

Shatkarma: The Unveil Key for Managing Skin Disorders

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Abstract

Ayurveda classifies various skin conditions under the umbrella term Kushta, and the treatment approaches may vary depending on the specific type of skin disorder and its underlying causes. Ayurveda often attributes skin diseases to imbalances in the Doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha). Psychological factors can involve the interaction between the mind and body, whereas psychosomatic factors influence physical health. Chronic unresolved emotional issues, such as longstanding grief, resentment, or guilt, may contribute to imbalances in the body and, in some cases, be associated with skin problems. Skin diseases with a psychosomatic component may be triggered or aggravated by emotional or mental factors. Shatkarma (cleansing practice) refers to a set of purification practices in traditional Hatha Yoga. These practices are intended to cleanse and purify the body and mind, which prepare for higher states of consciousness and have various therapeutic effects on the body and mind. While individual experiences may vary, these practices can contribute to overall well-being and the promotion of physical and mental health. Cleansing practices, such as Dhauti and Basti, are thought to aid in the detoxification of the body by eliminating the vitiation of Tridosha. Practices like Kapalabhati and Trataka are helpful in dealing with psychological distress, Trataka involves concentrated gazing and is believed to improve focus, concentration, and mental clarity. These practices may be helpful for individuals looking to enhance their cognitive function and reduce mental distractions. Cleansing practices are designed to balance the flow of Prana (life force energy) in the body. This balanced energy is believed to positively impact overall vitality, energy levels, and emotional well-being. The authentic Hatha Yogic texts and electronic literature databases were analysed for this review.

Keywords: Yogic Cleansing Practice, Kushta Rog, Hatha Yoga, Vitiation of Tridosha

Introduction

Skin is the largest organ of the human body(1). Sushruta Samhita classifies skin into seven distinct layers for better understanding of your Prakriti (body constitution) and effect of different Doshas on your skin health. According to Ayurveda, the health of skin relies on the nutrients provided by the Rasadhatu (nutrient fluid, the first of the seven tissues of the body). It is also one of the Gyanendriyas (sensory organs) that caters to the sensation of Sparsha (touch). Skin acts as a barrier to different kinds of activity, as an environmental barrier protecting major organs, as a diffusion barrier preventing water loss and as a metabolic barrier to break down chemicals more quickly after absorption has taken place. It regulates temperature, energy storage, and production of vitamin D, and it is the body's most extensive sense organ for the perception of tactile, thermal, and painful stimuli(2).

Yoga is a diverse and ancient tradition that has evolved over thousands of years. Various types or styles of Yoga have developed, each with its unique emphasis on different aspects of the practice. Hatha Yoga is one of the traditional forms of Yoga that focuses on the internal cleansing of the body. Body cleansing is gained through the practice of the six purificatory techniques. These six cleansing practices in Yoga are known as Shatkarma or Shatkriya, which are said to promote health and well-being by purifying the whole body. In Yoga, cleansing practices are described only in the Hatha Yoga tradition, which is known to balance the constitution of an individual. The major texts of Hatha Yoga, Gheranda Samhita, Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Hatharatnavali discuss the body's purifying process using six different approaches(3,4). The Gheranda Samhita provides a detailed explanation of the advantages and subtypes of cleansing practice. The most recent of the Hatha Yoga scriptures, Hatharatnavali, describes eight different types of purification methods(5). But still, the most well-liked among Yoga practitioners are the six purifying methods mentioned in Swami Swatmarama's Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Cleansing practice harmonise Ida and Pingala, the two primary flows of Prana, leading to mental and bodily harmony and purity. They are essential from the point of view of physical and mental health, these easy methods are also incredibly helpful in treating internal illnesses. One of the main objective of cleansing practice is to balance the Tridosha(6). According to Ayurveda and Hatha Yoga, any imbalance in these Tridosha gives rise to disease. The cleansing practice are also utilized before Pranayama (breathing practice) and other higher practices of Yoga so that the body becomes free from disease and does not create any obstacles on the spiritual path.

Methodology- This reviewed article examined the effects of cleansing practices on skin disorders. Mainly authentic Hatha Yogic texts were analysed for this review. The authentic electronic literature databases were also analysed for supportive evidence.

Ayurvedic perspective on Skin Disease –

The majority of skin diseases and conditions have been classified under Kushta in Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of India(7). Ayurveda differentiates between many kinds of Kushta, each with unique traits and treatment methods. These skin conditions are categorised into many categories in Ayurveda according to the participation of Doshas viz. Vata, Pita, Kapha and other variables. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Western medicine may not always exactly correlate with Ayurvedic principles and terminology. Ayurveda has identified deep etiological factors that contribute to the genesis of skin disorders. Etiological factors are divided into two categories based on their involvement in the genesis of disease that termed in Ayurveda as Sannikrishta Nidana (directly involved factor) or Vipkrishta Nidana (indirectly involved factor)(8).

The consumption of excess Guru Ahara (heavy food), liquids, Snigdha Ahara (graceful food), Mithya Ahara (wrong diet) and Viruddha Ahara (incompatible diet or food items of opposite nature) —all of which are difficult to digest, which is produced dushti in Rasavaha Srotas(9). Guru Ahara also leads Dusti of Mamsavaha Srotas(10). Excessive Drava (liquid) leads to Dushti of Raktavaha Srotas(11). The Viruddha Ahara leads to impairment in Agni (digestive power). The vitiated Agni does not digest even the Laghu Ahara (food substance easy to digest), resulting in state of Ama. The indigested food materials turn sour and acts like a poison, which is termed as Amavisha(12). Tridosha gets provoked by such type of Amavisha(13). In general, dietary materials and behaviours that are detrimental to bodily elements and comparable in quality to bio-humors vitiate the body channels (Srotas). Often having sexual intercourse before food is digested, insulting Gurus (teachers), sins committed in previous birth are also causative factor in the genesis of skin diseases. Ayurveda mentioned a number of things that have a detrimental effect on the psyche and mind, such as insulting gods and instructors, engaging in various immoral actions, and engaging in anti-social and anti-ritualistic behaviours(14).

Shatkarma

Dhauti Kriya - Dhauti literally means 'internal cleansing'. Hathapradipika only discussed Vastra Dhauti in the framework of Dhauti Kriya, but Mahrishi Gheranda has defined other kinds of practices, such as Antar (internal), Danta (tooth), Hrid (cardiac), and Moola Shodhana (purification of the anus), within the terms of Dhauti Kriya. The most favoured varieties of Dhauti include Shankha Prakshalana, Vastra Dhauti, and Vaman Dhauti (Kunjal Kriya).

Kunjala Kriya involves drinking warm saline water for the voluntary induction of vomiting to remove impurities and toxins from the stomach. Vastra Dhauti or Cloth Cleansing technique involves swallowing a long piece of thin, clean, and smooth cotton cloth of about 2 m in length and 4 cm in width and then gently pulling it out of the mouth in a slow and controlled manner to clean the digestive tract. The Shankha Prakshalana or Varisara Dhauti technique is designed to purify the entire digestive tract. Shankha Prakshalana involves the controlled drinking of a large quantity of lukewarm saline water, followed by a series of Yoga postures (Tadasana, Tiryak Tadasana, Kati Chakrasana, Triyak Bhujangasana, Udarakarshanasana) and movements to facilitate the elimination of the water along with accumulated impurities from the digestive system. The practitioner may experience a series of bowel movements, eliminating both water and accumulated toxins or the process may take some time, and it is important to allow the body to expel the water naturally(3). According to Hatha Yoga Pradipika, there is no doubt that coughs, asthma, diseases of the spleen, skin disorder and twenty kinds of diseases caused by vitiation of Kapha Dosha are destroyed through the effects of Dhauti Karma(15).

Neti Kriya - Neti Kriya is a useful technique for preserving nasal hygiene that entails cleaning the nasal passages. Only Sutra Neti is described in the original Hatha Yoga Pradipika reference; nevertheless, four types of Neti are generally performed, and these are Jala (water), Sutra (thread), Dugdha (milk), and Ghritha (ghee)(16,17). It removes all impurities from the head region(18).

Trataka - The traditional practice of Trataka involves concentrated gazing on a candle flame without blinking the eyes. Instead of a candle flame, you can choose to gaze at a symbol or a small image placed at eye level. Blink naturally to keep your eyes moist. If your eyes become tired, you can close them for a few moments and then resume the practice. After a period of gazing, close your eyes and try to visualize the image or the after image of the object in your mind's eye. The technique is beneficial to reduce the eye disorders and to reduce the laziness(19). The scientific studies on Trataka used cognitive functions and vision as their outcome measures.

Kapalbhati - The Sanskrit terms Kapal, which means skull, and Bhati, which means dazzling or illuminating, are combined to form the word Kapalbhati. The technique is frequently called the Shining Skull Breath or the Skull Shining Breath. When performing Kapalbhati, one must breathe out quickly by flapping the abdomen. According to Hatha Yoga text Kapalbhati destroys all mucous disorders(20,21).

Basti Kriya - Hatha Yoga describes two types of Basti, Sthala (dry) and Jala (water). In both Basti traditions, the colon is cleansed. According to Swami Swatmarama, the practice of Basti is good for clearing the mind and senses and balancing the Tridosha and Dhātu(22). Maharishi Gheranda claims that Basti helps with digestive and urinary issues as well as reducing Vata diseases. Additionally, it's proven to enhance digestion(23).

Nauli - Contracting and isolating the rectus abdominis muscles is known as Nauli. It is referred to as Lauliki in the Gheranda Samhita. The rectus abdominis muscles are referred to as the "navel string" in the root word Nala. Moreover, it refers to a tubular conduit. Lauliki is derived from the verb Lola, which implies "to roll" or "arouse." It is known as Dakshina Nauli when the rectus abdominis muscles twist anticlockwise, from left to right. Vama Nauli occurs when they are turned clockwise, from right to left. Madhyama Nauli occurs when the middle group of muscles protrudes and the muscles are drawn together. You must be able to do Uddiyana Bandha correctly before trying Nauli(24).

Discussion –

Viruddha Ahara (incompatible diet or food items of opposite nature) and Viruddha Vihara (incompatible lifestyle) that is against the season and the Prakriti (nature) of a person, Certain food combinations are strictly not recommended. For example, dairy and fish combinations such as yogurt and fish, cheese and shrimp, or fish with milk/cheese products are not considered healthy. If such foods are consumed for a prolonged period, causes the generation of toxins or poisons in our body. When these toxins accumulate in the body tissues, skin etc and contaminate them. These factors vitiate the body's physiological components or Tridosha. They have an impact on the body's Twak (skin), Rakta (blood), Mamsa (muscles), and Ambu (watery material found in the skin). These seven are the harmful substances that cause skin conditions. This is the root cause behind the formation of skin diseases(25).

The practice of Dhauti stimulates the digestive fire through the cleansing of the stomach and the entire digestive tract promoting better digestion and assimilation of nutrients. It gets rid of bacteria from the mouth and makes salivary glands work better. It also causes a sensation of well-being, relaxation, and lightness in the body since it increases blood circulation. Dhauti practices help in removing excess phlegm and mucus from the respiratory and digestive systems. Dhauti practices contribute to doshic balance by addressing specific imbalances related to the digestive system. It aids in reducing ailments of the digestive system like constipation, biliousness, indigestion, chronic gastritis, reflux acts. Even digestive system accessory organ disorders including a torpid liver, sluggish pancreas, problems with urine elimination, complaints about the kidneys, and dyspeptic condition are reduced by it(26). Vagal activation is one of the important mechanisms of cleaning process(27). The tenth cranial nerve, the vagus nerve, links the brain to the heart, digestive tract, respiratory system, and abdominal glands. The vagus nerve is activated in Vaman Dhauti, Vastra Dhauti, and Shankha Prakshalan, and this has an impact on all three systems. After Dhauti, vagal stimulation improves digestion by increasing the motions of the large intestine and assisting in the removal of stool. Additionally, it stimulates the secretions of the digestive glands, which in turn helps to restore the heart's resting rhythm. It gets rid of bacteria from the mouth and makes salivary glands work better. It also causes a sensation of well-being, relaxation, and lightness in the body since it increases blood circulation. It helps to gain control over autonomic nervous to a limited degree by the action of controlling natural force of vomiting during the practice(28).

The skin is a sensory organ with an abundance of nerve endings that communicate to the brain information about temperature, pain, and pleasure. The skin also represents our emotional and physical states and transmits information from the inside out. Acharya Charaka spoke about the connection between the skin and the mind. Dermatologic disorders may have associated psychological symptoms, such as stress, anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders(29). The two main arm of the stress response are the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) and the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis(30). Activation of the SNS and HPA axis results in the release of catecholamines and adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), culminating with cortisol release from adrenal glands. The release of neurohormones, neuropeptides, and neurotransmitters from both arms of the stress response impacts the skin(31). Dermatological disorders also give rise to psychological issues such as anxiety and depression that have an adverse effect on one's quality of life. The impact of dermatological problems on young adult and adolescent psychological health is well documented(32). Higher rates of anxiety and depression have been demonstrated in all skin conditions and life-long cumulative effects of having a skin condition are more severe when developed in adolescence (33). Skin disease patients constantly feel socially, emotionally, and physically embarrassed in society, which exacerbates the symptoms of their pre-existing conditions. Skin diseases often account for 10 to 15% of general practitioners' workloads, making them the second most prevalent reason for lost productivity(34). A number of dermatological problems can emerge or become worse as a result of psychosocial stress and associated psychological variables. As of right now, a number of research have indicated that the majority of dermatological conditions are immunogenic, psychological, and chronically inflammatory(35).

Cleansing practice bring about the harmonisation of Ida and Pingala, the two primary flows of Prana, leading to mental and bodily harmony and purity. They are very important from the point of view of physical and as well as mental health(36). The eye is directly connected to the pineal gland through the sympathetic nervous system(37). The centre of the sympathetic nervous system is the hypothalamus, which is also the centre of consciousness and pleasure(38). As a result, there are direct or indirect relationships between the eye, pineal gland, sympathetic nervous system, hypothalamus, and individual arousal(39). Yoga may increase glutamate transmission and stimulate the prefrontal cortex, which releases beta-endorphin, a neurotransmitter that reduces cortisol and reduces anxiety(40). When practising Trataka, the entire system is stimulated and awakened through the eye stimulation. Trataka and Kapalabhati ability to enhance mental clarity and improves cognitive performance(41,42) and also associated with decreased stress and anxiety(43)(44). These easy methods are also incredibly helpful in treating internal illnesses. Practicing Shatkarma also calms the mind and makes it happier(45).

Conclusion - According to Ayurveda, vitiation of Dosha and mental causes are the major factor in the genesis of skin disorder. The Poor digestion and improper elimination of waste can contribute to the accumulation of toxins in the body. This Indigested food turn into Amavisha is one of the major factors of vitiation of Dosha. This affects the skin and lead to skin diseases. Emotional and mental well-being are considered important in Ayurveda. Stress, anxiety, and other psychological factors can influence the health of the skin. Shatkarma is one of the best practices to purify the body's internal toxins either physically or mentally. The practitioner's vital capacity is especially increased by the Shatkarma. In the context of skin disorder the practices of Shatkarma are very helpful.

In Hatha Yoga Pradipika clearly mentioned the use of Dhauti Kriya in Kushta Rog. Dhauti, Vasti kriya eliminate the vitiation of Dosha through purification of digestive track and remove Amavisha while Kapalabhati and Trataka Kriya are found beneficial for mental health establishment.

Financial support and sponsorship -

Nil.

Conflicts of interest –

There are no conflicts of interest

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