

ROLE OF SHIRODHARA IN SHIRASHOOLA ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA

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Article Received on
21 Dec. 2020,

Revised on 11 Jan. 2021,
Accepted on 01 Feb. 2021

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20212-22823

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ABSTRACT

Shirodhara is a traditional ayurvedic method of healing, that has been in use since ancient times to bring the mind, body and soul to a harmonious level. Touted as one of the most purifying and rejuvenating treatments, this therapy is designed in such a way that it not only eliminates the harmful toxins from the body but also relieves stress, gets rid of mental exhaustion and treat a host of disorders. According to the classics Ayurveda, chinta (stress) and atichintan (overthinking) are the causes of Rasavaha srotodushti which lead to many diseases. Shirodhara is an important healing technique of Ayurveda that has neuro-immuno-physio-psychological effects on the

human body. Shirodhara purifies the mind, alleviates anxiety, reduces headaches, and expands awareness. Shirodhara can be administered on its own or as part of a panchakarma detoxification regime.

KEYWORDS: Shirodhara, Harmonious, Stress, Ayurveda, Chinta, Atichintan, Panchakarma.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Shirodhara' comes from two Sanskrit words, where 'Shiro' means 'head' and 'dhara' implies to 'pouring or sprinkling something', together it infers to dripping or pouring of warm herbal ayurvedic oils on the forehead from a specific height, for a specific time period in a continuous stream, allowing the oil to run through the scalp and down into the hair. While there are different types of massage techniques that work only on the external surface and help in relieving muscle pain and stress, Shirodhara, on the other hand, works on multiple layers of the being. Be it exfoliating dead skin cells, transporting lymphatic fluids,

mitigating stress, expunging muscular tension, balancing doshic elements, or obliterating toxins, this divine process does it all. It even enhances the function of the central nervous system, treats diseases like anxiety, depression, and mental fatigue and bestows a whole new experience to the mind and body. Shirodhara is an Ayurvedic method of treatment in which herbal oil, medicated milk or decoction is poured gently and steadily over forehead in a continuous stream at a particular point from a definite height. It is mainly indicated in insomnia, stress, anxiety, depression, hair loss, fatigue, and functional as well as organic disorders. Some questions regarding Shirodhara commonly arise in mind which perplex the contemporary aspirant of Ayurveda such as – What is the scientific reason behind using different material (such as medicated ghrita, medicated milk, decoction, etc.) for Shirodhara? What is the rational thought behind this mode of administration of drug? How Shirodhara is different in action from other method of drug administration such as Shiropicchu, Shiroabhyanga, and Shirotarpan? Ayurveda is a “Life Science” but yet scientific approach is wanting. Although with the help of intense researches in Ayurveda in past few decades a stupendous knowledge come in light but still a long way is to be covered for unanimously endorsement of Ayurveda as “Life Science”. Shirodhara produce a constant pressure and vibration which is amplified by hollow sinus present in frontal bone. The vibration is then transmitted inwards through the fluid medium of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). This vibration along with little temperature may activate the functions of thalamus and the basal fore brain which then brings the amount of serotonin and catecholamine to the normal stage. Pressure also has an effect on impulse conduction. If prolonged pressure is applied to a nerve, impulse conduction is interrupted and part of body relaxes. In the procedure of Shirodhara prolonged and continuous pressure due to trickling of medicated liquid over forehead causes tranquility of mind and reduces stress by modulating the nerve progression/stimulation.^[1] When nerve endings of autonomic nervous system are stimulated, they produce chemical substances like Acetylcholine which exists in the tissues in an inactive form and is activated by a nerve impulse vibration produced due to constant pouring of shiradhara over forehead which may stimulate nerve endings and in turn Acetylcholine may be liberated. Small doses of Acetylcholine cause fall of blood pressure leading to decreased activity of central nervous system resulting in tranquility of mind.^[2] It is to be noted that larger doses of Acetylcholine like substances activate central nervous system, thereby resulting in increased activity of body and mind. During the process the patient concentrates on Dhara Dravya which is falling on his head, which increases the intensity of a-brain waves and decreases the brain cortisone and adrenaline level. This factor is also contributory in anti-stress effect of Shirodhara.

Probably Shirodhara normalizes the two important neurotransmitters Serotonin and Norepinephrine, which regulates a wide variety of neuropsychological processes along with sleep. Serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT) is a neurotransmitter in the brain that has an enormous influence over many brain functions. It is synthesized, from the amino acid Ltryptophan, in brain neurons and stored in vesicles. Serotonin is found in three main areas of the body: the intestinal wall; large constricted blood vessels; and the central nervous system. Of the chemical neurotransmitter substances, serotonin is perhaps the most implicated in the treatment of various disorders, including anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, stroke, obesity, pain, hypertension, vascular disorders, migraine, and nausea.^[3-4]

Probable Mode of Action of Shirodhara

1. Tranquilizing effect: Continuous pouring of taila on fore-head for a specific period has Tranquilizing effect and induces Sleep. According to Modern science local applications as ointment may pass through the Stratum corneum into blood vessel and produces desirable effects by reaching the target organ. The continuous pouring of oil in relaxed and comfortable position has an additional effect which can be compared to the cradling of Mother to a child. This function act as a sedative and soothing effect for the Brain and produces Sleep. Medicated oil poured on fore-head may be absorbed, producing Tranquilizing effect by reaching the Brain cortex. The chemical constituent of medicated oil may act as a Neuro transmitter as deficiency of certain Neurotransmitter can be checked hypothetically if oil percolate in to Brain cortex as explained by Johnson while treating the patient of Angina by Nitroglycerine.^[5]

2. Effect on Autonomic Nervous System: Shirodhara may also have Alpha Adrenergic blocking effect and can thus block certain actions of adrenaline and nor adrenaline. Shirodhara may also act on the adrenergic neuron probably produce their effects by modifying the synthesis storage and uptake mechanisms of noradrenaline.

3. Effect on Endocrine system: The effect of Shirodhara on hormone secretion can also be postulated considering the effect on hypothalamus as hypothalamus is the main controller of endocrine secretions. The hypothalamic Neurons which secrete the regulatory hormones are themselves under the control of specialized monoaminergic, neurotransmitter neurons which arise in the mid brain. These latter release Dopamine, Nor adrenaline and Serotonin. In turn,

these mid brain nuclei are under the control of visceral brain and are responsive to stress and emotional disturbances.

4. Regulation of emotional and behavioural patterns: Together with the limbic system with the hypothalamus regulates the feeling of rage, aggression, pain and pleasure and behavioural patterns of sexual arousal. Ultimately it can be postulated that Shirodhara may be having some effect on hypothalamus resulting in decrease of most of the psychic and somatic disorders.

Shirodhara therapy generally uses different types of herbal oils or infusions to bring about a soothing sensation to the mind and body. Depending upon the type of liquid used, it is categorized into the following types:

Taila Dhara (Thaila Dhara)

A single type of oil or a mixture of several ayurvedic oils are used in Taila dhara type of massage.

Dugadha Dhara (Ksheerdhara)

The main ingredient used in dugadha dhara is milk.

Takra Dhara (Thakradhara)

Takra dhara mostly uses buttermilk as the main ingredient.

Kwatha Dhara (Decoction)

Depending upon the diagnosed condition or dosha imbalance, the main ingredient in kwatha dhara consists of decoctions made by using various herbs.

Jala Dhara (Aqueous formulation)

Generally used in case of Pitta imbalance in the body. This type mostly uses coconut water as the main ingredient for the treatment.

The choice of liquid for Shirodhara treatment depends upon the person's condition and Vata imbalance. Commonly used fluids include various oils, coconut water, buttermilk, decoctions especially those containing licorice and milk processed with herbs and other herbal ingredients. Generally, 2-3 litres of these massage liquids are used for the 1-hour long session. In most cases, Ksheer bala tailam (a mixture of Bala herb paste, sesame oil, and

cow's milk) is used for Shirodhara. Other varieties include Chandanadi tailam, Karpasasthyadi tailam, Narayana tailam and Dhanwantharam tailam.

Important guidelines during Shirodhara

- The treatment is usually done either in the morning or in the evening to get the maximum results.
- In some particular health conditions, apart from the head and scalp, a whole-body massage i.e. Abhayanga is done using the herb-infused oils.
- The patient should take bath using medicated water or warm water after 30 minutes, once the procedure reaches completion.
- Use medicated shampoos to remove the oil from the hair.
- Avoid intake of caffeinated products for a few days as this may negate the benefits of the treatment.
- Go for a Vata pacifying diet.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Shirodhara therapy holds great value for treating different types of psychotic problems like depression, dementia, restlessness, etc. Thanks to the potent anti-stress, anti-depressive and anti-anxiety properties of the herbal oils at use, the therapy balances the brain chemicals i.e. neurotransmitters and ups the secretion of dopamine which in turn keeps the serotonin level under control and helps to reduce various symptoms of anxiety and depression. The divine Shirodhara therapy provides the greatest experience of relaxation and induces calming effects on the mind. The various herbal oils used in this treatment not only soothes, nourishes and pacifies the doshas but also extensively used for treating a myriad of health anomalies including stress, depression, insomnia, hypertension, migraine, etc. Go for this classical ayurvedic therapy, that not only increases spiritual awareness but also helps create a newfound connection to the inner soul.

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