



Review Article

AN AYURVEDIC AND CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW OF MENOPAUSE: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Menopause is generally defined as the cessation of menses for period of 12 months or a period equivalent to three previous cycles or the time of cessation of ovarian function resulting in permanent amenorrhea. During the period of menopause the women enters an estrogen deficient phase which leads to the various symptoms. This period is generally associated with manifestation of aging process in women. Other symptoms include hot flushes, sweating, mood changes, loss of libido etc. These symptoms affect the quality of life of the female.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is the only alternative available for menopausal syndrome in modern medicine. It also has a wide range of side effects on the body of the female.

In *Ayurveda* the context of menopause is depicted as "*Jarapakwa avastha*" of body and *Rajonivrutti*. *Rajonivrutti janya lakshana* is a group of symptoms produced by degenerative changes in the body. Degenerative changes are explained in *Ayurveda* as *Dhatukshaya lakshana*. *Vata dosha* dominance is seen in the later stage of life. To combat the degenerative process of the body tissue, *Acharyas* have described *Rasayana Chikitsa*. *Rasayana* includes drugs which promotes longevity and improve the quality of life. Thus an effort is being made here, to study the effect of *Rasayana therapy*, on Menopausal syndrome, conceptually, based on Available information in *Ayurvedic* texts and other contemporary resources. The basic Rationale for this study is to establish a reliable platform for further Research on the Said subject.

KEYWORDS: Menopause, *Rajonivrutti*, *Rasayana*, *Dhatukshaya*.

INTRODUCTION

Menopause is generally defined as the cessation of menses for period of 12 months or a period equivalent to three previous cycles or the time of cessation of ovarian function resulting in permanent amenorrhea.^[1] Various hormonal changes take place in the body during this phase of life; which results in development of several signs and symptoms that may disturb the routine activities.

Incidence and prevalence rate of postmenopausal syndrome is 78% of population, but only 19.5% of the symptomatic women take treatment.^[2] Advancement in the health care services has led to increase in the average life span of individuals. Thus one – third of life span will be spent in post menopausal phase. Hence there is a need for definitive management during the Menopausal stage, to improve the quality of life of individuals.

During reproductive years, women are protected by female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. In menopause women, an estrogen deficient phase accelerates the aging process resulting in symptoms of menopause with decreasing life expectancy. Also, Regression of ovarian function

occurs, causing depletion of primordial ovarian follicles resulting in diminished estradiol levels. This diminished hormonal levels lead to the various symptoms seen in menopausal phase which includes vasomotor symptoms like hot flushes, night sweats, headache, insomnia, dizziness, etc. Psychological symptoms include mood swings, anxiety, depression, irritability, etc. Other symptoms include loss of libido, dyspareunia, osteoporotic changes as well as cardiovascular changes.

In *Ayurveda*, the context of Menopause is depicted as "*Jara Pakva Avastha*" of body and *Rajonivrutti*. According to *Acharya Sushruta* and various other references, 50 years is mentioned as the age of *Rajonivrutti*.^[3] Menopause is linked with *Vata dosha* dominated stage of life. Therefore symptoms in menopausal phase like insomnia, anxiety, urinary symptoms, osteoporotic changes are due to dominance of *Vata dosha*. Along with that *Pitta dosha* symptoms like hot flushes, irritability, etc are seen, during this phase. *Rajonivrutti janya lakshan* is a group of symptoms produced by degenerative process of body tissue. Degenerative changes are

explained in Ayurveda as *Dhatukshaya lakshana*. To combat the degenerative process of the body tissue *Acharyas* have described *Rasayana Chikitsa*. *Rasayana* includes drugs which promotes longevity and improve the quality of life. *Rasayana* therapy can be used in the management of menopausal syndrome.

Rationale For Ayurvedic Therapy

Incidence and prevalence rate of postmenopausal syndrome is 78% of population, but only 19.5% of the symptomatic women take treatment. In Modern science, Hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) along with multivitamins and oxidants is only alternative for menopausal syndrome, but it has wider range of secondary health complications like vaginal bleeding, breast cancer, endometrial cancer etc.^[2]

Modern Aspect Of Menopause

Menopause is defined as permanent cessation of ovarian function resulting in permanent amenorrhoea, it occurring between age of 45-50 years of average is 47 years. Climacteric is a phase of declining in ovarian function. Therefore no corpus luteum and hence no progesterone is secreted by the ovary leading to anovulatory cycle and thus irregular menstruation occurs. Later graffian follicle formation also stops, estrogen activity and atrophy of endometrium leads to amenorrhoea. Therefore, there is a fall in estrogen level and rebound increase in FSH and LH by anterior pituitary gland.^[4]

Menopausal Symptoms

- Hot flushes
- Insomnia
- Mood changes
- Vaginal dryness
- Atrophic vaginitis
- Cystitis
- Drying out and thinning out of skin
- Palpitations
- Loss of libido
- Osteoporosis
- Anxiety/Depression

Management

1. Counseling
2. Antioxidants and multivitamins
3. HRT (hormonal replacement therapy)

HRT has wider range of secondary health complications like vaginal bleeding, breast cancer, endometrial cancer etc. There is increased incidence of malignancy and thromboembolic disease.

Ayurvedic Approach In Menopausal Symptoms

According to *Ayurveda*, all classics have mentioned the age around 50 years for *Rajonivrutti*.

Sushruta Acharya has explained that there is *Shareera-shithilta* in *Vrudha-avastha* (old age) and women attains *Rajonivritti* stage at around 50 years. This age is dominated by *Vatadosha*, this dominant *Vatadosha* affects the female body.^[5] The dominant *Vata dosha* specially with *Laghu* and *Ruksha guna* results in reduction in *Dravata* of *Rasa dhatu*. This further leads to *Dhatukshaya* starting from *Rasa dhatu*, further respective *Uupdhatu kshaya* takes place. Thus leading to *Artava nasha* (amenorrhea).

The vitiated *Vata dosha* also disturbs the other *Sharir* as well as *Manas dosha* (*Raja* and *Tama dosha*) leading to various psychological disturbances. Thus according to *Ayurveda* we can make a correlation between the different menopausal symptoms seen in the body.

Various factors can be considered as the causative factors for *Rajonivrutti*.

Dhatukshay

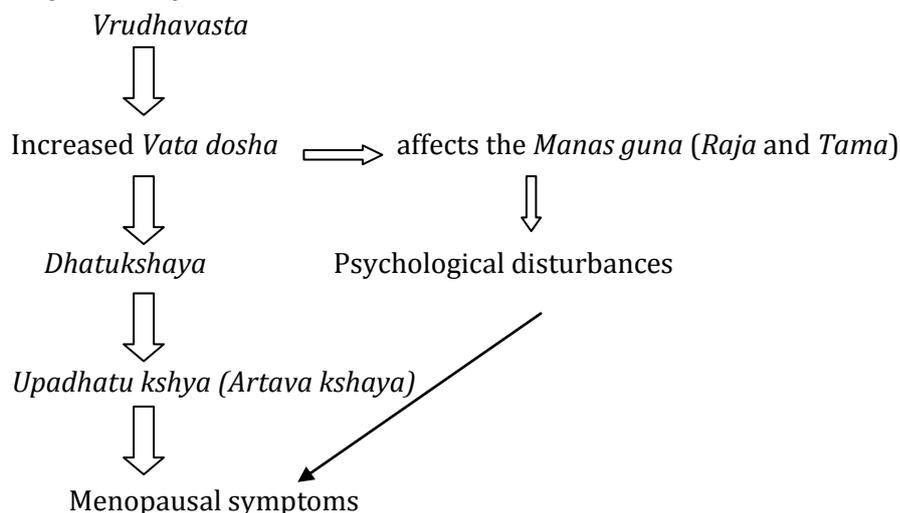
In old age all seven *Dhatu* ^[3] undergoes degenerative changes which causes various effects on female body.^[4]

1. **Rasakshay** - In *Ras kshay* various symptoms can be seen like *Shabda - Asahtva, Hridravata, Shool, Shrama, Shosha, Trusha*. (irritability, generalized weakness can be seen).
2. **Raktakshay**- In old age due to *Dhatukshay, Updhatu artav* formation also gets suppressed which results in *Rajonivrutti, Twakrukshata* and *Sirashaithilyata*. (dryness of skin, cessation of menses).
3. **Mansakshay**- *Sphikgandadishushkata, Toda, Rukshata, Glani, Sandhi Sphutan, Sandhi vedana, Dhamani shaithilya* is seen. (loss of tone and elasticity of skin can be seen in that condition).
4. **Medokshay**- *Angarukshata, Shrama, Shosha, krushta* is seen (dryness of skin, weakness, cachexia can be seen).
5. **Ashtikshay**- *Asthi kshay* and *Sandhi shaithilya* occurs in *Asthidhatu kshay*. (Arthritis and osteoporosis occurs in this condition).
6. **Majjakshay**- *Asthi soughirya, Asthi toda, Dourbalya, Bhrama, Tamah darshan, Sandhi Shunyatva* (mood swing and depression occurs sometimes).
7. **Shukrashay**- *Yonivedana, Shrama, Dourbalya, Panduta*, (dyspareunia, loss of libido).

As per *Samanya Vishesh Siddhant*^[6], *Dhatukshay* is responsible for *Vat - Vruddhi*. *Vayu* is responsible for initiation and progress of activity. Vitiated *Vata dosha* affects various organs, for example due to vitiated *Apan vayu* symptoms like vaginal prolapse, urinary incontinence, dry vagina occur. Due to *Pran* and *Udan vayu* psychological

symptoms like sleep disturbance, mood swings, depression can be seen.

Samprapti of Rajonivritti (Menopausal syndrome)



Management

- From the above theory we can conclude that various Ayurvedic drugs having properties of *Rasayana*, *Vata shaman* and *Kapha vardhan* can be helpful in the management of menopausal syndrome. *Rasayana* drugs in Ayurveda not only prevent the aging process, but also strengthens the body. *Rasayana*, also increases life span and memory. *Acharya Charaka* explains *Rasayana Prayojana* as life promoter, maintains positive health, preserves health, and preserves youth, and cures morbid sleep, drowsiness, physical and mental fatigue, laziness, weakness. It helps in balancing *Tridosha*, produces stability, cures smoothness of muscles, stimulates enzymes responsible for digestion & metabolism and brings about excellence in lusture, complexion and voice.^[5]

1. Medicines

- Dashmool*- it is known herbal combination to balance the *Vata dosha*.
- Bala*-it is an excellent anti-oxidant.
- Shatavari* -it is phytoestrogenic herb, filled with isoflavonoids, antioxidants, fibres and vitamins.
- Ashwagandha*- some clinical studies have established that if used singly in menopausal patients it controls effectively the vasomotor symptoms. (ICMR).
- Yastimadhu*- it is *Rasayan* drug which is promoting agent for life voice, hair, strength and libido.
- Chandrashur*- it is *Balya* (body strengthening), *Vatashaman* (herbs which normalize *Vat dosha*).
- Gokshur*- it is aphrodisiac, anabolic anti inflammatory, Agent Saponin in it promote libido.^[11]

- Amalaki*- it contains highest amount of stable vitamin C conjugated with gallic acid, this complex is powerful antioxidants cytoprotective and immune-modulatory action which promotes anti aging action.

Preparations like

- Ashwandha ghrita*
- Shatavari ghrita*
- Rason kshirpak*
- Bramhi ghrita*
- Saraswatarishta*
- Chyawanprash*

2. Panchakarma

- Snehan*- (Applying medicated oil all over the body) *Bala* oil, *Mahanarayan* oil.
- Swedan*- (taking steam) using *Dashmul* decoction, *Pottali pind sweda*.
- Shirodhara*- *Shirodhara* found to be effective in the management of disturbed psychological symptoms. *Shirodhara* with *Shatavari* oil, *Takra dhara*, *Dashmool kwath* can be helpful.^[12]
- Nasya*- (instillation of oil through nasal opening) *Panchendriya vardhan* oil, *Anu* tail.
- Uttarbasti*- (medicated oil is instillation through the vaginal or urethral opening) *Yastimadhu* tail.
- Pichu*- (medicated tampons kept in the vagina) *Shatavari* tail, *Shatdhaut ghrita*.
- Basti*- specially *Anuvasan Basti* (oil based medicated enema).

3. Diet

A balanced vegetarian diet is most important aspect in preventive management of menopause. *Vata shamak* and *Kapha vardhak* dietary constituents help in preventing effects of *Dhatukshaya*. *Acharya*

Vagbhat quotes that who takes Ghee and milk regularly in diet enters menopause late.^[11] Black grams, black sesame seed promotes ovarian function, green vegetables are important for mineralization of bones. legumes soya beans are known good source of phytoestrogens.^[11] Ghee, milk and milk products, protein and calcium rich diet, phytoestrogen rich food like soya, wheat etc. can be helpful.

4. Yoga, Exercise And Meditation

Yoga, *Pranayam*, *Suryanamaskar*, meditation along with *Anulom vilom* can be beneficial in relieving stress and other psychological symptoms as well as improve the muscle tone. Yoga is helpful to firstly decrease the anxiety, stress, depression of such patients. Along with that, some asana helps in *Medo pachan* and *Ama pachan*, resulting in proper formation of *Ras dhatu*. Yoga controls *Pranvayu* which regulates all *Panch vata* in human body.

5. Counseling

It is very important to maintain her physical as well as mental status, many psychiatric symptoms occurs during this period. *Sadvritta* (Righteous life style) and *Swasthvritta* (Healthy life style) are key to improve quality of life Counseling regarding stress management and develop positive approach towards menopause can be helpful.

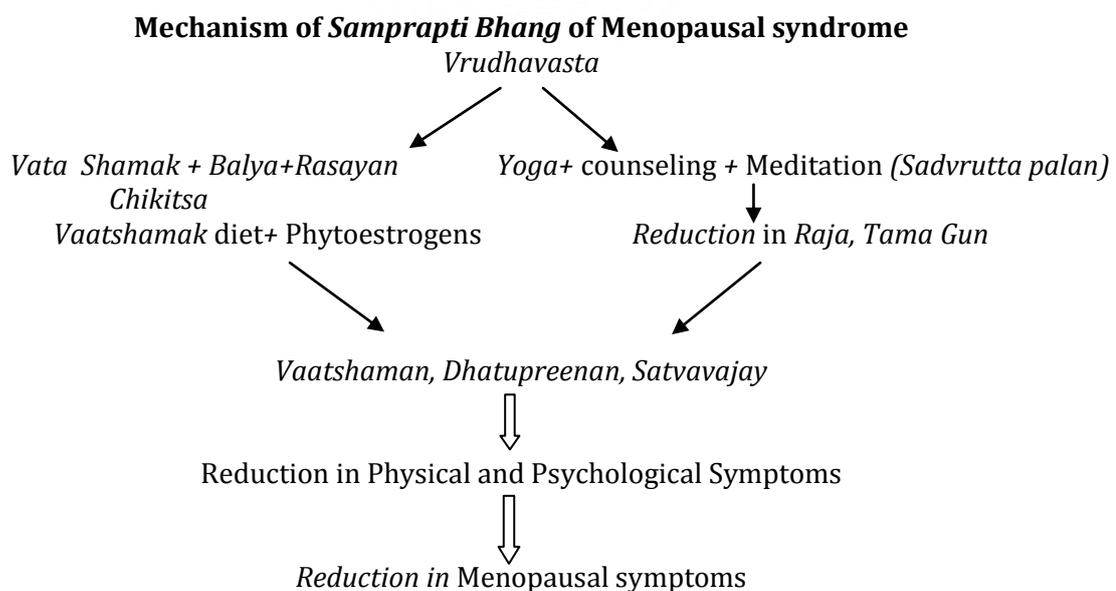
DISCUSSION

Menopause is simply not an estrogen deficiency state but it is associated with large number of symptoms which disturbs women's routine life. Menopause is linked with *Vata dosha* dominated

stage of life. Therefore symptoms in menopausal phase like insomnia, anxiety, urinary symptoms, osteoporotic changes are due to dominance of *Vata dosha*. Along with that *Pitta dosha* symptoms like hot flushes, irritability, etc are seen, during this phase. *Rajonivrutti janya lakshan* is a group of symptoms produced by degenerative process of body tissue. Degenerative changes are explained in Ayurveda as *Dhatukshaya lakshana*. *Sushruta Acharya* has explained that there is *Shareera-shithilta* in *Vrudha-avastha* (old age) and women attains *Rajonivritti* stage at around 50 years. This age is dominated by *Vatadosha*, this dominant *Vatadosha* affects the female body.^[5] The dominant *Vata dosha* specially with *Laghu* and *Ruksha guna* results in reduction in *Dravata* of *Rasa dhatu*. This further leads to *Dhatukshaya* starting from *Rasa dhatu*, further respective *Updhatu kshaya* takes place. Thus leading to *Artava nasha* (amenorrhoea).

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CONCLUSION

Nowadays, symptoms related to menopause are becoming a major problem; for which a safe and effective line of treatment is necessary. In *Ayurveda* special branch of *Rasayana* is explained; which is life

promoting and deals with the aging problems, to improve health as well as longevity.

Menopausal symptoms generally occur due to disturbed *Vata Dosha*. *Dhatukshay* is responsible for

Vat vruddhi and vitiated *Vata dosha* affects various systems in women's body. From the above theory we can conclude that various Ayurvedic drugs having properties of *Rasayana*, *Vata shaman* and *Kapha vardhan* along with *Panchakarma*, *Sadvrutaa*, balanced diet, *Yoga*, meditation can be helpful for the management of menopausal syndrome Thus, the development of specialized health care system in this direction can be a major step in this direction.

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Cite this article as:

Amrita Mishra, Rajashree V. Shelare. An Ayurvedic and Contemporary Overview of Menopause: A Conceptual Approach. International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research. 2018;6(2):34-38.

Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared

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