



Review Article

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AN AYURVEDIC INSIGHT TOWARDS AGEING WITH ITS PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, a rational system of medicine have gained global acceptance on virtue of its fundamental doctrine of holistic approach. In India 3.8% of the population are older than 65 years of age. According to an estimate the likely number of elderly people in India by 2016 will be around 113 million. Maintaining the vitality of youth and preserving quality of life has long been a quest of civilized man. Ayurveda Rasayana tantra describes technique providing multidimensional solutions to ageing, premature ageing and their complications. There is a sharp increase in variation in function with ageing. An organ function may appear to undergo a moderate decline with age on a population basis. Scientific studies in Ayurveda have proven the preventive efficacy for ageing (Vridhaawastha) and its conditions just because of Rasayana therapy and with the help of dietary prevention.

KEY WORDS: Anti-Ageing, Rasayana, Diet, Older, Vayasthapana, Geriatrics.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing means growing old, maturing, progressive changes related to the passage of time. Old age should be regarded as normal, inevitable biological phenomenon. The branch of medicine that deals with the problems of old age and treatment is known as 'Geriatrics'. In Rasayana division, also known as Jarachikitsa, has been practiced as long as Ayurveda has been recorded. The root of the word jara, meaning ageing (*jeerayate-iti jara*), is also from Greek word gerios that means old age, from which 'geriatrics' is derived.

Knowledge of the features of normal ageing is needed in order to gauge the importance of symptoms and science in elderly people. However, very few people reach old age completely free of disease. Normal ageing is thus something of a misnomer as its features have been established from a biologically elite population. Ageing or a natural progressive decline in body systems, starts in early adulthood, but it only becomes obvious several decades later and this in when we call ourselves old. According to Charak Samhita the aging (Vridhaawastha) is in between 60 to 100 years.¹

Some features of ageing are age- determined; that is, they are inevitable. Other are age – related and result from an accumulation of factors such as lack of exercise or poor diet or are accelerated by habit such as cigarette smoking, heavy alcohol consumption or over exposure to sunlight. Age related changes can therefore be slowed or prevented by a healthy life style and this remains worth encouraging even when old age has been reached.

The latest trends in beauty, health and wellness sectors are giving rise to a new realm of possibilities by fusing anti ageing cosmeceuticals with traditional Indian medicine – Ayurveda. Ayurvedic medical system believes in holistic approach. One can find concrete references with special consideration to geriatric care in Ayurveda. Elderly care by default is in built in Ayurvedic medical care. The term 'ayu' means 'aharahagacchati iti ayu; the time that keeps

reducing is ayu. It means ageing is a phenomenon which indicates that as one is growing older, he is loosing his age or nearing death, the end of life. Ayurveda gives top priority to geriatrics.

Problems due to ageing process

No one knows when old age begins. The 'biological age' a person is not identical with his 'chronological age'. It is said that nobody grows old merely by living a certain number of years. Years wrinkle the skin, but worry, doubt, fear, anxiety and self-distrust wrinkle the soul. While ageing merely stands for growing old, senescence is an expression used for the deterioration in the vitality or the lowering of the biological efficiency that accompanies ageing.²

Some of the changes of ageing are of no major clinical significance, such as depigmentation of the hair. Table 1 shows the important changes and their clinical consequences.

Presentation of disease in old age: The giants of geriatrics

- Immobility (dependency)
- Incontinence (social disintegration)
- Incompetence (intellectual impairment)
- Instability (recurrent falls)

Approach to Geriatric Patient

Comprehensive geriatric assessment include five dimensions

- Physical Health
- Mental health
- Socio-economic status
- Environmental circumstances
- Functional status

In Ayurveda concept of anti-ageing is embodied in Rasayana. The word Rasayana (rasa + ayana) refers to nutrition and its transportation in the body. Rasa means nutrition and ayana means various channels and here Rasayan essentially means nutrition at all levels from

macro to micro-cellular level. In other words, Rasayan therapy prevents ageing and provides longevity, immunity against diseases, improves mental and intellectual competence, increased vitality and luster of the body, complexion and excellent potentiality of the body.

Ayurveda offers vast amounts of information's on principles of anti-ageing activity and anti-ageing herbs, helping in the exploration of possibilities of developing new anti-ageing cosmaceuticals with natural ingredients for topical applications.

Table 1: Features and Consequences of Normal Ageing³

System	Changes with ageing	Clinical consequences
Central Nervous System	Neuronal loss, Cochlear degeneration, Lens opacification, Anterior horn cell loss	Increase risk of organic confusion, High tone hearing loss, cataract, Muscle weakness and wasting
Respiratory System	Reduced lung elasticity and alveolar support, Reduced immune function	Reduced vital capacity and peak expiratory flow, Increased risk of infection.
Cardiovascular System	Reduced maximum heart rate, Dilation of aorta, Reduced elasticity of aorta	Reduced exercise tolerance, Widened aortic arch on radiograph, Increased risk of postural hypotension.
Endocrine System	Reduced tissue sensitivity to Insulin	Increased risk of impaired glucose tolerance
Renal System	Loss of nephrons, Reduced glomerular filtration rate, Reduced tubular function	Impaired fluid balance, Increased risk of dehydration /overload, Impaired drug metabolism and excretion.
Gastrointestinal System	Reduced motility	Constipation
Bones	Reduced bone mineral density	Increased risk of osteoporosis

Anti-ageing Properties of Ayurvedic Ingredients

- The ingredient that nourishes the skin and ensures its optimum physiological functions and has an overall anti-ageing property is called *vayasthapana*, which literally means ‘maintaining youthfulness’ or arresting age. *Vayasthapana* herbs give overall support to the skin by keeping all three doshas in balance. *Centella asiatica* is the foremost *vayasthapana* herb with anti-ageing effects: one of its many properties is to enhance collagen synthesis.
- Gum resin exudates of *Boswellia serrata* have been used in the Ayurvedic system of medicine in the management of several inflammatory conditions.
- *Amalaki (Emblia officinalis)*, a potent antioxidant, rich in vitamin C, tannin and gallic acid, is foremost amongst the anti-ageing drugs (*vayasthapana*) or best amongst the rejuvenating herbs; it has properties like *Rasayan* (adaptogenic), *ajara* (useful in ageing), *ayushprada* (prolongs cell life), *sandhaniya* (improves cell migration and cell binding) and *kantikara* (improves complexion)⁴.

Anti-ageing (Vayasthapana) Herbal Drugs

Amrita, *Abhya*, *Dhatri*, *Mukta*, *Aprajita*, *Jeewanti*, *Shatavari*, *Mandookparni*, *Sthira* and *punarnava*, all of these *dravya* having capability to stable the process ageing and protect body from ageing disorders before time. If a person taking these herbal drugs regularly, becomes youth for longer time, so these *dravya* are known as ‘*Rasayana*’⁵.

Rasayana brings about the normalcy of *rasa dhatu* and thereby maintain other *dhatu* in equilibrium for a longer period. Such state of improved nutrition prevents ageing which can be understood as *Vayasthapana*.

Potential for Disease Prevention in the elderly

For older individuals, a great proportion of the disease burden derives from existing conditions, whether this burden is measured by prevalence rate, indicators of morbidity, disability, mortality, or by health and long term care utilization. In addition, older people with disability, resulting from chronic diseases, appear as high risk of acute illness and injuries. The evidence arrayed of the role of existing and often immutable disease argues for the importance of secondary and tertiary prevention,

in combination with primary screening or prevention for this population.

Many factors that contribute to decrements of ageing and the burden of illness are potentially responsive to preventive interventions. In view of this evidence, the design of preventive strategies appropriate to this population becomes crucial for the utility of preventive care, both in reducing risk and maintaining functional independence.

Much care is bestowed upon the old people in western societies by providing social welfare measures such as national assistance, supplementary pensions, home services, home care services, meals on wheel services, old folk’s homes, sitters up service and provision of services of health visitors. By providing these services, the state ensures that the years of retirement of those who have worked hard in its service shall be free from anxiety, want and boredom.

Some suggested extra dietary guidelines for older people are under given

- A nutritious diet from a variety of foods is more important than when younger because the total energy intake is usually smaller than in young adults. The number of calories needed is less but not the requirements for the most essential nutrients.
- According to ayurveda, *Ghrita* is the best *Vayasthapana* and milk is just like *amrit* for older people.
- To be light in weight eases the load on osteoarthritic joints and ageing heart and lungs and reduces the risk of accidents. Judicious regular exercise is much better than food restriction.
- Cut down the fat. Fat supplies more empty calories than any other dietary component. It predisposes to thrombosis, raised plasma cholesterol and atherogenesis.
- Eat plenty of bread and cereals (preferably wholegrain) and vegetables and fruit; older people are liable to constipation and a good intake of fiber will help to control this.
- Limit alcohol consumption, the smaller liver can not metabolize as much alcohol as in young adults and the consequences of fall or accidents are more serious.

- Cut down on salt and salty foods. They tend to raise blood pressure and hypertension predisposes to strokes.
- Avoid too much sugar because of the empty calories, but dental caries is less troublesome in surviving mature teeth.
- Women's especially should keep up a good intake of calcium from (low fat) milk or cheese or both. This may help to delay osteoporosis.
- Coffee and tea in the evening may contribute to insomnia.
- Build on established eating patterns when advising about changing food consumption; drastic changes are likely to confuse.⁶

Decisions about investigation required in ageing

Accurate diagnosis is obviously important at any age, but is particularly so in frail older people because their problem are so commonly caused or contributed to by several different pathologies. However, older people may not have sufficient stamina or cognitive function to withstand lengthy or invasive procedures and diagnosis may be revealed which cannot be treated for similar reasons. On the other hand, there is nothing worse than disability being accepted as due to age without adequate investigation.

The presence of co morbidity is more important than age itself in determining a patient's likely benefit from specific interventions. The more pathologies a patient has, the less likely he or she will be able to withstand an invasive or aggressive intervention.

CONCLUSION

The ageing process is a challenging human experience common to everyone and the desire to look young prevails in the majority of us. Discoveries in medical sciences and improved social conditions during the past few decades have increased the life span of man.

The twenty first century is witnessing a gradual decline in fertility and with increase in life expectancy; the society will need to grapple with issued of longevity. The biggest challenge with geriatric problem is that in most of cases the condition cannot be attributed to a single cause. In such cases the condition the conventional medical therapy

fails to come out with effective management plan and hence is severely compromised. Ayurveda have proven the preventive efficacy for ageing (Vridhaavastha) and its conditions just because of Rasayana therapy and with the help of dietary prevention.

Modern research trends mainly revolve around principles of anti-ageing activity described in Ayurveda; Vayasthapana (age defying), Shothhara (anti-inflammatory) and many Rasayan plants such as amalaki, mandukaparni are extensively used.

Ayurveda is a perfect holistic system where various rasayanas and rejuvenation therapies can produce a profound effect on human body and thus help a person cope with the day to day stresses of life, minus the anxiety. Rasayana therapy prevents ageing and provides longevity, immunity against diseases, improves mental and intellectual competence.

Ageing is a natural process, in the words of Seneca; "Old age is an incurable disease", but more recently, Sir James Sterling Ross commented: You do not heal old age, you protect it; you promote it; you extend it⁷.

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