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A review of *Mamsgatavata* with special reference to Fibromyalgia

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ABSTRACT

Mamsgatavata is a condition in Ayurveda where aggravated *Vata Dosha* affects the muscles (*Mamsa Dhātu*), leading to symptoms like pain, stiffness, and muscle weakness. This concept closely aligns with fibromyalgia, a modern medical condition characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, and cognitive disturbances. The *Ayurvedic* approach to managing *Mamsgatavata* focuses on pacifying *Vata* through dietary and lifestyle adjustments, herbal remedies, and therapeutic interventions like *Panchakarma*. This holistic approach targets the root causes of fibromyalgia, emphasizing long-term relief and the restoration of balance in both body and mind. By addressing physical, mental, and emotional health, *Ayurveda* provides a comprehensive framework for managing chronic conditions like fibromyalgia.

Key words: *Mamsa Dhātu, Mamsgatavata, Panchakarma fibromyalgia, Ayurveda*

INTRODUCTION

Fibromyalgia is a chronic disorder characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and cognitive issues. Although the exact cause of fibromyalgia remains unclear, many theories suggest it involves a combination of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. In Ayurveda, the condition can be understood through the lens of *Mamsgatavata*, which refers to the aggravation of *Vata Dosha* in the muscles (*Mamsa Dhātu*). The correlation between *Mamsgatavata* and fibromyalgia provides a traditional perspective on managing the condition with holistic principles, including dietary,

lifestyle, and therapeutic approaches.

Understanding Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is considered a disorder of pain regulation, where the body's nervous system amplifies the perception of pain. Some of the common symptoms include:

1. Widespread Pain: Pain affects both sides of the body and is felt above and below the waist.
2. Fatigue: Patients feel constantly tired even after sleeping for long periods.
3. Cognitive Difficulties: Commonly referred to as fibro fog, this involves problems with concentration, memory, and cognitive processing.
4. Mood Disorders: Depression and anxiety often accompany fibromyalgia.
5. Sleep Disturbances: Sleep is non-restorative, leaving the person feeling tired and sluggish.

Though modern medicine has yet to pinpoint a specific cause of fibromyalgia, it is often associated with abnormal pain signals in the brain, genetic predisposition, infections, and physical or emotional trauma.

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Ayurvedic Perspective: Mamsgatavata

In *Ayurveda*, diseases are classified based on the vitiation of the three primary *Doshas*: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. *Vata Dosh* is primarily responsible for movement and is closely linked to the nervous system. When aggravated, *Vata* can manifest as various disorders in different parts of the body. When *Vata* invades the muscles (*Mamsa Dhatu*), it leads to a condition known as *Mamsgatavata*. This condition is marked by pain, stiffness, and reduced muscle strength, which correlates closely with fibromyalgia symptoms.

Factors Leading to Mamsgatavata (Causes)

Several factors can aggravate *Vata* and lead to its invasion into the muscles:

1. **Aharaja** (dietetic factors): Consumption of dry, cold, and rough foods can vitiate *Vata Dosh*. A lack of unctuous, warm, and nourishing foods may further aggravate the condition.
2. **Viharaja** (regimen factors) Lifestyle: Excessive physical exertion, lack of sleep, prolonged stress, and irregular eating habits disturb *Vata* balance.
3. **Mansika Hetu** (emotional factors): Psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, and emotional trauma are significant contributors to *Vata* aggravation, which is often reflected in fibromyalgia.
4. **Kalaja Hetu** (Age and Season): As people age, especially after the age of 50, *Vata* naturally increases in the body. Cold and dry seasons, especially autumn, also aggravate *Vata*.

Pathophysiology of Mamsgatavata in Fibromyalgia

In the context of *Mamsgatavata*, the imbalance in *Vata Dosh* results in a disruption of the normal functioning of the muscles. This imbalance is exacerbated by weakened *Mamsa Dhatu* (muscle tissue), leading to the following clinical features:

So main symptoms of *Mamsagatavata* according to *Acharya Charaka* are as follows -

1. **Gurvangata (Stiffness / heaviness in the whole body)**: One of the most prominent characteristics

of *Mamsagatavata* is the presence of *Gurvangata* (stiffness) throughout the entire body. The level of stiffness may vary depending on the strength of the *Dosha Dushya Sammurchana* involved.

2. **Todanvata Vedana (Throbbing type of Pain) & Dandmusthihatam Vedana (Severe piercing pain as if beaten with sticks/fist)**: The primary indication of *Prakupita Vata* is a different type of *Shoola*. *Shoola* is considered to be impossible without *Vata*. The existence of several types of *Shoola* in *Vata* dominant illnesses is clear. In this instance, *Todanvata Vedana* and *Dandmusthihatam Vedana* are caused by *Vata Dosh* in the *Mamsa Dhatu* (muscles) throughout the body.
3. **Sruka (Continuous pain)**: Pain in *Mamsagatavata* is often exacerbated by *Nidana Sevana* and treated by avoiding those aggravating causes. However, in long-term sickness, pain remains persistent and is of the same intensity and severity irrespective of the presence or absence of aggravating circumstances. Continuous pain can occasionally cause interrupted sleep, which aggravates *Vata* and worsens other clinical characteristics.
4. **Athyarth Sharmita (Fatigue or overwhelming feeling of being tired)**: This is also one of the most prominent characteristics of *Mamsagatavata*. Patients with *Mamsagatavata* typically experience prolonged fatigue, even after enough rest. This fatigue may interfere with everyday tasks and is not alleviated by sleep.
5. **Tingling or Numbness (Supti)**: *Vata's* association with the nervous system can also lead to neurological symptoms, such as tingling, numbness, or even burning sensations.

Diagnostic consideration in Ayurveda

In *Ayurveda*, the diagnosis of *Mamsgatavata* is based on both clinical examination and the patient's history. The vitiation of *Vata* is assessed through the presence of dryness, roughness, and pain in the muscles, as well as the aggravation of other *Vata* symptoms like constipation, anxiety, and insomnia.

Treatment approaches in Ayurveda

The treatment of *Mamsgatavata* focuses on pacifying *Vata Dosha*, strengthening *Mamsa Dhatu*, and reducing the symptoms of pain, stiffness, and fatigue. The principles of treatment can be categorized into the following approaches:

1. Ahara (Dietary Recommendations)

A diet that pacifies *Vata* is essential for managing fibromyalgia. Some key dietary guidelines include:

- Warm and Nourishing Foods: Eating warm, well cooked foods that are easy to digest, such as soups, stews, and porridges.
- Unctuous Foods: Incorporating healthy fats like ghee, sesame oil, and olive oil to balance the dryness associated with *Vata*.
- *Vata* Pacifying Spices: Using spices like ginger, cumin, coriander, and turmeric to enhance digestion and pacify *Vata*.
- Avoidance of Cold and Dry Foods: Cold, raw, and dry foods should be minimized as they aggravate *Vata Dosha*.

2. Vihara (Lifestyle Modifications)

A balanced lifestyle is crucial in managing *Vata* disorders. Key modifications include:

Regular Sleep Patterns: Ensuring consistent, adequate sleep is important for restoring balance to *Vata*.

- Gentle Exercise: Engaging in light physical activity such as *Yoga*, *Tai Chi*, or walking helps to strengthen the muscles and calm *Vata*. Overexertion should be avoided, as it aggravates the condition.
- Stress Management: Practices like meditation, *Pranayama*, and mindfulness reduce the mental stress that can exacerbate fibromyalgia symptoms.
- Warmth: Keeping the body warm, especially in cold seasons, helps pacify *Vata*.

3. Shodhana (Detoxification Therapies)

Detoxification treatments in *Ayurveda*, particularly *Panchakarma*, play a vital role in reducing *Vata* accumulation and improving muscle health:

- *Abhyanga* (Oil Massage): Warm, medicated oils like *Mahanarayan* oil or *Dhanvantari* oil are used for body massage to nourish the muscles and calm *Vata*.
- *Swedana* (Fomentation Therapy): Application of steam or heat to the body helps to alleviate stiffness and pain in the muscles.
- *Basti* (Medicated Enemas): *Basti* is considered the best treatment for *Vata Dosha*. It involves the administration of medicated oils or decoctions through the rectum to balance *Vata* and provide relief from pain and stiffness.
- *Virechana* (Purgation Therapy): In cases where *Pitta* is also aggravated, *Virechana* can be used to detoxify the body and calm both *Vata* and *Pitta*.

4. Shamana (Palliative Therapies)

In addition to detoxification, palliative treatments are employed to reduce symptoms and promote overall wellbeing:

Herbal Remedies: Herbs that pacify *Vata* and strengthen *Mamsa Dhatu* are commonly used. Some effective herbs include:

- *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*): Known for its adaptogenic and muscle strengthening properties, *Ashwagandha* helps reduce pain and fatigue.
- *Dashamoola* (Group of Ten Roots): This herbal formulation is used to balance *Vata* and reduce inflammation in the muscles.
- *Guggulu* (*Commiphora mukul*): Known for its anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties, *Guggulu* helps alleviate pain and stiffness.
- *Rasayana* Therapy: Rejuvenating herbs like *Shatavari* and *Amalaki* can be used to rebuild *Mamsa dhatu* and improve muscle function.
- External Applications: Application of medicated oils, such as *Bala* oil, can help to strengthen the muscles and reduce *Vata* imbalance.

5. Psychological Interventions

In fibromyalgia, psychological stress and emotional trauma are significant contributors to symptom

aggravation. *Ayurveda* offers a holistic approach by incorporating practices like *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, which involves the management of the mind through counseling, Yoga, meditation, and other practices aimed at enhancing mental clarity and reducing emotional disturbances.

Pathya-Apathya: *Pathya-Apathya* is as important as medicine, and it is properly stated that if one practices *Pathya*, there is no need for medication. *Pathya* is essential in both the prevention and treatment of the illness. There is no precise *Pathya* and *Apathya* description for *Mamsgatavata*. However, we should follow the same guidelines as for general *Vatavyadhi*. The following is a list of some *Pathya-Apathya*.

Comparative Analysis: *Ayurveda* and Modern Medicine

While modern medicine focuses on symptom management through analgesics, antidepressants, and lifestyle changes, *Ayurveda* offers a more comprehensive approach aimed at balancing the body, mind, and spirit. Modern treatments often involve medications that can have side effects, while *Ayurveda* promotes the use of natural herbs, dietary adjustments, and lifestyle modifications that address the root cause of the disorder, focusing on long term relief.

Additionally, while modern medicine recognizes the psychological aspect of fibromyalgia, *Ayurveda* emphasizes the role of mental and emotional wellbeing in preventing and managing *Vata* disorders like fibromyalgia. Practices like meditation, *Pranayama*, and stress reduction techniques are integrated into *Ayurvedic* management plans to provide holistic care.

CONCLUSION

Mamsgatavata provides an *Ayurvedic* framework for understanding fibromyalgia. The correlation between the two conditions highlights the role of *Vata Dosha* in causing musculoskeletal pain, stiffness, and fatigue. *Ayurvedic* treatment approaches, which emphasize balancing *Vata*, nourishing *Mamsa Dhatu*, and calming the mind, offer a holistic and natural alternative to

managing fibromyalgia. By addressing the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health, *Ayurveda* provides a comprehensive solution for individuals suffering from chronic pain conditions like fibromyalgia, aiming for long term relief and improved quality of life.

This comprehensive approach not only targets symptom relief but also addresses the root cause of the condition by nourishing the muscles (*Mamsa Dhatu*) and calming the nervous system. The integration of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing in the treatment plan makes *Ayurveda* particularly suitable for managing chronic conditions like fibromyalgia. By adopting these holistic principles, individuals with *Mamsgatavata* can find lasting relief, improved quality of life, and a balanced state of health.

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