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Review Article

### PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE IN GERIATRICS

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#### ABSTRACT

Ageing is a process of physical, psychological and social change in multi dimensional aspects. Ayurveda, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by promotion of health and management of diseases occurring in old age. It has a focused branch called Rasayana (Rejuvenation) which deals with the problems related to ageing and methods to counter the same. Geriatrics or Jaracikitsa or Rasayana in Ayurveda is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring this degenerative phase of one's life. Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self dependant for their daily activities to maximum possible extent. Ayurveda and other traditional Indian health systems lay emphasis on preventing the diseases. Elaborate description is available on personal hygiene encompass diet and regimen during daily routine (dinacarya), seasonal routine (Ritucarya) and behavioral and ethical guidelines (sadvritta). Observance of certain rules regarding suppressible and non-suppressible urges also paves way towards positive health. These practices lay emphasis on prevention of diseases and promotion of health

**Keywords:** Ageing, Dinacarya, Ritucarya, Rasayana.

#### INTRODUCTION

AYURVEDA gives top priority to geriatrics. The term geriatrics is derived Greek word, Geri - old age and iatrics - care. It is the branch of medicine concerned with the care and treatment of elderly. The word geriatric has also a close link with the Sanskrit word 'Geeryadi' which means degenerated. According to Ayurveda, human body consists of seven constituents (Sapthadhathus) -rasa (lymph), raktha (blood), mamsa (flesh), medas (fat), asthi (bone), majja (marrow) and sukra (sperm). The dhathus get degenerated due to the body's prolonged structural changes. During old age we cannot enhance the capacity of dhathus, but it can be protected and rejuvenated<sup>1</sup>.

Ayurveda, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by promotion of health and management of diseases occurring in old age. Prevention and management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life and remain self dependant for their daily activities to maximum possible extent. Ayurveda has broad spectrum of preventing measures for combating the ageing process<sup>2</sup>.

**Aim:** To study preventive measure in Geriatrics

- 1) Daily regimen (Dinacarya)
- 2) Seasonal Regimens (Ritucarya)

3) Dietetics

4) Rasayana

#### Daily regimen (Dinacarya)

The Ayurvedic regimen of right living is designed for maintenance of health achievement of a long, healthy active life, providing relief from pain and disease thereby achieving satisfactory enjoyment of life and attainment of self-realisation.

#### Time to wake up

It is advisable to wake up during brahma muhurta (preferably between 4.00 a.m. to 5.30 a.m.). This is the best time for study and to gain knowledge.

#### Cleansing of teeth and mouth

Cleansing of teeth and mouth should be practiced after every meal in addition to early morning and before going to bed. The soft brushes made out of twigs of khadira, karaṃja, nimba, arka, apamarga, etc. should be used for this purpose. Tongue and mouth should be cleaned by a long flexible strip of metal or plant material. It not only cleanses the tongue but also stimulates digestion. Mouth should also be cleaned properly.

#### Drinking Water

Drinking water early in the morning according to one's capacity cleanses the body by enhancing the elimination of toxic wastes.

#### Bowels

One should attend the nature's calls. Elimination of urine and faeces cleanse the body and cheers up the mind.

**Eye Care**

Eyes should be cleaned with fresh water to prevent eye diseases and promote vision. Also wash eyes with triphala water every day.

**Betel Chewing**

Chewing of betel leaves with small pieces of puga (Areca nut) and fragrant substances like cardamom, cloves, refreshes the mouth and enhance digestion. Tobacco and tobacco preparations should be strictly avoided.

**Abhyaga (Oil Massage)**

It is highly beneficial to massage whole body including scalp with oil everyday to prevent dryness of body and stiffness of joints due to ageing in elderly. For massaging, tila taila (gingelly oil), sarsapa taila (mustard oil), narikela taila (coconut oil) or any medicated oils like Narayana taila may be used. Oil massage ensures softness and unctuousness of skin, free movement of joints and muscles; renders nourishment, improves peripheral circulation and eliminates metabolic wastes<sup>3</sup>.

**Exercise**

Regular exercise builds up stamina and resistance against disease, clears the channels of body (srotas) and increases the blood circulation and efficiency of vital organs, promotes appetite and digestion and prevents obesity. Daily walking is the best exercise that can be advised to old people. Before starting any exercise program consult with consultant physician.

**Bath**

Bathing improves enthusiasm, strength, appetite, span of life and removes sweat and other impurities from the body. After bath, one should wear clean clothes and smear the body with natural perfumes. One should have regular shaving, hair cut, clipping of nails etc.

**Marital Life**

Person should avoid extra marital sexual relationship and sexual intercourse with a woman during her menses, pregnancy, within one and half month after delivery, devoid of passion, older than one and suffering from disease to prevent Dhatu kshaya in elderly.

**Seasonal regimen (Ritucharya)**

Seasonal changes bring about diseases and they may be prevented by adopting certain seasonal regimen. According to Ayurveda, seasonal variations can have an impact on the elements of your body. Each dosha has an active season and by listening to the rhythm of the nature and making changes in your life style, it will help you to balance your constitution accordingly

Ritucharya: This word is the combination of two words i.e. ritu meaning seasons and charya meaning routine, thus giving the complete term the meaning of the routine that is to be followed in different seasons.

Following is the importance of Ritucharya: It maintains the climatic homology in form of dosh samya (equilibrium) in different seasons to promote swassthvruha (preventive & social medicine) on which ayurveda has laid a great stress since prevention is better than cure.

The year according to Ayurveda is divided into two kaals:

- *Aadaan kaal (Uttarayan)* (Northern Solastice)
- *Visarga kaal (Dakshinayaan)* (Southern Solastice).

This division is done according to the position of the sun. *Aadaan* means taking away and *visarga* means giving. In *aadan kaal*, the sun and wind are powerful. The sun takes away the strength of the people and the cooling qualities of the earth. It is the debialiting period. strength is weakened. In *Visarga kaal*, the sun releases the strength to the people. The moon is more powerful, the earth becomes cooled due to the clouds, rain and cold wind<sup>4</sup>.

A year consists of six ritus (seasons). Each ritu is two masas (months) long. Three ritus (one semester) form a kaal, The Six Ritus are mentioned in below table 1.

**Table 1: The six ritus and their properties can be summarized in the following table**

Kaal (Semester)	Ritu (Season)	Maas (Month)	Properties of the season
Aadaan (Northern Solastice)	Sishira	Magha and Phalguna (mid January to mid march)	Cold and dewy season
	Vasanta	Chaitra and Baisakh (mid March to mid May)	Spring season
	Grishma	Jyeshtha and Aashadha (mid May to mid July)	Summer season
Visarga (Southern Solastice)	Varsha	Shravan and Bhadrpada (mid July to mid September)	Rainy season
	Sharat	Aashvin and Kartika (mid September to mid November)	Autumn season
	Hemant	Margshirsha and Pausha (mid November to mid January)	Winter season

### **Hemanta Ritu (Winter Season)**

#### **Shishira Ritu (Cold and Dewy Season)**

This is the season of cold, where the atmosphere temperature drops down, the environment becomes chilly and this leads to the disequilibrium of vata dosha and kapha sanchay

#### **Diet-**

- Sweet, sour and salt taste food can be taken. In this season the digestive activity becomes more powerful. Increased vata gets obstructed from spreading out due to cold atmosphere outside which can digest the tissues. More intake of sweet, sour and salt helps reducing the vata.
- Wine prepared from *jaggery* (molasses) can be taken.
- Wheat/gram flour products, milk products, sugarcane products and corn/edible oils can be taken as a part of food.

#### **Life Style**

- Massage with oil.
- Ubvartan with fine paste/powder of kumkum (kesar).
- Exercise (*vyama*).
- Clothing-leather, silk and wool.
- Exposure to sunlight and fire to ke

### **Vasanta Ritu (Spring Season)**

In this season, increased kapha is liquified by the heat of sun which causes diminished agni (digestive activity) causing diseases

#### **Diet-**

- Easily digestible food.
- Barley, honey, roasted meat, mango juice can be taken as food.
- Beverages such as asava (fermented infusion), arista (fermented decoction), sidhu (fermented sugarcane juice), honey mixed with water and water boiled with extracts of chandan (sandal wood).
- Avoid hard to digest and cold food, sour, sweet and fatty food. Such food increase kapha causing dosha imbalance and hence genesis of disease

#### **Lifestyle-**

- Physical exercise.
- Dry massage.
- Nasal medication can be taken.
- After massage bath with karpura/chandan/kumkum
- Avoid sleeping during day time
- Vamana (Therapeutic Emesis)

### **Grishma Ritu (Summer Season)**

In this season, Sunrays become powerful. Kapha decreases vata increases day by day.

#### **Diet-**

- Sweet, light, fatty and liquid food can be taken.
- Wine should not be taken as it can cause burning sensation and even debility. If necessary take in very little quantity.
- Boiled rice with meat, cornflour, curd (yoghurt) can be taken in food.
- Drink very cold water. Panak Panchsara (syrup prepared with draksha (sugarcane), madhuka, date, kashmarya and parshuka fruits all in equal quantity cold with cardamom powder.

#### **Lifestyle-**

- Anoint body with chandan paste and take bath with cold water.
- Stay in cool places.
- Wear light dresses.

### **Varsha Ritu (Rainy Season)**

In this season the atmosphere is although cool due to rainfall but the humidity increases and this causes vata dosha prakopa.

#### **Diet-**

- Easily digestible food to be taken.
- Pulses, meat juice, soups, old grains and mastu (thin water of yoghurt) can be taken in food.

#### **Lifestyle -**

- Vasti (Administration of medicated enemata)
- Avoid sleeping at daytime, exertion and too much exposure to sunlight

### **Sharat Ritu (Autumn Season)**

Sudden exposed to sunlight after cold season aggravates pita.

#### **Diet-**

- Bitter, astringent and sweet taste can be included in food.
- Take easily digestible food like rice, green gram, amla, honey and sugar.
- Avoid heavy food, curd, oil, strong liquors.

#### **Lifestyle-**

- Udvartan with chandan.
- Bath with warm water.
- Pearls give soothing effect from aggravated pita
- Virecana (Therapeutic purgation)

### **Dietetics / Nutrition Ageing and Nutrition**

Elderly people have different nutritional requirements compared to the normal adult population. With increasing age, people become more vulnerable to malnutrition for many reasons including arocaka (anorexia) due to ageing, medication, disease like smriti nasha (dementia), manavasada (depression), stroke, kampakavata (Parkinson disease) and other neurological disorders, poor dentition, delayed gastric emptying, ill fitting dentures, swallowing problems, oral infections, taste changes and diminished smell sensation. Older individuals tend to respond to thirst much less than the younger ones, predisposing to dehydration particularly in case of fever and diarrhoea. Therefore fluid intake is necessary to replace physiological losses, better digestion and intestinal function and for renal clearance<sup>5</sup>.

There is no change in absorption of fats and carbohydrates, whereas vitamin D and calcium absorption is impaired, which leads to their deficiency. Calcium intake along with vitamin D is necessary to prevent bone mineral loss in elderly. Diet containing dairy products, fish, legumes, nuts, eggs, etc. are full of vitamin D and calcium. In addition, organic calcium like Pravala pishati Pravala panchamruta, Kukkutandaatvak bhasma, shankha bhasma, Kaparda bhasma etc. may be given as medication. Folic acid deficiency is more common in elderly. Diet containing cereals, vegetables, legumes and fruits should be given to the elderly. The diet should be regulated taking into account the habitat, season, age, etc. the diet should be balanced and the quantity should be according to one's digestive capacity. Following points may be considered while planning/ advising dietary and other life style regimen.

1. The food should be tasty, nutritious, fresh and good in appearance
2. Too spicy, salty and pungent food should be avoided
3. It should neither be very hot nor very cold
4. Liquid intake should be more frequent and in small amount
5. Heavy food can be prescribed in a limited quantity
6. Heavy food should not be given at night. The proper time for night meals is two to three hours before going to bed. After dinner, it is better to advice for a short walk.
7. Heavy physical work should be avoided after meals
8. Mind should be peaceful while eating
9. Eating only whenever hungry and avoidance of over eating
10. Inclusion of sufficient amount of vegetables and fruits in diet.
11. Daily intake of vegetable soup and fruit juices
12. Milk and ghee are the agrauAadha (drug of choice) of vardhakya (senility). Hence their daily usage is advisable. Patient with hyperlipidaemia, ischemic heart disease, obesity these use in moderate quantity is essential.

#### **Rasayana (rejuvenation)**

The strength of Ayurveda in the context of Geriatric care is Rasayana therapy. Rasayana stands as an answer in preventing premature ageing and to solve the problems due to ageing; it also ensures healthful longevity including mental health and resistance against various geriatric disease conditions. The observance of dietetics, rules of hygiene are essential for the success of treatment prescribed for healthy longevity of life and rejuvenation.

There are specific Rasayana for different age groups, which help in restoring the loss of specific bio-values of respective ages. Regular use of ghee, milk, fruits and vegetables in diet acts as Rasayana<sup>6</sup>.

#### **CONCLUSION**

A healthy mind is as important as healthy body. Satvik ahara is considered to be the best hitakara (wholesome), pathyakara

(compatible) diet. It is a vegetarian diet containing non-oily, non-spicy articles which are easily assimilable (satmya) e.g. milk, rice, green vegetables, certain fruits etc. Man is a social animal and one has to work in the society in a manner which is conducive to better hygiene and sanitation of his community. This can only be achieved by individual's efforts as well as his co-operation with the concerned authorities. Ayurveda adopts Satvavajaya cikitsa (non-drug psychotherapies) that includes various codes of conduct (achara rasayana) for maintenance of better mental health and to prevent various mental disorders. The principles laid down in the daily routine (Dinacarya), seasonal routine (Ritucarya) and behavioral and ethical principles (Sadvritha) & rasayana has been described here in brief. These measures are for preventing the diseases as well as for promoting the health. Proper observance of these principles leads to the perfect physical, mental and spiritual well being.

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