

Management of Rheumatoid Arthritis through Ayurveda

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Abstract

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune chronic inflammatory disorder. As the disease progresses, the inflamed synovium invades and damages the cartilage and bone of the joint. The potential of the synovial inflammation to cause cartilage destruction is the hallmark of the disease. In Ayurveda, Vatarakta is a disease caused by vitiated Vata and Rakta, where the aggravated Vayu gets obstructed in its course by the vitiated blood and the Vayu vitiates the entire blood. This vitiated Rakta in long term involves mamsadi dhatu. RA cannot be correlated with one single disease entity in Ayurveda. It was observed that clinicians use the protocols for management of Amavata and Vatasonita in different stages of RA. It can consider by the management of Amavastha and Niramavastha with medicines and Panchakarma procedures. It was concluded that RA can be cured completely or manage well with Ayurveda medicines and Panchakarma without any side effects, whereas non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs cause during the treatment.

Keywords: Rheumatoid arthritis; Ayurveda; Panchakarma; Vatashonita

Introduction

RA is an autoimmune chronic inflammatory disorder. The characteristic feature of RA is persistent inflammatory which possess cavities, known as synovial joints), usually involving peripheral joints in a symmetric distribution, where synovium becomes inflamed causing warmth, redness, swelling and pain. As the disease progresses, the inflamed synovium invades and damages the cartilage and bone of the joint. The potential of the synovial inflammation to cause cartilage destruction is the hallmark of the disease [1]. RA affects between 0.5 and 1% of adults in the developed world with between 5 and 50 per 100,000 people newly developing the condition each year. In autoimmune diseases normally the immune system displays self-tolerance and does not attack the body's own components. This self-tolerance breaks down and leads to an auto-immune disorder. The immune system fails to recognize self-antigens and mounts a misguided attack against them. In Ayurveda, Vatarakta is a disease caused by vitiated Vata and Rakta, where aggravated Vayu gets obstructed in its course by the vitiated blood and Vayu vitiates the entire blood. This vitiated Rakta in long term involves mamsadi dhatu [1]. This can be taken as a tool to understand autoimmunity in Ayurveda.

Probable causative factors of the disease

The probable causative factors are excessive intake of saline, sour, pungent, alkaline, unctuous, hot and uncooked food, excessive intake of oil-cake preparations or radish, intake of foods causing burning sensation during digestion, excessive intake of curd, sesamum paste, sugar cane, Aranala (kanji), Sauvira (sour preparation of dehusked barley), Sukta (vinegar), butter-milk, alcohol and wine, intake of

contradictory food, intake of food before the previous meal is digested, omission of the purification of body, sexual intercourse in improper ways, resorting to anger in excess, sleeping during day time and remaining awake at night [2]. Generally people of tender health who indulge in sweet food, leisurely eating and sedentary habits get afflicted by Vatarakta because of the above said reasons.

Actiopathogenesis

The sites where Vatarakta are manifested are hands, feet, fingers including toes and all the joints. In the beginning the hands and feet are afflicted. From this base, it spreads to all the other parts of the body because of the subtle pervasive nature of Vata and Rakta. Because of their fluidity and mobility, while moving through the vessels, it gets obstructed in the joints which make them further aggravated. Therefore, generally, the disease gives pain in all these joints. These different types of pain become excessively unbearable for the afflicted persons. Vatarakta has two varieties, viz, Uttana (superficial) and Gambhira (deep seated). The former is located in the skin as well as muscle tissues, and the latter is located in deeper tissues of the body [3].

Clinically it is a disease of two opposite dosha so it is difficult to plan the treatment. Of course, allopathic medicine has got a better management to overcome pain. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs decrease the inflammation, but tend to create gastrointestinal disturbance and disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs cause renal, bone and hepatic side effects like suppression. So the management of this disease by other systems of Medical sciences is not sufficient or cannot control the further progression of disease. Ayurveda as a holistic approach can help in a better way by improving the quality of life and restricting progression of disease (Table 1).

1. Morning stiffness (Pratah kale Gatrastandhata)	Morning stiffness in and around the joints, lasting at least 1 h before maximal improvement
2. Arthritis of 3 or more joint areas (Sandhishula and Sandhisotha)	At least 3 joint areas simultaneously have had soft tissue swelling or fluid (not bony overgrowth alone) observed by a physician. The 14 possible areas are right or left PIP, MCP, wrist, elbow, knee, ankle, and MTP joints
3. Arthritis of hand joints (Parva)	At least 1 area swollen (as defined above) in a wrist, MCP, or PIP joint
4. Symmetric arthritis (Padayohastayohsandhaya)	Simultaneous involvement of the same joint areas (as defined in 2) on both sides of the body (bilateral involvement of PIPs, MCPs, or MTPs is acceptable without absolute symmetry)
5. Rheumatoid nodules (Angulivakrata)	Subcutaneous nodules, over bony prominences, or extensor surfaces, or in juxta-articular regions, observed by a physician
6. RA Factor 7. Joint erosions in radiography	

Table 1: Cardinal features of disease.

Four out of 7 should be present to be diagnosed as Rheumatoid Arthritis according to 1987 ACR criteria for Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Associated features of disease

Jwara (pyrexia), Alasya (lethargy), Apaka (indigestion), Aruchi (anorexia), Gaurava (heaviness in the body), Asyavairasya (altered taste perception), Daurbalya (weakness), Akarmanyata (inability to do work), Utsahahani (laziness), Angamarda (body ache), Daha (burning sensation), Trishna (increased thirst), Bhutva bhutva pranashyanti punaravirbhavanti ca (remissions and exacerbations).

Prognosis

Before planning the treatment of the particular disease it is necessary to see the stage, type and accompanying dosha of the disease. Besides, this disease is curable when it is new and associated with only one dosha. It is difficult to cure when two dosha are involved and when it is a chronic disease. If three doshas are involved it is incurable.

Investigations

RA can be hard to detect because it may begin with subtle symptoms, such as achy joints or a little stiffness in the morning. Also, many diseases behave like RA early on. The diagnosis of RA depends on the symptoms and results of a physical examination, such as warmth, swelling and pain in the joints. Some blood tests also can help confirm RA.

CRP: C - reactive protein; RA Factor: Rheumatoid Factor; Anti-CCP: Antibodies to Cyclic Citrullinated Peptides

Elevated erythrocyte sedimentation rate (a blood test that, in most patients with RA, confirms the amount of inflammation in the joints)

X-rays can help in detecting RA, but may not show anything abnormal in early arthritis. Even so, these first X-rays may be useful later to show if the disease is progressing. Often, MRI and ultrasound scanning are done to help judge the severity of RA.

There is no single test that confirms an RA diagnosis for most patients with this disease. Rather, a doctor makes the diagnosis by looking at the symptoms and results from the physical examination, lab tests and X-rays.

Management

RA cannot be correlated with one single disease entity in Ayurveda. It is observed that clinicians use the protocols for the management of Amavata and Vatasonita in different stages of RA. The treatment protocol described here combines the treatments for Amavata and Vatarakta mentioned in the classical texts. In Caraka Samhita [1] and Astanga Hrdaya [2] it is clearly mentioned that in the first phase of Vatasonita, Kaphavatahara treatment is needed and in the next phase, the rakta prasadana treatment is needed. In Madhava Nidana, the treatment for the first phase was elaborated independently as Amavata. This approach is supported by references from Caraka Samhita and Astanga Hrdaya where it has been clearly mentioned that when Vata is affected by Kapha and Medas, then the treatment for Vata and Kapha should be done, after which the treatment for Rakta is to be administered.

As per allopathic practitioners, there is no cure for RA. Medications can reduce inflammation in joints in order to relieve pain and prevent or slow joint damage. Occupational and physical therapy can help in protecting joints. If joints are severely damaged by RA, surgery may be necessary. Many drugs used to treat RA have potentially serious side effects.

However, till date no satisfactory modern medical management has been developed for this problem. Hence the management of this disease is merely insufficient in other systems of medicine and patients are continuously looking with a hope towards Ayurveda to overcome this challenge.

Principles of management

Described in text can be categorized under following headings.

Amavastha: Langhana, Rukshana procedures, medicines.

Niramavastha: Shamana drugs and Panchakarma procedures.

The foremost treatment mentioned in classics for Vatarakta is Raktamokshana. Raktamokshana is a parasurgical procedure to expel out the vitiated blood from the selected areas of the body. Since the time of Veda, Ayurveda has much productive materials about Raktavsechana Karma as a part of treatment. Blood should be let out with horn, leech, needle, bottle gourd, scarifying or venesection according to morbidity and strength. Since the main doshas involved in the pathology of Vatarakta are Vitiated Vata and Rakta. Because of the vitiation of Rakta, shodhana of Rakta is essential. Raktamokshana

is considered to be the supreme therapy as it drains out the impure blood and cures the disease. Acharyas have also quoted that it not only purifies the channels, but also lets the other parts become free from disease and the action is faster than other remedies. Clearing the channels off Vitiated blood helps in the Samprapti vighatana of the disease, thus curing the disease.

Amavastha

Langhana is line of treatment; it can be gain by fasting or giving light food like green gram soup or gruel.

With this rukshana can be achieved by some procedures like application of sudation by sand pottali (Valuka sweda), salt pottali or powder pottalis.

If pitta is involved in the disease, this rukshana can be done with dhanyamla dhara or dashmoola kashaya dhara to get better effect.

Externally lepa (paste) can be apply to reduce pain and inflammation like

Kottamchukkadi: kapha dominance,

Jadamayadi: pitta Rakta dominance,

Shunthi+Gomutra lepa: swelling and pain, vata, kapha predominance.

Upnaha prepared with gomutra, buttermilk and dhanyamla can be apply to painful and swollen part.

Internal medicines:

Decoctions like Amrutottaram, Rasna-panchak, Gulguluthikthakam can be used.

Gulika like Ama pachana vati, Kaishore Guggulu, Sanjivani vati.

Powders like shunthi (Ginger), Vaishwanar, guduchi etc will be more beneficial.

Basti like vaitarana, kshar basti is more effective in this condition.

Niramavastha

Internal Medicines:

Decoctions like Rasnasaptakam, Manjishthadi, Kokilakshadi can be used.

Gulika like Yogaraja, Kaishore Guggulu, Simhanad guggulu.

Powders like Rasayana, guduchi etc will be more beneficial.

Panchakarma management

Virechana: In this condition Acharyas have also mentioned that at first the patient should undergo Virechana after unctious with unctuous or rough mild purgatives. Virechana is explained in the management of Vatarakta as a prime treatment modality. It cleans the Dhatu by doing purification of body. Virechana drug due to its Ushna, Tikshna, Sukshma Guna reaches to heart by the virtue of their potency and thereby circulates all over the body. They liquefy the morbid Dosha and bring them up to the Amashaya from here the morbid factors through anal canal route are expelled out leading to Virechana. It has direct effect on Agnisthana and thus also helpful in increasing Agni. In disease RA, Srotorodha is present which is clear due to the property of Srotovishyandana of Virechana drugs. Virechana also help in

normalizing the Pratiloma Gati of Vata thus release the general symptoms. Thus, Virechana help in breaking the Samprapti of disease

Basti: Regarding Basti, Acharyas have opined that there is no treatment of Vatarakta equal to Basti. Because of its vast field of therapeutic action, it has also been recognized as a complete therapy. Basti is not merely the enema, rather it is a highly complex, sophisticated and systemic therapy having wider range of therapeutic actions and indications. It is considered as a prime treatment modality for Vata Dosha. Since Vitiated Vata is involved in the pathology of Vatarakta, Basti karma has been explained as the main treatment modality in the management of Vatarakta.

Different types of basti can be used in RA and it is found to be very effective like Ksheera Basti, Yapana Basti, Yoga Basti etc.

Besides, Classical texts also reveal the treatment according to the type of Vatarakta i.e the external type (*Uttana Vatarakta*) should be treated with Lepa, Abhyanga, Parisheka, Upnaha, while the deep one (*Gambhira vatarakta*) should be treated with Virechana, Asthapana, Shamana Snehapana.

Lepa: A type of therapy wherein paste of drug is applied to the affected part. Drug enters through Romakupa and further gets absorbed through channels leading to desired effects.

Abhyanga (Oil massage): Abhyanga can increase the fresh oxygenated blood supply to the muscles and organs, and aid the drainage of venous blood, promoting the removal of waste products from the body. By increasing the flow of lymphatic material, waste removal is also aided and white blood cell production is increased, boosting one's natural immunity. It also influences the equilibrium in the nervous system. It helps in alleviating rheumatic disorders. It improves flexibility, softness and firmness of the skin and for long life. It is the most ancient method used to remove muscular fatigue and pain [4].

Parisheka: Pouring of warm drava (liquid) over the body from a specific height for a specific time. It has Vatahara action and relieves tiredness and confers stability of tissues.

Upnaha: Upnaha is the application of warm paste of roots of Vata mitigating drugs macerated with a sour liquid and added with more salts and fats, made unctuous and tied on the affected part.

Rasayana: Pippalivardhamana Rasayana: They start with 3 gm increase till 18 gm with QS cow milk and Chyavanaprasha: 5-15 gm with hot water/ milk in morning for 1-3 months.

Common herbs used in RA in medicines and purification procedures

Erand (Castor oil): Eranda taila has Vata-kapha-shamaka property which is more specifically required in the disease RA. Along with this it is also have Ushna Virya and Ama Pachana properties. Ricine present in the Eranda Taila on action of lipase enzyme gets hydrolyzed to Ricinoleic acid which is responsible for purgation [5].

Shunthi (Ginger)

Guggulu (*Commiphora wightii*)

Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*)

Yashtimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)

Milk

Shallaki (*Boswellia serrata*)

Pippali (*Piper longum*)

Conclusion

With above discussion it can conclude that RA can be cured completely or manage well with Ayurveda medicines and Panchakarma. There are many researches done on this topic which are the evidence to support this fact. There are no chances of recurrence if person follow the Ayurvedic concept of healthy life style and regular cleansing of body through Panchakarma.

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