

VAMANAKARMA: AN ANCIENT AYURVEDIC CLEANSING THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

'Charaka Samhita' an ancient text of Ayurveda emphasizes the cleansing of the body through Panchakarma. Today's generation is out of touch with nature. Poor dietary habits, fast foods, no proper exercise regimen, stress and strain of daily life to compete and survive-these patterns have led to a lot of hormonal changes, and the agents that regulate the body's mechanism have become poor leading to the spread of toxins throughout the body causing various diseases. As per Ayurveda, these toxins are called "ama". This foul-smelling, sticky, harmful fluid needs to be completely removed from the body. This is done through Panchkarma, which is advised quarterly, half-yearly, or yearly to get rid of the toxins from the body and also to provide protection from different diseases. This process has twofold benefits – cleansing of the body and also rejuvenation, thus giving a youthful appearance to the body. Panchakarma includes five methods through which the body is detoxified –Procedure of Vamana (induced vomiting), Procedure of Virechana (induced purgation), Basti (enema), Nasya (nasal application), Rakthamokshanana (bloodletting). The three Doshas (vital physiological factors according to Ayurveda) in the human body that is - Vata, Pitta, and Kapha are balanced, leading to good physical health and mental balance. Vamanaprocedure means induction of emesis. Through this procedure, the toxins are removed from the body especially through the upper body parts. Vamana is the best remedy for Kapha-related diseases. Most of the diseases today are due to improper digestion and metabolism (*Agni*). The cause is the changing lifestyle full of stress and anxiety. Irregular dietary habits add further to these issues. Diseases need to be uprooted from the base. Therapies like *Panchkarma* or particular therapy as *VamanaKarma* for particular *Doshas* like *Kapha* can be thought of on a regular basis as a remedy.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Vamana, Kapha, Panchakarma, health, detoxified, rejuvenation.

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine; in fact, it is the world's oldest healing science. Ayurveda means "the science of life". This is made up of two words – 'Ayur' which means "longevity" or "life" and the other is 'Veda' which stands for "science". Ayurveda believes that each individual is unique and made up of three Doshas, that is - Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. When these Doshas become assimilated, it will lead to diseases. The digestive fire or Agni is another important aspect that plays a role in overall health. If it is impaired, it may lead to the accumulation of toxins/ poisons and can further lead to various diseases. Hence restoration or strengthening of the Agni and balance of the three Doshas is very essential for good health. For this periodic cleansing is suggested which works both as curative and preventive because of its rejuvenating action. One of the prominent branches of Ayurveda is panchakarma meaning "Five procedures" as it consists of five techniques namely Vamana (induced vomiting), Virechana (induced purgation), Basti

(enema), Nasya (nasal application), Rakthamokshanana (blood purification). According to Ayurvedic texts, Panchakarma procedures are of much more importance than other therapy for preventing further imbalance (Prakopa) of Doshas and for curing of disease.⁽¹⁾ Among the five procedures, Vamana is the Pradhana Karma of Panchakarma⁽²⁾ therapy and it has been considered as the best line of treatment for the Kaphaja disorders.⁽³⁾

According to Acharya Charaka (compiler or editor of the medical treatise Charaka *Samhita*), *Vamana* is defined as a process of elimination of waste products or toxins (*Dosha*) through upper channels⁽⁴⁾ i.e. mouth. Other Ayurveda scholars such as Chakrapani has used the word *Urdhavamukha* i.e. upper end and Bhavaprakash have used the word *Mukhmarga* which means oral route. *Vamana* is regarded as the best one among all the therapeutic measures for *Kapha*⁽⁵⁾. If the *Vamana* procedure is adopted properly, lightness of the body, clarity of precordium (*Hridaya*),

throat/pharynx) (*Kantha*) and head (*Shirah*), happiness and weakness are the usual symptoms following (perfect cleansing of toxins) *Samyak Shuddhi* (proper purification).^(6,7) It is also mentioned in the *Samhitas* that the person undergoing the procedure of *Vamana* never develops⁽⁸⁾ *Kasa* (cough), *Malavridhi* in *Srotasas* (accumulation of waste in body channels), *Svarabheda* (hoarseness of voice), *Nidra* (sleepiness), *Tandra* (drowsiness), *Mukha Durgandhata* (bad smell in mouth), *Vishajanya Upadrava* (complications of poisoning/ toxins), *Kapha Srava* (excessive salivation), *Grahani* (malabsorption syndrome). According to Ashtanga Hridaya, *Samyak Shodhana* (perfect purification) results into clarity of *Buddhi* (thought), the strength of *Indriyas* (sense organs), stability of *Dhatu*s (body tissues), improvement of *Agni* (appetite and digestive capacity), delay of aging.⁽⁹⁾

A study in *Ayurveda* emphasized the practice of *Vamana* in *Vasant Ritu* (spring), *Virechana* in *Sharad Ritu* (autumn), *Basti* in *Varsha Ritu* (monsoon) for preservation and promotion of health and prevention of disease. According to Ayurvedic texts, as *Kapha Doshais* aggravated in *Vasant Ritu*; hence, *Vamana* is indicated in the spring season approximately in the month of March and April. *Vasantika Vamana* is highly beneficial for people having *Kapha* and *Kapha-Pitta* constitution and patients suffering from *Kapha* disorders and associated *Pitta* disorders or diseases originating or settled in the place of *Kapha*.⁽¹⁰⁾ *Vamanais* commonly practiced in *Kushtha* skin disease), *Shwasa* (asthma), *Unmada* (hysteria), *Arochak* (dysgeusia or ageusia), *Raktapitta* (urticaria), *Visuchika* (diarrhea), *Prameha* (diabetes), *Kaas* (cough), *Visarpa* (cellulitis) etc. in *Vasanta Ritu*, as *Purvakarma* (preparatory procedures) of *Rasayana* (rejuvenation therapy). But according to *Samhita*, *Vamana* therapy is contraindicated in pregnancy, people of soft nature, very strong digestive system, people engaged in lifting heavy weights, obesity, excess weak person, old age, children, during fasting, thirsty person, patients without going through *Asthapana Basti* (administration of medicated oil or decoction by rectal route), patients who have not undergone *Snehan*, *Swedana* (preparatory procedures), depressed people, intestinal parasites, tumor in abdomen, heart disease.

The medicines (*Dravya*) which are used for *Vamana* are called *Vamak Dravya* (emetics). Their qualities are *Ushna* (increase the acid secretion in the stomach or cause a rise in body temperature), *Tikshna* (more intense properties than *Ushna*), *Sookshma* (capable of reaching into minute channels), *Vyavayi* *Vikashi* (absorbs readily into body tissues) *Urdhwabhaga* (drug action on particularly upper of GIT) effect.⁽¹¹⁾ Some of the *Dravya* (drugs) used for *Vamana* are *Madanphala* (*Randiademeterum*), *Jeemutak* (*Luffa echinata*), *Ikshavaku* (*Lagenaria siceraria*), *Sarson* (*Brassica campestris*).

Administration of vamakdravya (emetic drugs)

The procedure to be followed for the *Vamana* procedure comprises of three steps: *Poorvakarma* (preparatory procedures), *Pradhanakarma* (main procedure), and *Pashchatakarma* (post-procedure care). *Snehana* (Oleation-use of oil or oily substance on the body) and *Swedana*

(treatments that produce sweat for example steaming) are done in *Poorvakarma*. Then *Kapha* enhancing food is given. The patient has been advised a good sleep before the day of the procedure. When *Vamak Dravyais* to be administered, the patient in a relaxed state is asked to sit on a soft seated bench of proper height which reaches up to the knees. The patient takes the *Vamana Dravya*, and the patient's umbilical region and back are massaged in an upward direction. The vomit is carefully observed by the physician who then is helpful in determining the further line of action. *Vamana* therapy is said to be best when there are eight episodes of emesis. Minimum should be 4 and 6 episodes. The process should be continued till there is the expulsion of greenish-yellow and sticky appearing substance. This indicates that all the *Kapha Doshas* has been expelled. Further, perspiration ensures the melting of *Doshas* and the appearance of goose bumps that is small bumps that appear on the skin surface as the hair becomes erect; indicate that *Doshas* have started moving from its location.

The third stage includes distension of the abdomen which indicates that *Doshas* have relocated in the abdomen. Nausea and salivation is the fourth stage indicating movement of *Doshas* in upward direction. If the *Vamana* procedure is not done correctly, then certain harmful effects can be seen which include rashes, itching, fever, foam or blood in the vomit, etc. The procedure of *Vamana* can be considered successful if the individual shows the following:- proper vomiting urges, absence of too much pain, elimination of *Doshas* in the order of *Kapha Pitta* and *Vata*, relieves stress and calms the mind, feeling of not too much discomfort. After this procedure, the hands, feet and face of the patient should be washed with warm water, consoled and then *Nasya* therapy is given. Later patient is kept in a closed room. A properly done *Vamana* procedure expels the *Kapha Doshas*, improves digestion and metabolism, gives strength to sense organs, skin becomes clear, improves immunity, increases libido, and slows the aging process.

Some research studies showing the effects of vamana procedure

According to research on hypothyroidism, *Vamana* procedure is the best line of treatment. The thyroid gland, located in the front part of the neck, is considered the location of *Kapha*, as per *Ayurveda*. The easy and nearer route for evacuation of *Dosha* is through the oral cavity. The *Manda Guna* (slow-moving quality) of *Kapha* causes the slowing of metabolic activities. Destroying and removing *Kapha Doshas* (*Kapha Chhedana*) is the ideal strategy, increasing *Dhatwagni* (physiological processes) and removing *Malasanga* (accumulation of waste). *Snehan* (administration of medicated ghee) followed by *Vamana* and *Virechana* and at the end, *Shamana* (regular oral route medicines) was found to be effective in symptomatic and biochemical profiles of the patient⁽¹²⁾ another research also showed similar results. TSH has a distinct circadian rhythm; that is a biological process that displays physical, mental, and behavioral changes following a roughly 24-hour cycle. TSH levels reach a maximum between

2 am to 4 am. As per *Samhitas*, *Vamana* has to be performed in *Kapha* period i.e., “*Purvahana*” (before noon). *Vamana* removes the morbid *Kapha* from the body which is responsible for hypothyroidism and thus shows its effects.⁽¹³⁾

A study carried out at Ayurveda Central Research Institute, Delhi which was in collaboration with the Department of Physiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), done on 30 healthy volunteers who were in the age group of 18 to 60 years, tried to understand the physiological changes during and after *Vamana*. It was seen that *Vamana* procedure is a cleansing process which improves appetite, regulates bowel habits and improves sleep pattern. It also showed a decrease in LDL and serum cholesterol level, indicating *Kapha-hara* (*Kapha* removing) action. During the *Vamana* process, slight elevations in BP (systolic and diastolic), pulse, temperature and respiration can be due to sympathetic stimulation. Therefore, its use in subjects with hypertension should be avoided. This increases appetite and regularizes the habits of the intestines. It also provides some relief to the abdominal feeling of heaviness after eating food. A mild cleansing action on intestinal flora was seen, though the bacteroids and *E.coli* remain within normal limits after *Vamana* procedure.⁽¹⁴⁾

Vamana procedure followed by *Shatapushpadi Ghanavati* is effective in regularizing menstruation, achieving considerable reduction in body weight and BMI and helpful in lowering FBS level, thus, this treatment protocol is seen as useful in the management of obese PCOS patients.⁽¹⁵⁾ *Vamana* procedure has been effective in management of *Vicharchika* (skin disease). *Amashaya* (upper part of GIT) is *Udhhavasthana* (location of the beginning of disease process) of *Vicharchika*. Being the *KaphaSthana* / location all morbid material is collected there and *Vamanaprocedure* expels out the morbid material from *Amashaya*. *Vamanaprocedure* removes the *Sanga* (blockage) in the *Rasavaha*, *Raktavaha*, *Mamsavaha*, *Swedavaha*, and *UdakavahaSrotasa* (types of nutritive channel system for various tissues) as all paths (*Srotasas*) are cleared. These cleared *Srotasa* to start nourishment of the body in proper manner. *BahyarogaMarga* (outer locations of diseases) for example, skin (*Twachadi*) gets cleared and *Khavaigunya* (lacuna in the health status) which is present in the *Twacha* (skin) is removed due to *Vamanaprocedure*.⁽¹⁶⁾ *Vamana* procedure also develops a state of eustress which enhances the functioning of the controlling systems of the body, thereby, influencing the body to achieve normal homeostasis, this is done by alerting body's corrective mechanisms and promoting healing processes.⁽¹⁷⁾

Most of the diseases today are due to improper digestion and metabolism (*Agni*). The cause is the changing lifestyle full of stress and anxiety. Irregular dietary habits add further to these issues. Diseases need to be uprooted from the base. Therapies like *Panchkarma* or particular therapy as *VamanaKarma* for particular *Doshas* like *Kapha* can be thought of on a regular basis as a remedy. In short, *VamanaKarma* helps to remove the vitiated *Kapha* and restores the normal functioning of the body. Ayurveda scholars should concentrate more on these

karmas and evaluate their efficacy for various diseases taking larger samples.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

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