

Geriatric Care through Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT: Geriatrics has become the new emerging science in the field of medicine. It includes all the necessary care of elderly people to meet their physical & mental needs which can improve their quality of life & maintain their independence of life as long as possible. As old age is the crucial stage of life in which all the debilitating physical conditions demand more attention & care. A long back ago our Acharya stated rejuvenating therapy which resembles the geriatrics but it is more precise than modern concept. Rasayana&Vajeekaran, these are the two magic therapies contributed by Ayurveda in the field of medicine. Ayurveda has the potential to grow as the best substitution for modern geriatrics. By adopting the basic principles of Ayurveda along with dietetics, Panchakarma, Ayurvedic medicines, Yoga it can serve the purpose of longevity.

Ayurveda believes that VataDosha becomes more prominent & active in later stages of life which produces diseases like dementia, Parkinsonism, paralysis, osteoarthritis, deafness, cataract etc. This PrakupitVataDosha produces imbalance between anabolism & catabolism leading to wasting of body in this group of people. The Indian government has also started certain welfare programs for elderly people. It is the responsibility of society to add certain healthy years to this population. The present article will give the special emphasis on longevity of life in elderly people through Ayurveda.

Keywords: Ayurveda, geriatrics, Rasayana, VataDosha, longevity

INTRODUCTION:

According to Ayurveda the lifespan of an individual is divided into three parts known as Vaya¹.

Every person passes through a period when various decaying changes take place, and this time period is known as Vriddhavastha. Vriddhavastha is the last part of the lifespan and is mainly characterized by degenerative changes. This stage is characterized by decay in the body, Dhatu (various anatomical

tissues), perception power of the Indriya (sensory and motor organs), potency, strength, speech, various mental and cognitive functions (e.g., memory, intellect, reception, retention, analytic ability, etc.). During this phase there is predominance of VaayuDosha. The major physical changes seen at this time are wrinkling of skin, greying of hair, baldness and a diminishing ability to do physical work. Diseases that complicate this stage are Kasa (cough), Shwas (asthma), Daurbalya (weakness) and so on.

Geriatrics is sometimes called as medical gerontology. Old age is a sensitive phase as elderly people need care and comfort to lead a healthy life without worries and anxiety. Geriatrics syndromes include a number of conditions such as dementia, depression, delirium, incontinence, vertigo, falls, spontaneous bone fractures, failure to thrive, neglect and abuse. Geriatrics syndromes are associated with reduced life expectancy.

In 1965, Bernard Isaacs coined the term "geriatric giants." Professor Isaacs named these 'giants' as immobility, instability, incontinence, and impaired intellect/memory².

PREVENTION OF AGING IN YOUNGSTERS

The process of aging is totally dependent on diet and lifestyle. Now-a-days young generation is also going through signs of aging at very early age. In this category aging can be prevented by:

- ❖ Including some important principles of Dincharya (daily regimen) in the daily routine, for example, Anjana, Abhyanga, especially Shiro-Abhyanga (head massage), nasya, Sneha-Gandusha, cleansing of feet and external orifices, exercise and so on.
- ❖ By following the other principles of Swasthavritta such as utilization of Trayopastambha according to the rules; to bear suppressible urges (i.e. mental fluctuations) and to expel unsuppressible urges (i.e., natural urges); regular removal of

aggravated Dosha according to Ritu (season) by Panchakarma; regular utilization of Rasayana (rejuvenating treatment) and Vaajikarana (aphrodisiacs) following the principles of Sadvritta (social and personal ethics) and AcharaRasayana (ethics having effects of Rasayana) and so on³.

- ❖ Taking a diet strictly in accordance with the prescribed rules.

MANAGEMENT OF AGING IN OLDAGE

It is a natural and Yapya (palliative) process. It occupies the prime place among the Yapya diseases in the context of AgryaDravya (foremost) described in CharakSutrasthana chapter 25⁴. It is essential to manage this period of aging properly, as it is a time of increased susceptibility to various chronic and degenerative diseases. The following principles can be considered in this context:

- ❖ Keep the lifestyle as close as possible to the ideal prescribed by Ayurveda.
- ❖ Avoid the provocative causes of Kshaya (degeneration) and Vata, for example, excessive physical and mental work, vigorous exercise etc.
- ❖ Follow all the rules regarding diet as far as possible.
- ❖ Take Laghu (light) and Santarpaka (nutritive) diet.
- ❖ Utilization of Rasayana, Vajeekarana, and YapanaBasti.
- ❖ Follow the principles of Sadvritta and AcharaRasayana
- ❖ If any disease persists or manifests, take treatment promptly.

TREATMENT OF AGING

Aging is considered as a kind of disease (Swabhavavyadhi) and its treatment has been clearly described in various Ayurvedic texts. Even in SushrutaSamhita, there is a chapter titled Swabhavavyadhipratishedhiya, in which RasayanaChikitsa (rejuvenating treatment) is described⁵. In this chapter, various treatment principles for natural diseases have been mentioned. Treatment principles related to aging are completely dependent on Rasayanaas exemplified in the famous story of Maharshi Chyawana⁶ mentioned by AacharyaCharak in Rasayanadhyay. However, some Vajeekarana formulations are also useful. If Rasayana therapy is used according to the classical methods, and if the correct drugs are available, it will be quite possible to treat aging successfully. However, the methods described are impractical and cannot be followed in

this era, due to various reasons. For example, drugs are either unavailable or are less effective, the lifestyle of the people is fast and busy, there is a low level of Satva or defective mental constitution, and so on.

Ayurveda comprises of a specialized branch that deals with ageing and has a rich source of drugs, formulations and various principles for anti-ageing. RasayanaTantra literally means the science that deals with anti-ageing, longevity of life span, improving physical strength, cognition and memory i.e. improving the functions of brain and body as well as treating various diseases in old age⁷.

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Besides Rasayana, Ayurveda can also play a major role in managing the long term debilitating disorders. More the elderly are independent; more improvement in their quality of life is seen. So, to improve the quality of life of the elderly, holistic approach in making them active and healthy is necessary. For this Ayurveda with all its medicines and principles related to lifestyle, food and psychological well-being can be applied to benefit the senior citizens in Indian society.

Indian government is also concerned towards elderly people since it is a major problem due to nuclear families & ignorance. So for the same, Indian government has launched certain schemes as the number of these people is increasing in the population which are enlisted below⁸

- SeniorCitizens Saving Scheme (SCSS) ...
- PradhanMantriVayaVandanaYojana (PMVVY) ...
- Varishtha Pension BimaYojana. ...
- RashtriyaVayoshriYojana (RVY) ...
- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme.

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