



ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN OLD AGE HEALTH

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Article Received on 25/06/2018

Article Revised on 15/07/2018

Article Accepted on 05/08/2018

ABSTRACT

Many physiological as well as anatomical changes occur in an individual due to growing age. The physical and mental deterioration due to chronological advancing age makes a person old aged. The population of old age people is growing faster not only in India but throughout the world. The physiological and anatomical changes are inevitable but the medical health problems and diseases specially affecting an individual in old age need medical management in order to sustain a comfortable and healthy aging. Modern system of medicine is usually limited in geriatric health care by providing only medical management of the diseases of old age. On the contrary, Ayurveda the science of life and longevity presents both prevention as well as management of old age problems. The present topic intends to review concepts of Ayurveda regarding prevention and management of old age problems.

KEYWORDS: Jirnavastha - old age. Bhrashyamanadhatu - Deteriorating tissues.

INTRODUCTION

Old age health is emerging as a challenging problem of this century, as the population of old age people is increasing day by day.

The body functions involve growth and development till certain age when different body systems function optimally. Gradually there comes a stage where functional capacity of organ systems starts declining. This process of aging is sequential which follows a time course that can be delayed by good dietary practices, proper lifestyle and regular physical activities but can not be prevented.

Elderly people are affected by various chronic age related diseases specially *vata vyadhis*, because *vata* gets vitiated in old age.

This communication reveals the role of Ayurveda in delaying the physiological deterioration which takes place with advancing chronological age.

Ayurveda involves not merely the physical and mental care of old people but rather social and spiritual health care also.

The fundamentals of Ayurveda in regarding achievement of old age health are reviewed under headings of healthy dietary practices, proper life styles and routine remedies.

Assessment of old age and its problems

Acharya Charak and Sushrut both have classified the span of human life in 3 parts.

- 1- *Balya* (early age)
- 2- *Madhya* (middle age)
- 3- *Vridha* or *Jirnavastha* (old age)

Charak has described *jirnavastha* or old age from sixty onwards upto hundred years. At this time *vata dosha* becomes the governing factor and the status of strength (physical, mental) immunity, digestive power, sexual potency, grasping power, memory, retaining power, speech, power of sense organs etc are declined (Ca, Vi, 8/122) This age is the stage of *bhrashyamana dhatu* or deteriorating tissues.

According to Sushruta the middle age is divided in 4 phases.

1. *Vridhi* (Phase of growth) 16-20 years
2. *Jauvana* (Phase of youthfulness) 21-30 years
3. *Sampurnta* (Phase of matured and intact tissues) 31-40 years
4. *Hani* (Phase of slow regression 41-70 years (Su, Su-35).

The process of aging slowly starts during later part of middle age and this is the actual time during which preventive measures to delay aging and to prevent old age diseases should be taken.

In *Ashtang Samgraha*, *Vagbhata* says that each factor like *balya* (childhood), *vridhi* (growth), *prabha* (complexion), *medha* (power of retention), *twak* (skin lusture), *shukra* (sexual potency), *akshi* (eye sight), *shruti* (hearing power), *mana* (mental ability) and *sarvendriya* (all sense organs) decline serially at the end of first to ten decade of life (A.Sa.Sa 8)

The above said classification of human lifespan and deteriorating condition helps in deciding proper diet, life style activities and therapeutic aspects like concurrent diseases, degenerative changes, and drug remedies.

I Proper dietary Practices, Importance of food

The importance of food had been rightly described by *Acharya Charak*

शिक ॥ककउ शिक ॥कझकअरकेरेरा यकसदकस.डझकककखडरअ
ख ॥कइउ शिलकनउ लकस्त्वषक तहडखरा शिडरझकक लटणकैअअ
रटडघ नउ टिडघन्वश्या सकक लखदेशस शिडरडघनैअ यक स्डददा
देश षनै खअन्नककस् लखधरकस् षप्क खस्डनदैअअ देक शखिघसइ
षप्कसत्रा रप्ककीषुस शिडरडघनैअअ झप-लथ- ३७ए३४क्ष
३५०च

Life of all living beings is food therefore the entire world seeks food. Complexion, clarity, good voice, long life, understanding, happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength and intelligence all are established in food. In spite of this, whatever beneficial for worldly happiness, what ever pertains to *vedic* sacrifices leading to heaven and whatever action leads to spiritual salvation is said to be established in food.

Ayurveda indicates that the diet which nourishes both the mental and physical built is called balanced diet.

Concept of Food Intake

The phenomenon of *hitashi* (wholesome diet) *mitashi* (appropriate diet) *kalabhaji* (adequate time for food intake) and *jitendriya* (control of senses in reference to food in take) is good for health i.e.

डगरकडकह लषकडूरकडकह लषकदकयझककसतह डतरसडूभषउअ
डिषुँ जकसधकुँ चगथुँ दघकुँ चडडफेकु डखघकेकडकुकरँअअ झप-
डप- ६ए३३च

Observing many troublesome diseases caused by irregular dieting, the wise should eat wholesome, measured and timely food with self restraint.

1. The wholesome food should be taken in appropriate quantity to fulfill the desire and needs of body.

2. The food should be taken at proper time which allows healthy digestion and fulfils the body need.
3. *Jitendriya* or control over senses helps the person to maintain the quality, quantity, hygiene and time for eating.

A daily diet should be such which not only helps to maintain present well being but serves as a prophylactic against common diseases.

रप्य डुषा शिषटक्तैतहर लवकल्डषाषसुकुटखररसअ वतकरकुका
डखदकज ॥ककुटेडिन्नकदजा पषरँअअ झप-लथ- ५ए३३च

e.g. *shashtic*, *shali*, *mudga*, *saindhava*, *amlaka*, rain water (pure water), milk, *ghrita*, meat of *jangla jantu* (if non vegetarian) *madhu* and *yava*. (Ca.Su. 5/12)

These food items contain all the nutrients present in a balanced diet which is required daily.

On the whole, food having all the six *rasas* is best and food having only one *rasa* is worst.

This concept regarding food intake provides

1. **Body building food** (rich in protein) e.g. meat, fish, milk pulses and eggs which are essential for tissue repair and important constituents of enzymes, hormones, antibodies, hemoglobin and *plasma* helping in regulating normal physiological functions
2. **Energy yielding food** (rich in carbohydrate and fats) e.g. sugar, *ghrita* and oil which maintains the energy need of the person.
3. **Protective food** (rich in vitamins and minerals) e.g. fruits and green leafy vegetables which maintain immunity of body.

METHODS OF FOOD INTAKE

One should take food which is warm, unctuous, non antagonistic in potency, after full digestion of previous meal, in a agreeable place, neither very quickly nor slowly, without talking or laughing, with full concentration and having regard to one self (Ca. Vi 1/23,24,25)

Water is taken now and then in between the meals because at before, it results indigestion and leanness and at the end cause obesity

लेलकथयकडडकक झकटछरेषकूरकशिडकेकैचटकिउअ झवा-ग-
लथ- ५ए३५च

Effect of defected dietary practices

Defects in food consumption may give rise to certain diseases e.g.

- 1) Deficiency diseases
- 2) Excess of food problems
- 3) Food intoxications

- 4) Food borne diseases
- 5) Food poisoning

II Proper life style

Acharyas have stated *dincharya* or the activities and habits which should be observed daily in general for good health comprise personal hygiene, which consists of the principles of the conduct of life and the practice of hygiene that are conducive to health and longevity.

These habits or activities are of two types -

- 1) Habits of healthy living and should be practiced daily.
- 2) Habits which affect the health, so they should be avoided for betterment of life.

A) Habits which should be practiced

I- Good Sleep

Sound sleep is very much essential for maintenance of good health during old age. In *Charak Samhita, sutra sthana* it is quoted that-

दुभ्रकषन्नक लटणका नटणका टिडघळ दकडषन्न चयकचर्येअ

खण्णकरक छयहखरक क्कुक्कु तहडखरा पअअ ज्ञप-लथ-

२१९३६३

Dependent on sleep are happiness and misery, corpulence and leanness, strength and weakness, potency and impotency, intellect and non intellect, life and death if taken properly and vice versa.

The old age problems like misery, leanness, weakness, impotency, non intellect and abnormal death can be prevented by taking good sleep at late middle age and early old age.

Day sleep is indicated in *grishma ritu* and in emaciated circumstances while contraindicated in other seasons and *kaphaja* conditions because *kapha* is vitiated by day sleep.

Night awakening is harmful because it causes *vata* vitiation which becomes complicated in old age.

Loss of sleep and excessive sleep both disorders are problem creating in old persons.

During sleep the person's *indriya* and *karmendriya* are under rest giving rise to mental and physical satisfaction. In this way timely and sound sleep is very necessary in old age.

2- Early rising

This principle is practiced by majority of people with a great benefit for their health and intellect in general. It facilitates an early evacuation of excreta (delaying of which causes bodily complaints) and helps in meditation, worship, study and other essential works in quiet, calm and pleasant atmosphere.

3- Morning drink of water

It helps in controlling the regular bowel habits and chronic constipation because of enhancing the peristaltic movements and thus helps the bowel act.

4 Cleanliness or care of whole body

- Mouth and teeth cleaning with use of *Ratu, tikta* and *kashaya rasa datauna* or tooth powder, metallic tongue scraper, gargling of mouth with pure water or oil based substance, washing of face and eyes with cold water is done regularly.
- Oilation of head and ear and combing of hair.
- Massage of body with oil or *ghrita* then taking bath with normal temperature water
- Wearing clothes according to climate.
- Care of feet is done by massaging, washing and wearing shoes.
- *Danda dharana* and *Chhatra dharana* is also beneficial and affects the body positively.

These activities promote the individual to achieve a state of positive health in old age.

Effects of Cleanliness

- Promotes the health by preventing the occurrence of many diseases like dental carries, oral and eye infections, constipation, body infections etc.
- Improves the physical appearance by development of physique, grace and personality etc.
- Enables the person to do daily activities with self confidence due to freshness and disease free state.
- Helps in restoring dignity and mental health.
- Makes him socially acceptable.

5 Daily Exercise

Acharya Charak considers it as an action of the body which promotes steadiness and strength or vigor to it.

ज्ञककजहज पसघळकषक पसघळक लकसकठककश् चय खफहुहअ

नसग खकषके लाणषकरके कडकषका रका लेकपजसरँअअ ज्ञप-

लथ- ७९३३

This bodily action depends to one's own willing and should be practiced in moderation. It also promotes digestion capacity and mental ability. It is restricted in summer and rainy season. *Walking is one of the most healthy exercise and be always practiced.*

6 Non suppression of natural urges

The old persons should be aware of natural urges or *adharniya vega*. They should not be suppressed or produced forcefully because both conditions are harmful and prove fatal in some condition as quoted by *Acharya Vagbhata*.

जकसधकउ लखसइ डितकपूरस खसधकसनहज ॥क

ककज ॥कसुअअ झव-ग-लथ- ४एरश्च

e.g. Micturition, defecation, flatus etc.

7 Following of ethics

If practiced fulfills two objectives simultaneously.

- Control over senses
- Maintenance of good health

This concept promotes personal hygiene and social hygiene which ultimately provides physical, mental and social health to old persons.

These ethics or noble acts if ignored than certain diseases may arise.

- Non communicable** - Arthritis, hypertension, accidents etc.
- Communicable** - AIDS, STDS, GIT infections, T. B.
- Psychological diseases**

8. Use of Panchakarma

In old age health is maintained by time to time expulsion of accumulated or imbalanced *doshas* from the body.

Merits of Panchakarma therapy

- Digestion capacity is increased.
- Diseases are pacified.
- Functions of sense organs are increased.
- Improvement of complexion, mind and intellect.
- Achievement of potency.
- Delay in aging process.

This therapy has some demerits eg. it is time taking, expensive, strict follow up and requires more carefulness.

Use of Rasayanas: In *Charak Samhita* it is quoted that.

नहकशेकषटउ लेउडरेसककेकजकसघषा रइ ॥का खषउअ
शिझककख ॥कर लखजकनकषक्र नसगसडूअषचया जिअअ
खकडछलडफ शि ॥कडरा दकडूरयझकरस खक जलकषुकुरँअ
यकझककसकिषकसडगडक लकुका जलकनहुकै जलकषुँअअ झप-
डप- १ए७८च

- It aims specially at promotion of strength and vitality in body.
- It maintains the integrity of *saptadhatus* of the body and thus increases the longevity.
- It promotes memory, intelligence, disease Free State, and preservation of youth age, luster,

complexion, voice, generosity, and strength of senses.

- It confers the capacity to get accomplished spoken words, command of the respect and regard of people and promotion of bodily glow.
- It is a measure by which an excellence of *rasadi dhatus* are achieved and maintained.
- A regular use of *rasayanas* in the prescribed manner, not merely attains longevity on the earth but goes by the auspicious way of the divine stages and finally reaches to imperishable *Brahma*. (Ca.Chi. 1.1/80)
- By Intake of *rasayanas* the great sages lived for thousands of years without being afflicted with old age, infirmity, disease and even death itself (Ca.Chi.1.1/79)

B) Habits which should be avoided

Some living styles are harmful for persons and should be avoided because they cause dreadful disease e.g.

- Drinking habit causes insomnia, neurocirculatory asthenia and liver disorders etc.
- Smoking leads to lung disease, coronary disease, bronchitis, esophageal problems.
- Chewing tobacco and areca nut causes oral cancer.
- Indiscriminate defecation causes water borne diseases and epidemics.

Some living patterns not documented in Ayurveda texts but concerning with present era should be controlled eg.

- Excessive television observing.
- Drinking chilled water
- Late awakening and late going to bed.
- Driving the vehicle with maximum speed.
- Taking long time on phones.
- Using cell phones during driving and other important jobs.

III Drug Remedies

Some common and broad spectrum remedies should be taken by old persons eg.

Ashwagandha Churna, Godanti Bhasma, Avipattikara Churna Chyavanprash, Shilajeet, Triphala Churna, Amlaka Rasayana etc.

Summary

The present paper entitled as 'Role of Ayurveda in old age problems' reveals the problems of old age and their prevention by Ayurveda principles.

Ayurveda stresses mainly on prevention of diseases then their cure. Some of the old age problems are natural and can't be prevented but can be delayed. Other problems can be prevented by following certain concepts of Ayurveda e.g.

- Proper dietary practices.
- Proper life styles.

Life styles are of 2 types

(a) Habits which should be practiced such as

1. Timely and sound sleep
2. Early rising
3. Morning drink of water
4. Cleanliness or care of whole body
5. Daily exercise
6. Non suppression of natural urges
7. Following of ethics
8. Use of *panchakarma therapy*.
9. Intake of *rasayanas*

Habits which should be avoided like drinking smoking, chewing tobacco etc.

Some common remedies

In this way Ayurveda helps in controlling old age problems.

CONCLUSION

In present era population of old peoples are increasing day by day. The food habits and life styles of young ones are not adequate for health. The young of yesterday when becomes old today is suffering from several problems. To attain positive health and to delay early senile changes is a burning global problem.

Therefore following conclusions are made. Proper dietary practices, timely sound sleep, early rising, morning drink of water, daily exercise specially walking, non suppression of urges, regular undergoing *panchakarma* therapy, regular use of *rasayanas* and avoiding of some harmful activities such as drinking, smoking, chewing of tobacco etc. should be practiced from late middle age (after 40 yrs) which will help in preventing old age problems and delaying early senile changes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At first we pay homage in the feet of God whose blessings are with us at every step. With folded hands we pay our regards to our teachers, parents and in last our affection to our kids for their support.

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