

## ROLE OF RUTUSHODHANA (RITU) IN PREVENTING AKALAJA JARA

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### ABSTRACT

Aging is a continuous process which starts from the beginning of conception and ends with death. *Acharya Sushruta* mentions *Jara* as *Swabhavika* i.e. it is not a disease, but a natural phenomenon just like hunger, thirst and sleep. He quotes, '*aparirakshana*' leads to *Akalaja Jara*. Just like how a diamond gets shrouded with dust on improper care, our body is challenged by the burdens of environmental persistence and bioaccumulation of toxicants. These pose a chief health risk by acting as *ranjaka hetu* to existent *kha vaigunya* thus leading to seasonal episodic diseases and acts as a major cause for lifestyle diseases, increased morbidity and early aging. WHO defines Healthy Aging "as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age". Instead of promoting superficial anti-aging creams or serums, it is the role of *Vaidya* to endorse and encourage *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya* and *Sadvritta*. One such major concept is '*Ritu Shodhana*', the exclusive contribution of *Ayurveda* wherein unwholesome diet and lifestyle followed in a certain season causing *dosha sanchaya* is removed in the following season. *Vasanta*, *Pravrut* and *Sharat* are the seasons selected for *Vamana*, *Nasya*, *Basti* and *Virechana* respectively. *Shodhana* is one such treatment where lipophilic endotoxins causing hormonal imbalances, immune disturbances, metabolic disorders causing early aging are expelled out in the nearest route. *Vagbhattacharya* quotes that *Shodhana* results in increased function of motor, sensory and mind systems, proliferated *agni* leading to apt metabolism, slows aging progression. Hence, in this era where quality life is more favoured than increased life expectancy, *Ritu Shodhana* should be extensively practiced by *Ayurvedic Vaidyas* and thus preserve the essence of *Ayurveda*.

**Keywords:** *Akalaja Jara*, *Ritu Shodhana*, lipophilic endotoxins.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of aging has been described well in *Ayurveda*. Aging is a continuous process which starts from the beginning of conception and ends with death. *Acharya Sushruta* mentions *Jara* as *Swaabhavika*. It is not a disease, but a natural phenomenon just like hunger, thirst and sleep.<sup>1</sup> The physiological changes occurring in *Jara* with respect

to *shareera*, *indriya* and *manas* has been explained in detail by various *Acharyas*. The incidence of few diseases is more in the period of *Jara*. *Ayurveda* has specifically described how to attain delayed *Jara*, how to prevent *Akalajara Vyadhi*, their treatment etc. In short *Ayurveda* has described how to age gracefully with good quality of life.

By 2020, the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than 5 years. In 2050, 80% of older people will be living in low- and middle-income countries. The pace of population aging is much faster than in the past. All countries should face major challenges to ensure that their health and social systems are ready to make the most of this demographic shift. WHO defines *Healthy Aging* “as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age”. Functional ability is about having the capabilities that enable all people to be and do what they have reason to value. This includes a person’s ability to meet their basic needs; to learn, grow and make decisions; to be mobile; to build and maintain relationships; and to contribute to society. *Healthy Aging* is the focus of WHO’s work on ageing between 2015 – 2030.<sup>2</sup>

At the biological level, aging results from the impact of the accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time. This leads to a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease, and ultimately, death. However, the rate of aging is dependent on each person. Research suggests that health problems in adulthood and old age stem from infections and health conditions early in life. Some researchers argue that important aspects of adult health are determined before birth, and that nourishment in utero and during infancy has a direct bearing on the development of risk factors for adult diseases—especially cardiovascular diseases.<sup>3</sup> However, these types of researches are yet to take full shape and difficult to conduct. Here is where Ayurveda comes into picture where prevention is given much more importance than cure. Various methods have been mentioned to postpone aging by our *Acharyas*.

*Acharya Sushruta* mentions two types of *Swabhavabala pravrutta vyadhi* – *kalaja* and *akalaja*. As *Jara* or *Vardhakya* is a type of *Swabhavabala pravrutta vyadhi*, *kalaja* and *akalaja Jara* can be considered. *Kalaja Jara* is the old age

occurring when efforts are taken to protect the body to prevent from wear and tear in the form of *bhojana*, *pana* and *rasayana*. *Akalaja Jara vyadhi* happens when no efforts are taken to maintain our *shareera*.<sup>4</sup>

#### EFFECTS OF AGING

According to *Acharya Charaka*, a human lifespan can be divided into *Bala* (0-30 years), *Madhya* (30-60 years) and *Jeerna* (>60 years). In *Jeerna avasta*, deterioration of *dhatu*, *indriya*, *bala*, *veerya*, *pourusha*, *parikrama*, *grahana*, *Dharana*, *smarana*, *vachana*, *vijnana* takes place. *Vata dosha* is predominant in this age and hence *vata vyadhi* are commonly seen in elderly persons.<sup>5</sup> *Sharangadhara* has described sequential loss of biological factors in aging. He describes that in age of 1-10 years *balya* is lost. Similarly, in each succeeding 10 years *Vruddi*, *Chavi*, *Medha*, *Twacha*, *Drushti*, *Shukra*, *Buddhi*, *Karmendriya* are lost respectively.<sup>6</sup>

The modern science also describes about sequential loss of Biological factors. For e.g. female fertility decreases after mid-twenties. Menopause occurs between 49-52 years. Incidence of Osteoarthritis rises to around 53% in 60-64 years. Almost half of people older than 75 years have Presbycusis and so on.<sup>7</sup>

#### PREVENTION AND DELAY OF AGING

Calorie Restriction is the key to prevent and delay age related diseases, says modern research.<sup>8</sup> A research work has established that calorie restriction improves lifespan by 50% in rodents.<sup>9</sup> Along with genetic conditions, few other factors like sleeping 6 - 7 hours every night, physical exercise (3500 Metabolic Equivalent minutes per week), avoidance of chronic stress, reduction in alcohol and smoking habits increases longevity.<sup>7</sup>

*Ayurveda* advocates increasing lifespan by following *dinacharya*, *rutucharya*, *sadvritta*, *shodhana* and *rasayana*. In such concepts, *Rutu shodhana* plays an important role.

A year consists of six seasons, namely, *Shishira* (winter), *Vasanta* (spring), and *Grishma* (summer)

in *Uttarayan* and *Varsha* (monsoon), *Sharata* (autumn), and *Hemanta* (late autumn) in *Dakshinayana*. In *Vasanta*, *teekshna vamana* and *nasya* is indicated, in *Varsha* *asthapana* and in *Sharat virechana* and *raktamokshana* are indicated. This is according to seasonal *dosha* vitiation.

In *Vasanta Ritu*, *Kapha* which was increased in *Shishira* becomes liquefied by the heat of the Sun in *Vasanta*. It diminishes the *Agni* and gives rise to many diseases because of which *Kapha* should be controlled quickly, by resorting to strong *Vamana*, *Nasya* and other therapies. In *Varsha Ritu*, *agnimandya* is a major phenomenon. It is already debilitated by summer; it undergoes further decrease and gets vitiated by the *doshas*. Further *vata dosha* gets severely aggravated by the effect of thick clouds full of water, cold wind having snow, dirty water because of rain, warmth of the earth and *amlapaka*. Due to the poor strength of digestive activity, the *Doshas* start vitiating one another and cause many diseases. Hence to control *Vata dosha*, *Asthapana basti* is planned. In *Sharat Ritu*, *pitta prakopa* is seen due to *sanchaya* of *pitta* in *Varsha Ritu*. When the person who is accustomed to cold season gets exposed to harsh sunrays it leads to *pitta prakopa*. Hence *pittahara* lime of treatment i.e. *virechana* and *raktamokshana* are indicated.<sup>10</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The major point to be discussed is whether all *shodhanas* indicated in a *ritu* is essential to an individual and the practical feasibility of it is also debatable. Classics mention that *Ritu Shodhana* is indicated in *Chayapoorvaka prakopa* rather than *Achayapoorvaka prakopa*. If *apathya sevana* in the previous *ritu* is done by not following the proper seasonal regime as told, it leads to *Chayapoorvaka prakopa*. In such conditions *Ritu Shodhana* is advocated. Also, practically if a person is suffering from

seasonal episodic disease like *Tamaka Shwasa* further episodes of the disease and its intensity can be reduced by undergoing *Vamana*. Similarly, patients with urticaria, acne vulgaris have seen better improvement if undergoes *Virechana* in *Sharat Ritu*. The reoccurrence of such episodic diseases reduces due to *doshaharana*.

In this era of pollution and adulterated toxic food consumption, bioaccumulation of pesticides, consumption of *apathya ahara* like refrigerated items (*rooksha*, *shushka guna*), *panyushita ahara*, daily consumption of *masha* in form of dosa and idli; all these lead to unimaginable *dosha sanchaya* and *aama* formation. These factors are the causes for India becoming a capital of Diabetes and many such lifestyle disorders. So *Ritu shodhana* is one method of preventing lifestyle disorders. In an original research – ‘lipophil-mediated reduction of toxicants in humans: an evaluation of an ayurvedic detoxification procedure’ by Robert E. Herron, PhD, and John B. Fagan, PhD substantial evidence was gathered on –

- Ingestion of lipophilic materials in substantial amounts can be effective in stimulating intestinal excretion of lipophilic environmental contaminants deposited in adipose tissues.
- Ayurvedic detoxification procedures may be useful in reducing body burdens of environmental and occupational toxicants.
- The prospective, longitudinal study demonstrated that use of the lipophil-mediated detoxification procedure resulted in significant reductions in serum levels of dichloro diphenyl dichloroethylene (DDE), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and beta-hexachlorocyclohexane (HCH).
- This research work gives evidence that *Ritushodhana* may be beneficial in reduction of toxicants accumulated due to environmental factors and bioaccumulation.

## CONCLUSION

Not only *Ritu Shodhana* helps in decreasing disease morbidity, it helps in preventing lifestyle disorders, immune disturbances, and hormone imbalance disorders. It helps in both *swastya rakshana* and *vikara prashamana* – which is what *Ayurveda* ultimately seeks. It helps in decreasing environmental toxicants and bio-accumulated waste which are responsible for premature aging. *Ayurvedic Vaidyas* should promote and educate patients to undergo regular *Ritu Shodhana* to avail all its benefits.

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