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# Hypertension : From Ayurvedic Understanding

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## ABSTRACT

Hypertension is a grave condition of raised blood pressure due to the stress related lifestyle, in which the blood vessels have persistently raised pressure which makes the pumping of heart deligent. Due to this increased pressure on heart , the pressure exerted on vessels supplying different body tissues and organs gets increased and can damage respective organs. It is an early stage of pathogenesis and a risk factor for the development of diseases affecting organs like heart, brain, kidney etc. Many people with hypertension stay undiagnosed for long period or until got diagnosed incedentally, therefore it can be considered as a silent killer. An estimated 1.13 billion people worldwide are suffering from Hypertension, therefore normalizing the abnormally raised blood pressure is a challenging task to be considered. In Ayurveda, systemic arterial hypertension can be understood on the basis of involvement of vitiated *Doshas* where there is the involvement of *Vata* and *Pitta* predominant *Tridosha*, which hampers the flow of these *Doshas* in respective *Srotas* (micro-channels ). The concept of *Avarana* (occlusion in the functioning of *Dosha* in normal state) gives a better understanding of Hypertension which should be considered for the better outcome of treating the disease from Ayurvedic perspective. Therefore here an attempt is made, to understand Hypertension from both modern and Ayurvedic concepts and to discuss the management of the condition from Ayurvedic point of view.

**Key words:** Ayurveda, Doshas, Vata, Pitta, Tridosha, Srotas, Avarana, Hypertension, Blood Pressure.

## INTRODUCTION

Where on one hand in modern medicine system the hypertension is managed by lifestyle modification along with the pharmacological means<sup>[1]</sup> with the newer molecules being discovered to control Hypertension. In Ayurveda the treatment approaches to identify morbidity of *Doshas*, body immunity, *Bala* (strength) of *Roga* (disease) as well as of *Rogi*

(patient), *Agni* (digestive fire), etc. But the overall goal is similar that is to reduce the cardiovascular and other risk factors associated with hypertension.

The prevalence of hypertension varies across the world, regions and country income groups. African Region has the highest prevalence of hypertension (27%).

A review of current trends shows that the number of adults with hypertension increased from 594 million in 1975 to 1.13 billion in 2015, with the increase seen largely in low and middle-income countries. This increase is mainly due to a rise in hypertension risk factors in those populations.

Factors like stressful lifestyle , insufficient sleep, changing environmental factors leads to many lifestyle related diseases and Hypertension is one among them. Hypertension cannot be directly correlated with any disease in Ayurveda, but it can be understood on the basis of some Ayurvedic concepts like, *Raktagata Vata*, *Pachaka Pitta*, *Prana Vayu*,

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*Apana Vayu, Sadhaka Pitta* and with respect to pathological state of *Avalambaka Kapha Bhava*. The involvement of *Manasika Doshas* like *Raja* and *Tama Doshas* also contributes towards the condition.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### Previous theories and comparisons - in Ayurveda

Many terms has been used to understand hypertension in terms of *Raktagata Vata, Avrita Vata, Rakta Vikshepa, Vyana Prakopa, Siragata Vata, Raktamada, Vyana Atibala, Dhamani Prapurana* etc.<sup>[3]</sup>

There is no straight reference of any specific disease in Ayurveda, which can directly be correlated with Hypertension, but a close comparison can be made between few concepts of Ayurveda and the pathophysiology of hypertension, to get a better understanding of the disease

#### Predisposing factors of Hypertension

Exact etiology of hypertension is unclear, but the risk factors for Hypertension that are modifiable include unhealthy diets (excessive salt consumption, a diet high in saturated fat and trans fats, low intake of fruits and vegetables), physical inactivity, consumption of tobacco and alcohol, and being overweight or obese. Other Non-modifiable risk factors include a family history of hypertension, age over 65 years and co-existing diseases such as diabetes or kidney disease.

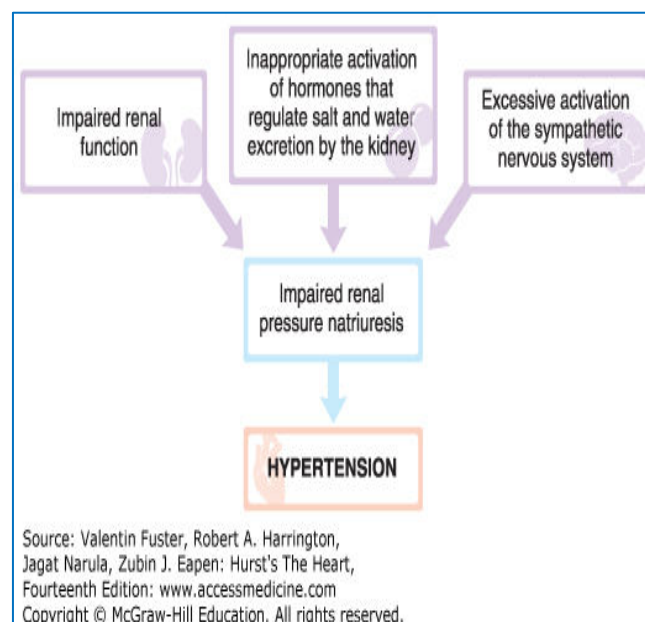
In Ayurveda predisposing factors like *Madyapana* (alcohol intake), *Atisnigdha* (oily food), *Divaswapa* (sleeping at day time), *Ati Madhura Rasa* (more sweet intake), *Bhaya* and *Shoka* (mental stress), *Ritu Sandhi* (transitional phase between two season), *Nidaanarthaka Roga* (diseases that precipitates Hypertension) like *Madhumeha* (diabetes), *Hridayaroga* (heart disease), *Vrikka Roga* (renal disease).<sup>[4]</sup> Other factors like, less physical activities and more intake of *Snigdha* (oily food) leads to increase in *Kapha Dosh* and *Medodhatu* [fat tissue and *Beejadoshaja* (genetic predisposition)]<sup>[5]</sup>

#### Pathophysiology of Hypertension

Hypertension can be primary or secondary, and on the aspect of relative frequency, 95% is primary and 5% is

secondary Hypertension.<sup>[6]</sup> Essential hypertension is defined as chronic elevation in arterial blood pressure above 140/90 mmHg with no definable cause.<sup>[7]</sup> Because of the arterial hypertension, the cardiac output or and increased systemic vascular resistance leads to a chronic elevation of blood pressure. Widening of pulse pressure with ageing, and other mechanisms like Renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system, Autonomic nervous system, Bradykinin Endothelin EDRF (endothelial derived relaxing factor) or nitric oxide ANP (atrial natriuretic peptide) are involved in hypertension.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to complications like Heart attack, stroke, Heart failure, Weak blood vessels in kidneys can prevent these organs from functioning normally, Thickened blood vessels in eyes, Metabolic syndrome, Dementia etc.



In Ayurveda, the pathology of hypertension can be understood as, due to *Nidana* (causative factors), the *Vata Dosh* gets vitiated, and gets lodged into *Rakta Dhatu* (blood) which hampers the circulation of blood. As there is disturbance in *Raktadhatu*, it will vitiate *Pitta Dosh* & because of disturbance in the equilibrium between *Doshas*, *Kapha Dosh* will also vitiate. *Apana Vata* will get disturbed due to which condition like *Udavarta* (upward movement of *Vata*) will cause increase in pressure in organs and thus aggravates hypertension.

*Sadhaka Pitta* and *Tarpaka Kapha* may vitiate and disturbs balanced functioning of heart and brain therefore aggravates hypertension and its related complications. So in multiple ways, the hypertension and cardiovascular stress gets increased, and leads to an overall adverse effect in the body organs.

### Avarana concept in Hypertension

The normal functioning of *Vata* plays an important role which can be occluded by other two *Doshas* that is *Pitta* and *Kapha*, or by *Rakta* and *Meda Dhatu*.<sup>[8]</sup> Because of the *Avarana*, the normal functioning of *Vata Dosh* is disturbed and the aggravated *Rakta dhatu*, will obstruct the normal functioning of *Vata* therefore *Avarana* (occlusion) occurs leading to *Raktaavrita Vata*.

### Classification and symptomatology of Hypertension

Hypertension is classified on the basis of severity as follows;

#### Classification of hypertension by severity<sup>[9]</sup>

Category	Systolic BP (mmHg)	Diastolic BP (mmHg)
Normal	<130	<85
High normal	130-139	85-89
Hypertension		
Stage I	140-159	90-99
Stage II	160-179	100-109
Stage III	≥180	≥110

Most of the Hypertensive patients are asymptomatic, and may have been with it for many years, and generally get diagnosed during routine checkup. In case of secondary Hypertension, symptoms will be seen on the basis of system or organ involved, and full physical examination is required in addition to the measurement of blood pressure. Features suggestive of secondary hypertension are atherosclerosis in renal involvement, headache, sweating, palpitation, anxiety, bradycardia, cold intolerance, lethargy are

other symptoms that may occur in hypertensive patients.

In Ayurveda, in the stage of *Prasarvastha*, *Doshas* move out from their respective sites with *Rakta* (blood) and circulate in the body, causing certain mild, nonspecific symptoms.<sup>[10]</sup> Specific *Lakshanas* (symptoms) of *Raktagatavata* (hypertension) has been mentioned as, *Rujasteevra* (severe bodyache), *Santapa* (feverish sensation), *Vaivarnya* (body discoloration), *Krishta* (lean body structure), *Aruchi* (anorexia), *Arunshika* (boils over body), *Stambha* (stiffness) after meals.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Management of Hypertension in Ayurveda

In Modern medicine, lifestyle modification, healthier diet with less salt, regular exercise and maintaining body weight, quitting smoking, limiting the amount of alcohol intake are the preventive measures for hypertension. Medications like beta blockers, calcium channel blockers, vasodilators, spironolactone like Aldectone in case of resistant hypertension are some drugs used in treating hypertension.

It is always better to prevent the conditions which may cause hypertension, as prevention is always better than cure, and the same is emphasized in Ayurveda. *Nidana Parivarjana* (avoiding causative factors) is said to be as the first line of management<sup>[12]</sup> in all diseases. Concept of *Avarana* should be considered promptly while planning the treatment for *Raktagatavata* (hypertension). Healthy lifestyle, and practicing *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Shodhana* (cleaning) of body, are important factors to be followed to avoid hypertension and to maintain equilibrium of *Doshas*, *Dhatu*s and *Mala* (excretory products) of body. *Virechana* (therapeutic purgation) and *Raktamokshana* (therapeutic removal of blood) has been mentioned in *Raktagata Vata*.<sup>[13]</sup> If the cause of hypertension is *Sthaulya* (obesity), *Medohara* (reducing excess fat) *Chikitsa* should be adopted. *Ashvagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), *Punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *Sarpagandha* (*Rauwolfia serpentina*) and *Rasayana* like *Brahma Rasayana* etc. are used in hypertension. Following

*Pathya Ahara* (wholesome diet) is also an important part in the management of hypertension in Ayurveda.

## CONCLUSION

Hypertension is a condition which remains unrevealed for a long period and the manifestation of the disease takes place when multiple organs or tissue gets involved and hypertension comes out with its complications. Therefore routine checkup with measurement of blood pressure is very important. In Ayurveda it has been mentioned that the disease should be diagnosed as early as possible in its *Kriyakala* (stages of disease manifestation) to make it *Sukha Sadhya* (easy to manage). Due to *Avarana* of *Vata* hear, it is very important to first diagnose and treat the *Avarana*, then only further management can get success. In the secondary hypertension, the underlying causative disease should be treated to manage hypertension. It is always important to consider the risk factors associated with hypertension, specially for the cardiovascular and renal system and treatment should be planned accordingly. Proper lifestyle and healthy practices prevents many causative factors of hypertension, therefore *Swasthavrita Palana* (following the rules for being healthy) plays an important role in preventing hypertension and to keep *Tridoshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) in equilibrium.

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