

Ayurvedic approaches to preventing Akalaja Jara: A Review

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Aging is an inevitable biological process that begins before birth and continues throughout life, with varying rates among individuals. Ayurveda classifies aging into three stages: Baalavastha (childhood), Madhyavastha (youth), and Vriddhavastha (old age), with Vriddhavastha/Jaraavasta typically starting between 60 to 70 years of age. In Ayurveda, Jara (aging) is categorized into Kalaja Jara (natural aging) and Akalaja Jara (premature aging). Akalaja Jara results from an imbalance in Ahara (diet), Vihara (lifestyle), and environmental factors, leading to early degenerative changes in Shareera (body) and Manas (mind). This review explores Ayurvedic approaches to preventing Akalaja Jara through various preventive measures such as Dinacharya (daily regimen), Sadvritta (ethical conduct), Shodhana Karma (purification therapies), and Rasayana Chikitsa (rejuvenation therapy). Dinacharya practices like Brahma Muhurta (early rising), Abhyanga (oil massage), Dantadhavana (oral hygiene), Anjana (eye application), Nasya (nasal therapy), and Vyayama (exercise) help align the body with natural rhythms and prevent premature aging. Shodhana Karmas such as Vamana, Virechana, and Basti aid in detoxification and Dosha balance, while Rasayana therapies provide nourishment, enhance immunity, and delay the signs of aging. This article discusses the multifaceted Nidanas (causes) of Akalaja Jara (premature aging), and Ayurvedic comprehensive framework to prevent Akalaja Jara and support healthy aging.

Keywords: Akalaja jara, Dinacharya, Premature aging, Rasayana

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Introduction

Growth, aging, and eventual death are natural and unavoidable stages of life. Interestingly, the process of aging begins before birth and persists throughout life, with variations in pace among individuals, races, and even tissues within the body. Aging encompasses two contrasting processes - growth and degeneration - reflecting the structural and functional transformations an organism undergoes throughout its lifespan.[1] In *Ayurveda* aging is divided into three stages-*Baalavastha* [childhood], *Madhyavastha* [youth], and *Vriddhavastha* [old age]. *Vriddhavastha* [old age] is the final stage of life, it begins around 60 to 70 years. Characterized by the dominance of *Vata dosha*, this stage brings degenerative changes in the *Shareera* and *Manas*[2,4] The global population aged 60 and older is rapidly increasing, projected to grow from 900 million [12%] in 2015 to 2 billion [22%] by 2050. [5]

Understanding Aging in Ayurveda

In *Ayurveda*, *Jara* or *Vridhavasta* [aging] is regarded as a natural process of decline, akin to hunger, thirst, or sleep, rather than a disease. It is explained through the theory of natural destruction [*Swabhavoparamavada*] by *Charaka*, which states that while there is a cause for the creation of life, its cessation, or death, occurs naturally. The concept of *Jara* includes four key aspects: *Nityaga* [the continuity of consciousness], *Dhari* [factors that slow the aging process], *Jeevitam* [sustaining life], and *Anubandha* [transmigration of the soul]. Factors influencing aging include physical [*Shareera*], emotional [*Indriya*], and psychological [*Satwa*] well-being, as well as metabolism [*Agni*] and immunity [*Bala/Ojas*]. *Acharya Sharangdhara* has described the gradual decline of bodily functions in a decade-wise manner. In the first decade, *Balyavastha* [infancy] comes to an end; the second decade sees a reduction in *Vridhhi* [growth]; the third decade marks the decline of *Chhavi* [complexion]; in the fourth decade, *Medha* [intellect] diminishes; the fifth decade shows deterioration of *Twak* [skin]; and the sixth decade is characterized by a decline in *Drishti* [vision]. These observations indicate ongoing catabolic processes in the body, primarily due to the gradual degradation of bodily elements [*Paramanu Vibhaga*]. Additionally, aging is shaped by cellular changes [*Parinama*],

Genetic and phenotypic traits [*Sharira Vriddhikara Bhavas*], and developmental changes linked to fetal growth [*Garbhahinivrittikara Bhava*].[6,10]

Ayurvedic definition of Aging

Aging is described as the progressive accumulation of molecular and cellular damage over time, leading to reduced physical and mental capacity, increased disease risk, and eventual death. In *Ayurveda*, the term "*Jara*" derives from "*Jrush Vayohanau*" explained as "*Vayah Krita Slathamamsady Avastha* meaning loosening of muscle and other tissues under the influence of aging.[11] *Jara* [aging] is classified into two types: *Kalaja* and *Akalaja*. *Kalaja Jara*[12] is natural and inherent in nature, also referred to as *Swabhavaja* or *Sahaja*. In contrast, *Akalaja Jara*, characterized as *Akalotpanna*, is an unnatural and premature aging process that occurs ahead of its expected time.

Characteristics of Premature Aging [Akalaja Jara]

Rasa Vagbhata states that the factors like excessive walking or *Pantha* [traveling], consumption of *Sheetalahara* [cold or frozen food], *Kadanna* [Improper diet], and *Manas Pratikula* [Mental stress], all of which contribute onset of *Sheeghra/Akalaja Jara*. [13] The physical symptoms of *Jara* include *Vali* [wrinkles], *Palitya* [premature greying of hair], *Khalitya* [hair loss], *Sukra Apravartanam* [reduced reproductive fluids], *Ojakshaya* [weakness], *Mamsa Saithilya* [muscle laxity], *Asamartha Chesta* [inability to work], and *Analpmada* [debilitation], while mental symptoms include *Medhahani* [reduced intellect], *Avasannata* and *Nairasya* [depression], *Smritihani* [memory loss], *Utsahahani* [lack of enthusiasm], and *Buddhihani* [decline in wisdom][14] Some theories claim that aging is caused by accumulated injuries from ultraviolet light, wear and tear on the body, by products of metabolism, so on.

Ayurvedic Preventive Regimen of Akalaja Jara

However, *Akalaja Jara*-results from an imbalance in *Ahara* [diet], *Vihara* [lifestyle], and environmental stressors. *Ayurveda* offers a robust framework for delaying the onset of aging and improving the quality of life mainly through *Dinacharya*, *Sadvritta*, *Shodhana Karma* and *Rasayana Chikitsa*, these factors emphasizing to prevent early onset of aging and help in rejuvenation.

Dinacharya Practices

In *Ayurveda*, Acharyas have provided ideal lifestyle regimen to promote healthy ageing is *Dinacharya* [Daily routine], it plays a vital role in personal well-being. Adapting to daily routines is essential for sustaining health and promoting longevity. *Dinacharya* include, *Brahma Muhurta*: Waking up early aligns the body with natural rhythms, before waking up early in the morning; one should assess the digestion of the previous night's meal. Elderly individuals need at least six hours of sleep and should wake up during *Brahma Muhurta*, around 1 hour and 36 minutes before sunrise, as it is considered the ideal time to begin the day.[15] *Abhyanga*: it involves applying warm oil to the whole body, from scalp to soles. Enhances circulation and balances *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*. [16] *Dantadhavana*[17] For oral hygiene, a twig measuring 12 **Angula** in length and as thick as the tip of one's little finger can be used for brushing. Suitable options include **Arka** [*Calotropis procera*], **Vata** [*Ficus benghalensis*], **Khadira** [*Acacia catechu*], **Karanja** [*Pongamia pinnata*], and **Kakubha** [*Terminalia arjuna*]. In old age, as teeth and gums become fragile, the twig should be gently crushed or chewed from the front to prevent injury. Alternatively, **Dantashodhana Churna** can be used instead of a twig to avoid potential harm. A formulation of **Trikatu**, **Trijata**, **Tejovati**, **honey**, **Saindhava**, and **Tila Taila** can serve as **Dantaprasadana Churna**[18] to maintain oral health. *Anjana*: Regular application of **Sowviranjana** [Antimony][19] in old age helps maintain eye health by enhancing vision, ensuring clarity, and preventing disorders. However, it should be avoided in cases of fever, eye conditions such as *Timira* [cataracts], pain, or swelling. *Nasya* and *Karna Purana*[20] Nourish sensory organs *Vyayama*[21] Exercise is an effective strength promoter it promotes lightness and vitality Regular activities like **Suksham Vyayama**, **Yogasana**, and **Pranayama** help prevent age-related health issues. **Cankramana** [walking] enhances *Ayu* [lifespan], *Bala* [strength], *Agni* [digestion], and sensory perception.[22] *Kavala* and *Gandusha* helps to maintain the oral health.[23]

Sadvritta

Sadvritta, derived from "Sad" meaning good and "Vritta" meaning conduct, it is aimed at maintaining balanced state of *Shareera* [body] & *Manas* [mind].

Principles of it also helps in achieving overall well-being by ensuring *Arogya* [good health] and *Indriya Vijaya* [control over the senses].[24,25]

Shodhana Karma [Purification Therapies]

Through *Shodhana Karmas* [purification therapies] one can effectively manage the *Akalaja Jara*. practice of *Vamana*, *Virechana*, and *Basti* helps to eliminate *Ama* [toxins], balance *Doshas*, and rejuvenate the body.[26] In *Jara Avasta*, Mainly *Basti* helps in *Vayah Stāpana* [youthfulness] by rejuvenating the body, restoring vitality, and promoting overall strength. *Basti* enhances *Vājīkaraṇa* [sexual vitality], *Cakṣus Prīṇayati* [improves eye health], and *Valīpalitam Apahanti* [prevents premature graying and hair loss]. And balances the *doshas*, preventing age-related degeneration. Overall, *Basti* is a powerful therapy for delaying aging and promoting longevity.[27]

Rasayana Chikitsa

Rasayana is a cornerstone of *Ayurvedic* geriatrics, the term "*Rasa*" is derived from "*Rasagatou Dhatu Aharahar Gachhati Iti Rasa*," meaning the essence of food reaches the *Dhatu* [tissues]. "*Ayana*," derived from "*Iyate Anena Iti Ayanam*," refers to the channel or pathway. *Acharya Charaka* emphasizes its significance, describing it as a substance that *Ayushya* [enhances longevity], *Smriti* [memory], *Medha* [intelligence], promotes overall health, preserves youthfulness, and improves *Prabha* [radiance] and *Varna* [complexion], the Key herbs include: *Amalaki*, *Ashwagandha*, *Yastimadhu*, *Shilajatu*, *Guduchi*, *Brahmi* etc. *drugs* act as adaptogens, antioxidants, and immunomodulators to combat oxidative stress. [28]

Discussion

In the current era *Akalaja Jara* [Premature aging] is driven by factors such as unhealthy diets, chronic stress, sleep deprivation, sedentary lifestyles, environmental pollution and excessive screen time, contribute to early aging by causing oxidative stress and cellular damage. However Hormonal imbalances, exposure to toxins, and poor mental well-being also accelerate the aging process. Adopting a healthy *Ahara-Vihara*, *Vyayama* [regular exercise] *Dinacharya Shodhana Karmas* and *Rasayana Chikitsa* might help delay aging and promote overall well-being.

Practicing *Dinacharya* aligns the body's biological rhythms with nature, promoting *Dirghayu*. Awakening during *Brahma Muhurta* harmonizes the body with natural cycles, enhances *Ojas*, *Medha*, and *Bala*, and fosters an invigorated lifestyle, aiding in the prevention of *Akala Jara*.^[29]

Danta Dhavana and *Anjana* are essential for maintaining *Indriya Bala*, ensuring the optimal functioning of sensory organs. Regular *Abhyanga* helps in pacifying *Vata Dosha*, improving *Twak Sara*, enhancing skin elasticity, and relieving *Sankocha*, thereby preventing degenerative disorders, Whereas *Padabhyanga* and *Shiroabhyanga* Promote relaxation and enhance sleep quality.^[30] *Nasya Karma* plays a vital role in *Indriya Prasadana*, and stimulating *Budhi*, making it effective in delaying the signs of aging^[31] Regular practice of *Vyayama* improves *Anga Laghava*, strengthens *Mamsa Dhatu*, ensuring *Asthi Bala* and overall musculoskeletal health.

Practicing selfless service can help in delaying premature aging by reducing stress, fostering a positive mindset, and promoting emotional well-being. When individuals engage in service without expectations, it minimizes mental strain and cultivates inner peace, which in turn supports hormonal balance and overall health. A longitudinal study found that individuals who practiced selfless service regularly lived longer than those who did not, highlighting its positive impact on overall health and longevity.^[32,34]

Shodhana Karmas helps in *Tridosha Samya* [doshaic balance], improves metabolic efficiency, and delays degenerative processes, whereas *Rasayana Chikitsa* serves as a cornerstone of anti-aging by focusing on *Dhatu Poshana* [tissue nourishment], *Agni Deepana* [strengthening digestive fire], and enhancing *Ojas* [vital immunity], thereby delaying *Jara Lakshanas* [aging signs], restoring *Bala* [strength], and promoting *Ayushya* [longevity].

Conclusion

Ayurveda provides a holistic approach to managing *Akalaja Jara* by focusing on balancing *Doshas*, nourishing *Dhatus*, and enhancing *Ojas* through *Dinacharya*, *Rasayana*, and *Shodhana* therapies. Practices like *Abhyanga*, *Vyayama*, and *Nasya* support physical and mental health, while *Basti* ensures rejuvenation and longevity.

By addressing the root causes of *Akalaja Jara* [premature aging], these interventions promote vitality, longevity, and overall well-being, ensuring a healthier aging process.

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