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Ayurvedic Approach to Menopause : A Review

Krishna Meher¹, Armaan Pariksha², Namrata Priyadarshini³, Sudeshna Meher⁴

1. PG Scholar, PG Dept of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Gopabandhu Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Puri, Odisha.
2. RMO, Sri Sri College of Ayurvedic Science & Research Hospital, Cuttack.
3. Medical Officer, HCG Panda Cancer Hospital, Cuttack.
4. Prof. & HOD, PG Dept of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Gopabandhu Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Puri, Odisha.

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Corresponding author-

Krishna Meher, PG Scholar, PG Dept of Prasuti Tantra and Stree Roga, Gopabandhu Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Puri, Odisha.

Email: -kmeher116@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Menopause marks the permanent cessation of menstruation resulting from irreversible changes in the hormonal and reproductive functions of the ovaries and is associated with large number of symptoms ranging from physical, psychological and genitourinary. In the present scenario menopausal health demands priority due to increase in life expectancy and growing population of menopausal women. *Rajonivritti* (menopause) as a diseased condition is not described separately in the classics; *Rajonivritti-kala* (menopause) is mentioned by almost all Acharyas. Due to changing lifestyle, food habits and socio-economic standards the age is decreasing. By taking into consideration all the references available in Ayurveda classics, efforts have been made to review critically the said subject in the light of Menopausal Syndrome mentioned in modern Medicine as the fundamentals of Ayurveda in this paper.

Keywords: - Menopause, *Rajonivritti*, *Rasayan*, *Yoga*, *Dhatukshaya*

INTRODUCTION

Peri menopause means 'around menopause'. During this period woman undergoes transition to menopause which is the end of her reproductive age. Near about age of 40 years, woman shows the signs of progression of menopause. Sometimes it starts at the age of 35 years also. The level of estrogen is sharply declining during peri menopause which causes many physical as well as psychological symptoms. Due to this there are irregularities of menstrual cycle. Sometimes she menstruate for a longer period. Along with variations in physical symptoms like hot flushes, anovulatory irregular menstrual cycle, sleep disturbances, vaginal dryness, night sweat, she suffers from mood swings irritability and even depression. Hence selection of drugs

are important to treat these vague symptoms.¹ Despite the fact that menopause is a physiological process in women, it is transforming into a significant medical issue lately in all over world. Each lady faces fluctuated physiological and psychological, sexual changes during this "phase of life" coming about because of hormonal unsettling. Now and then such unsettling influences, achieve the phase of illness or condition called as "menopausal syndrome" which is joined by different vasomotor, mental, and genital, locomotors and GIT related manifestations and subsequently require treatment. As the life span of population is increasing due to developed medical facilities there is increased cases of reporting of this issue.



Ayurvedic literatures has seen menopause as characteristic wonder in life of ladies as *Rajonivrutti* (menopause). Ladies having menopause are assigned as "*Nishphala*", "*Gatartava*" and it have been perceived as beginning of old age.² The age between 40-49 years in ladies can be named as "midlife transformation", when there are intense physical and mental changes. This is the age when her body starts to get ready for confronting the scars of maturing and menopause. The changes in women's body at any stage are credited to hormonal levels.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All the relevant texts of Ayurveda, contemporary science and information available on web were reviewed, analysed and presented in organised matter under results.

RESULTS

Menopause defined in modern science World Health Organization and Stages of Reproductive Aging Workshop (STRAW) defined menopause as permanent stopping of menstrual cycle which occur naturally or due to removal of uterus by surgery, chemotherapy or radiation. Natural menopause can be considered after 12 continuous months without menstrual cycle without any physiological or pathological reason. In artificial menopause uterus is removed by surgery or cancer associated radiation therapy.³

Rajonivrutti Kala (menopause):

Rajonivrittikala (menopause) is mentioned by almost all Acharyas without any controversy, few direct reference regarding the age of menopause, Acharya Sushruta said that menarche occur at the age of 12 years and due to the effect of aging menopause occur at the of 50 years.⁴ Vagbhata and Bhavamishra mentioned the same age for Menarche and Menopause. Here is an attempt to review ayurved approach for Menopause.

Nidana of Rajonivrutti (menopause):

According to *Swabhavaparam Vada* "No cause exists behind destruction of anything. Absence of factors responsible for production of it may be because of its destruction".(Theory of natural destruction)

Types of Rajonivrutti (menopause):

Ayurvedic science has divided all diseases into 4 major types- *Agantuj* (outer), *Sharira* (physical), *Manas* (mental) and *Swabhavika* (natural).⁵ Concentrating on "*Swabhavika*" "Type, it is described that this type includes all those conditions, which are naturally occurring. Acharya Sushruta has mentioned a group of naturally occurring

diseases under the heading of *Swabhava bala pravritta* includes *Kshudha* (Hunger), *Pipasa* (thirst), *Nidra* (sleep), *Jara* (aging) and *Mrityu* (Death).⁶ Although these disease are naturally occurring diseases, but sometimes they are being acquired also, which is described as "*Doshaja*" So they are further divided into two types- *Kala krita* & *Akalakrita*. In the some manners, *Rajonivrutti* (menopause) too is a naturally occurring condition in every woman as that of *Jaravastha* (elder age) etc. *Swabhavika Vyadhies*. So *Rajonivrutti* also can be divided into two types: 1)*Kalaja Rajonivrutti* 2)*Akalaja Rajonivrutti* *Kalaja Rajonivirutti*- If *Rajonivrutti* (menopause) occurs at its probable age (i.e. around 50 year of age) it is called as *Kalaja Rajonivritti*. According to Acharya Sushruta, the timely *Rajonivrutti* (i.e. natural diseases like aging) occurs only when the protective measurements of healthcare are being practiced. This condition is *Yapya* by *Rasayana* (rejuvenation). *Akalaja Rajonivritti-If Rajonivrutti* occurs before or after its probable age (i.e. around 50 years) it is termed as *Akalaja Rajonivritti*. Menopausal symptoms in Ayurveda (*Rajonivirutti anubandh lakshan*) - a) *Vata* dominant menopausal symptoms- dryness in vagina, extremities get cold, difficulty in getting sleep, mild to variable hot flushes (Invariable), anxiety, panic, nervousness, mood swings, dry skin, palpitations, bloating and constipation b) *Pitta* dominant menopausal symptoms- Angry, irritable, excess hot flushes, night sweats, extremely heavy periods with burning sensation, skin rashes, associated complaints such as UTI (urinary track infection). c) *Kapha* dominant menopausal Symptoms- Weight gain, heavy, lethargy, depression, lack of motivation, hormonal changes such as Thyroid malfunction, fibrocystic changes in uterus or in the breast and excessive fluid retention.

Lakshanas of Rajonivrutti:

As there is no direct reference available regarding *Lakshanas* (sign and symptoms) of *Rajonivrutti* (menopause) in the Ayurvedic classics, the clinical symptoms manifested by the patients of *Rajonivrutti* (menopause) are the manifestations of *Dhatukshayaja Lakshanas* along with vitiated *Doshas*. On the basis of available symptoms, differentiation can be done by applying *Doshic* theory to facilitate management of menopausal syndrome as *Vataja Lakshanas*, *Pittaja Lakshanas* and *Kaphaia Lakshanas*.

Various aspects of Menopause:

There are many terms to describe the different stages of the menopause cycle, which make it confusing for women who just want to understand why they are not feeling like

themselves. These phases are all physiologically different, but the symptoms can feel similar. Perimenopause is a transition easily confused with menopause that can last for several years. This phase presents similar symptoms to menopause that gradually increase, including fatigue, irritability, mood swings, and weight gain. The difference is that women in perimenopause continue to have periods, although they may be irregular. When you do not have a period for 12 months, you have entered menopause. Early menopause occurs in women between the ages of 40 and 45, and occurs naturally, in other words, is not medically or surgically initiated. Surgical menopause is a result of a hysterectomy, oophorectomy (removal of ovaries,) and other pelvic surgeries. Ablations, procedures to remove the lining of the uterus, can mimic menopause by stopping menstrual periods. Medical menopause may occur after medical treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and during the course of various drug regimens.⁷

The **preclinical features** of old age (*jara*) are similar to that of menopause as below.

1. Tiredness or loss of enthusiasm.
2. Decline in memory.
3. Wrinkles over skin.
4. Greying of hair.
5. Loose attachment of teeth to gums.
6. Change in a behaviour and mood swings etc. [M. Ni. Jararoga nidana 2-3]

The **clinical features** of aging (*jara*) and menopause are as below:

General features:

1. The decreased capability of physical and mental activities.
 2. A decline in memory, intellect, and luster.
 3. Wrinkling of skin and greying of hair.
- Various comorbid conditions due to decrease in strength and immunity (*ojas*) ex. Dyspnea (*shwasa*)

Menopause is a natural phenomenon. The pathological conditions associated with menopause can be prevented by proper care and health-promoting measures. Rejuvenation therapy (*rasayana*) is the preferred treatment.

The **treatment protocol** for the prevention of menopausal syndrome and premature onset includes the following measures:

1. Oleation (*snehana*) and sudation (*swedana*)

2. Purification therapy with unctuous medication (*shodhana-snigdha virechana*)
3. Therapeutic enema with strength promoting medicines (*yapana basti*)
4. Rejuvenation therapy(*rasayana*)
5. Aphrodisiac medications (*vrushya prayoga*)
6. Wholesome diet and lifestyle modification (*hita ahara-vihara*)
7. Those who consume milk and ghee daily can maintain normal reproductive health for a longer period.

Ayurveda offers a program which combines general principles of hygienic living with specific individualized constitutional guidelines. Overweight conditions are effectively addressed by understanding these conditions for what they truly are--an accumulated toxin with both physical and mental roots which are unique for each person. The molecular structure of human fat which deposits in different individuals may be identical, but the unhealthy habits, attitudes, misconceptions, and stored emotional experiences which promulgate obesity are unique and singular. *Panchakarma* (“five therapeutic actions”) *chikitsa* (“treatment”) are physical therapies that thoroughly cleanse and purify the physical and mental impurities from the body and mind. Normally the body has the innate ability to efficiently process and remove these waste materials, including the vitiated doshas. However due to ones repeated dietary indiscretions, hormonal changes, poor exercise patterns, lifestyle, and genetic predisposition, the digestive enzymes, metabolic co-factors, hormones, and *agnis* which regulate the body's internal homeostasis become disorganized. This can lead to the accumulation and spread of toxins throughout the physiology-resulting in disease. The general purpose of the Panchakarma Therapies is to loosen, liquefy, and remove the vitiated substances and doshas from their abnormal sites in peripheral tissues via their natural pathways of elimination.

Contemporary approach

Diagnosis of menopause

A woman is noted to have attained menopause only retrospectively. It is diagnosed when there is the cessation of menstruation for 12 consecutive months in a woman of the climacteric period.

Investigations

1. Vaginal cytology: showing maturation index of at least 10/85/5 (features of low estrogen)
2. Serum estradiol: <20 pg/ml
3. Serum Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Luteinizing hormone (LH) : >40mIU/ml (three values at weeks interval required)

Management

Hormone Therapy (HT)

It is indicated to overcome the short-term and long-term consequences of estrogen deficiency.

It is administered in different forms like:

1. Oral estrogen regime- for those who underwent hysterectomy.
2. Estrogen and cyclic progestin – for those with intact uterus.
3. Continuous estrogen and progestin therapy-prevents endometrial hyperplasia
4. Transdermal administration
5. Subdermal implants
6. Percutaneous estrogen gel
7. Transdermal patch
8. Vaginal cream
9. Progestins- in patients with a history of breast carcinoma or endometrial carcinoma
10. Levonorgestrel intrauterine system(LNG-IUS)
11. Tibolone, Testosterone, parathyroid hormone are also used.

Hormone therapy has many risks like endometrial cancer, breast cancer, venous thromboembolic disease, coronary heart disease, alteration in lipid metabolism etc. So, it is to be used with lowest effective dose and for a short period of time.

Non-hormonal Treatment

It includes a nutritious diet, exercise, lifestyle modification, supplementation of calcium, vitamin D, vitamin E etc.

Abnormal Menopause

1. Premature menopause: Occurs before the age of 40 years.
2. Delayed menopause: Fails to occur even beyond 55 years.
3. Artificial menopause: Permanent cessation of ovarian functions done by artificial means.

a) Surgical menopause-

1. Menstruating women with bilateral oophorectomy experience the symptoms of menopause.
2. Post-hysterectomy cases

b) Radiation menopause-

1. Ovarian functions may get suppressed by external gamma radiation.
2. Intra cavity introduction of radium can destroy the endometrium and depress ovarian functions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Health problems at menopause represent imbalances in the body that were already in growing in the body and diet plays a key role in balancing hormones during pre-menopause and in menopause. More serious symptoms, such as frequent hot flashes, continual sleep disturbance, and moderate to severe mood swings, are signs of deeper imbalances. Ayurveda describes that these stubborn symptoms are usually due to the build-up of wastes and toxins, referred to as "Aama," in the body's tissues. In this case, a traditional Ayurvedic detoxification programs "Panchakarma" may be needed to clear the body's channels and gain relief. This internal cleansing approach is also the treatment of choice for more serious problems such as osteoporosis and high cholesterol. Panchakarma-Abhyanga (Massage), *Mriduswedana* (sudation), *Shiro dhara*, *Mridu Virechan* (purgation), *Basti* (enema). Ayurvedic detoxification programme “panchakarma” may be needed to clear the body’s channels and gain relief. Lifestyle management also plays a significant role in the time of menopause. *Rasayana* therapy(rejuvenation) is not only preventing the aging changes, but it brings in youth fullness to a person. It increases life span, memory, & intelligence health; improve color & complexion, Strength & performance of the organs of cognition & conation. Hence an addition of *Rasayana* Therapy is also needed for the management of the disorder.

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ORCID

Krishna Meher , <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0071-2326>

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