SHIRODHARA – THE STRESS MANAGEMENT THERAPY OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT
Lifestyle of the modern era leads to poor health in many ways. These lifestyle changes vitiate doshas and ultimately cause various diseases. Purification therapy is a unique feature of Ayurveda involving the complete cleansing of the body and thereby eliminating vitiated doshas. Shirodhara is one such purificating and rejuvenating therapy. The word Shirodhara breaks down into two ideas: Shiro, meaning head, and dhara which mean flow. Together they form a concept that aims to bring physical and emotional balance by rejuvenating the spirit and preserving health by relieving stress. Shirodhara works primarily on the “Manomaya Kosha” as it is referred to in Ayurveda. It is traditionally used to calm the nerves, harmonize vata constitutions, restore the nerves, release stored emotions and free the mind from stress. In Ayurveda it is considered an important tool in the pursuit of higher states of consciousness.

Keywords: Shirodhara, stress, purification, rejuvenation

INTRODUCTION
Along with the economic advancement, man is going far away from Nature, and in order to find an honorable place in the society, he is often exposed to physical fatigue and mental tension. This stressful living is the primary culprit responsible for many of the present day maladies of psycho-neurotic nature. According to ayurveda, the function of the mind and nerves is dependent upon vayu or vata. All the functions of the body, according to ayurveda are controlled by three elements which in ayurvedic parlance are called doshas. Shirodhara is a classical and a well-established ayurvedic procedure of slowly and steadily dripping medicated oil or other liquids on the forehead. The word shiro means head and the word dhara means stream. This procedure induces a relaxed state of awareness that results in a dynamic psycho-somatic balance. Shirodhara is one of the most powerful treatments to relieve Vata (wind) in the mind. Preoccupied with swarming thoughts, the mind has a difficult time slowing down. This can lead to inability to handle stress, creating nervousness, anxiety, depression, insomnia, fa-
tigue, psychological disorders, and more\textsuperscript{1}. Shirodhara is the specific treatment for these disorders and any other disorder that is stress related.

**SHIRODHARA: CLASSICAL DESCRIPTION AND TYPES**

Shirodhara is a titillating form of snehan treatment, whereby the Taila or therapeutic substance methodically drips along a course thread onto the forehead. A metal or clay vessel, the dharapatra, is suspended directly above the forehead. This treatment involves pouring a stream of Taila over the patient’s forehead. Most commonly medicated Tiltaila is used for this treatment. Traditionally, specifically prepared Shastrayukta tailas, milk, or buttermilk are used. The taila or other fluid is poured into the pot, with which then seeps through a hole in the bottom of the pot and slides down a 4-inch-long thread, half of which hangs through the hole. The drops of taila from the thread drip directly onto the area of SringatakaMarma, or center of the forehead. An ancient technique, Shirodhara is meant to be maintained at a certain rhythmic flow while awakening the Marmasthana. Vast and miraculous healing occurs when this technique is performed to perfection. The rhythm of the taila trickling onto the SringatakaMarma, which is the seat of our cognitive vision, evokes deep cognitive memories. Through the arousal of these memories, bodily tissues are transformed and good health is restored. Before Shirodhara is administered, the preliminary procedure of abhyanga is performed. A soporific treat, Shirodhara soothes and invigorates the senses as well as the mind. A total state of wellness is induced in the process. There are several kinds of dhara techniques, depending on the medium for dripping. For example, takradhara uses taila that is prepared with the curd of cow’s milk. Kshiradhara uses cow’s milk mixed with some medicinal herbs such as bala (Sidacordifolia) or satavari (Asparagus rasemosus) or musta (Cyperusrotundus). Tailadhara uses medicated taila mixed with cow’s milk, water, herbs and tiltaila.

Different liquids are used depending on the conditions being treated. Commonly used liquids include water, various tailas, buttermilk, or coconut water. First, the taila stream or dhara should be thick and heavy. Second, the taila stream should be continuous so that if the treatment needs to last an hour, it can be provided. Third, the taila needs to be warmed and needs to be maintained just above body temperature at all times. The fourth component is that the stream needs to be moveable and not stationary.

Generally, tilataila processed with various medicinal herbs is used for Shirodhara. However, milk and buttermilk processed with herbs are also used in this treatment depending on the condition.

**INDICATIONS**

Patients of Insomnia with mild hypertension, mild depression and anxiety disorders without any complications of any other diseases can be treated optimally with Shirodhara. Shirodhara is suitable for patients suffering from Shiroroga, metabolic disorders, and the different kinds of mental diseases described in Ayurveda. It has long been conducted to combat insomnia, headache, anxiety neurosis, depression, schizophrenia, motor-neurosis, depression, schizophrenia, motor-neuron disease, hypertension, and several kinds of psychosis. Shirodhara has been shown to be effective in attention deficit/hyperactively disorder in children, hyperten-
sion, menopause, cerebral ataxia, general anxiety disorder, headache, and insomnia. Vata Disorders: prickling pain in the head; loss of hair; loss of hearing; fatigue and mental exhaustion; grayish coating on the tongue; dryness of face and scalp; constipation.

Pitta Disorders: burning sensation in head and body; ulcerated or inflammatory conditions of the head; pharyngitis; conjunctivitis; excess sweating; dimness of vision; blood disorders; hemorrhage; jaundice; herpes; yellowish coating on the tongue; greenish or yellowish coloring of urine and faeces.

Kapha Disorders: excessive sleep; heaviness of body; indigestion; mucus; obesity; weak digestion; white coating on the tongue; white urine and faeces; loss of appetite; repulsion for food; anorexia. In addition to relieving the disorders listed above, this treatment has the added effect of awakening the third eye, invigorating the body and mind, and stimulating cognitive memories.

EFFECTS OF SHIRODHARA

The neurophysiological mechanism of the effects of Shirodhara on the psychophysiological changes may be related to the tactile stimulation of the skin or hair follicles innervated by the first branch of the trigeminal nerves. The impulses would be transmitted to the thalamus through the principal nucleus and forward to the cerebral cortex (somato-sensory field) or limbic system. While most Ayurvedic therapies have their impact on the physical and energy sheaths of the subtle body system, Shirodhara most effectively purifies the mental sheath, where patterns of behavior (vasanas) and emotional traumas can distract the mind from its’ role in supporting good health and spiritual growth. When during a therapy the patient is taken into a deep, meditative state of silence, the basal metabolic rate is significantly lowered, and with successive treatment, it is lowered even more. If the body were a lake, it would become totally calm and crystal clear. In this state the body experiences itself more profoundly as a unified field of consciousness rather than thousands of physical parts. In this procedure the metabolic rate drops, and the brain waves become slow and coherent. The state of calm achieved with Shirodhara is unparalleled by other relaxation techniques, and it brings the nervous system into the depths of inner silence.

MECHANISM

The medicated liquid that is poured from a height of 4 angula on the forehead produces electromagnetic waves.

Strikes on the surface of the skin and electromagnetic waves are created and transferred to the cerebral cortex and hypothalamus.

Hypothalamus acts as the centre of stimulation and inhibition centre in the body hence stimulating effect created on the hypothalamus.

It results in the secretion of various neurotransmitters like epinephrine, serotonin, dopamine, etc.,

Hypothalamus controls the function of the pituitary gland, which is known as the master gland of our body. Pituitary gland in turn, controls all the systems of body.
DISCUSSION

A standardized Shirodhara leads to a state of alert calmness similar to the relaxation response observed in meditation. The clinical benefits observed with Shirodhara in anxiety neurosis, hypertension, and stress aggravation due to chronic degenerative diseases could be mediated through these adaptive physiological effects. A total feeling of wellness, mental clarity, and comprehension is experienced in this process. Shirodhara stimulates the pineal gland which produces the hormone melatonin. Melatonin regulates the wake and sleep cycles of the body. In the procedure of Shirodhara, a particular pressure and vibration is created over the forehead. The vibration is amplified by the hollow sinus present in the frontal bone. The vibration is then transmitted inwards through the fluid medium of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This vibration along with little temperature may activate the functions of thalamus and the basal forebrain which then brings the amount of serotonin and catecholamine to the normal stage inducing the sleep. The procedure of Shirodhara brings the SanjnavahaSrotas in peaceful state of rest which helps in inducing sleep. The process of Shirodhara also produces a meditation effect which helps to overcome the complaint of insomnia. The method Shirodhara produces almost similar effects as that of Yoganidra technique in yogic science.

CONCLUSION

Now a days, Shirodhara is becoming popular, because of its wonderful effects like relieving fatigue and promoting relaxation. As taila is poured on the forehead, the nervous system is deeply stilled. The brain waves slow down and become coherent. Once the brain is quieted, the pranavaha and manovahasrotas begin to transport prana, oxygen, and other necessary nutrients to the brain. When the brain is quieted and the srotas are activated, the cerebral circulation is greatly improved, and access to these mood stabilizing receptors is enhanced. The result is better brain function, mood stability, and improved stress handling ability. Shirodhara may be the oldest, but is the most skillful healing technique that manipulates cerebral circulation, cerebral function, and the state of consciousness. It may provide a new tool and new knowledge for modern brain research into consciousness. Furthermore, it may open new paradigms for exploring what we refer to as spiritual biotechnology.

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