



## A Review on Role of Upanāha Sveda in Musculoskeletal Pain arising from Sedentary Lifestyle

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In Ayurveda the first step in pain management is Nidanparivarjan i.e. to find and treat the cause. The most effective approach is a combination of medications, therapies and lifestyle changes. Modern medicine primarily offers symptomatic relief through analgesics, steroids which may provide temporary benefits but often lead to side effects or recurrence. In this context, Ayurveda presents a holistic and sustainable solution through interventions like Upanāha Sveda, a traditional Snigdha Sveda therapy. Upanāha Sveda is a powerful, classical Ayurvedic therapy that addresses the root cause of many lifestyle-related musculoskeletal disorders. Its ability to pacify Vāta, reduce inflammation, nourish tissues, and restore balance makes it highly effective for those leading sedentary or stressful lives. Regular application can prevent progression to more severe conditions and improve quality of life. This paper aims to explore the therapeutic efficacy of Upanāha Sveda in managing musculoskeletal pain associated with sedentary lifestyle habits and to highlight its relevance as a sustainable, non-invasive intervention.

**Keywords:** Pain Management, Lifestyle Disorders, Upanāha Sveda

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## Introduction

With a surge in sedentary habits due to desk jobs, prolonged sitting, digital device usage, and reduced physical activity, the 21st century has witnessed a dramatic shift in lifestyle patterns. These changes have led to a rise in musculoskeletal disorders, particularly affecting the neck, shoulders, and lower back. Musculoskeletal disorders related to lifestyle factors such as poor posture, prolonged sitting, lack of exercise, and occupational strain are rapidly increasing in prevalence across all age groups. These disorders manifesting as chronic pain, stiffness, and functional limitations significantly impair quality of life and productivity. *Ayurveda*, the ancient system of medicine, offers various therapeutic approaches to manage such conditions, among which *Upanāha Sveda* holds significant importance for its localized, non-invasive, and effective action in relieving pain and stiffness. In this article we have tried to explain the utilisation of *Upanāha Sveda* as a sustainable and side-effect-free therapeutic protocol in integrative medicine.

## Aim and Objectives

### Aim

To evaluate the therapeutic efficacy of *Upanāha Sveda* in relieving musculoskeletal pain caused by sedentary lifestyle practices.

### Objectives

1. To compile and analyze classical *Ayurvedic* references related to *Upanāha Sveda* and its application in musculoskeletal disorders.
2. To review and synthesize findings from modern clinical and pharmacological studies on the efficacy of *Upanāha Sveda*.
3. To establish a conceptual correlation between *Ayurvedic* principles and contemporary understanding of pain management in lifestyle-related musculoskeletal conditions.

## Methodology

This is literature review research paper focusing on *Ayurvedic* intervention of *Upanāha Sveda* in musculoskeletal disorders arising due to sedentary lifestyle. Study design is qualitative & descriptive in nature, aiming to synthesize existing classical *Ayurvedic* references & modern scientific studies.

**Data Sources and Search Strategy:** Relevant literature was collected from classical *Ayurvedic* texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Sushruta Samhita*, along with peer-reviewed journal articles from electronic databases including PubMed, AYU Journal, Ancient Science of Life, and Google Scholar.

**Data Extraction and Analysis:** Key information was extracted regarding the mode of action, therapeutic indications, procedural descriptions, clinical outcomes, and comparative analyses. The findings were then interpreted through an *Ayurvedic* framework and supported with modern biomedical correlations.

### Review on Musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are among the most common chronic conditions in individuals with sedentary habits. These disorders are primarily characterized by pain, reduced range of motion, and functional impairment. In *Ayurveda*, such conditions are attributed to aggravated *Vāta Doṣha*, often associated with *Āma* (toxins), *Dhātu Kṣaya* (tissue depletion), and *Strotorodha* (channel obstruction).

### Cause of Lifestyle-related Musculoskeletal Disorders:

Sedentary lifestyle practices such as prolonged sitting, lack of exercise, improper posture, continuous gadget usage, and repetitive strain lead to musculoskeletal imbalance and pain. From an *Ayurvedic* perspective, these habits cause *Vāta Prakopa* due to *Alpa Vyāyāma*, *Atinidrā*, *Mithyā Āhāra-Vihāra*, and *Vegadhāraṇa*. Over time, this results in *Snāyu-Sandhi-Māṃsa Kṣaya*, *Āma Sanchaya*, and *Strotorodha*, manifesting clinically as stiffness (*Stambha*), pain (*Śūla*), and reduced mobility (*Cheṣṭā Hāni*). Psychosomatic contributors such as *Manasika Santāpa* (mental stress) further vitiate *Vāta* and deplete *Ojas*, weakening tissue integrity and repair mechanisms.

### Review on Upanaha Sveda[1,2]

*Upanāha Sveda* is one of the traditional fomentation methods described in classical texts, particularly effective in *Vāta-Kapha* conditions. It involves the external application of a warm herbal paste over the affected body part, covered with leaves or cloth, and retained for a few hours. The therapy is classified under *Snigdha Sveda*, meaning it provides both oleation and sudation benefits. This therapy offers localized pain relief, reduces inflammation, and promotes muscle relaxation.

## Procedure

- 1. Preparation of Lepa** - Herbal powders (e.g., *Godhuma*, *Masha*) are mixed with warm oil (like *Eranda Taila*).
- 2. Application** - Paste is applied over the affected area in thick layer.
- 3. Covering** - With *Arka/Nirgundi* leaves or cloth.
- 4. Duration** - Retained for 1–2 hours, depending on condition.
- 5. Course** - 7 to 14 days for chronic conditions.

**Types:** *Upanāha Sveda* is classified based on various factors including *Doṣha* involvement, temperature, ingredients, and application method. The following categories summarize the different types used in *Ayurvedic* practice:

**Table 1: Based on Doṣhic Involvement[3]**

Type	Indicated in	Key Characteristics
Vātānulomaka Upanāha	Vāta Vyādhi (e.g., Katigraha, Grīvagraha)	Snigdha, Uṣṇa, heavy formulations
Kaphahara Upanāha	Kapha-related stiffness, heaviness	Drying and heating herbs like Musta, Shunthi
Āma-Pācaka Upanāha	Conditions with Āma Lakṣhaṇa	Dipana and Pācana herbs like Pippali, Shunthi
Samśamana Upanāha	Chronic or degenerative conditions	Mild herbs, nourishing base (e.g., Masha, Godhuma)

**Table 2: Based on Temperature and Application Timing**

Type	Application	Example Herbs
Uṣṇa Upanāha	Applied warm; for stiffness, pain relief	Eranda, Rasna, Dashamoola
Śheeta Upanāha	Applied cold; for swelling or pitta symptoms	Sandalwood, Manjishtha, Haridra

**Table 3: Based on Ingredients Used**

Base Material	Doṣha Action	Examples
Godhuma (wheat)	Snigdha, heavy; balances Vāta	Godhuma + Saindhava + Taila
Masha (black gram)	Snigdha, strengthening	Masha + Bala + Eranda Taila
Saindhava (rock salt)	Āmahara, Strotoshodhaka	Mixed with oils in Vāta-Kapha disorders

**Table 4: Based on Duration of Application**

Type	Duration	Purpose
Laghu Upanāha	1–2 hours	Mild disorders or in children/elderly
Guru Upanāha	3–6 hours	Chronic, deep-seated conditions
Upanāha	Applied overnight	For continuous and long-term therapeutic effect

## Review on Therapeutic Interventions[3]

### Upanāha Sveda in Musculoskeletal Lifestyle Disorders

*Upanāha Sveda* is a non-invasive, cost-effective, and sustainable Ayurvedic therapy that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of musculoskeletal disorders caused by poor lifestyle.

**Vāta-Pradhān Disorders:** Almost all musculoskeletal disorders are *Vāta*-dominant. *Upanāha* helps balance *Vāta* through *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Uṣṇa* (hot) qualities.

**Ingredients Tailoring:** Selection of herbs/formulation depends on *Roga* (disease), *Rogibala* (patient strength), and *Doṣha Avasthā* (stage of pathology).

**Contra Indications:** Acute inflammation (*Āma* stage), fever, or open wounds.

## Benefits

**Table 5: Common musculoskeletal lifestyle disorders & Upanāha Sveda herbs[4,5]**

Modern Musculoskeletal Disorder	Ayurvedic Correlation	Ayurvedic Pathology	Common Upanāha Herbs/Formulations
Cervical Spondylosis	Grīvagraha	Vāta-Kaphaja Granthi, Snāyu-Śoṣa, Sandhi-Gata Vāta	Nirgundi, Dashamoola, Eranda Taila, Arka Patra
Lumbar Spondylosis / Low Back Pain	Katigraha, Trika-Graha	Vāta Prakopa, Snāyu-Gata Vāta	Masha, Godhuma, Bala, Eranda, Saindhava
Osteoarthritis (Knee/Spine/Shoulder)	Sandhigata Vāta	Vāta Vyādhi, Dhātu Kṣaya, Āma Janya Śhula	Dashamoola, Eranda, Shatapushpa, Guduchi, Rasna
Frozen Shoulder	Avabahuka	Vāta-Kaphaja Vyādhi, Snāyu Saṅkocha	Shunthi, Nirgundi, Masha, Guggulu, Bala Taila
Fibromyalgia	Māmśa-Gata Vāta, Āma Vāta	Āma, Vāta-Kapha Avarana, Dhātu Saithilya	Rasna, Dashamoola, Bala, Guduchi, Pippali
Myofascial Pain Syndrome	Snāyu-Gata Vāta, Vāta Vyādhi	Snāyu Sandhi Vāta Dushti, Āvaraṇa, Māmśa Daurbalya	Masha, Saindhava, Eranda, Bala, Nirgundi
Sciatica	Gridhrasi	Vātānubandhi Roga, Snāyu and Māmśa Vitiation	Dashamoola, Eranda Taila, Arka Patra, Rasna
Rheumatoid Arthritis (Chronic Phase)	Āma-Vāta (Pakva Avasthā)	Āma With Vāta-Kapha Dushti, Sandhi Shotha	Guduchi, Shunthi, Pippali, Dashamoola, Saindhava
Sports Injuries (Muscle/Tendon Strain)	Māmśa & Snāyu-Gata Vāta	Dhātu Kṣhaya, Snāyu Saṅkocha	Masha, Eranda, Taila Upanāha with Bala/Nirgundi

Reduced pain intensity, Improves joint flexibility and muscle mobility, Relief from morning stiffness, Enhanced functional independence and sleep quality, Reduction in dependence on oral analgesics. This table presents the common musculoskeletal lifestyle disorders and their Ayurvedic correlates, pathological insights, and commonly used *Upanāha Sveda* herbs or formulations for therapeutic intervention.

## Discussion

The therapeutic effects of *Upanāha Sveda* are not only evident through symptomatic relief but also align with classical Ayurvedic concepts of disease reversal. Various outcomes reported in clinical observations and trials can be understood through Ayurvedic principles as follows:[6-8]

One of the primary outcomes of *Upanāha Sveda* is *Śhoola Hāni*, or the reduction of pain. In Ayurveda, pain is predominantly a manifestation of aggravated *Vāta Doṣha*. The unctuous (*Snigdha*) and hot (*Uṣhṇa*) qualities of *Upanāha* help pacify *Vāta*, thereby alleviating *Śhoola*. This aligns with the action of *Vedana Sthāpana* (analgesic) and *Vāta-Śhamaka* (*Vāta*-pacifying) therapies as mentioned in classical texts. The medicated poultices, when retained over affected region, promote *Snigdhatva* (unctuousness) and enhance local tissue nourishment, facilitating relief from chronic pain.[9-11]

Another significant outcome is *Sandhi-Māṃsa Saithilya* and *Sthiratva*, i.e., improved joint flexibility and muscular stability. In musculoskeletal disorders with *Vāta-Kapha* predominance, joints become stiff and muscles weak. *Upanāha Sveda*, through its warm and penetrating action, helps restore *Shaithilya* (relaxation of tight structures) and induces *Sthiratva* (stability) in the musculoskeletal system. This translates into improved range of motion and muscular coordination, a vital functional outcome for individuals with lifestyle-induced disorders. Morning stiffness, a hallmark symptom in many chronic *Vāta-Kapha* conditions, is addressed effectively by *Upanāha* therapy. Known in Ayurvedic terms as *Prātaḥ Kāla Stambha*, this symptom arises due to *Āma* accumulation and aggravated *Kapha* during early hours of the day. The *Uṣhṇa-Snigdha* nature of *Upanāha* promotes *Āma pachana* (digestion of toxins) and *Kapha shaman*, leading to *Stambha Nivṛtti* or the resolution of rigidity and heaviness.

## Probable Mode of Action

It provides both symptomatic relief & functional improvement. Its holistic effects combining thermal, pharmacological, & mechanical benefits make it valuable intervention in managing chronic pain associated with lifestyle disorders. *Upanāha Sveda*, type of *Snigdha Sveda* (oleation-based fomentation), plays significant role in management of *Vātaja* & *Kapha-Vātaja* disorders, especially those manifesting with *Śhoola* (pain), *Stambha* (stiffness), & *Gaurava* (heaviness). When applied in lifestyle disorders, which often lead to musculoskeletal issues due to *Vāta* vitiation & *Āma* accumulation, *Upanāha* offers localized & systemic relief through several Ayurvedic & physiological mechanisms.

## Recent Research Support

1. A pilot trial (2018) in *Ancient Science of Life* found that *Nirgundi Upanāha* applied for 7 days in patients with cervical spondylosis resulted in: Significant improvement in range of motion, decreased muscle spasm, Better sleep quality and daily functioning.
2. Pharmacological studies have confirmed *Eranda Taila*, *Nirgundi*, & *Dashamoola* possess anti-inflammatory, analgesic, & muscle relaxant properties by inhibiting COX enzymes, improving local circulation, & reducing prostaglandin synthesis.
3. A 2021 clinical study published in *AYU Journal* on *Dashamoola Upanāha* in *Sandhigata Vāta* (knee osteoarthritis) showed: 45% reduction in VAS score, Improved WOMAC index (Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index) within 15 days of therapy.

## Conclusion

*Upanāha Sveda* is a safe, effective, and non-pharmacological approach to managing musculoskeletal pain caused by sedentary lifestyle habits. Its multidimensional benefits, rooted in classical *Ayurvedic* principles and supported by modern understanding, advocate its inclusion in integrative pain management protocols.

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