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ACHARA RASAYANA – AN AYURVEDIC CONCEPT FOR STRESS RELIEF IN OLD AGE

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ABSTRACT:

Human body and mind are the abode of enjoyment (health) and suffering (ill-health). *Ayurveda* provides mental and physical health by *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) therapy. The effect of *Rasayana* therapy appears as, excellent production of the *Dhatus* (tissues or structural entity) of the body that promotes health. The therapy is not only the internal administration of drugs and diets but also practice of *Achara* (good behavioral conduct and healthy living habits) which help to achieve fine tissue nutrition and promote health. Health means both physical and mental as they are interdependent and complementary to each other. Old age is the phase of agony. Long term stress is the most common cause of old age agony. The article presents *Achara Rasayana* as effective measure for control of stress in old age.

Key Words: *Achara-Rasayana, Dhātu, Stress, Old-age*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda provides complete physical and mental health. [1] A complete health can be obtained by *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) therapy. [2] It is a comprehensive discipline of *Astanga Ayurveda*. The unique concept of *Achara Rasayana* was introduced in the chapter of *Rasayana* for the first time in *Charaka Samhita*. *Achara* involves regular practice of such methods which can induces *Rasayana* effect (rejuvenating effect) and enhances health, happiness, and longevity. [3] In old age mental crisis develops from long term stress that influences physical health too. *Achara Rasayana* promotes health in old age by reducing stress or increasing the stress tolerance level. *Achara rasayana* can reduce the use of stress relieving medicines which have adverse effects on long term use.

Worldwide health hazards among the senior citizen is very common, therefore global awareness for *Achara rasayana* is extremely important. The present study shows stress related disorders of the elderly can be prevented and managed by judicious exercise of *Achara Rasayana* which can be an effective contribution in the welfare of the community as a whole.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To establish the role of *Achara Rasayana* in maintaining well being of individual in old age.
2. To establish *Achara Rasayana* as non-medicinal approach for relieving stress in elderly, thus curbing the use of tranquillizers and anxiolytic drugs.
3. To establish the physiological implication of *Achara Rasayana* in relieving stress.

MATERIALS:

Textual materials are used for various references in this study. *Ayurvedic* texts followed are *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya* and other books of *Ayurveda*. Non-*Ayurvedic* texts include books of physiology and articles from journals.

Conceptual Study:

Human Physiology And Health In *Ayurveda*:

The human body is the conglomeration of the *Dosas* (functional entity), the *Dhatus* (the structural entity), and the *Malas* (the waste products that are to be expelled out of the body). [4] The physiology depends on the equilibrated action of the above entities in presence of *agni* (digestive power). [5] When the gastro intestinal tract has fine power of digestion, the food ingested are properly digested, absorbed, assimilated and metabolized. This ensures the fate and nourishment of the *dhatu*. [6] The excellence of the *dhatu* promotes the physical, mental and spiritual health. [7]

Effect of *Rasayana* Therapy on Health:

The therapy involves *Ayurvedic* formulations of drugs and diets for internal administrations and regular practice of some socio- behavioral conducts with an objective to promote health, prevent and cure diseases by producing excellent *Dhatus*. *Achara Rasayana* does not require rejuvenating formulas for internal administration but includes some practical methods like eating, sleeping, meditation, *Japa* (rhythmical repetition of the same sound in same tone), control of emotions (anger, harsh speech, violence), and good behaviors, so as to help achieve the finest effect of the *Dhatu* nutrition. [8]

Old Age and Stress:

World is ageing, both the number and proportion of people aged above 60 years are increasing in different rates in different parts of the world. The 2011 census has shown that the elderly population of India accounted for 100 millions compared to 77 million in 2000. Thus situations like elderly poverty, social inferiority, social isolation, physical weakness, insecurity, powerlessness and humiliation are consistent phenomena for the aged individuals.

The modern society with high speed urbanization and industrialization is immensely changing the financial, psychological and social structure of the individual and the impact on older people is far great producing long term stress.

Common Causes of Stress in Elderly:

1. Survival stress: Develops due to poverty and elder abuses.^[9]
2. Internal stress: Develops due to loss of social status after retirement and death of spouse.^[10]
3. Environmental stress: Air, water, sound pollution
4. Physical stress: Fatigue due to chronic ill health and over work to meet up with the financial break down.^[11]

Signs and Symptoms of Stress:

These long terms stress develops alarming sign and symptoms which are cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioural in nature.^[12]

1. Cognitive symptoms: inability to concentrate, memory and judgment problem, constant worry.
2. Emotional symptoms: Agitation, loneliness, isolation, depression, short temper, and general unhappiness.
3. Physical symptoms: body aches, diarrhea or constipation, nausea
4. Behavioural symptoms: eating and sleeping either more or less, addiction to alcohol or smoking, nervous habit of nail biting, and neglecting responsibility.

So stress plays havoc with health in more way than one and the digestive system is likely to be the target.

Effect of Stress On Gastro Intestinal Tract (GIT):

The life sustaining functions of the body is regulated through Autonomic nervous system, a complex network of nerves extending from the brain and the spinal cord to the motor organs of the body. They are sympathetic (fight or flight system), and parasympathetic (the rest and repair system) nervous system. These two along with enteric nervous system regulates digestion.

The stress is the Natural Response of the body to any kind of demand or dare situations and acts as a de-stabilizer of homeostasis when the body is exposed to stress for long time.^[13]

In stress the blood leaves the GIT floods the muscles so that they can be used to meet the threatened situation. If the body is chronically stressed commonly as in elderly the parasympathetic nervous system in charge of digestion is turned down and sympathetic system takes the upper hand. This means chronically blood will be diverted from the GIT and it will be difficult in digesting food.^[14]

The brain-gut axis helps explain not only physical but social and psychological stress disturbs digestion.

DISCUSSION:

The urge to live, the desire for youth, aversion to old age and quest for rejuvenation have always been the interest of mankind since antiquity. The impact of population aging has imposed a serious impact on global economy resulting in major problem in dependency and health care system. This develops stress which is long termed and causes mental crisis. Physical and mental health is interdependent & complementary to each other so mental crisis disturbs physical health too.

Dhatu (tissue) nourishment depends on proper digestion of the ingested food followed by proper absorption, assimilation and metabolism that promotes physical and mental health. But long term stress disturbs *Dhatu* (tissue) nourishment due to gastro intestinal disturbance.

Health in old age is to a large extent a reflection of living circumstances and action of the individual during the entire span of life. This implies the individual can influence how they age by practicing *Achara* (healthier living habits and good conduct) and adapt to age associated changes to relieve stress.

The *Acharas* are the following:

1. Practice of staying free from anger, violence, and barbarous act: Anger is there in all individual that culminate in violence and barbarous act. By practicing unconditional forgiveness anger is prevented from flaring up which makes easier to take stress in stride.
2. Practice of respecting elders, caring all living beings and being in the company of the wise: If the parents respect & take care of aged parents, the children will learn the same and the cycle of supporting and care giving will continue. This will combat the stress developing from insecurity and loneliness. Further wisdom and experience of the senior helps to share how to practice unconditional

forgiveness unlike knowledge from the book that is practically difficult to apply.

3. Practice of speaking the truth: Truth helps to unveil the negatives of the speaker as well the listener which otherwise would affect their health. Harsh truth must be avoided but must be said in a way without hearting others.
4. Practice of taking *Sattvika Ahara* (food): This is a balanced diet that can be easily digested, so that proper absorption, assimilation and metabolism is possible to meet the tissue need for replenishment and functioning for proper mental and physical health.
5. Practice of maintaining balance timing for sleep and wakefulness: Sleep is the heightened anabolic state of the body. Proper balance in timing and duration of sleep and wake full state makes the body tuned to natures' rhythm. This causes maximum alertness in day and deep rest at night such that the stress and tiredness of the day is balanced by tranquility and rest of night. This prevents development of behavioural symptoms.
6. Practice of *Japa* (rhythmical repetition of same sound in same tone) and meditation: These procedures cause relaxation response to the body and divert the mind from stress causing problem and let the body to recuperate and relax and clears the neuro – endocrine action that is built up due to stress. [15]
7. Practice to be optimistic regarding time and situation: This helps to overcome and accept the changes in life and keep stress a back.

If people are to live longer, the extra years of life should be one that older people can enjoy and live independently with dignity. These *Achara* help to avoid stimulus or circumstances that disturb the biological rhythm and emotional harmony and also increases the stress tolerance level through sense of control, support network, attitude and outlook and realistic knowledge.

CONCLUSION:

Quality life in senior citizen is endangered by social, psychological and physical stress. The *Achara* produces social, ethical and moral values

and help to take stride over stress and give rejuvenating effect to the body. Therefore, it is never too late for people to change the way they live, it is also never too early to develop the healthy living habits. The earlier is the better.

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