



IDEAL LIFESTYLE: THE AYURVEDIC WAY

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ABSTRACT

Modern medical science has eliminated the threat of death and disability from most infectious diseases through improved sanitation, vaccination, and antibiotics. But death from lifestyle diseases is now the primary concern. Altered lifestyle has many implications on human health which are potentially preventable. Concept of lifestyle varies with culture and geographical area. Considering these variations Ayurveda advocates an ideal lifestyle applicable for all. By following the principles of lifestyle told in Ayurveda it is possible to fight the lifestyle diseases on several fronts. Various aspects of lifestyle are dealt under the headings of Dinacharya, Rutucharya and Sadvritta. The present scientific era demands an evidence base for every concept before it is being accepted universally so also is the concept of lifestyle in Ayurveda. An attempt is made in the article to explore the concepts of Lifestyle in Ayurveda with possible evidence base.

Keywords: Lifestyle diseases, Dinacharya, Sadvritta.

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle denotes the way people live, reflecting the whole range of activities, attitudes of everyday from sunrise to sunset. Dramatic shifts in the way humans live their lives, often due to advancements in a society or its scientific progress leads to altered lifestyle which has many implications on human health and may lead to many disorders including diabetes mellitus, CHD, primary hypertension, obesity. These diseases are often termed as 'Diseases of longevity' or 'Diseases of civilization'. Lifestyle diseases are different from other diseases because they are potentially preventable, and can be lowered with changes in diet, lifestyle, and environment.

Ayurveda being a holistic healing science emphasizes the importance of a healthy lifestyle in preventing diseases which is evident from its objective i.e., "Swasthya rakshanam" (Maintenance of health).¹ Ayurvedic perspective of an ideal lifestyle include, following Dinacharya (daily regimen), Rutucharya (seasonal regimen), Sadvritta (codes and conduct) all of which are instrumental in the prevention of disease and promotion of ideal health. These concepts are mainly aimed at understanding the rhythms of nature and body, and the measures for maintaining homeostasis in these rhythms leading to a healthy life.

Lifestyle diseases are becoming even more widespread with the substantial change in Peoples' diet and regimen in the second half of the twentieth century as countries became more industrialized. The need of the hour is conversion of defective sedentary lifestyle to an ideal, healthy and disease free lifestyle.

Ayurvedic perspective of an ideal lifestyle

Ayurveda emphasizes much on the systematic daily routine in order to maintain ideal life style through the following principles:

Dinacharya

Sadvritta

Dinacharya – It includes

- Brahma muhurtha utthana
- Achamana
- Dantadhavana
- Jihwa nirekhanam
- Nasya
- Anjana
- Abhyanga
- Vyayama
- Snana
- Vastra dharana

Sadvritta

It is right conduct in order to lead an ideal social harmonious life as guided by the classics.

- Madhura bhashana
- Indriya vyavahara
- Gamana vidhi
- Dharma acharana
- Shareera chesta vidhi
- Achara rasayana

Critical Analysis of the Chief Components of Dinacharya

Brahma muhurtha: It is considered as the apt time for waking up which is the fourteenth Muhurtha of Ratri (night).² The exact time of Brahma muhurtha varies from region to region as the time of sunrise is not uniform throughout the world. It is approximately two muhurtas i.e. 96 minutes (almost 1.5 hrs) before sunrise in that region. Period of Brahma Muhurta is an intermittent duration between respiration and photosynthesis in plant kingdom. There will be Abundance of nascent oxygen which easily mixes with hemoglobin forming oxy-hemoglobin reaching to the remote tissues and also boosts the immune system as oxygen deficient bodies are highly

prone to diseases. Also it is the right time for adhyayana (study) and the time when melatonin synthesis in the body will be optimum. Late rise from bed induces lethargic mood throughout the day causing inactivity.

Danta dhavana: Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of Oral hygiene for which Danta dhavana (Brushing), Jihwa nirlekhana (tongue scraping) and dhumapana (medicated smoking) are explained.

Dantadhavana Dravya and Tooth paste

A typical toothpaste contains an abrasive (calcium phosphate dihydrate, chalk, alumina), humectant, binder, detergent, flavor (Cellulose), preservative and therapeutic agent. Flavors, coloring and preservative agents may give rise to allergic reactions. The detergent or essential oil flavors may produce localized mucosal irritation. Ingestion of excessive amounts of fluoride toothpastes by young children has been implicated in dental fluorosis, degeneration of bones and teeth.³ Fluoride has a cumulative effect, once consumed it cannot be excreted. Population subjected to excess fluorine in drinking water over a period of time will suffer from fluorosis. (Ayurwave-Nov.2002)

This is the logic behind indicating twigs of plants possessing katu (pungent), tikta (bitter), kashaya (astringent) rasas (tastes) for the purpose of danta dhavana as it poses minimum risk of allergic reactions or mucosal irritation. It is a known fact that astringent drugs possess analgesic and antiseptic properties.

Jihwa nirlekhana: Many of the microbes that contribute to bad breath live on the tongue. Because the surface of this muscle is pebbled with tiny ridges and taste buds, which provides a deceptively large area for bacteria to live on, particularly since the root of the tongue extends far back into the throat. Tongue scrapping is effective in eliminating the microbes that contribute to bad breath. It also stimulates taste perception and increases the salivation (saliva contains Ptyalin, lysosomes, which acts as bactericidal). It also results in an increased threshold level of the basic taste perception, Increased Stimulation levels of unconditioned reflex in cephalic phase for gastric secretion hence increased appetite and also proper digestion.

A cross – over study to evaluate the effect of tongue scrapping in combating bad breath revealed that tongue scrapping appears to be the most important hygienic procedure to reduce morning bad breath in periodontally healthy subjects.⁴

Nasya: Nasya is a unique method of delivering drug via transnasal route. It promotes strength and prevents diseases of urdhwajatu gata angas (head and neck). One distinct advantage of transnasal drug delivery is that drug uptake into the blood by absorption through the nasal mucosa can be quite rapid.^{5,6} This is due to the large surface area, porous endothelial membrane, high total blood flow, the avoidance of first-pass metabolism, and ready accessibility.

Transnasal drug delivery may be the route of choice for diseases such as migraine headaches, since there may be direct access from the nasal cavity to the central nervous system (CNS) via the olfactory neurons, thus avoiding the problems with the blood–brain barrier observed for drugs administered intravenously; however, this remains to be

confirmed and quantified. Another distinct advantage of transnasal drug delivery over conventional oral drug administration in the form of drug-containing tablets and liquids is the avoidance of low pH, associated chemical degradation, enzymatic inactivation and hepatic elimination of the drug.⁷

The logic behind advocating medicated oils for the purpose of nasya is evident from the fact that the nasal mucosa presents an ideal site for bioadhesive drug delivery systems. Drug delivery systems, such as microspheres, liposomes and gels have been demonstrated to have good bioadhesive characteristics and that swell easily when in contact with the nasal mucosa. These drug delivery systems have the ability to control the rate of drug clearance from the nasal cavity as well as protect the drug from enzymatic degradation in nasal secretions.⁸

Gandusha and kavala: They are intended to tone up jaw and facial muscles along with maintaining oral hygiene. The oral mucous membrane has the capacity to absorb lipid soluble drugs especially the buccal mucosal cell membrane which is lipophilic in nature permitting considerable absorption of lipid substances across the mucosa.⁹ Hence the lipid soluble constituents present in kavala and gandusha gets absorbed. It enhances the sensory and motor functions of tongue, stimulate blood flow, relieve tension, and improve overall appearance of the face.

Dhumapana: It promotes strength and prevents diseases of urdhwajatu gata angas. It has a stimulant effect on the respiratory center in brain stem. Disinfective action on the nasal mucosa and nasopharynx. Maintains the patency of nasopharynx and oropharynx as it clears excess secretions.

Vyayama (Exercise): Half of one's capacity (Ardha shakti) is considered as beneficial in Ayurveda as it increases the digestive power, makes body light and able to withstand exhaustion. It helps in maintaining a healthy state of body and mind, and aids in maintaining ideal body weight, lypolysis of accumulated excess adipose tissue, metabolize carbohydrate, increases oxygen supply to all tissues, increases BMR (Basal Metabolic Rate).

In addition, studies that followed large groups of individuals for many years have documented the protective effects of physical activity for a number of non cardiovascular chronic diseases, such as non–insulin-dependent diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, and colon cancer.⁹ In contrast, one can observe a higher rate of cardiovascular events and a higher death rate in those individuals with low levels of physical fitness.^{10,11}

Abhyanga (Massage with medicated oils): It will increase blood circulation locally providing better transportation of oxygen and nutrients in body. It increases nerve stimulation (sensitivity) depending on the area on which it is done (foot, head, ear and whole body). Relaxes and softens injured and overused muscles. Other benefits include Nourishment to hair roots and eyes, tones up muscles, increases skin complexion.¹²

Tambula sevana: It is told as mukha vaishadyakara (cleanses oral cavity).

Tambula Guna – Teekshna, Ushna Veerya, Ruchikaraka, Kashayarasa, Saraguna Asyavairasya Nashaka. Besides

the aforesaid benefits betel leaves has many proven medicinal uses.¹³

Nutritional composition of fresh betel leaf

Constituents' with approximate composition –

- Water 85-90%
- Protein 3-3.5%
- Fat 0.4-1.0%
- Minerals 2.3-3.3%
- Fibre 2.3%
- Chlorophyll 0.01-0.25%
- Carbohydrate 0.5-6.10%
- Nicotinic acid 0.63-0.89 mg/100g
- Vitamin C 0.005-0.01%
- Vitamin A 1.9-2.9 mg/100g
- Thiamine 10-70 µg/100g
- Riboflavin 1.9-30 µg/100g
- Tannin 0.1-1.3%
- Nitrogen 2.0-7.0%
- Phosphorus 0.05-0.6%
- Potassium 1.1-4.6%
- Calcium 0.2-0.5%
- Iron 0.005-0.007%
- Iodine 3.4 µg/100g
- Essential Oil 0.08 - 0.2%
- Energy 44 kcal/100 g

The essential oil contained in the leaves possesses antibacterial, antiprotozoan and antifungal properties. Therefore, the oil kills or inhibits growth of dreadful bacteria causing typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis etc that needs proper evaluation and exploitation.¹³

The leaves are very nutritive and contain substantial amount of vitamins and minerals and therefore, six leaves with a little bit of slaked lime is said to be comparable to about 300 ml of cow milk particularly for the vitamin and mineral nutrition. The leaves also contain the enzymes like diastase and catalase besides a significant amount of all the essential amino acids except lysine, histidine and arginine, which are found only in traces.^{14, 15}

Ahara sevana: Concept of balanced diet in Ayurveda is considered under the heading of Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayathana (Eight dietetic measures) and Dwadasha ashana pravichara (twelve factors to be considered while planning a meal). In general food must be pleasant to taste and should be pure, fresh and warm. The influence of psychology over food consumption is well appreciated nowadays as the nutritionists and dieticians recommend not to eat in front of the TV or while busy with other activities, pay attention to what you are eating, chew your food well, and fully enjoy the smell and taste of your foods.¹⁶ These concepts are being explained in Ayurveda under Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayathana which states that the food consumed should be fresh and warm, unctuous, balanced and one should not take any food unless there is proper digestion of previous meal and good appetite. Food should be consumed in a pleasant place, neither too fast nor too slow, should

restrain from laughing, engaging in talks, enjoy the meal with due consideration to quality and quantity of food, concentrate on the food which is being consumed thus ensuring a mindful eating.

CONCLUSION

Concepts related to lifestyle told in Ayurveda are very unique; evidence based and aims at physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing which are practical even in the present era. "Prevention is better than cure" hence incorporation of the concepts of lifestyle definitely confers complete health to a person.

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