



SHIRODHARA THERAPY – A REVIEW

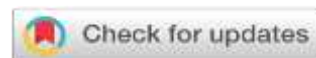
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(Published Online: September 2022)

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Article Received: 24/08/2022 - Peer Reviewed: 09/09/2022 - Accepted for Publication: 11/09/2022



ABSTRACT

Shirodhara is the pouring of medicated oil or decoction over the forehead. It is a type of *bahya Snehana* (external oleation therapy) as mentioned in Ayurveda. *Shirodhara* is one of the major Panchakarma procedures that has gained immense acceptance and popularity globally because of its efficacy in various disorders. *Shirodhara* is the standard treatment procedure in the management of neurological and psychological disorders. The present review was done on the need to elaborate on the process and mode of action of *Shirodhara*.

Keywords: *Ayurveda, Panchakarma, Shirodhara, Bahya Snehana*

INTRODUCTION

Shirodhara is derived from the two Sanskrit words, “*Shiro*” means head and “*Dhara*” means flow. It is a form of Ayurvedic therapy that involves pouring of lukewarm medicated liquids over the forehead in a continuous manner from a specific height for a specific period of time^[1]. There are various forms of *Shirodhara* - *Taila Dhara, Takra Dhara, Jal Dhara, ksheer Dhara, and Kashaya Dhara*. The type of

Dhara to be selected depends upon various aspects such as disease, involvement of *Doshas*, and *Prakriti* of the patient.

The procedure has not been detailed in the classical text under the Panchakarma procedure but is comprised of *Snehana karma*. Four types of *Murdha taila* have been elaborated in the classical text. These are – *Shiro Abhyanga, Shiro Seka, Shiro Pichu, and Shiro*

Basti. These are considered superior successively i.e., *Shiro Basti* is considered the most superior [2]. All these procedures are a form of external oleation therapy. The procedure of *Shirodhara* is extensively used in the management of psychosomatic and neurological disorders such as – Anxiety, Depression, Migraine, Insomnia, Hypertension, Tension headache, Phobia, and Attention deficit hyperactive disorder. Besides this condition, *Shirodhara* is also used in the treatment of hair fall, dandruff, and ulcers in the head.

Ayurveda considers the head as the "*Uttamanga*" i.e., superior to most parts of the body [3]. It is because the head contains the brain and all the sense organs and controls every system of the body. So, in case of any illness, we need to get back to the controlling system of the body. Applying medicine in the form of *Shirodhara* treats diseases of all parts of the body. The present paper is a review of the procedure and probable mode of action of *Shirodhara*. For this, references were collected from various classical texts and previously published research papers.

METHODOLOGY:

Procedure: The procedure of *Shirodhara* is divided into three different steps [4]–

1. Pre-Procedure or *Purva Karma*

- 2. Procedure or *Pradhana Karma*
- 3. Post Procedure or *Paschata Karma*

Pre-Procedure or *Purva Karma* –

EQUIPMENT’S AND MATERIAL USED –

Droni / Dhara table, Dhara Patra, Dhara stand, Dhara Varti, Heating devices such as electronic inductions or gas cylinders, Towel, Eye cap or bandage, Utensils, Gloves, Drugs.

- *The signing of the consent form:* Before the main procedure, the patient is asked to sign a consent form containing the necessary details about the procedure.
- *Patient Examination:* The patient is examined thoroughly to assess his/ her suitability for the procedure.
- *Recording of Vitals:* Vitals of the patient such as BP, temperature, and pulse is recorded.
- *Clearing of bladder & bowel:* The patient is asked to pass any natural urges before starting the procedure.
- *Preparation of therapy room:* The *Shirodhara* room should be clean, and quiet, with low lights and a comfortable temperature should be maintained.
- *Selection of medicated liquid:* The medicated liquid is selected according to the disease of the patient [5].

<i>Vata Roga</i>	<i>Tila taila, Mahanarayana Taila, Dashmoola Taila</i>
<i>Pitta Roga</i>	<i>Chandanadi Taila, Ksheera Dhara, Takra Dhara</i>
<i>Kapha Roga</i>	<i>Nagar, Mustaka, and Madhuyashti Kwatha</i>

- *The temperature of medicated liquid:* The liquid used should be lukewarm (40°C).

Procedure or *Pradhana Karma* –

- *Position of the patient on the table:* Then the patient is made to lie down in a supine position over the *Droni* or *Dhara table*.
- *Covering of Eye:* Eye cap or bandage should be used to cover the eyes and the ears should be covered with cotton.
- *Adjustment of Dhara Patra:* The *Dhara Patra* should be fixed at 4 *angula* or 8 cm above the forehead of the patient.

- The liquid is kept in *Dhara Patra* hanging on the *Dhara stand*.
- *Starting of the procedure:*
 - *Dhara* is poured continuously over the forehead of the patient in a specific manner- neither too fast nor too slow.
 - When the *Dhara* starts pouring, the *Patra* is moved in an oscillating manner (10/minute) so that the whole forehead is covered.
 - *Dhara* stream should also not be too thick or too thin.
 - The liquid poured is collected in another vessel and is used to refill the *Dhara Patra* before it is empty.

Period for changing the liquid^[6] -

- ⇒ Oil – 3 days once
- ⇒ Takra – daily
- ⇒ Ksheera – daily
- ⇒ Dhanyamla – 3 days once

- *Time* – Preferably in the morning for a duration of 45 minutes.
- *The total duration of therapy - Shirodhara* can be performed for 7 /14 /21/28 days depending upon the severity of the disease

Post Procedure or Paschata Karma

- After the procedure of *Shirodhara* is completed, the head of the patient is wiped off, cleaned well, and covered with a towel.
- The patient is advised to take rest for a short duration (10-15 minutes) followed by a bath with lukewarm water.
- Post-procedure vitals of the patient are again recorded. Any remarkable deviation from base line (pre-procedure) should be taken care properly.
- The patient is advised to take a Light diet (*Pathya Ahara*)
- Avoid:
 - Sleeping in the daytime and waking during the night.
 - Direct exposure to sun and wind.
 - Prolonged sitting in the same position.
 - Use of very high or low pillow.

INDICATIONS –

- **Takra Dhara**^[7]

Premature greying of hair, Fatigue, Emaciation, Headache, Heart disease, Cracks in the soles of hands and feet, Dyspepsia, Disease of eyes, ears, nose, and throat

- **Ksheera Dhara**^[8]

Insomnia, Epilepsy, Insanity, Burning sensation of head

- **Taila Dhara**^[9] –

Hair fall, Anxiety disorders, Insomnia, Memory loss, Greying of hair

CONTRAINDICATIONS –

Inflammatory condition of head, Indigestion, Vomiting, Syncope^[10]

Dhara and its benefits –

According to *Acharya Charaka*, one who has his head well oil massage daily does not get headaches, baldness, and grey hair. The strength of his cranial

bones is markedly increased, and his hair becomes firmly rooted and black. The sense organs are toned up and the skin of the face becomes beautiful, and the person gets sound sleep and feels happy^[11].

DISCUSSION

Mode of action of Shiro Dhara –

According to Ayurveda, the head is considered the "*Uttamanga*"^[12]. It controls every system and every function of the human body. All the *Indriyas* (*sense organs*) are sheltered in the head. Because of this reason, *Shirodhara* provides strength to all *Indriyas* which are disturbed in case of Psychosomatic disorders. The effect of *Shirodhara* has a broader scope of action according to dravya used. According to *Sushruta Samhita*, the *Virya* of drugs present in *Shirodhara* are absorbed into the skin and digested by *Bhrajaka Pitta*. Then it is absorbed through *Romakupa* and *Dhamani* and circulated in the whole body because of which *Dhatu Poshana* occurs and this leads to *Dosha Shamana*.^[13]

Any substance/material when at rest possesses potential energy. The energy of the substance depends upon the mass and height of the substance. According to the 'law of conservation of energy,' this potential energy is converted to kinetic energy when the substance falls from a certain height. Also, when the substance in motion collides with the object at rest it generates acceleration. In *Shirodhara* liquid Falls from a fixed height. Hence, the energy depends upon the mass of the substance, the greater the mass, the more energy and more will be momentum generated. This change in momentum causes voltage change and the nerve impulse generation and vibrations are produced. The magnitude of momentum is the ultimate factor that decides the voltage difference for nerve impulse generation and conduction, if the magnitude is small then energy is absorbed by the skull only. This is the reason why *Shirodhara* is given for 45 minutes.^[14]

Effect of temperature on Shirodhara – Any fluid hot /lukewarm causes vasodilatation. In *Shirodhara* medicated liquid at 40°C is poured for a period of 45

minutes. This causes vasodilatation and increases circulation in the brain. Vibrations along with temperature activate the function of the thalamus and basal forebrain which bring the amount of serotonin and catecholamines to normalcy.

Effect of constant pressure on Shirodhara – In the Shirodhara procedure constant pressure and vibrations are produced which are amplified by the Hollow sinus present in the frontal bone. These vibrations are transmitted inwards through cerebral spinal fluid. When prolonged pressure is applied to the nerve its ability to conduct the impulse is interrupted and this is the reason why a person relaxes during the procedure of Shirodhara. The continuous pressure applied in Shirodhara causes modulation in the nerve stimulation and thus causes the tranquillity of the mind. Acetylcholine is produced due to stimulation of the nerve ending of the autonomic nervous system which in turn reduces the Blood Pressure leading to decreased activity of the central nervous system. Hence the cortisone and adrenaline levels in the brain decrease and this works as an anti-stress effect of Shirodhara^[15].

CONCLUSION

As people are advancing in the modern world stress induced disorders have shown a tremendous increase. People are facing challenges every day in their lives on personal as well as professional fronts. Shirodhara is a form of rejuvenating therapy that relieves mental exhaustion, stress, and any other neurological conditions. Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Shirodhara has therapeutic efficacy of great level in treating somatic as well as psychological disorders. Further studies need to be conducted to study its mode of action in detail.

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Source of Support: Nil

Conflict of Interest: None Declared

How to cite this URL: Manvi Yadav & Gyan Prakash Sharma: Shirodhara Therapy – A Review. International Ayurvedic Medical Journal {online} 2022 {cited September 2022} Available from: http://www.iamj.in/posts/images/upload/2536_2539.pdf