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Ayurvedic Preventive Health Measures in Geriatrics Care

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ABSTRACT

Geriatrics is a process of physical, psychological and social change in multidimensional aspects. Geriatrics is a progressive irreversible phenomenon of body rather than disease. It is manifested as a medical as well as social problem world over. The number of elderly population is increasing without limits and it is the challenge of the era to limit the disabilities of the elderly. A healthy and successful ageing is what everyone desires. Evidence based medicine and treatment has become the need of the hour. Modern medicine has evolved a separate branch for the cure of illnesses of the aged called as geriatric medicine. It focuses mainly on the health care problems of the elderly. Conventional system of medicine is not very satisfactory in this problem as lack of holistic and comprehensive approach towards this problem. Ayurveda, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by promotion of health and management of diseases occurring in old age. It has a broad spectrum of preventive measures for combating the ageing process. *Rasayana* (Rejuvenation) or Geriatrics or *Jara Chikitsa* in Ayurveda is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. *Panchakarma* is a radical approach of Ayurveda designed to cleanse the *Srotas* of the body. It is beneficial for preventive, promotive and rehabilitative health purposes and management of various systemic diseases.

Key words: Geriatrics, Geriatric Health, Rasayana Chikitsa, Panchkarma, Jara.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing or aging is the process of becoming older. It is natural phenomenon of becoming old and decaying. Ageing is an irreversible consequence of the human body. The old age is frequently associated with set of illness as well as discomfort in healthy life style.

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In humans, ageing represents the accumulation of changes in a human being over time, encompassing physical, psychological and social changes. Ageing is among the greatest known risk factors for most human diseases. Old age also creates different life style disorders like diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, dyslipidaemia etc. Ageing requires special attention in diagnosis of disease as well as their treatment. The biggest challenge with geriatric diseases is that in most of the cases the condition cannot be attributed to a single cause or in certain conditions of neuropsychiatric disorders like, Senile dementia, Alzheimer's disease, depression, the structural cause is unknown. In such cases conventional system of medicine fails to come out with effective management. Ayurveda, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by promotion of health and management of diseases occurring in old age.

Rasayana or Geriatrics or *Jara Chikitsa*, a unique branch of Ayurveda deals with the health problems of the aged and measures to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. *Panchakarma* is a radical approach of Ayurveda designed to cleanse the *Srotas* of the body. It is beneficial for preventive, promotive and rehabilitative health purposes and management of various systemic diseases.

Need of the study

Living longer has been a goal of mankind since antiquity and ancient scholars working in the area of health have concentrated on the measures for promotion of longevity. The cause of morbidity and mortality world over is shifting from communicable diseases a few decades ago to non-communicable diseases. The leading causes of mortality among aged people comprise respiratory problems, heart diseases, cancer and stroke. Significant causes of morbidity among this group are chronic inflammatory and degenerative conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, psychiatric disorders, Parkinson's disease and age related urinary problems. To provide an adaptable and comfortable medical management to retard the process as well as to provide a healthy aging with the help of evidence based Researches has become the need of the hour.

AIM

1. Preventive health care measures in geriatrics.

OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the current status of geriatrics and the common disorders of the aged.
2. To discuss the concepts of geriatric nutrition.
3. To discuss the geriatric health care measures in Ayurveda.

CONCEPT OF JARA

Acharya Sharangadhara has narrated decade wise decline conditions: In the 1st decade, *Balyavastha* (infancy) will be diminished, in the 2nd decade *Vridhhi* (growth), in the third decade *Chhavi* (complexion), in

the fourth decade *Medha* (intellect), in the 5th decade *Twak* (skin), in the 6th decade *Dristi* (vision), and so on. The effect of ageing is clearly noticeable in the 5th decade of life when the properties of skin escape. Various Ayurveda classics give detailed classification of *Vaya* based on the degenerative changes in the body. Acharya Charaka has divided *Vaya* as *Balyavastha* (*Aparipakva Dhatu*: 1-16 yrs and *Virvardhamana Dhatu*: 17-30 yrs), *Madhyavastha* (31-60 years) and *Jirnavastha* (61-100 years). Acharya Sushruta has classified the *Vaya* as *Bala* (1-16 years), *Madhya* (17-70 years) and *Vrudhha* (70-100 years). Acharya Vagbhata classified *Vaya* as *Balyavastha* (1-34 years), *Madhyavastha* (34-70 years) and *Jirnavastha* (70-100 years).

Human life is of 100 years. With every decade progressing, you start losing something. It is inevitable. It is part of the design. You can only slow it down. But it will go on. Decay is natural. Unfortunately, in our age, instead of natural decay or slowed down, it is accelerated.

By the end of

- first decade, childhood will perish
- second decade, growth of body will see pinnacle
- third decade, luster of body will achieve best state and starts reducing
- 4th decade, or intellect reached possible perfection in this body and starts decaying
- 5th decade, skin observes wrinkles
- 6th decade, vision becomes blur
- 7th decade, shukra reduces (not sperm! Shukra is something different and more than reproductivity!). It is more related to immunity.
- 8th decade, strength and risk taking ability is gone
- 9th decade, buddhi or analytical power is vanishing
- 10th decade, senses give up

That is when complete 100 years are lived.

Ayurvedic understanding of Geriatrics

Ayurveda, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by

promotion of health and management of diseases occurring in old age. It has a focused branch called *Rasayana* (Rejuvenation) which deals with the problems related to ageing and methods to counter the same. Geriatrics or *Jara Chikitsa* or *Rasayana* in Ayurveda is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. Ayurvedic treatment as such is very individualistic and general; sometimes physician may need to prescribe different formulations for patients having the same disease, considering their *Prakriti* (constitution), *Satmya* (habit / allergies), *Bala* (strength), etc. It is difficult to bring out generalized management plans for a particular disease condition and implement the same in a large scale geriatrics population. There is a need to come up with protocols to document, diagnose in an integrative frame work for the holistic management of geriatric problems.

Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self dependant for their daily activities to maximum possible extent. Ayurveda has broad spectrum of preventing measures for combating the ageing process which is still widely practiced in our country. Ayurvedic literature record numerous single and compound plant based medicines, herbo-mineral, herbo-metallic formulations for general well being and in disease specific conditions relating to geriatrics.

Daily and Seasonal Regimens

Maintenance of a healthy life by one's own right action is called *Svasthavritta* which means the regime of abiding one's own nature. Health is the dynamic integration between our environment, body, mind and spirit. Ayurveda and other traditional Indian health systems lay emphasis on preventing the diseases. Elaborate description is available on personal hygiene encompass diet and regimen during daily routine (*Dinacarya*), seasonal routine (*Rutucarya*) and behavioral and ethical guidelines (*Sadvritta*). Observance of certain rules regarding suppressible and non-suppressible urges also paves way towards positive health. These practices lay

emphasis on prevention of diseases and promotion of health.

Geriatrics Nutrition

Elderly people have different nutritional requirements compared to the normal adult population. With increasing age, people become more vulnerable to malnutrition for many reasons including *Arocaka* (anorexia) due to ageing, medication, disease like *Smriti Nasha* (dementia), *Manoavasada* (depression), stroke, *Kampavata* (Parkinson disease) and other neurological disorders, poor dentition, delayed gastric emptying, ill fitting dentures, swallowing problems, oral infections, taste changes and diminished smell sensation. Older individuals tend to respond to thirst much less than the younger ones, predisposing to dehydration particularly in case of fever and diarrhoea. Therefore fluid intake is necessary to replace physiological losses, better digestion and intestinal function and for renal clearance. There is no change in absorption of fats and carbohydrates, whereas vitamin D and calcium absorption is impaired, which leads to their deficiency. Calcium intake along with vitamin D is necessary to prevent bone mineral loss in elderly. Diet containing dairy products, fish, legumes, nuts, eggs, etc. are full of vitamin D and calcium. In addition, organic calcium like *Pravala Pishti*, *Pravala Panchamruta*, *Kukkutandatvak Bhasma*, *Shankha Bhasma*, *Kaparda Bhasma* etc. may be given as medication.

Diet containing cereals, vegetables, legumes and fruits should be given to the elderly. The diet should be regulated taking into account the habitat, season, age, etc. the diet should be balanced and the quantity should be according to one's digestive capacity. Following points may be considered while planning / advising dietary and other life style regimen.

1. The food should be tasty, nutritious, fresh and good in appearance.
2. Too spicy, salty and pungent food should be avoided.
3. It should neither be very hot nor very cold.

4. Liquid intake should be more frequent and in small amount.
5. Heavy food can be prescribed in a limited quantity.
6. Heavy food should not be given at night. The proper time for night meals is 2-3 hours before going to bed. After dinner, it is better to advice for a short walk.
7. Heavy physical work should be avoided after meals.
8. Mind should be peaceful while eating.
9. To eat food only whenever hungry and avoidance of over eating.
10. Inclusion of sufficient amount of vegetables and fruits in diet.
11. Daily intake of vegetable soup and fruit juices.
12. Milk and ghee are the agraushadha (drug of choice) of vardhakya (senility). Hence their daily usage is advisable. Patient with hyperlipidaemia, ischemic heart disease, obesity these use in moderate quantity is essential.

Code of conduct

A. Ethical regimen

A healthy mind is as important as healthy body. This ethical regimen contains principles of right conduct that are applicable to all. Effort should be made to maintain mental balance by *Satvik* food and life style. *Satvik Ahara* is considered to be the best *Hitakara* (wholesome), *Pathyakara* (compatible) diet. It is a vegetarian diet containing non-oily, non-spicy articles which are easily assimilable (*Satmya*) e.g. milk, rice, green vegetables, certain fruits etc.

1. One should suppress urges of greed, grief, fear, fury, pride, shamelessness, envy and excessive passion.
2. Observe self control and always speak truth.
3. One should not harm others and should always act in a polite manner.

4. Errors / mistakes in dietetic and behavioral habits if any should be given up gradually and good habits should be practiced.
5. An intelligent person who seeks happiness should make a great effort to make good company and avoid the bad one.

B. Social hygiene

Man is a social animal and one has to work in the society in a manner which is conducive to better hygiene and sanitation of his community. This can only be achieved by individual's efforts as well as his co-operation with the concerned authorities.

1. The house refuse / waste should not be thrown at random. It should be consigned to its proper place.
2. The drainage should not remain blocked.
3. Latrines and urinals should be kept properly cleaned.
4. Water sources should not be contaminated and well protected from environmental pollutants.
5. In case of outbreak of any infectious disease concerned authorities should be immediately reported.
6. Always discourage use of plastic bags.

C. Achara Rasayana (Good conduct)

Ayurveda adopts *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* (non-drug psychotherapies) that includes various codes of conduct (*Achara Rasayana*) for maintenance of better mental health and to prevent various mental disorders. This includes the factors viz.

1. Practice universal prayer.
2. Always be truthful.
3. Speak softly, gently.
4. Speak with others kindly and with smiling face.
5. Always be considerate about others' feelings.
6. Donate generously.
7. Don't lose temper.

8. Don't take much stress.
9. Don't ridicule.
10. Don't harm others.

Preventive Regimens

A. Rasayana (rejuvenation)

The strength of Ayurveda in the context of Geriatric care is *Rasayana* therapy. *Rasayana* stands as an answer in preventing premature ageing and to solve the problems due to ageing; it also ensures healthful longevity including mental health and resistance against various geriatric disease conditions. The observance of dietetics, rules of hygiene are essential for the success of treatment prescribed for healthy longevity of life and rejuvenation.

Specific Rasayana drugs according to age.

Age in yrs.	Bio-values which are on decline	Suitable Rasayana
1-10	Bala (Childhood)	Vacha (<i>Acorus calamus</i> Linn.), Kashmari (<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Linn.), Svarna (Aurum)
11-20	Vruddhi (Growth)	Kashmari (<i>Gmelina arborea</i> Linn.), Bala (<i>Sida cordifolia</i> Linn.), Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i> Dunal)
21-30	Chavi (Color and complexion)	Amalaki (<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> Gartn), Lauha Rasayana
31-40	Medha (Intelligence)	Shankhapuspi (<i>Convolvulus pluricaulis</i> Choisy), Yastimadhu (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> Linn.), Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i> Dunal), Guduchi (<i>Tinospora</i>

		<i>cordifolia</i> (Wild) miers.)
41-50	Tvak (Skin Luster)	Bhringaraja (<i>Eclipta alba</i> Hussk), Somaraji (<i>Psoralea corylifolia</i> Linn), Priyala (<i>Buchanania lanzen</i> Spreng.), Haridra (<i>Curcuma longa</i> Linn.)
51-60	Dristi (Vision)	Triphala ghruta, Saptamrita lauha, Kataka (<i>Strychnos potatorum</i> Linn.f.)
61-70	Shukra (Semen)	Kapikacchu Beeja (<i>Mucuna pruriens</i> Hook), Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i> Dunal), Krishna Mushli (<i>Curculigo orchioides</i> Gaertn), Milk, Ghruta etc.
71-80	Vikrama (Valor)	These age group are not fit for Rasayana Karma.
81-90	Buddhi (Wisdom)	
91-100	Karmendriya (Muscles and organs)	

Actions of some medicinal plants used in Geriatric disease condition

Selected Diseases	Suggested Naimittika Rasayana
Diabetes mellitus	Silajatu, Haridra
Leprosy and Dermatomes	Tuvaraka, Haridra, Somaraji
Bronchial Asthma	Haridra, Sirisha
Hypertension and IHD	Sarpagandha,

	<i>Pushkaramula, Arjuna</i>
Urinary Disorders	<i>Punarnava, Gokshura</i>
Arthritis	<i>Bhallataka, Eranda, Guggulu</i>
Neurodegenerative Diseases	<i>Brahmi, Ashwagandha</i>
Dementia	<i>Brahmi, Sankapushpi</i>
Immunodeficiency	<i>Amalaki, Guduchi</i>
Cancer	<i>Bhallataka, Amalaki</i>

Another *Rasayana* described in Ayurveda i.e. *Aajasrika Rasayana* refers to daily rejuvenative dietetics. Regular use of ghee, milk, fruits and vegetables in diet acts as *Rasayana*.

B. Panchakarma

Panchakarma is a speciality of Ayurveda having preventive, promotive and curative actions and indicated in wide range of disease conditions/ health problems. It is a bio-cleansing regimen, which facilitates the body system for better availability of therapies, besides achieving homeostasis of humors. *Panchakarma* is beneficial for:

1. Preventive and promotive health.
2. Before performing rejuvenative therapies.
3. Management of various systemic diseases viz. Gynecological, Musculoskeletal, Respiratory, Joint, Neurological, Dermatological, Psychiatric, Geriatric disorders.
4. The regimen is also widely prescribed in chronic diseases for improving the quality of life.

Indications of Panchakarma in geriatric care

Name of organ system	Elderly ailments	Procedures
Cardiovascular system	Hyper cholestraemia	<i>Lekhana Vasti</i>
Urogenital system	BPH, Atonic bladder, Oligospermia	<i>Vasti - Anuvasana,</i>

		<i>Asthapana</i>
Respiratory system	Bronchial asthma, Respiratory allergies	<i>Vamana, Virechana</i>
Nervous system	Neurodegenerative diseases	<i>Vasti, Sirovasti, Sirodhara, Kayaseka, Pinda Sveda</i>
Skin	Wrinkling, Pigmentation, Dryness	<i>Snehana, Svedana, Vamana, Virechana, Rakta Visravana</i>
Loco motor system	Amavata, Cervical and lumbar spondylosis, Gout etc.	<i>Snehana, Svedana, Patra Pinda Sveda, Pinda Sveda, Vasti, Rakta Visravana</i>
ENT Diseases	Pratisyaya, Headache, Deafness, Sinusitis	<i>Nasya, Karnapurana, Shirodhara, Vasti</i>
Gastrointestinal system	Gulma, Plihavikara, Digestive disorders, Constipation etc.	<i>Vamana, Virechana, Vasti</i>

The principles laid down in the daily routine (*Dinacharya*), seasonal routine (*Rutucharya*) and behavioral and ethical principles (*Sadvritta*) has been described here in brief. These measures are for preventing the diseases as well as for promoting the health. Proper observance of these principles leads to the perfect physical, mental and spiritual well being.

CONCLUSION

Due to increased elderly population, the prevalence of Geriatric specific disease conditions is also increasing. The biggest challenge with geriatric diseases is that in most of the cases the condition cannot be attributed to a single cause. Geriatric health care approach has two aspects: measures for the promotion of health

and longevity and management of diseases of old age. The medical field has been able to manage the geriatric disorders, but they failed in the point of promotion of a healthy and successful ageing. Ayurveda is notably strong in this aspect and it has rich potential to promote health of the elderly. Ayurveda offers a wide range of therapies i.e. *Rasayana*, *Panchakarma*, lifestyle changes, diet modification etc. for the promotion of health of elderly. The rejuvenative and rehabilitative effects of *Rasayana* and *Panchakarma* can be utilized in the field of geriatric health care. It is the duty of the young health care professionals to explore the Ayurveda classics and to create awareness about the strength of Ayurveda in geriatric care.

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