preventive measures has been said to allay diseases. Acharyas has said that prevention of causative factor is the first line of treatment (*nidana parivarjanam*). There are so many drugs also which can be used regularly to stay healthy and

rejuvenated. So ayurveda is the only system of medicine which can be used to prevent and cure diseases in a holistic way of healing.

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