

Role of bahiparimarjana chikitsa (external therapies) in the pain management of Grudhrasi w.s.r. to Sciatica- review study

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Abstract

Gridhrasi is defined as Stambha (stiffness), Ruk (pain), Toda (pricking pain) in a radiating manner along with Spandana (tingling sensation) starting from Kati Pradesha (low back) to Prushtha (back), Janu (knee joints), Jangha (calf muscles) and Pada (dorso lateral aspect of feet) of either one side of the lower limb or may involve both lower limbs. There are two clinical presentations as Kevala Vata and Kapha Vata. Association of Kapha produces additional symptoms like Tandra (drowsiness), Gaurava (heaviness) and Arochaka (loss of taste).

It can be correlated with sciatica. The pain starts in the back and radiates down to one or both lower limbs. It is caused by the irritation or compression of sciatic nerve often due to a herniated or slipped disc, lumbar stenosis, Degenerative disc Spondylolisthesis (slipped vertebra) Muscle spasm (esp. piriformis muscle) or Trauma, tumors, or rarely infections etc. In Ayurveda line of treatment includes Nidana Parivarjana, Shodhana Chikitsa, Shamana Chikitsa, Rasayana Chikitsa and External applications i.e. sthanik bahiparimarjan chikitsa

In Ayurveda, Bahiparimarjan chikitsa is highly emphasized in Vata vyadhi like sciatica. it works by acting directly on the affected site. Selection of proper chikitsa paddhati according to Dosha, Dhatu and Sthan shanshraya is very important for accurate management. So that this study focused on different External Therapies in various aspects. It includes significance of Abhyanga, Swedan, Kati Basti Pichudharan, Lepa, Upanaha, RaktaMokshan, Siravedha, and Jalaukavacharana.

Keywords: Gridhrasi, sciatica, abhyanga, swedan, kati basti, pichudharan, lepa, upanaha, raktamokshan, siravedha, and jalaukavacharana, agnikarma

Introduction

Aims and objectives

1. To Review various types of sthanik Upachar paddhati mentioned in Ayurveda for the management of Ghrudhrasi.
2. To evaluate selection and application of proper External Therapies in Ghrudhrasi according to Dosha bhed, dhatu dushti, Avastha, Bala and Sthan sanshraya

Review of literature

Gridhrasī is well described in the Brihatrayī (Charaka, Suśruta, Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya) and later nighaṇṭus under Vātavyādhi.

HETU:

Ruksha, Shita, Alpa, Laghu, Tikata, Katu, Kashaya - Anna sevana (food intake), Ativyayam, Excessive sitting or standing longer time, Amotpatti, Dhatukshaya etc.

Samprapti

For Vatakapahaja Gridhrasi

Nidana Sevana - Formation of Ama- Excessive secretion or vitiation of Kapha

- Abnormal formation of Mala of Dhatu and Dosha- Obstruct normal pathway of Vayu- Gridhrasi

For Vataj Gridhrasi

Nidana Sevana- Vitiation of Vata/Dhatukshaya- Rukshata, Kharata & Parushata - Kha-Vaigunya (emptiness) in strotas in Kati region and along Sciatic nerve innervation- Ghrudhrasi

Samprapti Ghataka (Pathological Factors)

Dosha – Vyana and apana vata, kapha

Dushya – Rasa, Rakta, asthi, majja, sira, kandara, snayu

Agni – Jatharagni and Dhatwagni

Ama – Jatharagnijanya and dhatwagnijanya

Udhbhava sthana– Pakwashaya

Adhithana – pritha, kati, sphik

Strotas – Rasa, rakta, mansa, medo, asthi and majjavaha srotasas

Vyakti – Adhosakthi–uru, janu jangha and pada

Rupa – Ruk, toda, stambha arochaka, suptata, bhaktadwesa, tandra, gaurava.

Methodology

Bahiparimarjana (External Therapies) In Gridhrasi

These play important role in Ghrudhrasi. The significances are explained in a structured way:

Abhyanga (Oil Massage) Abhyanga is the external application and gentle massage of warm medicated oils over lumbar region, buttocks, thighs, and legs. Massage with gentle pressure in downward strokes, focusing on the sciatic nerve pathway.

Commonly Used Oils

- Mahanarayana Taila – relieves stiffness and nourishes nerves
- Sahacharadi Taila – specific for Vata disorders of lower limb
- Ksheerabala Taila – strengthens nerves and muscles
- Dhanwantharam Taila – relieves pain, improves circulation

Swedana

After Abhyanga, medicated fomentation is applied to the lumbar-sacral region, buttocks, thighs, and legs to enhance oil absorption and relieve symptoms.

Types used in Gridhrasi:

- Nadi Sweda – medicated steam through a tube.
- Patra Pinda Sweda – bolus of fried herbal leaves (Nirgundi, Eranda, Arka) applied warm.
- Valuka Sweda – fomentation with heated sand (useful in stiffness)
- Kashaya Sweda – decoction steam for Vata-Kapha dominance.

Kati basti It provides sustained heat and nourishment to the lumbar region.

Procedure of Kati Basti

A dough ring is prepared from black gram flour/wheat flour and fixed on the lumbar-sacral region. Warm medicated oil is poured inside the ring. Oil is retained warm for 30–40 minutes, maintaining temperature by replacing cooled oil with warm oil. After removal, gentle massage is done and the patient may undergo mild Swedana (fomentation).

Pichudharan

Pichu Dharana is a type of Snehana (oleation therapy) where a cotton pad soaked in warm medicated oil is applied and retained over the painful area.

Procedure of Pichu Dharana

Medicated oil is warmed. A thick sterile cotton pad (pichu) is soaked in the warm oil and placed over the lumbar-sacral region. Oil is reheated and replenished at intervals to maintain warmth. Kept in place for 30–40 minutes. After removal, the area is gently massaged and sometimes followed with mild Swedana (fomentation).

Lepa

Application of paste prepared from herbs directly on the site of pain.

Procedure

Herbs are chosen according to dosha predominance. Drugs are powdered/freshly ground and mixed with a suitable liquid medium to form a smooth paste.

Application

The paste is applied in thick, uniform layer over the affected part (lumbar-sacral region, buttocks, thigh, or leg in Gridhrasi). The applied area is then covered with a clean cloth or leaves (e.g., castor, arka, nirgundi) to retain warmth and moisture. It is kept for 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the drug and patient's condition. After the prescribed duration, Lepa is gently removed with warm water, followed by mild oil application if required.

Upanaha Chikitsa

Warm medicated paste/poultice is applied and bandaged over the affected area. It combines the effect of Snehana (oleation), Swedana (sudation), and Lepana (paste application) in one treatment. Herbs like Dashamoola, Eranda, Nirgundi, Rasna, Shigru, Godhuma (wheat), Yava (barley), Masha (black gram) are made into a paste with warm oil or ghee and then wrapped with a clean cloth. Kept on affected part for several hours.

Raktamokshana

In Gridhrasi when Vata is associated with Rakta or Pitta, leading to daha (burning), raga (redness), shopha (swelling), and severe pain. Raktamokshana mentioned in Sushruta Samhita. By eliminating vitiated blood and relieving the obstruction to Vata, Raktamokshana helps reduce pain and inflammation and improves functional mobility.

Siravedha

(Bloodletting through venesection) It is specifically indicated in acute, severe, or stubborn pain conditions where Vata-Pitta are aggravated and there is local congestion. In Gridhrasi, Siravedha is performed as a form of Raktamokshana to relieve pain and remove vitiated Doshas. The patient is made to sit or lie comfortably, and the affected lower limb is exposed. According to classical Ayurvedic texts, the vein located four Angulas above or below the Janu Sandhi (knee joint) on the affected side is selected for venesection. A tourniquet is applied proximal to the site to make the vein prominent. After aseptic preparation, the vein is punctured with a suitable sterile instrument, and vitiated blood is allowed to flow until adequate bloodletting is achieved. The procedure is stopped when the desired signs of proper bloodletting appear. The tourniquet is then released, pressure is applied to control bleeding, and the puncture site is dressed. The patient is advised appropriate post-procedure care, including rest and a light, wholesome diet.

Jalaukavacharana (leech therapy)

It is indicated in patients with burning, tenderness, or Pitta dominance. After proper examination and aseptic preparation, healthy medicinal leeches are applied over the most tender or painful area, commonly in the Kati (lumbar region), Sphik (gluteal region), or along the affected lower limb. The leeches are allowed to suck blood until they detach naturally or show signs of satiation. After removal, the bite site is cleaned and dressed appropriately.

Agnikarma

Agnikarma is performed with the help of agni which is very effective, simple, safe, cheap and having quick action. Carakacharya mentioned Agnikarma in Gridhrasi at the site of Antara- Kandara-Gulpha pradesha (6) i.e., from mid of medial aspect to the mid of lateral aspect of lower limb, covering the dorsal surface at height of four angulas from medial malleolus and lateral malleolus/ Achilles tendon). procedure of Agnikarma is performed in three steps i.e., purva karma, pradhana karma and paschata karma. In purva karma, the exact sight of Agnikarma should be marked and cleaned. During the pradhana karma, the procedure of Agnikarma is done with the red hot shalaka at the marked sight in such a way that samyaka dagdha lakshanas were observed. In paschatakarma, the pulp of Aloe vera was applied over treated part and then powder of Yashtimadhu and Haridra was sprinkled

Discussion

- Abhyanga Pacifies aggravated, nourishes nerves and muscles. Relieves stiffness and spasm. Improves circulation and reduces dryness caused by Vata. It supports long-term management when combined with other Ayurvedic therapies.

- Swedana Chikitsa directly targets the symptoms of pain, stiffness, and restricted movement. By pacifying aggravated Vata and kapha, improving circulation, and relaxing muscles, it offers both symptomatic relief and functional improvement, especially when combined with Abhyanga and Basti therapy.
- Kati basti provides sustained heat and nourishment to the lumbar region. By pacifying aggravated Vata, relieving pain and stiffness, and nourishing spinal tissues, it strengthens the lower back for long-term recovery.
- Pichu Dharana is effective in pacifying Vata, relieving pain, stiffness, and nerve irritation, and provides deep nourishment and relaxation to the affected area.
- Upanaha Sweda is indicated in Gridhrasi, especially in Vata-pradhana conditions characterized by Shoola (pain), Stambha (stiffness), Graha (muscle spasm), Gaurava (heaviness), and restricted movements of the lower limb. It helps in Vata Shamana, relieves pain and stiffness, and improves mobility. However, Upanaha Sweda should be avoided in Ama Avastha, acute inflammatory conditions with redness, heat, and burning sensation, Pitta-pradhana manifestations, Jwara (fever), open wounds, ulcers, skin infections, and other conditions where Swedana therapy is contraindicated.
- Raktamokshan is indicated when vata dosha is associated with Rakta and Pitta.

Siravedha (bloodletting through venesection) It is specifically indicated in acute, severe, or stubborn pain conditions

Jalaukavacharana (leech therapy): It is indicated in patients with burning, tenderness, or Pitta dominance.

- Agnikarma helps to alleviate Vata and Kapha Dosha. The therapeutic heat generated during Agnikarma provides Vedanasthapana (pain relief), reduces Stambha (stiffness) and Gaurava (heaviness), improves local circulation, and removes obstruction in the channels (Srotorodha). The Ushna (hot), Tikshna (sharp), and Sukshma (subtle) properties of Agni help normalize the movement of Vata and reduce the symptoms of radiating pain along the sciatic nerve. Agnikarma is particularly beneficial in chronic and recurrent cases of Ghrudhrasi.

Conclusion

In Gridhrasi, Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa should be selected according to the predominant Dosha involved. In Vataja Gridhrasi, therapies such as Abhyanga, Patra Pinda Sweda, Nadi Sweda, and Upanaha Sweda are preferred due to their Snigdha and Ushna properties, which help alleviate pain, stiffness, and restricted movement. In Vata-Kaphaja Gridhrasi, where heaviness, numbness, and Kapha predominance are present, Ruksha Udvartana, Valuka Sweda, Churna Pinda Sweda, and Agnikarma are beneficial as they reduce Kapha and relieve channel obstruction. In Vata-Pittaja or Vata-Raktaja Gridhrasi, characterized by burning sensation, tenderness, redness, and inflammation, Jalaukavacharana and Siravedha are indicated to remove vitiated Rakta and Pitta, while excessive heat therapies should be avoided. In cases of Sama Gridhrasi, where Ama is present, Ruksha Swedana is initially advised and Snigdha therapies are introduced only after Ama Pachana.

Thus, selection of proper Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa helps effectively in pain relief, reduction of inflammation and stiffness, restoration of normal Vata movement, and improved functional mobility in Gridhrasi.

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