



Geriatric health care- An ayurvedic perspective

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Abstract

Geriatrics is emerging as a most challenging and promising field of twenty first century. As the population of aged people is increasing, not only in India but throughout the world, it has raised both medical and sociological needs. In India the last decade has projected as significantly rising rate of aging population and hence a great need is now felt to strengthen the geriatric health care in this fast developing country. Conventional System of medicine has no much to look after in the care area of geriatric health. Experts feel the increasing requirement of the medical management of the diseases of old age. Ayurveda is the science of not only medicine but as well as of life and longevity. It presents a sound concept and science of aging, its delaying and management. Ayurveda specially incorporates *rasayana* (drugs and treatment for rejuvenation) as one of its eight specialties, which is exclusively devoted to nutrition, health and immunity promotion and geriatrics.

Key Words: Geriatrics, aging population, immunity

Introduction

Geriatrics is the branch of medicine that focuses on health promotion, prevention and treatment of disease and disability in later life. The term comes from the Greek word 'Geron' meaning 'old man' and 'iars' means 'healer'. The word geriatric has also a close link with the Sanskrit word 'Geeryadi', which means degeneration. Ayurveda usually gives priority to preservation and prevention of health and geriatrics comes most promising in this object. It is called "jarachikitsa" which deals in geriatrics with the aspect of delaying of aging process, protection of the human body against the diseases. According to Ayurveda, human body consists of seven *dhatu*s which represents the sequential transformation of food through several mechanisms in to such matter which to be assimilated by body tissues grow and repair themselves i.e., *rasa*, *rakta*, *mansa*, *meda*, *asthi*, *majja* and *shukra*. The *dhatu*s get degenerated due to the body's prolonged structural changes. For example during old age the capacity of *dhatu*, cannot be enhanced but it can be

protected and rejuvenated by the use of *rasayana*, the herbs and regimen for rejuvenation. In Ayurveda the human life has been divided in to three spans according to growth and development.

- 1- From birth to the age of 20 in which all tissue of body grow.
- 2- 20 to 40 in which tissues continue to grow.
- 3- 40 to 60 in which the mental activities and power of judgment increases but some decay in tissues starts.

S.No.	Decades	Loss of ability or strength
1.	0 – 10	<i>Balya</i> (childhood)
2.	11 – 20	<i>Vridhhi</i> (growth)
3.	12 - 30	<i>Chhavi</i> (glow)
4.	31 - 40	<i>Medha</i> (intellect)
5.	41 - 50	<i>Twak</i> (skin)
6.	51 - 60	<i>Dristi</i> (vision)
7.	61 - 70	<i>Shukra</i> (power of sex)
8.	71 - 80	<i>Vikram</i> (physical strength)
9.	81 - 90	<i>Buddhi</i> (wisdom)
10.	91 - 100	<i>Karmendriya</i> (locomotor and other physical activities)

(Saranghadhara, 2002)

The main issue in geriatric health care is not merely the concern about the physiological phenomenon which is evitable, rather it is more the medical health problems and disease specificity afflicting an

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individual in old age warranting medical management in order to sustain a comfortable and healthy aging. Thus geriatric health care has to address to two fold problems, firstly the basic anti-aging care to retarded the rate of physiological aging and secondly the medical management of diseases and disorders specially occurring in old age such as Hypertension, Ischemic heart disease, Diabetes, Senile dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinsonism, Degenerative arthritis, Osteoporosis, Opportunistic infections, Prostatic enlargement, degenerative eye diseases like cataract a range of Angiopathies, Neuro degenerative diseases and Senile Psychoses which cause major morbidity in old age.

Ayurveda, being fundamentally the science of life and longevity, seems to have addressed these issue in an unique holistic manner involving not merely the biological case, so there also encompassing the psychosocial and spiritual dimensions (Sharma, 1992). There are strong possibilities to develop a safe and cost effective package for geriatric health Care on the basis of *Ayurvedic* life style management, *Rasayana* therapy and practice of *Yoga*.

Theories and Phenomenon of Aging

Ayurveda considers aging as *Swabhava* (inevitable) of life. In other words senescence is the *Swabhava* or nature of living being, because the life is time bound and it is inherently mortal. *Ayurveda* believes that aging occurs only in the body and mind, not in the real essence of the life i.e its conscious component which is eternal and it only changes the body which is made by the nature for one life span and thereafter through aging and death. Western biosciences have been trying hard to identify the cause of aging. A number of theories and observation have been projected such as genetic theory of aging, immunological theory, stress theory, free radical injury, hormonal involution theory etc but none of these have yet been proved. However these researches obviously indicate effect aging is a multifactorial phenomenon, and genomic and immune mechanism seem to be the sheet anchors. Thus till date there is no fundamental contradiction between east and west expect the philosophy of time bound life and rebirth and the splendid speculation about life beyond death (Singh, 1987).

Aging and death are the inevitable incidences of life. However, a long healthy life has been the considered wish of all beings, in all cultures and traditions. Hence tremendous attempts have been made to prolong life by delaying the process of aging. *Ayurveda* also links the phenomenon of aging with the doctrine of three humours called *dosha* i.e., *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. The childhood is embedded with the *Kapha* in the body, adulthood with *pitta* and old age with *vatadosha*. *Vatadosha*, by nature dries and decays the body and produces senile changes (Dhar, 2005). Thus the phenomenon of Aging can be evaluated in terms of the physiology of three *dosha*, and aging can be managed in tune with this theory with use of different specific rejuvenative measures.

The important medieval text of *Ayurveda*, namely *Sarangadhar Samhita* describe the process of aging depicting the involutionary features of specific bi-losses occurring during different decades of life due to aging. These descriptions are relevant even today if the chronology is corrected with present life span of man. Other important features of aging process consist weak digestion, loss of integrity of tissues, endotoxins at biological level. *Ayurvedic* Classics propound an unique concept of *ojas* which is the essence of all *dhatu*s (Sushruta, 1988). It is of two types namely 1- *Para-ojas* which is in minute quantity located in the heart and is vital for life; If *Para-ojas* is hatred, instantaneous death follows. 2- *Apara-ojas* which is relatively gross, is spread all over the body and is generally responsible for immune strength and considered to be of three categories i.e.,

1. Primary natural immunity,
2. Acquired natural immunity,
- 3- Artificially induced immunity.

They form an important consideration in the process of aging besides many other lifestyle related factors.

Concept of rasayana

Ancient *Ayurvedic* physicians had developed certain dietary and medicinal measures to delay ageing and rejuvenating whole metabolism of the body. This revitalization and rejuvenation is called as *Rasayana* treatment. *Rasayana* is one of the eight clinical specialties of *Ayurveda*. Not only drugs and food supplements are considered for rejuvenation but special health promoting conduct with peaceful



and stress free living also of prime importance in this respect(Singh, 2005a). The word *Rasayana* is composed of two words one is *rasa* and second is *ayan*. *Rasa here denotes all the body tissues and ayan is path*. This specially deals with the science of nutrition, geriatric health care and rejuvenation. This signifies not a single drug or medication, rather refers to rejuvenation regimen which of course uses rejuvenation remedies or drugs dietetics and overall healthy lifestyle and positive

psychosocial conduct (Sureshababu, 2001). The use of such measures and remedies produces best qualities tissues. tissues by acting through one or all of the following three principle levels of biological system with net result of improved nutritional status leading in turn, to better qualities of tissues, longevity, immunity, resistance against disease and improved mental faculties (Singh, 2005b). The Primary modes of rejuvenation effects are at level of tissues, metabolism and circulation.

Some herbs as Rasayana is classified as per the scope, method and use in following table -

S.No.	Age in Years	The diseredRasayana effect	Suggested Rasayana Remedies
1.	0 - 10	Corpulence	<i>Vacha, Kasmari</i>
2.	11 - 20	Growth	<i>Kasmari, Bala, Asvagandha</i>
3.	12 - 30	Lusture	<i>Amalaki</i>
4.	31 - 40	Intellect	<i>Brahmi, Sankhapuspi</i>
5.	41 - 50	Skin Glow	<i>Bhrangaraja, Jyotismati</i>
6.	51 - 60	Vision	<i>Jyotismati, Triphala</i>
7.	61 - 70	Virility	<i>Kapikacchu</i>
8.	71 - 80	Strength	<i>Ashwagandha</i>
9.	81 - 90	Mental Cognitive Power	<i>Madhuyashti</i>
10.	91 - 100	Locomotor Ability	<i>Arjuna</i>

As per scope of use

1. Promotor of normal health
2. Promotor of vitality & longevity of life
3. Promotor of intelligence
4. Promotor of complexion.
5. Promotes the vitality in specific diseases

As per method of use

1. Out door treatment
2. In door treatment

As per content of medicine

1. Drug based
2. Diet based
3. Conduct and life style based

The effect as rejuvenation

The *Rasayana* remedies described in Ayurveda are claimed to possess special nutritional supplement effect. Generally most of the *Rasayana* are micro molecular nutrients and they act through nutrition dynamics and not really on pharmacodynamics like other drugs. These drugs are likely to be nutrient tonics, antitoxins, anti-stress, adaptive and immune-modulators. The net effect of all these attribute is the anti aging effect. Certain recent studies on popular herbs like *Amalaki, Asvagandha,*

Guduchi, Brahmi and classical compound *Chyanvanaprasa* have shown evidence to suggest their efficacy as anti aging remedies.

Geriatric Health Care

Geriatric health care consists of following regimens -

- 1-Regimen should be followed according to body type. The body type is based on three dosha. The overall health status should be monitored to help in planning the geriatric health care (Singh, 2001a) .
- 2- Codes of personal and social hygiene should be followed.
- 3- Dietary Care avoiding too much of fat and heavy proteins performing easily digestible nourishing simple diet.
- 4-Regular exercise according to the requirement.
- 5-Regulated rest and relaxation according to the need.
- 6-*Yoga* and meditation
- 7- Massage and purification therapies
- 8-*Rasayana* therapy prescribed in consideration of individual needs considering the findings scored under item mentioned above (Singh, 2001b) .



9-Medical management of associated age related disease if any.

10-Supportive therapy and care of spiritual health.

Conclusion

Ayurveda, being fundamentally the science of life and longevity, contains a measure of geriatric health care. It deliberates on the science and philosophy of life and longevity with the goal of healthy aging and long life to achieve the all pleasures of life. 'Geriatrics' is emerging as a challenging specialty, because of ever growing population of aged people all over the world. In near future, every physician has to "treat" a large number of aging problems of our ripe and senior citizens in their clinics. Traditional remedies or herbals preparation are the only answer to meet out the geriatric challenges. Especially the Ayurvedic system of medicine offers an excellent line of management for these i.e aging problems, through *Rasayana* therapy which compensates the age related biological losses in the mind-body system and affords rejuvenation effect to a notable extent. Combining Ayurvedic herbs, dietetics, hygiene, noble conduct yoga and spirituality, it is possible to develop an effective package for geriatric health care today for global use.

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