

THE BASICS OF HEALTHY LIVING (SWASTHAVRITTA) – A BOON FROM AYURVEDA

Dewan Shweta Chouhan Mahesh Baldev Kumar

Department of Basic Principles, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

In today's fast life, diseases like respiratory tract disorders, lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes are mounting in everyday and are burning challenge for the medical system in the current scenario. Immunological status is continuously being degraded with the passage of time and centuries. In addition, the environmental derangement in the form of various kinds of pollution is also on rise because of industrialization and urbanization. Immunity is the capacity of an individual to resist an infection i.e. invasion, multiplication and production of a disease by an organism. And this can be attained by getting proper nutrition, minimal exposure to pollutants, reducing stress in one's life. And *Ayurveda*, the science of life caters to all these needs very effectively. Maintenance of a healthy life by one's own ethical code of conduct is called *Swasthavritta*, which literally means the regime of abiding by one's own nature. One who stands in the balanced status of one's own self is called *Swastha*. Being in this state is *Swasthya* that is the state of equilibrium of *Dhatu*. It raises the limit and standard of life; so as to enable man to fulfill his personal and social obligations perfectly. In other words it improves both qualitative & quantitative aspects of man not only in individual perspective but also in relation to social environment.

Keywords: *Swastha, Ritucharya, Dincharya, Swasthavritta*

INTRODUCTION

The glory of *Ayurveda* lies in its evolution of theory for maintenance of health. Centuries have passed by; the nature of disease perhaps has changed, new diseases have appeared and some of the old ones are almost extinct. But *Ayurvedic* theory of maintenance of health stands for all times and circumstances justifying ancient needs and catering for the future. This theory of maintenance of positive health that is "*Swasthavritta*" is dealt in detail in the second *Catushka* of *Charaka Samhita*¹ where detailed description of *Swasthavritta* has been given.

Now a day, every person is running after life's goal. Hence, does not have time to think and act for the healthy life. In addition, the environmental derangement in the form of various kinds of pollution is also on rise because of industrialization and urbanization. This concept of fast life has led to many allergic diseases like respiratory, skin related problems and also lifestyle disorders like obesity and diabetes mellitus. And the lower immunity level in people has further increased simple diseases turning into grave, targeting lives of people. Immunity is the capacity of an individual to resist an infection i.e. invasion, multiplication and pro-

duction of a disease by an organism.² It is defined as a state of resistance through the defense activities of human body against the disease. And this can be attained by getting proper nutrition, minimal exposure to pollutants, reducing stress in one's life. The practical approach of chapters five to eight in *Sutra Sthana* described in *Charak Samhita* describes the above similar benefits. By these chapters *Charaka* gives the ways to live in accordance with the nature. Overall he explains the ways to *Sukhayu* and *Hitayu* and gives stress on preventive and social medicine.³ He explains the advantages of prevention in indulgence of three basic *Hetus* i.e. *Atiyoga Hinayoga, Ayoga* of the *Kala, Prajna* and *Indriya*. Human body is greatly influenced by external environment. Many of the exogenous rhythm and endogenous rhythm have specific phase relationship with each other; which means that they interact and synchronize with each other.⁴ Any change in the external environment causes change in one's body. So it is advised to follow such regimen which helps in adapting the external environment smoothly.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To enlighten the basics of *Swasthavritta* to its full perspective and to elaborate this concept w.s.r *dincharya, ritucharya Sadvritta*, and utilize it thoroughly to understand the benefit of healthy living.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study Ayurveda elementary books were thoroughly searched where the concept of *Swasthavritta* has been described. It was analyzed and comprehended.

Concept of healthy living (swasthavritta):

The word "*Swasthavritta*" is compounded by two words (1) *Swastha* and (2) *Vritta*.

Swastha: *Swa* means - Innate, natural,

inherent, peculiar, one's own, belonging to one self; *Av* means -To protect, defined, do good to; *Stha* means -To stand, do well, and live. In total it means "one's own stand to protect life". Therefore, one who stands excellently without any diseases and where there is no stimulatory factor for disequilibrium of *Dhatus* is a *swastha*.

- **Vritta** means: Worshiping of preceptor, being compassionate / merciful, Maintenance of purity. Therefore, controlling mind and sensory organs, commencing good things are included under *Vritta*.

Definition of Swasthavritta

The word *Swasthavritta* is compounded from three words - *Swa, Sth* and *Vritta* contains a trinity of ideas, resembling the trinity of *Dosas* in *Ayurveda*. The three words represent in themselves the joint effort of all the *Dosas* in the body, when working in full co-operation and co-ordination with one another. The result of this concord of *Dosha* is health and happiness. *Swasthavritta* thus helps one to attain the goal of perpetual normal health and happiness. It represents stability or maintenance and it means "one who stands". In *Ayurveda* it means one who is stable in carrying out his duties and attends the requirements of body i.e. A "*Swastha*" is one who enjoys normal life.

Charaka has frequently used the term *Prakrti, Swasthya, Sukha, Arogya, Dhatusamya* as synonyms of health. He stresses that disorder is disequilibrium of *Dhatus* and their equilibrium is health. Health is known as happiness while disorder is unhappiness.⁵

Characteristics of Swastha⁶:

- Persons having proportionate musculature and compactness of the body with strong

sensory organs will overcome onslaught of diseases.

- Can withstand hunger and thirst.
- Can withstand heat of the sun and cold.
- Can withstand physical exercises.
- They can digest and assimilate the food properly

It is quite natural for human being to cherish a healthy and happy life but the concept of *Swasthavritta* described in *samhitas* is not aimed at mere happy and healthy life. The life so desired should be good leading to fulfillment of four main objectives of human life i.e. *Purusartha*. If this fulfillment is set aside the pursuit of healthy life is worthless.

Charaka has explained the ways to prevent disease preserve and promote the health of the person with simple changes in the habits of the persons. The concept of *Swasthavritta* deals with the aim of '*Swasthasya Swasthyraksanam*' as a whole, also it is having its role from chapters of *Sutrasthana* to *Siddhasthana*, because aim of *Ayurveda* is always to maintain *Ayu*. It has been described in following chapters with particular subject in mind:

Relevance of food in chapter MATRASITIIYA: Of all the factors for the maintenance of positive health food taken in proper quantity occupies the most important position.⁷ But body is subjected to diurnal changes or circadian rhythm. To maintain the normalcy of rhythm *Charaka* has elaborated specific regimen to be followed in daily life in this chapter.

Relevance of ritucharya in chapter TASYASITIIYA: In previous chapter, it is proposed that food taken in appropriate quantity helps the individual in bringing about strength, complexion, happiness and longevity without disturbing the equilibrium

of *Dhatus* and *Doshas* of the body. This is possible only if one adopts suitable diet and regimen according to seasonal homologation.

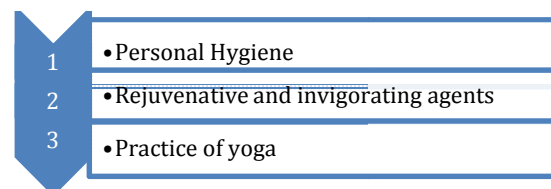
Relevance of urges in chapter NAVEGANDHARANIYA: In previous two chapters food according to diurnal and seasonal changes is dealt with. Food after digestion and metabolism result in production of *Mala* (toxins, feces, urine etc) as end products, if they are not discarded properly, their accumulation in the body leads to the manifestation of all types of disorder.

Relevance of conduct in chapter INDRYOPAKRAMANIYA: Part of the preventive medicine "Normal conduct" is described in this chapter along with the instruction regarding the avoidance of excessive utilization, non utilization and wrong utilization of sense organ and mind. Thus this particular chapter covers all aspects of positive health systematically.

Contents of swasthavritta:

1. Daily regimen (*Dincharya*)
2. Seasonal Regimen (*Ritucharya*)
3. Occasional Occupational duties
4. Precautionary Observances in sexual activity
5. General rules of conduct for the well being of society: Ethical Regimen (*Sadvritta*)
6. Precautionary measures against untimely old age
7. Conduct and Practices to achieve self realization.

Three levels of Preventive Measures



1. First level of Personal Hygiene consists of the appropriate daily routine, seasonal regimen, and ethical conduct. *Swastha* means physically, psychologically and spiritually harmonious condition. Hence various methods, which increase physical, mental and spiritual strength, are included in this branch.

2. Second level is rejuvenation (*Rasayana*) and invigoration (*Vajikarana*). There are special foods and herbs to prevent ageing, strengthen immunity, improve mental faculties and increase vitality. *Vajikarana* drugs are specifically used as aphrodisiac and fertility improving agents.

3. Third level is practicing *Yoga*. Though *Yoga* in itself is a separate faculty; as a form of medicine, it is considered as part of rejuvenation practice of *Ayurveda*. The regular practice of yoga keeps body and mind fit, which provides a feeling of well-being, prevents ageing and inhibits disease.

Benefits of healthy living

By understanding and implementing the concept of *swasthavritta* one can achieve the four main objectives of human life⁸

Service to society (*dharma*)

Service to family (*artha*)

Service to self (*kama*)

Self emancipation (*Moksha*)

Our own misconduct is the cause of diseases. There are three important causes of the diseases, which encompass broadly of all diseases. They are⁹

- Incompatible core relation of the senses with their objects
- Volitional transgression that is wrong use of the will which ultimately occurs due to disregard of advice for the physical and mental health respectively
- Effect of time

Of these three the last cause in unavoidable and prior two causes definitely make the situation worse. This means if we avoid the misconducts the probability of occurrence of diseases will be less. Also to train each individual for treating diseases is not possible but to understand preventive measures to avoid diseases is much easy. The key to health does not lie in the application of drugs but in the prime factors on which our life and vitality is based. The three most important ones are food, sleep and sexual energy.¹⁰ While considering these pillars one should include daily routines like oil massage etc in addition to diet. If one can compliance all the three pillars in proper way, it can be very beneficial for one's life. Hence this all can be attained by study of *Swasthavritta*.

Some highlights on *Dincharya*

Waking up early: A healthy person should arise one and half hour before sunrise.¹¹ This period is called *Brahma Muhurta* because this is the best time for meditation thus acquiring *Brahmajnana* that is supreme knowledge and eternal happiness. Also this is the time when *Vata Dosha* is predominant and helps in easy evacuation of bowels.

Evacuation of Bowel: To get nature's call after getting up from the bed in the morning is a sign of good health. But due to lifestyle and ill habits of many people now a days they do not get proper bowel movement in the morning. This should be avoided.

Body Hygiene: Hands, feet, mouth should be thoroughly washed with soap and water after defecation. This type of cleanliness prevents bacterial contamination.

Dental Hygiene: After defecation proper cleaning of teeth is necessary. Seers have prescribed special herbs for brushing like *Vat (Ficus bengalensis)*, *Vijaysara (Ptero-*

carpus marsupium), *Jati* (*Myristica fragrans*), *Karavira* (*Nelium indicum*), *Arjuna* (*Terminalia arjuna*), *Nimba* (*Azadirachta indica*) and *karanja* (*Pongamia pinnata*).¹²

Cleansing of tongue: It should be cleaned by a flexible and long strip of metal or wood. This stimulates the whole digestive tract and increases the digestive fire.¹³

Cleansing of mouth: *Gandusha* and *Kaval* are both variants of gargling described in *Samhitas*. In *Gandusha* one takes such a large quantity of fluid into the mouth that one is unable to move it inside the mouth. Whereas in *Kaval* one holds and moves the semisolid paste solution in the mouth. Either practices help in removing the odour, stimulates the taste buds, strengthens the gums and teeth and increases the appetite.¹⁴

Application of collyrium: Ever day collyrium should be applied in the eyes. Its regular use increases the brightness of the eyes and strengthens their ability to withstand the bright light.¹⁵

Instillation of Nasal Drops (*Nasya*): All the medicated medicines whether in form of liquid, vapors, powder or smoke when applied inside the nose is called *nasya*. Out of the entire five sense organs nose is termed as the gateway to the head. Regular use of *nasya* helps to keep the nose, ears, eyes clean intact and healthy.¹⁶ Also the voice becomes clear and unobstructed; helps prevent premature graying of hair and baldness, stiffness of neck and jaw.

Smoking of medicinal herbs (*Dhumpana*): Medicated herbs like *Jatamansi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), *Guggulu* (*Commiphora wightii*), *Agaru* (*Aquilaria agallocha*), *Lodhra* (*Symplocos Racemosa*), *Udumbara* (*Ficus racemosa*)¹⁷ when wrapped in a cigarette form are inhaled through nose or mouth but never the fumes are exhaled from nose un-

like normal smoking. This helps alleviating extra *Kapha Dosha* present in head or nose region. Also it is indicated in many diseases especially *Vata Kaphaja* predominant and healthy individual. It prevents premature graying of hair. It is useful in excessive salivation, itching in the mouth, sneezing, sinusitis, pain in the ear and many such diseases pertaining to head and nose region.

Massage (*Mardana*) and oil massage (*Abhyanga*): Rubbing of the body is called *mardana* and when done while using certain oils is called *abhyanga*. Both procedures improve blood circulation in the body, stimulates nervous system, prevents old age and increases longevity.¹⁸

Exercise (*Vyayama*): Everybody should do regular light exercises. With exercise the body grows and become proportionate in shape. It also increases muscular strength. It is best when done to the extent of half the exercising capacity of the individual. When sweat appears on the forehead and armpits, and the respiration becomes quick, exercise should be stopped.¹⁹

Some highlights on *Ritucharya*

The word *Ritu* is derived from the *Sanskrit* root: - 'Ri' which means 'to go'. *Ritu* means time, suitable time, proper time for sacrifice.²⁰ All the environmental factors like the nature of the land, water and various atmospheric phenomenon including temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric-pressure undergo a continuous change and at a time, no two moments are exactly alike in a given place. Thus with the rising sun the temperature keeps on rising and gradually drops at night. These are known as diurnal variations in the temperature.

The maximum and minimum temperature fluctuates daily but it is highest

in summer and lowest in winter. Similarly, all these factors show diurnal as well as seasonal variations and these variations for a particular time are known as season (*Ritu*). So following the regimen according to seasonal variations is *ritucharya*.

By following the lifestyle described in various seasons it counteracts with the predominant *Dosha* accumulated in that particular *ritu*/season. But it is not possible to neutralize completely the adverse effects of environmental factors. That is why seers advised the proposition of *Shodhana karma* (bio purification) to remove the excessive *Dosha* from the body in different seasons.

Kapha Dosha is brought in stomach and is removed from the body by *vamana* i.e medicated vomiting in *vasant ritu*. (spring season)²¹ *Pitta Dosha* is brought to the small intestine and is removed from the body by *virechana* (purgation) in *sharad ritu* (Autumn)²² *Vata Dosha* is brought to the colon and is removed by *asthapana basti* (cleansing enema) in *varsha ritu* (monsoon)²³

Some highlights on *Sadvritta*

‘*Sad*’ means good and ‘*Vritta*’ means regimen. This is code of conduct for keeping good and balanced condition of body and mind.

Speaking truth, avoiding losing of temper in any circumstances, Controlling passions and desires, not harming anyone are some of the ethical conducts described in texts. Some more details are Endeavour to speak pleasant and sweet words, regular meditation, be straight forward and kind, always respecting elders and teachers, acting in courteous and polite manner.²⁴ So in all we can comprehend that *ayurveda* describes all types of conduct whether ethical, moral, physical, or social in detail for the benefit of person following it. For a healthy living bal-

ance between the state of mind and body is essential. By restraining emotions like anger, greed one can control the mind. Also mind and *Vata Dosha* are inter related. By controlling mind we can control the predominant *Dosha* and vice versa. And the above concept caters to that notion effectively.

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda considers the imbalance of the three *Dosha* as the immediate cause of all types of disease. And these are basically dependent on three factors:

Role of sense Organs (*Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga*): There is compatible co relation of sense organs with their objects. Sound, touch, light, taste and smell are the five sense qualities through which environmental factors can enter the human body. And these can be in excess, minimal or perverted. These three abnormal contacts cause diseases. E.g we all know that disturbances in sound waves cause pathological changes in blood. Similarly other abnormal contacts also adversely affect the body.

Role of Intelligence (*Prajnapradha*): It means failure of intelligence or volitional transgression that is wrong use of will. It refers to human weakness by which we resort to substances even after we have experienced them to be harmful. It ultimately leads to misuse of the mind which is caused by the changing states of *rajas* (agitated state) and *tama* (dull state) *mansika Doshas*. This causes development of fear, grief, anger, greed, envy and other negative emotions which imbalance both body and mind.

Role of Time (*Parinama*): By proper efforts one can certainly avoid the first two causes but no one can escape the effects of time. During the change in environment factors there are changes in the body accordingly

according to imbalance states of the *Doshas*, for which seers have proposed the theory of *Panchkarma* or *Shodhana* therapy.

CONCLUSION

Being healthy means balance, harmony and equilibrium in all the physiological activities of body and mind. This harmonious situation gives pleasure and eternal happiness devoid of any stress. And all this can be attained by following the regimen described in texts. Thus at last we can say the concept of *Swasthavritta* is pioneer in the field of medicine propagated by our ancient seers and is basic need for building a healthy society.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Dr. Shweta Dewan

MD Scholar, Dept of Basic Principles,
National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Email: arorau51@yahoo.com

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