UPANAHA SWEDA THERAPY IN AYURVEDA AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN JOINT DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

The procedure of applying warm herbal paste to the effected part of the body followed by bandaging is referred to upanaha sweda. It is a type of ekanga sweda which can be done with or without heating the medicine. Upanaha Sweda is one among four types of Sweda described by Acharya Vagbhata. Moreover, both Charaka and Sushruta have accepted it as a therapy of choice in case of Sandhigata Vata. Upanaha sweda is one among the modality of swedana used widely in the management of sandhigatavata, which is found to be helpful clinically. This therapy has vatahara, shothahara (anti-inflammatory), shoolaghna (analgesic) action. It can be used with Agni Samskara or even without use of Agni. Mode of action of Upanaha Sweda having multiple factors and their combine effects that includes, prevention of heat loss from body, increasing the absorption of medicinal contents through skin, increasing or removing Kleda from affected joint depending upon the type of drug utilized and by supporting and limiting the movement of the affected joint. Ayurvedic texts opines that Upanaha Sweda acts by trapping the heat inside the body by preventing the heat loss through Romakupa.

Keywords: Upanaha, Sweda, Sandhigata Vata

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is a science based on the theory of Panchamahabhuta where these elements are used wisely to cure the diseases. Swedana is one such therapy that uses primarily the Agni Mahabhuta. However, Ayurveda has described 13 Sagni Sweda and 10 Niragni Sweda¹ and beside these classical types there are various other clinically useful Swedana practices are used. The purpose of Swedana therapy is not just providing the heat to the body but the amount of the heat, duration and drugs also matters a lot. Upanaha Sweda is one such important Swedana practice which is mentioned in Sagni and in Niragni type of the Swedana by Charaka.² Upanaha Sweda is indicated in Chikitsa of Sandhigata Vata,³ this therapy gains prime importance with respect to joint disorders.

The word ‘Upanaha’ is split as upa+ nah, in which upa is upasarga (prefix) which means near, ‘nah bandhane’ means to tie or bind.⁴ The other meanings
of upanaha are bandage, bandage with warm paste of medicaments, bandage using Charma (leather) or Pata (cloth), bandage applied for Vranapaka (suppuration of wound). Most of the classical texts have considered Upanaha as bandhana (tying) and lepa (application).

Types of Upahana:
1) Sagni Upahana, where the drugs are heated first and then applied.
2) Niragni Upahana, where Ushna Veerya Dravya (drugs with hot potency) are applied without heating.

Clinical spectrum of Upahana:
Upahana is used in various disease conditions for specific reasons. The classical indications of Upanaha Sweda are as follows.

Commonly used drugs in Upahana:

Classical references of Upahana Yoga in joint disorders:
“Godhumashakali ---------- upanaha Prashaye” Ch.Su.14/35
“Kolamkulattha ----------- Pradeha” Ch.Su.3/18-22
“Anupamatsamisha ------- Ch. Su3/19
“Takrenayuktam yavachurnamushnam ------ Ch.Su.3/20
“Satila Satasi beeja ------------ Shasta Syadupanahane Ch.Chi.25/51
“Upanahaswedastu vataharamula --------- Su.Chi.32/12

practically Upanaha Sweda have been utilized by various clinicians and researchers in following conditions and was found to be effective.

Table 1: Disease and Type of Upahana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Type/ drugs of Upahana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Osteoarthritis</td>
<td>Nirgundipatra Upahana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gouty arthritis</td>
<td>Jadamayadi Upahana Sweda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manyastambha</td>
<td>Kukkutanda Upahana Sweda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katigraha</td>
<td>Godhumadi Upahana Sweda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis</td>
<td>Kottamchukadi Upahana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Purva karma: In purvakarma the patient with calm and quiet mind who have followed dinacharya, is allowed to sit in a suitable position according to the part in which the sweda should be performed.

- Then prior to the swedana therapy snehana is done (external) with suitable medicated or non-medicated snehas.
- Nivata griha should be selected for the procedure in order to avoid wind and discomfort.
• All the instruments for the pradhana and paschat karmas should be collected.

• **Pradhana karma:** After proper oleation of the diseased part, pradhanakarma is performed. It includes the following steps.

• Powder form of the drugs used should be prepared.

• **Nirasthi Pishita Mamsa** prepared and taken in a clean vessel.

• Vehicles for mixing the powder i.e. Taila, Paya, Takra, Kinwa etc are taken in the quantity required.

• Fresh leaves which pacify Vata Dosha are taken and washed very well (most commonly the leaves of arka). The leather skin of animals with Snigdha Guna and Ushna Veerya is specified in classics.

• If the **Upanaha** desired is of Sagni type, then the powder along with its vehicles and Saindhava salt in a suitable amount is heated after proper mixing. If it is of Anagni type, the powdered form of drugs is mixed with the vehicles without heating and made into a thick paste. **Nirasthi Pishita Mamsa** is added in enough quantity in both procedures.

• The paste is then applied over the diseased body part in a proper thickness.

• **Vatahara Patra** like Arka should be slightly warmed in oil and Saindhava. Then these Patras should be applied over the paste.

• Then **Bandhana** is applied over it by cotton bandage.

**Figure 1. Steps involved in Upanaha Therapy**

**Time of application:** **Upanaha** tied in night should be removed in morning and that tied in day should be removed in night. This duration may be extended in *Sheeta Ritu*.

**Mode of action of Upanaha:**
Principles on which **Upanaha Sweda** acts can be summarised as follows:
1. Continuous sudation due to Prevention of heat loss
2. Providing oleation/ absorption of excess moisture from affected part
3. Immobilisation of affected joint

**Continuous sudation due to Prevention of heat loss:** Ayurvedic texts opines that **Upanaha Sweda** acts by trapping the heat inside the body by preventing the heat loss through **Romakupa**. If skin temperature is greater than that of the surroundings, the body can lose heat by radiation and conduction. But, if the temperature of the surroundings is greater than that of the skin, the body gains heat by radiation and conduction. In such conditions, the only means by which the body can rid itself of heat is by evaporation. So, when the surrounding temperature is higher than the skin temperature, anything that prevents adequate evaporation will cause the internal body temperature to rise. In **Upanaha Sweda** if it is Sagni Type, the warm paste of herbs is applied on affected part that increases the local skin temperature and further it prevents heat loss a thick layer of herbal paste works as a bad conductor of heat. It also maintains the humidity and moisture of the skin to optimal level hence also prevents loss by evaporation as Humidity affects thermoregulation by limiting sweat evaporation and thus heat loss. Thus application of **Upanaha** maintains temperature of af-
fected area to be slightly higher than the others and that too for minimum of 12 hours. It is known that decreased blood circulation in tissue is associated with the development of pain. An association between decreased blood flow and knee pain has been reported. Long-term local heat treatment using Upanaha may improve blood flow in periarticular tissue, resulting in pain relief. Inflammatory mediators are flushed from affected site due to Upanaha. In addition, the effects of local heat treatment include an increase in collagen fiber extensibility, analgesic effects due to an increase in the pain threshold, and effects on muscle metabolism. Commonly Arkapatra, Charma or Kshaumavastra are applied over Upanaha. All these are bad conductor of heat thus prevents heat loss through radiation and conduction. Arkapatra especially is a xerophytic plant that live in arid conditions and have elaborate structural and physiological modifications that reduce water loss. Desert plants show high stomatal resistance, to reduce water loss.

Absorption of medicinal contents and Providing oleation/ absorption of excess moisture from affected part: Ruksha and Snigdha are two types of the Upanaha. In Ruksha Upanaha no Sneha is added, instead Gomutra, Dhangamla etc. are used. Thus, in Ruksha Upanaha the Sweda not only provides the heat but also is able to absorb the excess Kleda from affected part as a result Samata of the affected joint decreases that reduces the joint inflammation. On opposite side Snigdha Upanaha increases the oleation of the joint due to local absorption of fats in circulation. Slight increase of temperature of skin during Upanaha Sweda causes better absorption of medicinal contents of the drug and the oil used due to increased permeability. An increase in temperature increases the fluidity of the lipophilic layers between the corneocytes which in turn increases the skin permeability. It has also been suggested that an increase in temperature affects the lipid viscosity by causing a transition of the lipid in the stratum corneum from a gel to a liquid-crystalline phase. all these factors together makes possible the absorption of medicinal contents of Upanaha.

Supporting and Limiting movement of affected joints: Braces or belts are commonly used in cases of Arthritis. Upanaha is the only Sweda that uses Bandhana thus giving effect of Knee braces along with Swedana. Menisci serve as washers to increase stability within the joint and to distribute load so that when the meniscus is intact, focal stress is kept at low levels.

DISCUSSION

The word Upanaha is derived from the Sanskrit word upanahana, meaning bandage. The procedure of applying warm herbal paste to the effected part of the body followed by bandaging is referred to upanaha sweda. It is a type of ekanga sweda which can be done with or without heating the medicine. If upanaha is done during day, it should be removed at night and if done during night, it should be removed in the morning. It is usually done in osteoarthritis, Tennis elbow & vathakanta. Application of Upanaha prevents excessive movement of joint thus reduces inflammation due to reduction in this focal stress. Sandhigatavata(Osteoarthritis) is a disease dealing with musculoskeletal system affecting the major joints. Upanaha sweda mentioned by Charaka Susrutha and Vagbhatta gives the classical reference of its application and efficacy in the treatment of sandhigata vata. Meniscal tears due to excessive joint movement and obesity lead to increased focal stress across the joint and subsequently high rates of Osteoarthritis. Also, it helps joint to distribute the weight of the body evenly. However normal static exercises which are indicated in most cases of arthritis can be performed along with Upanaha to prevent the loss of muscle bulk around the joint.

CONCLUSION

Upanaha Sweda is a useful Swedana method in joint disorders and acts by prevention of heat loss from body, increasing the absorption of medicinal contents through skin, increasing or removing Kleda from affected joint depending upon the type of drug utilized.
and by supporting and limiting the movement of the affected joint.

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