

Ayurvedic Perspective of Irritable Bowel Syndrome as Grahani - Assessing the Effectiveness of a Holistic Treatment Approach


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Background: Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a chronic functional gastrointestinal disorder characterized by recurrent abdominal pain, bloating, and altered bowel habits, including constipation, diarrhea, or a combination of both. IBS could be correlated with Grahani, a condition caused by the dysfunction of the digestive system due to an imbalance of Agni (digestive fire) based on the homology of symptoms of both. Grahani, the seat of digestion and assimilation, becomes impaired by factors such as stress, improper diet, irregular eating habits, and lifestyle disturbances, leading to improper digestion, irregular bowel movements, and systemic manifestations. The vitiation of Vata and Pitta doshas plays a crucial role in the pathophysiology of this condition.

Keywords: Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Grahani, Abdominal pain, Altered bowel habits

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Introduction

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) has an estimated worldwide prevalence of around 5%. It is characterized by recurrent abdominal pain in association with abnormal defecation in the absence of a structural abnormality of the gut. IBS accounts for frequent absenteeism from work and impaired quality of life. The cause of IBS is incompletely understood but biopsychosocial factors are thought to play an important role, along with luminal factors, such as diet and the gut microbiota.[1]

The key symptoms of IBS include recurrent abdominal pain and altered bowel habit. Abdominal pain is usually colicky or cramping in nature, felt in the lower abdomen and related to defecation.[2]

Grahani is considered one of the *Mahagadas* in *Ayurveda*. [3] *Grahani* is closely associated with digestive dysfunction, and in today's context, the prevalence of this condition has significantly increased due to poor dietary habits, irregular lifestyles, stress, and environmental factors.[4]

The proper functioning of the *Grahani*, a crucial part of the digestive system, relies on the strength of *Agni*. When *Agni* becomes weakened due to various pathological or environmental factors, it disrupts the normal digestive processes, leading to the impairment of *Grahani*.

This dysfunction results in the release of undigested food particles into the gastrointestinal tract, which further stimulates the formation of *Ama*. The accumulation of *Ama* is a key factor in the onset of *Grahani*, which manifests as digestive discomfort, irregular bowel movements, and other gastrointestinal disturbances. This cascade of imbalances creates a vicious cycle that exacerbates the symptoms and leads to the chronic nature of *Grahani*. [5]

Grahani manifests through a range of symptoms, such as *Muhurbaddha Muhurdrava Mala* (alternating episodes of diarrhea and constipation), *Udarashoola* (abdominal pain), *Trushna* (excessive thirst), *Arochaka* (loss of taste), *Asyavairasya* (inability to perceive flavors), *Praseka* (excessive salivation), *Shoon Padakara*, *Asthiparva Ruk* (joint and bone pain), *Chardan* (vomiting), *Jwara* (fever), and *Louhagandhi Amlaudgara* (iron-like, pungent burps). [6] These diverse symptoms, when present together, significantly affect a patient's overall well-being.

Although existing medical guidelines offer treatments for IBS, the wide spectrum and complexity of symptoms often lead to partial relief. While common symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, and abdominal discomfort may improve, other critical symptoms like fatigue, which impact a patient's quality of life, are frequently left unresolved. The impairment of the gut-brain axis in IBS is well-documented, but its therapeutic potential has not yet been fully explored or validated in mainstream treatments.[7,8]

The present case series aims to offer a holistic approach to IBS management by utilizing Gastrointestinal therapy such as *Basti* (medicated enema) & mind-body interventions like *Shirodhara* (therapeutic Decoction pouring on forehead), complemented by *Ayurvedic* counseling & clear communication regarding patient's condition. By integrating these therapies, we seek to address both physical & emotional aspects of IBS, providing a comprehensive solution that may lead to long-lasting relief & enhanced well-being for patients.

Materials and Methods

A case series of 10 patient presenting with the chief complaints of abdominal pain, alternating episodes of constipation and diarrhea, mucus-laden stools, abdominal heaviness, and fatigue diagnosed with IBS a based on ROME IV criteria underwent a personalized Ayurvedic treatment regimen including Panchakarma therapies (*Piccha Basti* and *Shirodhara*). Along with Oral medications primarily having digestive and carminative properties to restore *Agni* and regulate bowel movements. Lifestyle and dietary modifications were also recommended to support digestive health and maintain doshas balance.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

1. Diagnosis of IBS:

- Confirmed using Rome IV criteria:
- Recurrent abdominal pain (at least 1 day/week in the last 3 months) associated with two or more of the following:
 - Related to defecation.
 - Change in stool frequency.
 - Change in stool form (appearance).

2. Age Range:

- Adults aged 18-60 years

Exclusion Criteria

- Secondary Gastrointestinal Disorders
- Severe Comorbidities: Conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes, heart disease, or renal impairment.
- Pregnancy and Lactation
- Recent Surgeries

Subjective Parameters

Baddha Mala

Normal once daily	0
Alternative days	1
Once in two days	2
once in three days	3
Once in four or more days	4

Muhur Drava Mala Pravritti

Normal once daily	0
Twice daily	1
3-4 times daily	2
5-6 times daily	3
>6times daily	4

Udarashula or discomfort

No abdominal pain	0
Occasional/rarely abdominal pain	1
Intermittent lower abdominal pain	2
Relieved by passage of flatus and stool	3
Continuous pain not relived by passage of flatus and stool	4

Sense of incomplete evacuation

No sense of incomplete evacuation	0
Sense of incomplete evacuation till two motions	1
Sense of incomplete evacuation till 3 to 4 motions	2
Sense of incomplete evacuation till 5 to 6 motions	3
Sense of incomplete evacuation even after 6 motions	4

Consistency

Semisolid	0
Solid	1
Very hard stools with pellets	2
Watery stool	3

Amayukta Mala (mucus in stool)

No visible mucus in stool	0
Visible mucus sticked to stool	1
Passage of mucus with frequent stool	2
Passage of large amount of mucus in stool	3

Patients Assessed Outcome

Parameters	BT	AT	Mean Difference	Percentage relief	S.D.	S.E.	P value	T value	Results
Baddha Mala	1.00	0.30	0.7000	70%	0.6749	0.2134	0.0095	3.280	VS
Muhur Drava Mala Pravritti	2.00	0.50	1.5000	75%	0.5270	0.1667	<0.0001	9.000	ES
Udara Shola	1.20	0.20	1.000	83.3%	0.8165	0.2582	0.0038	3.813	VS
Sense of incomplete evacuation	1.20	0.40	0.8000	66.66%	0.6325	0.2000	0.0031	4.000	VS
Consistency	1.00	0.20	0.8000	80%	0.7888	0.2494	0.0107	3.207	S
Amayukta Mala	2.20	0.50	1.7000	90%	0.6749	0.2134	<0.0001	>.965	ES

Treatment Schedule

SN	Drug	Dose	Anupana
1.	स्वर्ण पर्पटी	125mg BD	Lukewarm water
2.	चित्रकादि वटी	1 TDS	चूषणार्थ
3.	बिल्व चूर्ण, कुटज चूर्ण	4gm BD (equal quantity)	
4.	शिरोधारा जटामांसी काथ्	QS	14 days
5.	पिच्छ बस्ती	200ml	14 days

Discussion

Grahani Roga is a chronic disease of *Annavaha Srotas* which occur in organ *Grahani* due to vitiation of *Agni*. Acharya *Vagbhata* included it in *Ashtamaha Gadhas* which are hard to diagnose and difficult to treat. *Chitakadi Vati* has properties like *Deepana*, *Pachana*, *Grahi*, *Shulaghna*, *Vata-Kapha Shamana* etc. and with the help of these properties, these drugs act as excellent medication in GI tract diseases.

Parapati Kalpana is well known and successfully used preparations for the management of *Grahani Roga*. *Swarna Parpati* is one of the formulations of Ayurveda which comes under *Parpati Kalpana*. It is used in treatment of *Rajayakshma*, *Grahani*, *Udarashoola*, (Bhaishajya Rantnavali). This strengthens the intestine, improves metabolism and helps in improvement of *Dhatuskhaya*.

The holistic science of Ayurveda, as supported by various Ayurvedic scriptures such as the *Charaka Samhita*, *Raj Nighantu*, and *Sarangadhar Samhita*, strongly affirms this *Bilva Churna* and *Kutaj Churna* as a remedy for several conditions. These include:

Enhancing stomach fire (*Deepana*), aiding digestion (*Pachana*), alleviating bloating (*Anaha*), reducing inflammation (*Shothahara*), treating indigestion (*Amahara*), preventing indigestion (*Kupachan*), stimulating appetite (*Rochana*), and relieving intestinal worms (*Krimihara*)."

Various types of *Basti Karma* are mentioned in classics based on their action and one of them is *Piccha Basti*. It is named because of its *Picchila* property which means sticky or lubricant in nature. Because of this property, it forms a protective layer over the intestinal mucosa to avoid friction and reduction in intestinal irritation. The ingredients used in *Piccha Basti* include *Shalmali Nirryasa*, *Krishna Tila Pista*, *Gritha*, *Madhu* and *Dugdha*. Most of them have similar properties like *Madura Rasa*, *Sheeta Veerya* and *Madura Vipaka*. By virtue of these properties, it acts as *Pitta Shamaka*, *Shota Hara*, *Vrana Ropana*, *Rakta Stambaka* etc. These are helpful in controlling *Grahani Roga*.^[10]

Mode of action

- *Shothahara* and *Vrana Ropaka* (Anti Inflammatory and Ulcer Healing).
- *Raktastambhaka* (Hemostatic Agent)
- *Sangrahi / Stambhan* (Anti Diarrheal & Anti Dysenteries)
- *Pitta Shamaka*
- *Agnideepaka*

Shirodhara works on the cerebral system helps in relaxing the nervous system and balancing the *Prana Vayu* around the head. It improves the function of the five senses, helps in insomnia, stress, anxiety, depression, hair loss, fatigue, and imbalance of *Vata*, and makes one calm and fresh accompanied by distress or impairment in daytime functioning.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated an average relief of 77.78% across all symptoms in all patients with IBS. The highest relief was observed in *Muhur Drava Mala Pravritti* and sense of incomplete evacuation, both showing 100% relief. Other symptoms also showed significant improvement, indicating the effectiveness of the intervention. The present case series highlights the efficacy of *Ayurvedic* principles in addressing the root cause of IBS,

Providing a comprehensive framework that integrates therapies to restore *Agni*, balance *Doshas*, and manage stress. The holistic approach demonstrates the potential of *Ayurveda* in improving the quality of life of patients with functional gastrointestinal disorders like IBS. Integrating *Ayurvedic* insights with modern medical practices offers a promising pathway for effective IBS management.

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