



Kashtartava And Dysmenorrhoea: An Ayurvedic Approach To Understand And Manage The Menstrual Pain

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Abstract

In today's fast-paced and sedentary lifestyle, combined with a lack of physical activity, dysmenorrhoea has emerged as a growing concern. Modern women are increasingly facing challenges brought on by stress, improper diet (Mithyaahara), unhealthy routines (Vihara), overexertion, and malnutrition. These factors can lead to imbalances in the "Rituchakra" and contribute to various menstrual disorders. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of following Dinacharya (daily routine) and Ritucharya (seasonal routine), along with appropriate dietary habits and regular practice of Yoga, including Asanas, Pranayama, and meditation, to effectively manage dysmenorrhoea. In certain cases, Ayurvedic therapies such as Uttarbasti, Garbhashaya Balya Aushadhi, and Anuvasana or Matrabasti may also be recommended.

Conventional treatments for dysmenorrhoea often involve the use of analgesics and antispasmodics, which are not suitable for long-term use due to potential side effects. Kashtartava is mentioned as a symptom within the context of other disorders. Therefore, this study aims to explore and compile the scattered classical references related to Kashtartava in Ayurvedic literature.

Key words: ,Artava, Apatyamarga, Baddhartava, Kashtartava, Dysmenorrhoea.

Introduction

Painful menstruation, known as dysmenorrhea, is a growing concern worldwide. Characterized by crampy, labor-like pain in the lower abdomen, dysmenorrhea disrupts daily life and activities. In Ayurvedic classics, this condition is not recognized as a standalone disease, but rather as a symptom associated with various other health issues.

Stress has become an unavoidable aspect of modern life, and in the constant pursuit of material comfort, women are often sacrificing their health. A key reason behind the increasing prevalence of menstrual problems is the neglect of the fundamental principles of healthy living, which are essential for both physical and mental well-being. Menstruation is a natural physiological process in women's reproductive life; however, it can

cause discomfort and disrupt daily activities, leading to absenteeism from work or school and limiting participation in sports or other routines.

Menstruation is a natural aspect of female reproductive life. However, modern sedentary lifestyles and lack of exercise have contributed to the increasing prevalence of dysmenorrhea. This condition causes significant discomfort, impacting women's daily routines and overall well-being.

Review of Literature

According to Ayurveda

Artava refers to the bodily substance that is discharged at a specific time. Healthy Artava is characterized by its pain-free, non-burning, and non-slimy flow through the reproductive tract (Apatyamarga). The formation of Artava is primarily governed by two vital energies: Apana Vayu, which regulates downward movement, and Vyana Vayu, which facilitates outward movement and distribution.

Kashtartava (dysmenorrhea) is not classified as a distinct disease entity in itself, but rather is often mentioned as a symptomatic manifestation within various other diseases.

The term Kashtartava is derived from two words: "Kashta" meaning painful or difficult and "Artava" referring to menstruation. Thus, Kashtartava literally translates to a condition where menstruation is accompanied by significant pain and difficulty, aptly described as "Kashtena Muchyati Iti Kashtartava" - where Artava is shed with great distress.

Samprapti

The pathogenesis of Kashtartava involves multiple factors. Key contributors include:

1. Doshas: Predominantly Vata, with involvement of all three doshas (Tridosha), specifically Vyana and Apana Vata, Ranjaka and Pachaka Pitta, and Kapha as a secondary dosha.
2. Dhatu: Involvement of Rasa, Rakta, and Artava dhatus.
3. Upadhatu: Artava upadhatu is affected.
4. Agni: Impaired digestive fire (Jatharagni) and metabolic fire (Rasagni and Raktagni).
5. Srotasa: Obstruction in Rasa, Rakta, and Artavavaha channels.
6. Srotodushti: Types of channel obstruction include Sanga (accumulation) and Vimargagamana (abnormal flow).
7. Rogamarga: The disease pathway is internal (Abyantara).
8. Sthana Samshraya: The site of manifestation is the uterus (Garbhashaya), which is also the site of symptom expression (Vyakti Sthana).

According to Ayurveda, pain associated with Kashtartava (dysmenorrhea) is primarily attributed to Vata dosha. As noted by Acharya Charaka, gynecological disorders, including Kashtartava, cannot manifest without the involvement of aggravated Vata. While other doshas may also contribute, Vata is the key factor, with others playing a secondary role (Anubandhi). Pain in Kashtartava is therefore caused by Vata alone or in combination with other doshas.

Modern Review

Menstruation is a unique biological process in women and higher apes, characterized by the periodic shedding of the endometrium, accompanied by bleeding. Occurring approximately every 28 days between menarche and menopause, menstruation is a visible manifestation of the intricate interplay between hormones along the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian-endometrial axis, leading to cyclic uterine bleeding.

Dysmenorrhea is defined as painful menstruation, characterized by crampy, labor-like pain in the lower abdomen. This pain often radiates to the upper abdomen, waist, and thighs, and may be accompanied by systemic symptoms such as nausea.

Mechanism

The mechanism of pain production in dysmenorrhea can be attributed to several factors:

1. **Obstructive theory:** Obstruction to menstrual blood flow, possibly due to uterine abnormalities or premenstrual congestion, leads to spasmodic and painful contractions, linked to Vata dosha.
2. **Hypoplasia theory:** A prepubertal uterine state with underdeveloped muscles can cause retention of menstrual blood, resulting in painful contractions, associated with Alpa Mamsa Dhatu.
3. **Disturbed uterine polarity:** Disrupted uterine polarity can lead to retention of menstrual blood and painful contractions, linked to Apana Vata and Vilomagati of Rajah.
4. **Clotting of menstrual blood:** Clotting can cause dysmenorrhea by making it difficult to expel clots, associated with Kapha dosha and Baddha Artava.
5. **Degenerative nerve changes:** Degenerative changes in uterine nerves may contribute to pain, linked to Vyana Vata.
6. **Muscle ischemia theory:** Uterine muscle ischemia during contractions may cause pain, attributed to Vata dosha.
7. **Prostaglandins and metabolites:** Increased levels of prostaglandins and metabolites can contribute to pain.
8. **Excessive decidual formation:** Excessive decidual formation may cause dysmenorrhea, associated with Kapha dosha.
9. **Uterine malformation:** Uterine abnormalities, linked to Beeja Dosha, can cause dysmenorrhea.
10. **Corpus luteum:** The presence of corpus luteum is associated with dysmenorrhea, as anovular menstruation is often painless.
11. **Low pain threshold and general health:** Factors like low pain threshold and poor overall health (Alpa Sara) can contribute to dysmenorrhea.
12. **Psychological factors:** Mental and emotional factors (Manasika Karanas) can play a role in dysmenorrhea.
13. **Environmental factors:** Environmental factors causing nervous tension (Viharaja) can also contribute to dysmenorrhea.

Types of Dysmenorrhea

Dysmenorrhea can be classified into two main types:

A. Primary Dysmenorrhea

Primary dysmenorrhea refers to menstrual pain that occurs in the absence of any underlying reproductive organ pathology. It is associated with ovulatory cycles and is thought to be caused by prostaglandin-induced myometrial contractions, leading to uterine ischemia and pain. Psychological factors, such as personality traits and attitudes towards menstruation, may also play a role.

B. Secondary Dysmenorrhea

Secondary dysmenorrhea, on the other hand, is menstrual pain caused by a detectable underlying pathology. Common causes of secondary dysmenorrhea include:

1. Endometriosis
2. Adenomyosis
3. Uterine myoma
4. Endometrial polyps
5. Obstructive genital tract malformations

Other potential causes of pelvic pain include:

- Chronic pelvic inflammatory disease
- Pelvic adhesions
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Interstitial cystitis

Sudden onset of dysmenorrhea may be caused by:

- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Unrecognized ectopic pregnancy
- Spontaneous abortion

Accurate diagnosis is essential to distinguish between primary and secondary dysmenorrhea, as treatment options may vary depending on the underlying cause.

Treatment

In managing gynecological disorders, it's crucial to first normalize Vata dosha, followed by treatment for other doshas. A comprehensive approach involves initial oleation, sudation, and the five purifying measures (Panchakarma), including emesis (Vamana) and purgation (Virechan Karma). After thorough cleansing of doshas through upper and lower passages, other medications can be administered.

For Vata-related menstrual disorders, specific treatments to suppress Vata should be employed, considering properties like unctuous, hot, sour, and salty. In contrast, Pitta-related issues may benefit from sweet, cold, and astringent substances, while Kapha-related issues may require hot, dry, and astringent approaches.

In cases of Avrita Apana Vayu, treatments like Agnideepana (enhancing digestive fire), Grahi (absorbing), and Pakvashaya Shuddhikara (purifying the digestive tract) can be beneficial. Additionally, lifestyle modifications, Anulomana (regulating Apana Vayu), and Pakvashaya Shuddhikara can also be employed to manage gynecological disorders effectively.

Lifestyle Modifications and Recommendations

To alleviate symptoms and promote overall well-being, consider the following:

Exercise and Rest

- Engage in regular exercise, ideally 3 times a week, for at least 30-45 minutes.
- Prioritize sound sleep, aiming for 6-8 hours each night.

Substance Avoidance

- Refrain from smoking and alcohol consumption.
- Limit caffeine intake.

Dietary Recommendations

- Focus on consuming healthy, warm, and fresh foods.
- Eat smaller, frequent meals (5-6 times a day).
- Include beneficial fruits like plums, dark grapes, apples, and pomegranates in your diet.
- Increase intake of leafy vegetables.
- Regularly incorporate ginger into your meals.
- Avoid high-fat and high-sugar foods.

Supplements

- Consider taking supplements like calcium, magnesium, vitamin E, B6, and B12 to support overall health.

By adopting these lifestyle modifications and dietary recommendations, you can help alleviate symptoms and promote overall well-being.

Yoga for Women's Health

Yoga can help alleviate and prevent various women's health issues, promoting strength, stability, and flexibility. Specific yoga asanas, such as Ushtrasana, Bhadrasana, Gomukhasana, and Vajrasana, have been found to have pain-relieving effects. Yoga is a convenient, drugless, and inexpensive method that can also increase pain threshold capacity.

Ayurvedic Treatment Approach

According to Ayurveda, menstrual disorders are primarily caused by Vata dosha imbalance. Treatment focuses on alleviating Vata to achieve excellent results. Panchakarma therapies like Uttarbasti, Anuvasana, or Matrabasti are effective in addressing Vata-related menstrual issues. Additionally, Garbhashaya Balya Aushadhi can help reduce associated symptoms.

Specific Ayurvedic Treatments

- Snehana Karma (oleation) with Trivrita Sneha
- Swedana Karma (hot fomentation)
- Oral administration of Dashmoola kwath
- Basti (enema) with Dashmoola Ksheera
- Anuvasana Basti (oil enema) and Uttarbasti (intrauterine oil instillation) with Traivritasneha
- Poultice made from ingredients like barley, wheat, Kinva, Kusta, Shatapushpa, Priyangu, and Bala
- Oral intake of Sneha
- Swedana with milk
- Snehana in the form of Anuvasana Basti and Uttarbasti
- Other Vata-suppressing measures

Recommended Medications and Therapies

- Rajah Pravartini Vati
- Kaseesadi Vati
- Dashmoola Taila
- Trivrit Taila for Uttarbasti

These treatments and therapies can help alleviate menstrual disorders and promote overall well-being.

Discussion

The term "Primary Dysmenorrhea" is widely recognized globally, often abbreviated and used in casual conversations to refer to menstrual difficulties. In everyday contexts, the term is frequently used without strict adherence to its clinical definition, encompassing a broader range of symptoms.

In Ayurveda, Vata dosha is considered responsible for various gynecological disorders, including Udaavartini. Treatment modalities for Vata-related conditions include Basti, which is considered an effective approach. Basti can be categorized into two main types:

- Niruha or Kashaya Basti(decoction-based)
- Anuvasana or Sneha Basti(oil-based)

Matrabasti is a subtype of Anuvasana Basti , highlighting the versatility of Basti therapy in addressing Vata-related issues. Matrabasti is considered an effective treatment for dysmenorrhea, with both local and systemic effects. By normalizing Apana Vata through Vatanulomana, it helps alleviate symptoms. The gut, as a sensory organ, plays a crucial role in regulating bodily functions through its neural, immune, and sensory detectors.

Basti therapy may work by:

- Stimulating the enteric nervous system (ENS), influencing the central nervous system (CNS) and other organs.
- Acting on the neurohumoral system, restoring physiological balance at the molecular level.
- Reducing inflammatory substances like prostaglandins and vasopressin.

- Facilitating the excretion of excess prostaglandins.

- Activating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and autonomic nervous system, releasing neurotransmitters like serotonin and hormones.

Relief from Dysmenorrhea Symptoms by normalizing neurotransmitters, hormonal, and neural pathways, Matrabasti can alleviate symptoms caused by neurohormonal imbalances. The underlying pathology of dysmenorrhea involves spasms caused by vitiated Apanavayu, obstructing menstrual blood flow. The therapeutic properties of Taila, such as Sookshma, Vyavayi, and Vikasi, allow it to enter Srotas, removing spasms and restoring balance.

Conclusion

Ayurveda approaches primary dysmenorrhea as a condition resulting from doshic imbalance, which can be effectively managed through a balanced lifestyle, diet, herbal supplements, exercise, routine, yoga, meditation, and nourishing inputs. As a holistic system of medicine, Ayurveda offers proven remedies that can successfully address gynecological disorders, providing a comprehensive solution to this common health issue.

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