

AYURVEDA AND DENTISTRY

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ABSTRACT:

Even though dentistry was not a specialized branch of Ayurveda, it is included in its Shalaky Tantra (system of surgery). Problems such as deformities of the oral cavity, plaques and infections were managed in ancient India. Traditional medicine can treat various infectious and chronic conditions. Research has shown that all kinds of chewing sticks described in ancient Ayurveda texts have medicinal and anti-cariogenic properties. Its oil pulling (Kaval, Gandush) practice is claimed to cure about 30 systemic diseases. Amla (Emblimyrobalan), is a general rebuilders of oral health. Bilberry fruit (*Vacciniummyrtillus*) and hawthorn berry (*Crateagusoxycanthus*) stabilize collagen, strengthening the gum tissue. Liquorice root (*Glycyrrhizaglabral*) promotes anti-cavity action, reduces plaque, and has an antibacterial effect. Use of safe, quality products and practices should be ensured based on available evidence if traditional medicine is to be acknowledged as part of primary health care. Scientific validations of the Ayurveda in dental health practices could justify their incorporation into modern dental care.

Key Words: Ayurveda, Oral health, Oil pulling, Traditional Medicine.

INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine which evolved in India some 3000-5000 years ago, a system of traditional medicine native to the Indian subcontinent, now practiced in other parts of the world as a form of complementary medicine.^[1] The earliest literature on Indian medical practice appeared during the Vedic period in India. The *Suśruta Samhitā* and the *Charaka Samhitā* are its earliest authoritative texts.^[2] Over the centuries, Ayurvedic practitioners developed large numbers of medicinal preparations and surgical procedures for the treatment of various ailments and diseases.^[3] Even though dentistry was not a specialized branch of Ayurveda, it was included in its system of surgery. In ancient India, problems such as deformities of the oral cavity, plaques and infections could be managed and even cured.

Traditional medicine is the sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures that are used to maintain health, as well as to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental illnesses. Traditional medicine that has been adopted by other populations (outside its indigenous culture) is often termed complementary or alternative medicine. Herbal medicines include herbs, herbal materials, herbal preparations, and finished herbal products that contain parts of plants or other plant materials as active ingredients.

Methods used to treat oral health

Chewing sticks

Ayurveda recommends chewing sticks in the morning as well as after every meal to prevent diseases. These herb sticks should be either 'kashaya' (astringent), 'katu' (acid), or 'tikta' (bitter) in taste. The method of use is to crush one end, chew it, and eat it slowly.^[4]

The neem (*margosa* or the *Azadirachta indica*) is a famous herbal chewing stick. Chewing on these stems is believed to cause attrition and levelling of biting surfaces, facilitate salivary secretion and, possibly, help in plaque control, while some stems have an antibacterial action.^[5]

Oil pulling

Oil pulling, in CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine), is a procedure that involves swishing oil in the mouth for oral and systemic health benefits.

Brushing is contra indicated in the cases of mouth ulcer, fever, indigestion, those who have tendency to vomit,

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asthma, cough, thirst. Oil pulling can be used to clean the oral cavity in all these cases.

Using oil pulling method, surgery or medication could be prevented for a number of chronic diseases.^[6]

Tissue regeneration

In Ayurveda, the well-known Rasayana herb, amla (the fruit of a tree) is considered a general builder of oral health.^[7]

Some Ayurvedic Remedies for Common Dental Problems

Yellow teeth: Use mixture of salt with finely powdered rind of lime as toothpowder. Similarly mixture of keekar wood (50gms), roasted alum (20gms) and namaklahori (10gms) can be used to clean teeth.^[8]

Dental decay: Eat food rich in calcium. Mix turmeric, salt and mustard oil to make a paste and rub it on teeth and gums. Eat liberal amount of raw vegetables.^[9]

Bleeding gums: Twig of neem, banyan, babul and holy basil used to clean teeth can help to stop bleeding. Mix alum with mustard oil and massage gums, then rinse your mouth with water mixed with alum. Chewing leaves of guava tree can also help to stop bleeding. Eat plenty of roughage, lemon, citrus fruits, and green vegetables.^[8]

Toothache: Til, cinnamon and clove oil can be effective for preventing toothache. A clove of garlic with rock salt, pinch of pepper powder mixed with clove oil or a paste of the bark of bay berry prepared with vinegar can relieve toothache. Variety of oral complaints, such as Xerostomia, Aphthous ulcer, Lichen planus, and Bechet's syndrome can be treated better by ayurveda.^[9]

Efficacy and safety

Many people believe that because medicines are herbal (natural) or traditional they are safe (or carry no risk for harm). However these traditional medicines and practices sometimes cause harmful, adverse reactions if the product or therapy is

- of poor quality,
- Taken inappropriately
- Taken in conjunction with other medicines.

So patient awareness, knowledge about safe usage of ayurvedic medicines is important, as well as more training, collaboration and communication among providers of traditional and other medicines is necessary.^[5]

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Many people believe that because medicines are herbal (natural) or traditional they are safe (or carry no risk for harm). However, traditional medicines and practices

can cause harmful, adverse reactions if the product or therapy is of poor quality, or it is taken inappropriately or in conjunction with other medicines. Increased patient awareness about safe usage is important, as well as more training, collaboration and communication among providers of traditional and other medicines.

Traditionally, Ayurveda uses many metals in therapeutics, but that is only after due purification process strictly followed in accordance with authentic traditional methods. Lead, mercury, and arsenic intoxication have been associated with the use of Ayurvedic herbal medicine product (HMPs).

Robert *et. al.* conducted a study to determine the prevalence and concentration of heavy metals in Ayurvedic HMPs manufactured in South Asia and sold in Boston-area stores. They concluded that one of 5 Ayurvedic HMPs produced in South Asia and available in Boston South Asian grocery stores contains potentially harmful levels of lead, mercury, and/or arsenic. Users of Ayurvedic medicine may be at risk for heavy metal toxicity, and testing of Ayurvedic HMPs for toxic heavy metals should be mandatory.^[10]

Research has found that in US, 51% of FDA approved drugs have serious adverse effects not detected prior to their approval. 1.5 million people are sufficiently injured by prescription drugs annually that they require hospitalization. Once in hospital the problem may be compounded. The incidence of serious and fatal adverse drug reactions (ADRs) in US hospitals is now ranked as between the fourth and sixth leading cause of death in the United States, following next after heart disease, cancer, pulmonary disease, and accidents. Thus the safety of and risks associated with medical interventions is an issue across all categories of health care.^[11]

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