



ROLE OF *MARMA CHIKITSA* IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STRESS

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<https://doi.org/10.46607/iamj03p9032025>

(Published Online: March 2025)

Open Access

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Article Received: 06/02/2025 - Peer Reviewed: 27/02/2025 - Accepted for Publication: 08/03/2025.



ABSTRACT

Marma are vital points on the body at the junction of *Mamsa* (Muscle), *Sira* (Vein), *Snayu* (Ligament), *Asthi* (Bone) and *Sandhi* (Joint). It is also called *Jeevasthan* and *Pranayatana*. A total of 107 *Marma* is accepted universally by all *Acharya* of *Ayurveda*. *Marma chikitsa* can stimulate specific vital body points to enhance the 'Pranic energy'. It can be defined as the technique to stimulate *Marma* points in a certain way at a critical moment for healing. This is the 'Pranic Healing' method, i.e., to heal the body without any medicines. They help in removing blockages at mental levels and combat negative emotions. Stress is unavoidable in human beings, caused by several factors leading to several disease states. In modern times, there is a rise in the number of cases suffering from mental health issues. 'Stress' may refer to external and internal affairs that trigger negative emotions. It may be physical, physiological or psychological; out of these, psychological stress needs to be addressed as it disturbs social welfare and can damage someone's mental health and personal safety. There is a certain *Marma* on the head and neck region that can powerfully relieve modern-day stress.

Keywords: *Ayurveda*, *Marma*, stress.

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, stress has become a common phenomenon. Modern life can be incredibly demanding, and it is not uncommon to feel overwhelmed by the multiple responsibilities and competing demands that come with it. Balancing work, family, relationships, health, and personal interests can be challenging, and the fast pace of modern life can exacerbate the stress.

Marma points are vital energy points in the body, as described in ancient *Ayurvedic* texts. These points are considered intersections of the body, mind and soul and are located where *Mamsa* (muscles), *Sira* (veins), *Snayu* (ligaments), *Asthi* (bones) and *Sandhi* (joints) meet¹. According to *Ayurveda*, there are 107 *Marma* points (excluding the mind), each influencing both the physical and subtle energies of the body². These are very vulnerable to injuries and may lead to complications or death. These points are key Prana (life force) centres and are believed to regulate energy flow throughout the body.

Marma Chikitsa is the therapeutic application of *Marma* points to promote healing, balance and well-being. It is a principle of *Ayurveda* that involves stimulating specific *Marma* points through gentle massage, pressure or other techniques to unblock energy pathways and restore harmony in the body. *Marma Chikitsa* aligns perfectly with the holistic principles of *Ayurveda*, which aims to promote comprehensive health and well-being at all levels, i.e., physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. To conduct an in-depth study of stress and *Marma* science based on classical *Ayurveda* texts and existing literature.
2. To identify and examine the *effective Marma points* in managing stress.
3. To explore *Marma Chikitsa* for relieving stress.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Literature on stress, *Marma*, and *Marma chikitsa* was collected from different *Ayurveda* texts, modern books, previously published articles, and internet media.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

STRESS

According to Hans Selye, 'Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it'. Morgan says, 'Stress is an internal state which can be caused by physical demands on the body or by environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resources for coping'.

Types of stress³

According to 'Selye' there are two types of stress-

1. Eustress or positive stress—The optimal amount of stress helps to promote health and growth. Eustress is referred to as beneficial stress or good stress. It produces positive feelings of excitement.
2. Distress or damaging stress or negative stress or bad stress is known for the manifestation of various disorders like hypertension, peptic ulcer, ulcerative colitis, coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus, IBS, behavioural disorders like anxiety, depression, emotional disorders, insomnia, etc.

The other types of stress are-

1. Physical stress -

Physical stress is the stress that affects the individual's physical health conditions. There are numerous causes of physical stress, i.e. various types of health problems and illnesses, wounds, injuries, infections, toxins, inadequate light, lack of electricity, fatigue, insufficient oxygen supply, deficiencies of essential nutrients, food allergies and sensitivities, unhealthy eating habits, dehydration, substance abuse, dental challenges and musculoskeletal misalignments and imbalances.

2. Psychological stress-

Psychological stress is the stress that takes place as a result of various types of psychological problems, i.e. anger, depression, trauma, anxiety and frustration.

3. Emotional stress –

Emotional stress can be more severe and painful than other types of stress when the work pressure is too much within the workplace, or the individuals experience strenuous terms and relationships with other

individuals, i.e. family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, supervisors, employers or other individuals. When this stress is experienced in a major form, it adversely affects the physical and psychological health conditions.

Causes of stress

1. Biological factors – like nutritional status, general health, exposure to toxins, biological sensitivities.

- 2. Psychological factors – include intelligence, verbal skills, morale, personality, past experiences, self-concept, motivation etc.
- 3. Sociocultural factors include age, gender, education, income, occupation, social position, religious upbringing and belief, and political affiliation.

Stressors

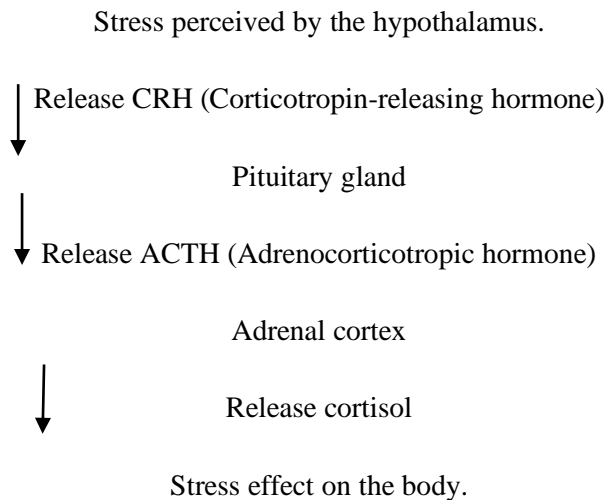
	Stressors	Examples
1	Physiological	Trauma, disease, radiation, infectious processes, etc.
2	Environmental	Pollutants, sensory overload, noise, foul odour etc.
3	Socio-cultural	Financial status, vocational pressure, family dysfunction, poverty, unemployment etc.
4	Chronic	Permanent functional disability, chronic illnesses, etc.
5	Major complex stressor	Involving larger groups such as natural calamities, war, terrorism, etc.

Symptoms/effects of stress

- 1. Physiological reactions—Rapid increase in pulse rate, muscles become tense, dry mouth, trembling, feeling sick in the stomach.
- 2. Affective reactions – Increased anxiety, restlessness, pessimism, depression, anger and irritability, lack of interest in usual activities, poor control over emotion.
- 3. Cognitive reactions - Poor attention and concentration, inability to learn new things, forgetfulness, improper judgement, confusion, unhealthy thoughts.

The biological process of stress

- The sympathetic nervous system becomes activated, responding to stressful conditions and regulating the body's physiological processes.
- The amygdala has a role in emotional processes and regulates mental factors like anger, grief, fear, etc., while responding to stress.
- Adrenal glands are responsible for producing stress hormone, which is secreted at the time of stress response.



Stages of stress⁴

1. Alarm stage - Fight or flight response

It is the body's immediate reaction. Virtually anything an individual perceives as threatening, worrisome or dangerous can trigger the response, and each person has different tolerance and sensitivity levels. In this phase, effects like an increased heart rate, sweating, nervous fidgeting and feeling tense, anxious, worried or scared as the body engages in fight-or-flight to react to the cause of stress. The sympathetic nervous system is stimulated, and biological changes like increased heart rate and blood pressure occur to prepare the body to take action.

2. Resistance stage - Stress response

The second stage is when the body attempts to return to a normal balance, counteracting the "alarm" response in the first stage. The parasympathetic nervous system begins to bring the heart rate, the body's physiological functions return to normal, and anyone can better focus on attending to the source of the stress. In this phase, you may think you're ready to take on more stress, or you may get the impression the threat has passed because the sense of urgency is reduced. But if the cause persists, the body can experience adverse effects like fatigue, sleep disturbances, irritability, poor concentration, chronic anxiety and other challenges.

3. Exhaustion stage - End of the stress response

The final stage is exhaustion, which results from your body trying to combat stress for an extended period. In this stage, you feel run down and have less energy than usual. You may fall ill more easily, as your immune system can also weaken due to stress. This stage is a signal that your stress is severe. Long-term psychological changes can occur as well, potentially causing you to become depressed, sleep-deprived, and/or chronically anxious. Chronic stress may lead to a weakened immune system and increase the chances of diabetes, heart disease, ulcers, viral infections, depression, and other potential effects of stress.

Stress in Ayurveda

Stress factors, such as physical, mental, social, etc., can cause all types of morbidities. These are factors responsible for degenerative changes in Dhatu and

Oja Kshaya. Psychological/mental factors are also responsible for stress. Raja becomes aggravated due to Krodha and Chinta, while Tamas is aggravated due to Bhaya, Shoka, Moha, etc. When Raja and Tamas overcome the Sattva, stress manifests.

Prajnaparadha is a fundamental concept in *Ayurveda* that refers to the "crime against wisdom" or an error in judgment. It is considered one of the primary causes of physical and mental imbalances, including stress, in today's world. *Prajnaparadha* occurs when a person consciously or unconsciously acts against their knowledge of what is right or beneficial, leading to harmful consequences on both the mind and body.

MARMA AND MARMA CHIKITSA

In the *Ayurveda* treatise, the concept of Marma is described in *SushrutaSamhita*. *Sushruta* defines Marma as the junction of *Mamsa*, *Sira*, *Snayu*, *Asthi* and *Sandhi*. 'Prana' resides by nature in these places. Any infliction or trauma to the point of their situation causes death or serious damage or severe pain to the body; therefore, these areas are called *Marma*. According to *Sushruta*, there are 107 Marma in the human body, the same is followed by *Ashtanga sangraha* and *Ashtanga hrudaya*, while *Charaka* has given prime importance to three majors *Marmani*; these *Tri-marma* are *Hridaya* (heart), *Basti* (Bladder) and *Shira* (Head)⁵.

Ayurveda represents a very effective alternative system of medicine with its effective therapies like Yoga, Mud Therapy, *AharaChikitsa* and many others. Among these, *MarmaChikitsa* is developing and gaining importance. It is the precise art of stimulating the vital points of an individual's body in precisely the right place at a critical moment for healing and bringing flawless results in many disorders that create hindrances to the healthy life of an individual. The basics of *MarmaChikitsa* can be considered as *AngirasiChikitsa*.

Guidelines for MarmaChikitsa:

To perform *MarmaChikitsa*, one has to know the actual location of the specific Marma. The exact location of the Marma varies according to an individual and the measurement of the body and body parts. The site concerns bony prominence, joints, and other

body structures. The distance is measured using a finger (*AnguliPramana*).

Different methods of stimulating and affecting the *Marma* points to gain therapeutic benefits are available in literature. These are-

1. Frawley et al. have described several methods of *Marma* Therapy, which may be classified into three main groups, i.e.⁶.
 - (i) massage and energy methods, including techniques like *Abhyanga* (massage), aromatic oils, pressure, etc.
 - (ii) herbal methods, including applying herbal paste, taking medicinal herbs, etc.
 - (iii) using instruments, which include *Acupuncture*, heat application, etc.
2. Lad and Durve have described 10 methods of stimulating the *Marma* (Techniques of *Marma Chikitsa*), which include oleation, sudation, dry massage, deep pressure, application of paste and heat, puncturing with a needle, etc.
3. Joshi has been working on *Marma* stimulation with a very simple method of giving pressure on these points; the rate of applying pressure is by the heartbeat and respiratory rate. This technique depends upon three basic things–
 - Identification of *Marma* point
 - Giving proper pressure on *Marma* point with the help of thumb and fingers
 - Relaxation of *Marma* point
4. Schrott et al. explain 20 methods to treat the *Marma*, which include techniques like massage, pouring oil, application of herbal paste or heat or light, taking herbal medicines, using aromatic oils, *Yagya*, *yogasana*, *pranayama*, etc.⁹.

MARMA CHIKITSA IN STRESS

Marma chikitsa is done on following *Marma*-

*Shankha Marma*¹⁰-

भ्रुवोरन्तयोरूपरिकर्णललाटयोर्मधेशङ्खौ, (सु.सू. 6/27)

Over the temples (head).

Technique of stimulation-

1. *Marma* massage by index finger in a gentle circular method
 2. Aroma therapy by using almond oil or sesame oil
- Sthapani Marma*¹¹-

भ्रुवोर्मध्येस्थपनी, (सु.सू. 6/27)

Point situated between two eyebrows.

Technique of stimulation-

1. Join your hands and place the interphalangeal joint of your thumb by flexion action or by applying pressure to it and then releasing it.
2. *Trataka kriya* (focusing on the flame), *Bhramari Pranayama*
3. *Shirodhara* with milk, *Sneha* or *Takramassage*.

*Simanta Marma*¹²

पञ्चसन्धयःशिरसिविभक्ताःसीमन्तानाम, (सु.सू. 6/27)

Cranial suture.

Technique of stimulation-

1. *Shirodhara*,
2. *Shiropichu*,
3. oil massage,
4. pressure massage

*Adhipathi Marma*¹³

मस्तकाभ्यन्तरोपरिष्ठात्सिरासन्धिसन्निपातोरोमावर्तोऽधिपतिः, (सु.सू. 6/27)

On top of head is surrounded by ring of hair.

Technique of stimulation-

Place a single hand finger together over the point, give the pressure and release pressure.

*Krikatika Marma*¹⁴

शिरोग्रीवयोःसन्धानेकृकाटिके, ... (सु.सू. 6/27)

Point form by head and neck junction (Atlanto occipital joint).

Technique of stimulation-

Fix all ten fingers in each other on the back of the neck, using thinner eminence hand pressure 10-15 times.

DISCUSSION

There are 107 *Marma* points on the body's surface, and *MarmaChikitsa* utilizes these points for healing. The knowledge of these energy points is a valuable gem within the vast wisdom of *Ayurveda*. It offers a method to address emotional disturbances and provide deep, lasting relief by going beyond symptom management. *Marma* points can be stimulated through various techniques, including touch, massage, application of essential oils, vibration and breath work. For example, *ShankhaMarma*, located near the temples, can be stimulated by massaging in a

circular motion with the index finger. This helps direct energy to the brain, providing a calming effect that promotes sleep. *Sthapani Marma*, situated between the eyebrows, is a powerful point that governs the *Agya Chakra* (Third Eye *Chakra*). It influences *Prana* (life force), *Vatadosha*, senses, mind and pituitary gland. Stimulating this *Marma* aids in awakening higher perceptual abilities associated with the third eye.

Additionally, practices like *Bhramari Pranayama* (a humming bee breath) and *Shirodhara* with milk, oil or buttermilk are highly effective in quickly reducing stress. Combining the stimulation of these *Marma* points with such techniques helps promote emotional balance, calm the mind, regulate the flow of *Prana* and relieve stress effectively. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, *Marma* points are sites where the three *Dosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and their subtle forms, *Prana* (life force), *Tejas* (inner radiance) and *Ojas* (vital essence)—reside, along with the three mental qualities or *Guna* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*). Stimulating these *Marma* points helps in balancing the *Dosha* and their subtle forms. As seats of *Prana*, *Marma* points play a crucial role in regulating the body's physical and subtle processes. Proper stimulation of these points can influence *Prana*, enabling it to clear blockages and either increase or decrease energy flow in the body. This modulation of energy currents leads to various healing effects.

Additionally, *Marma* points are linked to the subtle body's *Nadi* (the subtle channels) and *Chakra* (energy centres). The *Chakra* corresponds to the seven primary *Marma* points or Pranic centres, which energize the other *Marma* points. By stimulating these points, the flow of *Prana* through the *Chakras* is enhanced, which activates the *Chakra* themselves. This activation can awaken dormant brain areas, improving control over the body-mind system, including the autonomic nervous system and various organs, thereby promoting overall healing. How Marma Therapy Helps in Stress Relief:

1. Improving *Prana* Flow (Vital Energy Flow):

In *Marma* therapy, gentle stimulation (through pressure or massage) is applied to specific *Marma* points

to improve the flow of *Prana* (vital energy). This unblocks stagnated energy and removes obstacles in the body's natural flow, which helps reduce stress levels and create a feeling of well-being.

2. Calming the Nervous System:

Marma therapy activates the parasympathetic nervous system by stimulating key points. This reduces the breathing and heart rate, promoting a relaxation response. *Marma* points on the head, forehead, and chest area are particularly effective in calming the mind, reducing anxiety, and releasing tension.

3. Balancing Hormones:

Chronic stress can disrupt hormone levels, increasing stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. *Marma* therapy helps regulate the endocrine system, balancing hormone levels to reduce stress and improve mood naturally.

4. Strengthening the Mind-Body Connection:

Marma's points are connected to the mind-body relationship. Stimulating these points enhances self-awareness, helping the individual better recognise and respond to stress. It also enables emotional release, relieving emotional and psychological blocks that contribute to stress.

5. *Dosha* Balancing:

Stress tends to increase *Vatadosha*, which can lead to anxiety, restlessness, and mental instability. *Marma* therapy specifically helps calm *Vata*, bringing balance to all three *Dosha* and reducing symptoms of stress.

6. Enhancing Circulation and Relaxation:

Marma therapy promotes blood circulation and lymphatic drainage, relieving muscle tension, fatigue, and stiffness that often accompany stress. Improved circulation helps reduce physical manifestations of stress and promotes relaxation.

CONCLUSION

The above study can conclude that *guda* plays a vital part in the excretory process of the human body. It helps in the excretion of *mala* and *apan vayu* or excretory products of our body. Along with these functions, it has significant surgical importance in the human body. Its structural relevance should be kept

in mind while performing any surgical or para-surgical procedures. Otherwise, it can be a life-threatening condition.

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Source of Support: Nil

Conflict of Interest: None Declared

How to cite this URL: Deepa & Rakesh Kumar Sharma: Role of Marma Chikitsa in the Management of Stress. International Ayurvedic Medical Journal {online} 2025 {cited March2025}