

AYURVEDIC APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF SANDHIGATA VATA (OSTEOARTHRITIS)

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ABSTRACT

Sandhigata Vata, correlating to osteoarthritis in modern medicine, is a degenerative joint disorder characterized by Sandhishoola (joint pain), Sandhigraha (stiffness), and joint deformity. It predominantly occurs due to aggravated Vata Dosha and Dhatukshaya (tissue depletion), causing functional impairment and reduced quality of life. Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to its management, focusing on Dosha balance, tissue rejuvenation, and pain alleviation. Key therapeutic modalities include Panchakarma (detoxification therapies) like Virechana and Basti, internal administration of Rasayana (rejuvenatives) such as Ashwagandha and Guggulu, and external treatments like Abhyanga (medicated oil massage) and Upanaha (poultices). Dietary and lifestyle modifications also play a significant role in controlling disease progression. This article explores the pathophysiology of Sandhigata Vata, its Ayurvedic management strategies, and their correlation with modern interventions. Evidence from classical texts and recent studies supports the efficacy of these approaches in alleviating symptoms and improving joint function.

KEYWORDS: Sandhigata Vata, Osteoarthritis, Panchakarma, Rasayana, Abhyanga, Ayurvedic treatment, Vata Vyadhi.

INTRODUCTION

Sandhigata Vata is a condition described in Ayurveda under the umbrella of Vata Vyadhi (disorders caused by Vata Dosha). It aligns with osteoarthritis, a progressive degenerative joint disorder that represents a leading cause of disability globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 10% of men and 18% of women over 60 years suffer from symptomatic osteoarthritis. In the Ayurvedic context, the condition is predominantly associated with the imbalance of Vata Dosha and depletion of Shleshaka Kapha (synovial fluid), resulting in joint degeneration and impaired mobility.

Risk factors such as advanced age, improper dietary habits, sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and trauma exacerbate the condition. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of addressing these risk factors holistically. The classical symptoms of Sandhigata Vata include joint pain, swelling, stiffness, and crepitus on movement, which can significantly impair daily activities and reduce the quality of life. While modern medicine relies heavily on symptomatic treatment, including analgesics and surgical interventions, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive management approach aimed at addressing the root cause, enhancing joint health, and preventing recurrence.

Pathophysiology of Sandhigata Vata

In Ayurveda, Sandhigata Vata arises due to Vata Prakopa (aggravation) and Dhatukshaya. Factors like advanced age, improper dietary habits, excessive physical strain, and injury contribute to the depletion of Shleshaka Kapha (synovial fluid) and joint tissues, leading to reduced lubrication, pain, and stiffness. The imbalance in Vata Dosha also causes Rukshata (dryness) and Karshana (emaciation) in the affected joints.

From a modern perspective, osteoarthritis is characterized by cartilage degradation, subchondral sclerosis, synovial inflammation, and osteophyte formation. These changes mirror the Ayurvedic understanding of Vata-induced degeneration and Kapha depletion.^[1]

Ayurvedic Management

The management of Sandhigata Vata involves Shodhana (purification), Shamana (pacification), and Rasayana Chikitsa (rejuvenation).

1. Shodhana Therapy

- Basti Karma (Medicated Enema): Basti is the prime treatment for Vata disorders. Yavana Basti and Anuvasana Basti, prepared with medicated oils like Dashamoola Taila or Ksheera Basti, help reduce pain, stiffness, and inflammation by nourishing the joints and calming Vata Dosha.^[2]
- Virechana (Purgation Therapy): Administered with Trivrit Lehya or Avipattikar Churna, Virechana eliminates toxins and balances Pitta and Vata Dosha.^[3]

2. Shamana Therapy

- Herbal Formulations:
 - Guggulu Preparations: Yogaraja Guggulu and Mahayogaraja Guggulu are effective in reducing inflammation and pain.^[4]
 - Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*): This Rasayana improves strength and reduces inflammation.^[5]
 - Rasnasaptaka Kwatha: A decoction useful in relieving joint pain and stiffness.^[6]
- External Applications
 - Abhyanga (Massage): Daily massage with medicated oils like Mahanarayana Taila or Sahacharadi Taila improves circulation and reduces stiffness.^[7]
 - Upanaha (Poultices): Herbal poultices made of Dashamoola or Nirgundi paste alleviate pain and swelling.^[8]

3. Rasayana Therapy

- Chyawanprash: Enhances tissue regeneration and immune strength.
- Amalaki (*Embllica officinalis*): Rich in antioxidants, it prevents joint degeneration.^[9]

Dietary and Lifestyle Modifications

- Ahara (Diet): A Vata-pacifying diet, including warm, unctuous, and easily digestible foods, is recommended. Avoid cold, dry, and processed foods.
- Vihara (Lifestyle): Regular exercise like yoga and Pranayama improves joint flexibility and balances Vata Dosha. Avoid excessive physical strain and exposure to cold weather.^[10]

Therapy/Aspect	Details
Shodhana Therapy	Basti, Virechana
Herbal Formulations	Guggulu, Rasnasaptaka Kwatha, Ashwagandha
External Treatments	Abhyanga, Upanaha
Rasayana Therapy	Chyawanprash, Amalaki
Diet	Warm, unctuous foods; avoid cold, dry, and processed items
Lifestyle	Yoga, Pranayama, avoiding cold exposure and excessive physical strain

Scientific Evidence Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Ayurvedic interventions in managing osteoarthritis. A clinical trial on Dashamoola Basti reported significant improvement in pain and mobility among patients with knee osteoarthritis.^[11] Another study highlighted the anti-inflammatory properties of Guggulu formulations.^[12] Additional research on Abhyanga showed improvement in stiffness and range of motion.^[13]

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda's approach to Sandhigata Vata focuses on holistic healing by addressing the underlying pathology, alleviating symptoms, and enhancing joint health. Panchakarma therapies provide detoxification and nourishment, while Rasayana drugs rejuvenate the tissues. These interventions help restore Shleshaka Kapha and control the aggravation of Vata Dosha. Clinical evidence has shown the effectiveness of therapies like Basti and Virechana in reducing inflammation and improving joint mobility. Herbal formulations such as Yogaraja Guggulu and Rasnasaptaka Kwatha work synergistically to reduce pain and stiffness. The incorporation of dietary and lifestyle changes ensures long-term benefits by preventing further deterioration.

Despite the promising results, challenges remain in standardizing Ayurvedic treatments. Individualized approaches make it difficult to create uniform protocols. Integrating Ayurveda with modern research methodologies can further substantiate its efficacy and pave the way for global acceptance. Additionally, addressing patient adherence to dietary and lifestyle recommendations is crucial for achieving optimal outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic management of Sandhigata Vata offers a promising alternative to conventional treatments for osteoarthritis. Its comprehensive approach, rooted in detoxification, pacification, and rejuvenation, not only alleviates symptoms but also addresses the root cause of the disease. Panchakarma therapies like Basti, combined with Rasayana drugs, can

significantly improve joint health and quality of life. Further research and clinical trials are needed to establish standardized protocols and validate the effectiveness of these interventions on a larger scale. Collaborative efforts between Ayurvedic and modern medical systems can revolutionize the treatment landscape for Sandhigata Vata.

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