

# Oral Hygiene in Ayurveda with Special Reference to Kavala (Oil Pulling)

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## Introduction

Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine which evolved in India some 3000-4000 years ago. It is native to Indian subcontinent, but now practiced all over the world and globally accepted as one of the form of complementary medicine. Even though dentistry is not a separate branch in Ayurveda but it is included in its Shalakyatantra {system of surgery}. Many diseases of the oral cavity are described and their prevention and cure are given in ancient texts which hold true even today also. The concept of Ayurveda believes in three doshas or spiritual energy. These are Vaata, Pitta and Kapha. Dental diseases involve an imbalance of kaphadosha located in oral cavity. Maintenance of kapha in normalcy especially in oral cavity is the most important factor in oral hygiene as to prevent oral cavity disorders.

We present ourselves to world by speaking, a function of mouth, but it also has many other functions to perform. Along with communication mouth is necessary for eating, drinking, licking, chewing and taste. Teeth are important for proper chewing of food which helps in proper digestion. They also enhances facial beauty. Tongue are for enjoying taste of delicious food. In Ayurveda oral diseases are said to occur at seven sites viz. lips, gums, teeth, tongue, palate and whole oral cavity.

Oral diseases are significant burden to all countries of the world. About 75% of Americans have gum diseases and they are not aware of it<sup>1</sup>. Percentage of children aged between 2-17 years with a dental visit in year 2010 was 78.9%.

There are various data which clearly show that:

1. Sex Not a Significant Factor.
2. Race and Hispanic Origin is a Significant Factor. Black, non-Hispanic children and Hispanic children of Mexican origin had significantly higher percentages of untreated cavities than white, non-Hispanic children.
3. Poverty Level a Significant Factor.
4. If we consider only dental caries, it is the second most common disease in our country after common cold.

According to WHO statistical information system deaths due to dental diseases do occur. Only in year 2011, 5 deaths occurred in US and one each South Korea, El Salvador, Solvenia, Netherlands, Japan, Mexico and Australia. These percentage clearly depicts that more proper care has to be

taken of oral cavity.

Improper oral hygiene not only affects oral cavity but there is interrelationship between oral and general health. Many general diseases also have oral manifestations that increase the risk of oral diseases, which in turn is a risk factor for a number of systemic diseases.

At a given time more than 500 species of various microorganisms some beneficial, some harmful reside in our mouth. These bacteria easily escape our daily hygiene practices as they reside in pockets around teeth. These bacteria and their toxins easily propagate throughout the whole body. So if we can control the harmful micro organisms and their toxins with in the mouth, good improvement in general health is sure to occur.

Ayurveda provides many herbal remedies and dental hygiene practices for proper oral care.

1. **Chewing Sticks** : Ayurveda recommends chewing of sticks, which should be obtained fresh from a healthy tree. Preferably it should be kashaya (astringent), katu(acrid), tikta (bitter) in taste. It must be crushed and chewed for some time. It removes foul smell, tastelessness, dirt of tongue, teeth and mouth cavity. It also removes excess kapha. It is similar to tooth brushing with a toothbrush but not the same, as it not only cleanses but also provides medicinal values of the twig used. According to a study by Sambhi et al 1994 neem extract is top among ayurvedic toothpowders and commercial toothpastes in antiplaque activity. Other recommended twigs are karanja (pongamiapinnata), karavira (Neriumindicum), arka (Calotropisgigantea), arjuna (terminaliaarjuna), etc.
2. **Tongue Scraping** : Daily tongue should be scraped with a tongue cleaner which is not sharp, but with curved edges. It is said to clean tongue properly to prevent halitosis.
3. One desirous of clarity, taste and good smell of mouth should keep in mouth- fruits of jati (Myristicafragrans), puga (Areca catechu), kakkola (Piper cubeba), ela (Elattariacardamomam), flower stalk of Syzygium aromaticum, leaves of tambula (Piper betel), extract of karpura (cinnamomu-mcamphora).
4. Herbal plants like cinamomum, til and clove oil should be used to prevent tooth decay and toothache.
5. Garlic cloves can also be used to reduce

pain and along with vinegar for strengthening of teeth.

6. Mouthwash of equal parts of dried ginger, mustard seeds and triphala.
7. Powder of fruits of amla (Embliaofficinalis), vibhitak (Terminaliachebula) can be used for gum massage.
8. In dental caries filling of cavity with asafoetida fried in ghee.
9. Massage gums with powdered bark of Indian Madder with honey.
10. Purified lac (shudhhlaksha) can also be used many times a day for gum massage.
11. Common used drugs for oral diseases are Khadiravidati, Triphalaguggulu, Jatyadi tail etc.
12. Turmeric is well known drug that can be used in dental caries and pains.
13. Eating fresh guava a good source of vitamin C.
14. Having calcium rich diet itself prevent many tooth problems.
15. Chewing clove after meals act as mouth freshner and prevent oral diseases too.

## For proper oral care following points must be remembered

1. Avoid excessive sweets and sticky sugary items and rinse mouth immediately after eating such items.
2. Do not mix very hot and chilled items together, like eating ice-cream just after hot coffee or tea.
3. In case of pain in gums avoid hot, spicy, sour and fried foods.
4. After each meal fresh water gargle helps a lot in prevention of dental caries.
5. A child's complete preventive dental programme should include fluoride, brushing twice daily, wise food choices and regular dental care.

## Oil Pulling (Lavala or Gandush)

Oil pulling therapy is an ancient medicinal technique used to improve oral health that involves swishing oil in the mouth. In ancient texts it is mentioned as kavala, kavalgraha or gandoosha. Basically when liquid viz. oil, milk, decoction, ghee etc are only kept in oral cavity for some time it is called as gandoosha and if the liquid is swished all over mouth it is called kavala. It was popularised in 1990's as oil pulling or oil swishing.

Kavala with til oil is beneficial for the strength of jaws, depth of voice, flabbiness of face, excellent gustatory sensation and good taste for food. One who does so regularly never get dryness of throat, nor do his lips ever get cracked, his teeth will never get carious, he will not have any tooth ache nor he will have teeth set on sour intake and can

chew the hardest eatables

It can be done using edible vegetable oils like sunflower, safflower, coconut oil, but authorised texts consider sesame oil to be best.

Best time for kavala is early morning, empty stomach, in sitting position with chin straight up. Take 1 tablespoon (10 ml) of oil in mouth and swish it all around. It must be done back and forth and side to side upto all possible sites in mouth for about 15-20 mins. By this time thick oil will become thin, white and milky consistency. Then it must be spat out and followed by brushing and tongue scraping. It must not be gargled and not to be swallowed. If it is done for less than 20 mins it won't be sufficient and if swished for more than 20 mins there can be reabsorption of toxins. It can be done above 5 years, during menstruation and pregnancy.

There is not enough scientific data about how actually oil pulling works but it does have considerable effect against plaque, gingivitis halitosis etc. As the oil in engine picks up dirt and grime and is removed when I oil is drained. Likewise oral cavity get rid of bacterias and toxins when after oil swishing it is spat out. It cleanses the mouth and cannot actually draw the toxins from blood as oral mucosa is not a semipermeable membrane and hence toxins cannot pass through it. Sesame oil has sesamin, sesamol and sesaminol, which have antioxidant property and potentiate vitamin E action.

The procedures we routinely do as a part of daily oral hygiene cannot reach the bacterias buried in pockets. Here oil pulling is one step ahead which is likely to be effective for removing bacterias in gum pockets. First it is done with oils which is having antibacterial properties and some with anti-inflammatory activities also. Next it is done for 20 mins, sufficient for oil to work as compared to toothpastes and toothpowders. Also there is forceful swishing pulling of oil back and forth across the gums so that oil seeps into every nooks and crannies of the gums.

In a study by Tritton CB and Armitage tooth brushing and oil pulling has reduced the plaque scores 11-27% and 18-30% respectively and gingivitis has reduced by 8-23% and 52-60% respectively.

According to the African journal of Microbiology Research, oil pulling is an effective defence against dental caries and is beneficial for bleeding gums, fastening of loose tooth and whitening of teeth. It is also seen that oil pulling and chlorhexidine both reduce S. mutans count significantly yet reduction was more in chlorhexidine group.

Yet sufficient scientific study has not been carried out on oil pulling but still it can be taken as preventive home therapy to maintain oral hygiene. It has many advantages over other hygiene practices. It is simple cheap easily available and can be done at home. It has no lingering after taste and also

does not stain teeth.

### Conclusion

Among many untouched and unspoiled part of ancient medicine this is the one, which when analysed scientifically will certainly stand test of time. Oil pulling not only improves oral health but also has beneficial systemic effects. Even if the use of Ayurvedic drugs is restricted to vaidyas, the dietary rules and other procedures has universal acceptance. Seeing the good results allopathic practitioners also suggest ayurvedic regime, which is very good for patients and practitioners of both the stream.

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