



Review Article

ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN STRESS AND RELATED DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Today is the world of competition and everybody is running day and night to achieve the best in their terms. The mankind is set into a new dimension of time where ceaseless activity throughout is making everybody restless. Overall result is the never ending physical and mental stress coming out in the form of variety of health disorders which can be called as stress related disorders like hypertension, coronary artery disease, arthritis, ulcerative colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes mellitus, thyrotoxicosis and behavioral disorders like anxiety and depression. Ayurveda mentions the stress as *Sahas* and its impacts on the body as aggravation of *Vata Dosha* and *Ojokshaya* leading to lowered immunity and resulting number of diseases due to that, it also relates the stress to the degeneration in the body tissues causing early aging and reduced life span. Although Acharya Caraka states that in order to stay healthy and to save the life one should always avoid over-exerting himself, however, in today's world, stress is an inevitable part of life and so the stress induced diseases. Therefore, instead of looking for the stress avoidance strategy it is important to work on preventing the effects of stress on the body and increasing the coping capacity of the body by life style modifications, dietary interventions and other means. Ayurveda relate the *Sahas* to *Vata* aggravation in the body and provides the solution to the problem in the form of *Vata* balancing diet and activity regimen, *Vasti* therapy, rejuvenation or *Rasayana* therapy and application of *Yoga* and *Pranayama*.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ayurveda every person is entirely different from the other person^[1]. Though we are very similar in terms of anatomy and physiology according to modern system of medicine but we very well know that we are different from each other in terms of our nature, our likes and dislikes, our tastes, our inclination to certain things and repulsion to other things. So, what actually can explain this difference is the concept of body constitution in Ayurveda.^[2]

According to Ayurveda there is a concept of body types dependent upon three energies which govern each body system. Vedas clearly say that the entire universe including plants, animals and humans are made up of five basic elements i.e earth, water, fire, air and ether^[3].

We commonly know them as *Panchatatva*. Among these two are stable elements, earth which forms the very basis of creation also can be said as the basic matter and due to which a body is said as *Parthiva Sharira* after death and the other is ether or *Aakash* which is the space between the matter and here indicates all micro and macro channels in the body. The other three elements namely air, fire and water are actually the three energy forces which govern every body system.

In Ayurveda these three elements air, fire and water also known as *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* respectively are responsible for all the physiological functions of the body^[4] and also determines once body constitution as the ratio of these three vary from person to person. In the present article an overall view about *Vata* body type or *Vata* dominating personality is discussed, their characteristic body and mind features, probability of common ailments, their prevention and cure. As, according to Ayurveda any kind of stress in the body causes *Vata* aggravation,

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knowing the concept of *Vata* can help to relieve the stress and related disorders.

Importance of *Vata*

Ayurveda says that life exists as long as *Vata* lasts in the body^[5]. *Vata* is the cause of every movement in the body which is actually indicative of the presence of life^[6]. *Vata* is mobile element and is also responsible for keeping the fire and water element in motion^[7]. Actually, the nervous system is the seat of *Vata*. So, besides movement the other functions of *Vata* are intimation and processing information or knowledge.^[8]

Qualities of *Vata* and *Vata* Body Type

Though the *Vata* is *Panchabhoutika*, there is the predominance of air and ether element.^[9]

Vata has been stated to be *Rajoguna Pradhana* because the action of *Rajoguna* is to bring everything into action which is the same as that of *Vata*^[10].

The basic qualities of *Vata* are dryness, lightness, roughness and hardness. It is penetrative means having the capacity to penetrate in the minute channels and to clear them by its drying effect. It is cold and mobile.^[11]

Body Features of *Vata* Body Types

They are thin and light bodied having dry skin which chaps easily, hands and feet are usually colder.^[12] Due to air energy, they have less peripheral circulation and sweat only a little and therefore have dry and cold extremities. They prefer to stay in warm surroundings and are comfortable in summers. They have irregular appetites and food habits and often suffer from indigestion. They have a tendency to get frequent constipation.^[13] *Vata* type people remain always active, both physically and mentally due to mobile nature of *Vata*. They have vivacious personality and new ideas and thoughts always emerging in their mind, but on the same time they become anxious easily due to a sensitive nervous system. They can't handle much stress and get fatigued easily. They have an erratic lifestyle and seldom have discipline in their life as they can't set a routine. They often have difficulty with sleep. They are the most vulnerable to suffer from anxiety stress disorders.^[14]

These features are important to know as

- An increase or decrease in these indicates the vitiation of *Vata* in the body and
- The application of the opposite quality diet and medicine helps to alleviate the vitiated *Vata*.

So, the knowledge of the qualities of *Vata* and the body characteristics owing to that facilitate a proper approach in the treatment of *Vata* ailments.

Location of *Vata*

The seats of *Vata* are large intestine, waist, thighs, ears, bones and the organs of touch. The large intestine or colon is considered as the special seat of *Vata*.^[15] Hence, when *Vata* is vitiated or out of balance, it manifests itself first in the colon in the form of flatulence, bloating or pain abdomen. If ignored, it causes constipation later.

Functions of *Vata*

Expiration, inspiration, enthusiasm, movement of various parts, sense perceptions, initiation of the natural urges are some of the important functions of *Vata*^[16]. *Vata* is the originator of each and every kind of action in the body. It is the controller of mind and conductor of mental faculties. *Vata* restrains *Manas* from undesirable objects and guides it towards desirable objects. It coordinates all the sense faculties and helps in enjoyment of their objects. It brings about compactness in all the tissue elements of the body. It brings together different parts of the body. It prompts speech. It is the origin of touch and sound. It is the root cause of the auditory and tactile senses. It is the causative factor of joy and courage. It stimulates the digestive fire and expels out excreta. It creates the gross and subtle channels.

Vata is not only mobile but it controls the movement of other two energies and also regulates the circulation of blood, movement of food in the intestines and removal of excreta.

Causes of Vitiation of *Vata*

Excessive exercise, excessive sexual intercourse, excessive swimming, late night sleeping, carrying heavy weights, walking a long distance, taking food often with bitter taste, taking very light food, fasting, unequal or irregular meals, voluntary suppression of urges of urine, tears, semen or the mucous secretions of nose in coryza, voluntary suppression of urge of defecation, eructation or sneezing.^[17]

Vitiation of *Vata* and its Relation to Stress

Vata may be increased or decreased in the body due to various reasons. Stress is foremost among them. The fact that stress plays an important role in the aetiology of several diseases is well recognized in Ayurveda. Several physical, psychological and environmental stress factors vitiate the *Dosas* especially *Vata* leading to several diseases. *Sahasa* by increasing *Vata* directly leads to *Ojoksaya* or loss of immunity and increase the susceptibility of the body to various diseases. Therefore, one must know about the various signs and symptoms of the vitiated *Vata* so as to manage them accordingly. Any kind of physical or mental stress directly increases the *Vata* in the body. First this increase occurs in the own place of *Vata* in the body like nervous system and colon. The person

becomes hyperactive and there is anxiety and nervousness. Increased *Vata* in the colon leads to more of gases in the abdomen causing flatulence and constipation. Further, there is lack of appetite and sleep.

Other Features of progressive increase of *Vata* in the body are emaciation or loss of the muscle tissue, blackish discoloration, unwanted movements in the body, tremors, desire for heat, loss of consciousness, decrease of strength and capacity of sense organs, pain in bones, delusion, timidity, fear and grief.

Prolonged stress in the body also causes early degenerative changes leading to the fast-aging process. It is also due to *Vata*. It has been clearly stated in Ayurveda that with increasing age, *Vata* increase in the system which is responsible for bringing the senile changes or geriatric changes in the body. It is explained as the age progresses, slowly *Kapha* or water element of the body is depleted leading to the dryness of all body tissues due to the increased *Vata*. Dryness of skin, loss of hairs, unease or pain in the joints, progressive weakness of the muscles, loss of strength and vigor are all due to increased *Vata* in the body.^[18] So the concept of *Vata* in the body helps one to learn about how the stress correlates with a number of basic health problems occurring in today's time. It also helps to learn the signals of stress in the form of induced early symptoms in the body and also the remedial measures to combat it at an early stage so as to check any upcoming disease in future.

Remedial Measures for Stress According to Ayurveda

Now, as we know that stress increases the *Vata* in the system and both are linked to each other very closely, regulating the vitiated *Vata* may help bringing the body back in harmony. The root cause of all stress related disorders is vitiated *Vata* and therefore the *Vata* balancing diet and activity regimen is greatly helpful in reversing the stress related pathology in the body.

Vata Balancing Diet

According to Ayurveda, sweet (*Madhur*), salty (*Lavana*) and sour (*Amla*) foods are good for balancing the *Vata* as they give immediate nutrition and satiety to the system.^[19] Food consumed must be essentially warm and supplied with added ghee or butter so as to alleviate the dry and cold nature of *Vata*.^[20] Added spices like ginger powder or black pepper helps in good enzyme induction which is generally low in the stressed people facilitating the proper digestion thereby avoiding the digestive problems which are quite frequent in these people.

It is generally favorable to avoid salads as they are cold and astringent. Instead, hot soups added with spices and seasoned with some oils are good to invigorate the system and heal the wear and tear in the

tissues induced due to stress. Nuts like almonds, raisins and dates are also nourishing and well preserve the *Agni* disturbed due to stress. Dairies are very good at times of stress to nourish all the tissues specially the nervous system leading to calmness and satiety^[21]. Sweets also can be consumed in moderate amount so as to nourish as well as to give a feeling of wellbeing to reduce the anxiety and to add up a feel-good effect.

A regular practice of yoga with more of *Asanas* or static postures and meditation is very helpful in alleviating both the *Vata* and stress. Practice of *Pranayama* is also an efficient key to regulate the vitiated *Vata* and combating the stress related problems.^[22]

Ayurveda also provides specific treatment for this in the name of *Panchakarma*, that is *Vasti* treatment^[23] in which the medicated oils and decoctions are given alternatively from the anal route to nourish the body. It helps in the same way as the water is given in the roots of a tree but nourishes the entire tree. As *Vata* is the root cause of most of the diseases, *Vasti chikitsa* is also said to be *Ardha chikitsa* as it alone is helpful in remission of fifty percent of symptoms of any disease.

CONCLUSION

So, Ayurveda provides an appropriate answer to the cause of stress and related problems and also the proper diet and activity regimen as an effective remedial measure. Definitely, the correct kind of daily activity regimen according to one's own body type as mentioned in Ayurveda can help to prevent oneself from the stress. Especially the *Vata* body type people are more prone to stress and they need to be really more careful. The presented article provides a quick guide about that.

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