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Perimenopause: A Gentle Transition through Ayurveda

Inchara P¹, Rachana HV²

¹Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science and Research, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

²Professor, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science and Research, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

ABSTRACT

Perimenopause represents a profound juncture in a woman's life, bridging her reproductive years to the cessation of menstruation in menopause. Modern medicine views perimenopause as a transitional phase marked by hormonal fluctuations, typically manifesting in symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, irregular menstrual cycles, and changes in bone density. These physiological changes often impact a woman's quality of life and well-being, prompting the need for effective management strategies. In contrast, *Ayurveda*, the ancient holistic healing system, perceives perimenopause as a natural progression influenced by the balance of *Doshas* - *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* - within the body. According to *Ayurvedic* principles, imbalances in these *Doshas* can exacerbate symptoms experienced during perimenopause. Therefore, *Ayurvedic* interventions focus on restoring *Doshic* equilibrium through personalized dietary recommendations, lifestyle modifications, herbal supplements, and therapeutic practices.

Key words: Perimenopause, menopause transition, Rajonivrutti, Rasayana, Panchakarma

INTRODUCTION

Perimenopause is a significant yet often misunderstood phase in a woman's life, representing the transition from reproductive age to menopause. It is a period characterized by hormonal fluctuations, most notably in estrogen and progesterone levels, which can lead to a variety of physical, emotional, and psychological changes.

Whereas, Menopause means permanent cessation of menstruation at the end of reproductive life due to loss of ovarian follicular activity. The premenopause refers to period prior to menopause, postmenopause to

period after menopause and perimenopause to period around menopause.

Perimenopause is the part of the climacteric when the menstrual cycle is likely to be irregular^[1]. Women typically begin the shift from a reproductive state to non-reproductive state during their mid-to late 40s, and they remain in this transitory state for approximately 4–5 years before reaching menopause. This can last for several years also.

Perimenopause culminates with menopause, when menses have ceased for a period of at least 12 consecutive months.^[2]

The menopause transition is experienced by 1.5 million women each year.^[3] During this menopause transition women experiences variety of psychosomatic symptoms such as Depression, Forgetfulness Irritability, Insomnia, Loss of concentration, Anxiety, Hot flushes, Night sweats, Headache, urinary symptoms, Joint pains, vascular endothelial disorders, Cognitive impairments, Dementia, skin & hair problems.^[4] The main treatment includes HRT either estrogen alone or with the combination of progesterone.

In *Ayurveda* there is no much references are found as it is considered as a part of physiological changes and

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Inchara P

Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science and Research, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

E-mail: incharap.1997@gmail.com

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menopause is considered as *Rajonivrutti* and there no exact term in *Ayurveda* which describes for perimenopause or menopause transition.

This can be understood in terms of *Swabhava*, *Jarapakvasharira* due to *Kala*, *Dhatukshaya*, Effect of *Dosha*, *Vayu*, *Abhighata*.^[5]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All available References of Perimenopause, menopause, menopausal Syndrome and *Rajonivrutti* have been collected from literatures, *Ayurvedic Samhitas*, *Ayurvedic* textbooks and modern text books, different websites, published articles, are collected and critically examined.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, health is understood through the balance of three fundamental energies or *Doshas*: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. Each *Dosha* has distinct characteristics and influences specific bodily functions. Perimenopause is viewed as a time of natural *Doshic* imbalance, often requiring specific interventions to restore harmony. Perimenopause can be understood in terms of imbalance of *three Doshas*.

The first stage is *Kapha* and occurs from conception to around the pre-teen years, in other words, childhood. The second stage is governed by *Pitta* and spans from teen years i.e., start of the menstrual cycle for females up until menopause. The third stage is governed by *Vata* up to our last breath and it's at this stage of perimenopause transition and menopause.

In menopausal transition there is a shift from a *Pitta* to a *Vata* - dominated stage of life, due to this transition, the Estrogen levels surge throughout the final reproductive years. These hormonal changes can disrupt the bioenergetic field as the body finds its new equilibrium - sparking lighter (or heavier) periods, lower libido, fatigue, and body aches also women feel more anxious, stressed, reactive, or simply "off."

So, role of *Pitta* during perimenopause can be understand as:

- **Metabolic Changes:** *Pitta Dosha* regulates metabolic activities in the body. During

perimenopause, metabolic rates may fluctuate, leading to weight changes, hot flashes, and night sweats. These are direct manifestations of *Pitta's* influence.

- **Hormonal Changes:** *Pitta* is closely linked to the endocrine system. The fluctuations in estrogen and progesterone levels during perimenopause are governed by *Pitta*, contributing to symptoms like irritability, mood swings, and hot flashes.
- **Emotional and Psychological Impact:** *Pitta* also influences the mind and emotions, often leading to increased irritability, anger, and impatience during perimenopause.

While the primary transition during menopause is from *Pitta* to *Vata*, *Kapha* also plays a role in this process. Although *Kapha* is not the primary *Dosha* during menopause, its characteristics and imbalances can still influence the transition. The transition phase of *Kapha* can be explained as follows:

- **Weight Gain:** As metabolism slows, there can be an increase in *Kapha*, leading to weight gain and fluid retention.
- **Depression and Lethargy:** Excess *Kapha* can cause feelings of heaviness, lethargy, and depression. This contrasts with the anxiety and restlessness of *Vata* but can occur in some women.
- **Joint Pain and Stiffness:** With the decrease in estrogen, the body may experience joint pain and stiffness, which are influenced by both *Vata* and *Kapha*.

Transition Phase

- **Shift in Dominance:** As menopause approaches, there is a natural shift from the *Pitta* phase of life (middle age) to the *Vata* phase (elderly). This transition brings a change in the predominant *Dosha* affecting the body and mind.
- **Symptoms of *Vata* Dominance:** The onset of menopause brings *Vata* qualities like dryness (vaginal dryness, dry skin), irregularity (irregular menstrual cycles), and instability (mood swings, anxiety). These symptoms reflect the increasing influence of *Vata Dosha*.

Kashyapa describes *Artavaotpatti* (menarche), but the age given there, is only *Praayika* (probable) and not the exact. Depending upon the *Ahara* and *Vihara* and *Arogya* of the female, age of menarche and menopause may differ by a few years which are practically seen around 45-55 years.

Whereas *Bhela* and *Dalhana* clarify that the reason for nonappearance of *raja* before menarche is *Aparipurna Dhatu Avastha* (immaturity of body system), whereas the reason for its debilitation at the age 50 is because of *Kshaya* of *Shareera Dhatu* due to aging.^[6]

Imbalances in *Vata* - dominated individuals may experience increased anxiety and insomnia, *Pitta* types might face hot flashes and irritability and *Kapha* dominance person could lead to weight gain and sluggishness. For all these, *Vata* is the one which is responsible for the equilibrium of other *Doshas*.

Since perimenopause is the stage of *Vata* predominant, understanding the functions of *Vata* and its imbalance becomes necessary. *Acharya Charaka* has elaborately described the various activities of *Vata Dosha* in *Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana, 12th chapter* among those some of the symptom's which can be correlated to perimenopause are:

- *Niyanta Praneta Cha Manasa* - *Vata* restrains and impels the mental activities.
- *Sarvashariradhatuvyuhakara* - *Vata* brings about compactness in all the tissue elements of the body.
- *Samirano Agne* - *Vata* ignites the digestive fire.
- *Sandhanakara Sharirasya* - *Vata* brings together different parts of the body.
- *Harsha Utsaha Yoni* - *Vata* is the causative factor of joy and courage.^[7]

Even *Acharya Sushruta* has also described the various functions of *Vata Dosha* in *Sushruta Samhita, Nidansthana, 1st chapter* as-

- *Doshadhatwagnisamatam* - *Vata* maintains the balance between *Dosha, Dhatu* and *Agni*.
- *Sampraptim Vishayeshu* - *Vata* coordinates sensory organs with their objects and

- *Kriyanamanulomyam* - *Vata* is responsible for proper functioning of all the physical and mental activities.^[8]

Also, *Acharya Vagbhata* also described the various functions of *Vata Dosha* in *Ashtanga Hridayam, Sutrasthana, 11th chapter* as-

- *Utsaha* (enthusiasm)
- *Ucchvas* (inspiration)
- *Nihswas* (expiration)
- *Chesta* (movements)
- *Vegapravartanam* (initiation of natural urges) and
- *Samyagatya Cha Dhatunamkshananam Patavena Cha* (maintenance of body tissues in their normal state and proper functioning of the sense organs).^[9]

Here if we consider perimenopause symptoms then there is:

Signs	Symptoms	Predominant Dosha	Ayurvedic perception
Irregular menstrual cycles:	often begins with changes in the menstrual cycle, including irregular periods, shorter or longer cycles, and variations in flow	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Apana Vayu</i> , a subtype of <i>Vata</i> , is responsible for the downward movement and elimination processes, including menstrual flow. Imbalance in <i>Apana Vayu</i> causes irregular menstrual cycles due to its erratic and unstable nature.
Hot flashes:	Sudden feelings of intense heat, often accompanied by sweating and flushing	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Ranjaka Pitta</i> , responsible for blood and liver metabolism, when imbalanced, increases internal heat, leading to the

			sensation of hot flashes.
Night sweats:	Similar to hot flashes, night sweats involve sudden episodes of sweating during sleep, which can disrupt sleep patterns.	<i>Pitta</i>	Excess <i>Ranjaka Pitta</i> increases internal body heat, particularly affecting the body's ability to cool down at night, leading to night sweats and disturbed sleep.
Mood swings:	Hormonal fluctuations during perimenopause can lead to mood swings, irritability, anxiety, or depression.	<i>Vata</i> and <i>pitta</i>	<i>Prana Vayu</i> , a subtype of <i>Vata</i> , affects mental stability and clarity, leading to emotional instability and mood swings. <i>Sadhaka Pitta</i> , related to the emotions and intellect, when imbalanced, causes irritability and anger, contributing to mood swings.
Vaginal dryness:	Decreased estrogen levels can result in vaginal dryness, itching, or discomfort during sexual intercourse.	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Apana Vayu's</i> dry and rough qualities cause decreased lubrication and moisture in the pelvic region, resulting in vaginal dryness during perimenopause.
Decreased libido:	Changes in hormone levels may affect libido or sexual desire in some women.	<i>Vata</i> and <i>kapha</i>	<i>Apana Vayu</i> imbalance leads to dryness and depletion, reducing sexual desire. <i>Kledaka Kapha's</i> heaviness and sluggishness can decrease libido

			due to reduced energy and vitality.
Sleep disturbances:	Perimenopausal women may experience difficulties falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless sleep	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Prana Vayu</i> governs the mind and nervous system, while <i>Vyana Vayu</i> affects circulation. Imbalances in these <i>Vata</i> subtypes disrupt sleep patterns, causing insomnia and restlessness.
Fatigue:	Some women may experience increased fatigue or lack of energy during this stage	<i>Vata</i> and <i>kapha</i>	<i>Prana Vayu</i> depletion leads to overall fatigue and reduced energy levels. <i>Kledaka Kapha's</i> heavy and slow qualities contribute to feelings of lethargy and tiredness.
Weight gain:	Changes in hormone levels and metabolism can contribute to weight gain, particularly around the abdomen.	<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Kledaka Kapha</i> and <i>Meda Dhatu</i> (fat tissue) imbalances lead to weight gain. <i>Kapha's</i> heavy, slow, and stable qualities result in increased fat accumulation during perimenopause.
Breast tenderness:	Hormonal fluctuations may cause breast tenderness or changes in breast tissue during perimenopause.	<i>Pitta</i> and <i>Kapha</i>	<i>Ranjaka Pitta</i> imbalance causes inflammation, while <i>Sleshaka Kapha</i> , responsible for lubrication and tissue fluids, leads to fluid

			retention, resulting in breast tenderness.
Changes in skin and hair:	Reduced estrogen levels may lead to changes in skin elasticity, dryness, and thinning hair.	<i>Vata</i> and <i>Pitta</i>	<i>Vata</i> causes dryness and brittleness in skin and hair. <i>Bhrajaka Pitta</i> , governing skin health, when imbalanced, leads to inflammation, skin issues, and hair problems.
Bone density loss:	Estrogen decline increases the risk of osteoporosis and bone density loss in menopausal women.	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Vata</i> governs <i>Asthi Dhātu</i> (bone tissue). Its dry and light qualities contribute to the depletion and weakening of bones, leading to reduced bone density.

		joints, spine, and extremities.	waking up.	<i>Vata</i> , and prevents dryness.
After <i>Abhyanga</i>	<i>Snana</i> (Bathing)	Bath with lukewarm water using herbal powders like <i>Nalapamadi Churna</i> or decoction s.	light, warm breakfast: milk with dates, ghee, and rice preparations.	Cleanses the body, reduces fatigue, and promotes relaxation.
Winter (<i>Hemanta/Sharishira</i>)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Daily)	Use warm, unctuous oils (<i>Sesame oil</i>) with light <i>Swedana</i> .	Include nourishing foods: ghee, milk, nuts, soups, meat soup (<i>Mamsa Rasa</i>) , and freshly cooked grains.	Prevents dryness, nourishes tissues, and protects against <i>Vata</i> aggravation.
Spring (<i>Vasant</i>)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Occasional)	Use lighter oils to avoid <i>Kapha</i> aggravation.	light foods like: barley, honey, lentil soups, and green vegetables. Avoid heavy or oily foods.	Reduces <i>Kapha</i> accumulation, supports detoxification, and prevents sluggishness.
Summer (<i>Greeshma</i>)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Mild)	Use cooling oils like <i>Chandana di Taila</i> . Avoid hot oil massages.	Include cooling and hydrating foods: coconut water, sweet	Prevents excessive heat, cools the body, and pacifies <i>Pitta</i> .

So, when it is considered the above symptoms the main cause for the perimenopause is the imbalances of three *Doshas*, among those, *Vata* is responsible for these imbalances.

In Ayurveda, implementing lifestyle modifications, *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya*, and suitable exercises plays a crucial role in maintaining overall health and effectively managing the symptoms during this period.

Also, lifestyle modification includes, *Yogasana* and *Pranayama* thus reducing the stress of the individuals.

Dinacharya and *Rutucharya* for Perimenopause includes:

Time/Season	Practice	Details	Diet	Benefits
<i>Brahma Muhurta</i> (Early Morning)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Oil Massage)	Use warm Sesame oil or <i>Bala Taila</i> . Focus on	lukewarm water to be taken after	Nourishes skin, strengthens bones, pacifies

			fruits (watermelon, pomegranate), milk, and rice preparations.	
Monsoon (Varsha)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Regular)	Use warm <i>Mahanarayana Taila</i> . Avoid exposure to cold and dampness.	Consume warm, <i>Vata</i> -pacifying foods: soups, ghee, rice, moong dal, and fresh ginger-infused meals. Avoid raw and cold foods.	Balances aggravated <i>Vata</i> , prevents stiffness, and improves digestion.
Autumn (Sharad)	<i>Abhyanga</i> (Soothing)	Use cooling oils like <i>Chandana di Taila</i> to pacify <i>Pitta</i> .	Include cooling foods: rice, milk, ghee, Amalaki and seasonal sweet fruits. Spicy and sour foods to be avoided	Reduces <i>Pitta</i> -related symptoms like irritability, hot flashes, and excess heat.

		supports reproductive health.
	<i>Bhujangasana</i> (Cobra Pose)	Strengthens the spine, reduces back pain, and relieves fatigue.
	<i>Setu Bandhasana</i> (Bridge Pose)	Balances hormones, strengthens back, and calms the mind.
	<i>Shavasana</i> (Corpse Pose)	Relieves stress, promotes deep relaxation, and calms the nervous system.
<i>Pranayama</i>	<i>Anulom Vilom</i> (Alternate Nostril Breathing)	Balances <i>Vata Dosh</i> , reduces anxiety, and enhances mental clarity.
	<i>Bhramari Pranayama</i> (Bee Breathing)	Calms the nervous system, reduces irritability, and promotes sound sleep.
	<i>Ujjayi Pranayama</i> (Victorious Breath)	Improves energy, relieves hot flashes, and stabilizes emotions.
	<i>Nadi Shodhana</i> (Channel Purification)	Cleanses energy channels, balances <i>Dosh</i> s, and enhances focus.

CONCLUSION

The treatment in *Ayurveda* comes in correction of the *three Dosh*s. Balancing the three *Dosh*s is key to ensuring the avoidance of excesses which can result in unbalanced mental and physical constituents. However, balancing the *Vata Dosh*a becomes prime importance, whether through diet, forms of physical exercise, meditation or lifestyle factors. The *Dosh*a play an important role to maintain health and treatment of disease. *Vata dosa* can be balanced by adopting *Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Vatashamana, Rasayana, Vaysthapana, Panchkarama, Sthanik Chikitsa*. By adopting these perimenopause and the menopause symptoms can be treated effectively without any or nil side effects and it brings harmony to the body.

Category	Practices	Benefits
<i>Yogasana</i>	<i>Tadasana</i> (Mountain Pose)	Improves posture, strengthens bones, and reduces fatigue.
	<i>Vrikshasana</i> (Tree Pose)	Enhances balance, stability, and focus.
	<i>Baddha Konasana</i> (Butterfly Pose)	Improves flexibility in the pelvic region and

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