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Care of Ageing by Ayurvedic perspective

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ABSTRACT

Ageing is a progressive generalized impairment of function that leads to sluggishness of the body functions those progresses with the advanced age. Ageing is considered as *Vardhakyavastha* in Ayurveda. Lord *Dhanawantari* is prayed to mitigate the fear of ageing, pain and death. Ageing is defined under the name of *Jaravastha*, *Jara*, *Vardhakya* etc. in Ayurveda. *Charaka* says, in *Shareera* continuous destruction takes place which leads to ageing or *Jaravastha*. Ayurveda provides various modalities to lead a healthy life even in *Jaravastha* as well and it has various modalities to overcome *Akala Jara*. *Jara* is a *Swabhavika Vyadhi* which suggests that it is incurable. Freedom from life (salvation) is possible with the coordination among *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. The modalities for care of ageing include the practice of *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Sadvritta*, *Swasthavritta*, *Rasayana* and *Vajikarna* therapy.

Key words: *Jara*, Ageing, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Sadvritta*, *Swasthavritta*, *Rasayana*, *Vajikarana*.

INTRODUCTION

The chronological age of a human subject can often be estimated to within a decade or so on the basis of physical appearances alone. This is true at all ages and is certainly true in the elderly.

Ageing is defined as a progressive generalized impairment of function resulting in the loss of adaptive response to stress and growing risk of age associated disease.

Concept of ageing is not new as the same has been explained in the prayer of Lord *Dhanawantari* (god of Ayurveda) as he is prayed to mitigate the fear of ageing, pain and death. Ageing comes under the

names of *Jaravastha*, *Jara* and *Vardhakya* etc. *Shareera* as explained in the texts of Ayurveda is one which is getting old day by day or in which continuous destruction is going on and that definitely leads to ageing. *Jaravastha* or ageing is the state where all the body activities slow down due to the weakening of the *Dhatu*s of the body and the body is unable to do its routine activities. Ageing is not a single entity as it contains a series of various changes even at molecular level and these series of changes are nothing but a state of age or we can call it ageing.

Clinicopathological features of Ageing

1. Some features associated with ageing are merely accompaniments, others are directly involved in the ageing process.
2. Every organ changes with age, often with progressive functional impairment.
3. Multiple pathology and co-morbidity are common in the elderly includes following features from head to toe.
 - Balding of head
 - Senile dementia
 - Cataract

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- Deafness
- Loss of teeth
- Dermal elastosis in face
- Hypertension and ischemic heart disease
- Osteoporosis
- Prostatic hyperplasia
- Diverticular disease of colon
- Degenerative joint disease
- Ankle oedema due to heart failure

Measures for prevention of ageing

Ageing being a degenerative mechanism of the body affects from macro to micro level. Ayurveda as a life science has given various protocols to be followed to prevent the hazards of ageing. Premature ageing (*Akalaja Jara*) and ageing after attaining 60 years of life (*Kalaja Jara*) are the two different conditions where the intervention is also different. In case of premature ageing treatment modalities are fixed according to the cause, where as in maturity ageing process may be irreversible but the physical mental and cognitive behavior may be made to retain competence thus improving the quality of life.

Four options of Life^[1]

- A pleasurable and comfortable individual life style (*Sukha Ayu*)
- A disastrous and painful individual life style (*Dukha Ayu*)
- A socially useful life style (*Hita Ayu*)
- A socially harmful life style (*Ahita Ayu*)

What is an ideal Life meaning?

- Caring other beings
- Truthful
- Tolerant
- Watchful but no ego
- Well balanced attitudes towards *Dharma, Artha* and *Kama*

- Recognizing the deserved
- Proper identification and application of one's ability and capacity of all that is learned (*Jnyana Vijnyana Upashama Sheela*)
- Tender care of elderly
- Well regulated emotions like attachment, excitement, anger, jealousy, ambitions etc.
- Always be helpful to others by fulfilling their needs.
- Be regular in meditations and practicing spiritual attitude towards the living and divine world (*Iha* and *Para loka*).

Ageing is the accumulation of changes in a person over time.^[2] Ageing in humans refers to a multidimensional process of physical, psychological and social change. Some dimensions of ageing grow and expand over time, while others decline. For example: Reaction time may slow with age, while knowledge of world events and wisdom may expand.^[3] Ageing is an important part of all human societies reflecting the biological changes that occur, but also reflecting cultural and societal conventions. Roughly 100,000 people worldwide die each day of age related causes.^[4]

Age is measured chronologically and a person's birthday is often an important event.^[5]

Differences are sometimes made between populations of elderly people. Divisions are sometimes made between the young old (65–74), the middle old (75–84) and the oldest old (85+). However problematic this may be, chronological age does not correlate perfectly with functional age, i.e. two people may be of the same age, but differ in their mental and physical capacities.

Division of the life spans^[6]

An animal's life is often divided into various age ranges. However, because biological changes are slow-moving and can vary within one's own species, arbitrary dates are usually set to mark periods of life. The human divisions given below are not valid in all cultures;

- Juvenile (via infancy, childhood, preadolescence, adolescence): 0–19
- Early adulthood: 20–39
- Middle adulthood: 40–59
- Late adulthood: 60+

Successful Ageing ^[7-10]

The concept of successful ageing can be traced back to the 1950's and was popularized in the 1980's. Previous research into ageing exaggerated the extent to which health disabilities, such as diabetes or osteoporosis, could be attributed exclusively to age and research in gerontology exaggerated the homogeneity of samples of elderly people.

Successful ageing consists of three components;

1. Low probability of disease or disability
2. High cognitive and physical function capacity
3. Active engagement with life

Successful ageing may be viewed as an interdisciplinary concept, spanning both psychology and sociology, where it is seen as the transaction between society and individuals across the life span with specific focus on the later years of life. The terms 'healthy ageing' and 'optimal ageing' have been proposed as alternatives to successful ageing, partly because the term 'successful ageing' has been criticised for making healthy ageing sound too competitive.

Six suggested dimensions of successful ageing include^[11]

1. No physical disability over the age of 75 as rated by a physician
2. Good subjective health assessment (i.e. good self-ratings of one's health)
3. Length of able life
4. Good mental health
5. Objective social support
6. Self-rated life satisfaction in eight domains, namely marriage, income-related work, children, friendship and social contacts, hobbies,

community service activities, religion and recreation/sports.

Strategies to enhance successful ageing

The idea of successful aging is a social construct which aids in our acceptance of the apparent inevitability and pain associated with the aging process. As successful aging tends to be more dependent on behaviour, attitude and environment than to the hereditary traits, researchers and clinicians are developing strategies to enhance aging well. Current strategies include restricting calories intake, exercising, quitting smoking and substance use, obtaining appropriate health care, and eating healthy. Seeking help for mental illnesses such as depression is critical, as these conditions interfere with nearly all determinants of successful aging. Additionally, it is considered important to develop cognitive and psychological strategies such as positive attitude, resilience, and reducing stress. Cognitive and emotional adaptation to chronic illnesses that often impact older adults is also an important aspect. Finally, social strategies, such as seeking and giving social support through volunteering, working in a group, learning a new skill, or mentoring younger individuals, have been found to promote successful aging.

Graceful ageing

'Vina Dainyena Jeevitam Anayasenamarnam'

It states life without dependence and death without discomfort.

Ageing as associated with physical dependence as well as other various age related disorders which affects the old age.

Most common problems observed in elderly

- Loss of appetite
- Increased body weight
- Poor eye sight
- Hearing impairment
- Locomotor problems
- Irritability

- Poor judgment
- Dependence / Helplessness
- Sleeplessness
- Psychosexual problems

Can we reverse this? Yes We Can, by the following protocols;

- Always remember 'No day is late for corrections' and earlier the better and easier
- Provided we feel the need
- Constant awareness of
- Food
- Attitude
- Time

Food

Qualities of food and timings of food should be like that;

- Select food as per *Prakruti* (*Dosha* constitution)
- Consume ideal food (*Hitaashee Syat*)
- Avoid excess food (*Mitaashee Syat*)
- Take food at regular time interval (*Kala Bhojee Syat*)
- Have good control over the food (*Jitendriyah*)

Attitude

Towards graceful ageing should be by following;

- Physical and Mental Exercise
- *Dinacharya*
- *Rutu Charya*
- *Sadvrutta* and *swasthvrutta*
- Regulated *Panchakarma*
- Use of *Rasayana* and *Vajikara* Medicines
- Spiritual thoughts
- Positive Emotions
- Meditations

- *Yoga*

Tripods of life support (*Trayopasthambha*)^[12]

- Food (*Ahara*)
- Sleep (*Nidra*)
- Awareness (*Brahmacharya*)

Among these tripods *Brahmacharya* is not only the celibacy but it is a source of confidence that definitely makes the aged people stable and can help in minimizing their physical dependence. The different modalities have been explained in Ayurveda to counter the problems in ageing. These modalities includes the;

- ***Dinacharya***: daily routine practices including the body cleaning as well as other measures.
- ***Rutucharya***: following seasonal regimens according to the current *Ritu*, coming *Ritu* and in between the two *Ritu* (*Ritusandhi*).
- ***Sadvritta***: includes the better way of leading a confident life with the protocols by the means of physical as well as mental health.
- ***Swasthvrutta***: includes collectively the regimens of *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Sadvrutta* for maintaining the complete health of individual as well as to counter the ill effects of ageing.
- ***Rasayana and Vajikarana***: (Rejuvenation and Aphrodisiac) as it has been already stated that among 2 types of *Jara*, *Akalaja Jara* can be prevented by the means of therapeutic measures which includes *Rasayana* and *Vajikarana* therapy. These two therapies are meant for taking care for untimely ageing and for the maintenance of the potency of body. Various formulations have been quoted in Ayurveda books e.g. in *Charaka Samhita* reference of *Indra Rasayana*,^[13] *Brahma Rasayana*,^[14] *Chavanaprasha*,^[15] *Vrishya Yoga*^[16] etc. are given. *Rasayana* medicine is having two qualities i.e. 1. *Swasthaurjoskrama* 2. *Rogaprashamana*.^[17]

Rasayana therapy provides *Deerghayu*, *Smrutij*, *Medha*, *Arogya*, *Taruna vaya*, *Prabha Varna*

Swaraudarta, Dehendriyabala, Vaaksidhi, Namrata and Kanti.^[18]

Vajikarana therapy provides Yasha, Shriya, Bala, Pusti, Apatya Santanakara.^[19]

CONCLUSION

Ageing is a natural body process characterized by sluggishness of body activities as well as other age related changes in body. Ayurveda philosophy considers ageing under the heading of *Jaravastha*. Ageing cannot be prevented but it can be made graceful by the means of Ayurveda. The different modalities have been explained in Ayurveda to counter the problems in ageing. These modalities include the *Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Swasthvrutta, Rasayana & Vajikarana* (Rejuvenation and Aphrodisiac) as it has been already stated that among 2 types of *Jara, AkalajaJara* can be prevented by the means of therapeutic measures which includes *Rasayana* and *Vajikarana* therapy. These two therapies are meant for taking care for untimely ageing and for the maintainance of the potency of body. Various formulations along with various regimens have been quoted in *Ayurveda* books to make ageing graceful.

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