



Review Article

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MANAGEMENT OF MENOPAUSE (RAJONIVRITTI) THROUGH AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Menstruation is unique to females. Menarche and menopause are two significant landmarks in the entire journey of a women's life. Menarche traces the beginning of the reproductive life of a woman. Right from menarche, a woman undergoes several changes-behavioral and physical and finally attains a phase of complete cessation of menses known as menopause or *rajonivritti*. *Rajonivritti* or menopause is a natural and physiological phenomenon. However, various changes starting from physiological changes like depression, sleep disturbances, somatic changes like hot flushes, constipation etc., pathological changes like cardiac disorders, endometrial carcinoma etc., are very often found. By adopting a proper diet and regimen as per Ayurveda, all these changes developed in the pre-menopausal and menopausal phases can be prevented.

Keywords: Menarche, Menopause, *Rajonivritti*, *Ayurveda*.

INTRODUCTION

Menopause marks the end of the menstrual cycle in a woman's life. Every woman has to face this phase of life, and she meets it with discomfort, which may be mild or, at times, range from moderate to severe.

The process leading to the final onset of menopause is determined by the number of oogonia present in the ovaries at birth, the rate of atresia during reproductive years and the hormonal interplay regulated by the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis.¹

The primary aim of this study is:

1. To throw light on several changes affecting female health and wellbeing during the menopause.
2. To study and focus on lifestyle modification according to various *Ayurvedic* classics concerned with menopause (*rajonivritti*).

DESCRIPTION

Menopause is defined as the cessation of ovarian follicular activity, which results in permanent amenorrhoea. It takes 12 months of amenorrhoea to confirm that menopause has set in, so it is a retrospective diagnosis. When the follicular number falls, it sets in, usually between 45 to 50 years.

Climacteric is the phase of waning ovarian activity and may begin 2-3 years before menopause and continue for 2-5 years after it. The climacteric is thus a phase of adjustment between the active and inactive ovarian function. It occupies several years of a woman's life, involving physical, sexual and psychological adjustments.²

Many women's transitions from the reproductive phase to menopause (*rajonivritti*) is not smooth. It is often associated with various signs and symptoms, which pose distress resulting in a host of new problems. These viz. psychological, anatomical and social problems require modification in lifestyle and adaptation accordingly.

Ayurvedic view

Nirukti- "*raja*" denotes menstrual blood, and "*nivritti*" means cease or to stop. Hence, *rajonivritti* means cessation of menstruation.

In *Ayurveda*, *Acharya Sushruta*, the age for *artavadarshan* (menarche) and *rajonivritti* are 12 and 50 years, respectively. He has mentioned a relaxed body resulting from ageing as the cause of *rajonivritti*.³

However, neither the phenomenon nor the clinical features of *rajonivritti* are mentioned in any *Ayurvedic* texts.

Modern view

Menopause usually occurs between 45-50 years, the average age being 47 years. However, a woman can menstruate well beyond the age of 50. The cause of this delayed menopause may be related to good nutrition and sound health.

Late menopause is also seen in women with uterine fibroid and those at high risk of endometrial carcinoma. Premature menopause is the one which sets in before the age of 40 years. Menopause is a physiological phenomenon that results from about 50% reduction in androgen production and about 66% reduction in oestrogen.⁴

The sign and symptoms of menopause can be divided into:

Early features

- Hot flushes
- Sweating
- Insomnia
- Headache
- Irritability
- Depression
- Lack of concentration, loss of memory
- Dyspareunia, dry vagina, decreased libido
- Urinary stress incontinence

Late features

- Arthritis, backache, osteoporosis and fracture.
- Cardiovascular accidents like myocardial infarction, atherosclerosis, hypertension etc.
- Stroke
- Alzheimer's disease
- Tooth decay
- Prolapse of the genital tract
- Endometrial carcinoma
- Stress incontinence of urine and faecal incontinence.
- Ano-colonic cancer⁵

Diagnosis of menopause is from the classic symptom of 'hot flush' and confirmed by elevated FSH levels to >100mIU/ml and serum oestradiol <20pg/ml.⁶

MANAGEMENT OF MENOPAUSE (RAJONIVRITTI) THROUGH AYURVEDA

Ahara Rasayana: The cause of *rajonivritti* is ageing or *jarawastha*, and to combat it, *Rasayana chikitsa* has been the primary treatment principle.

Rasayana is a therapeutic measure which promotes longevity, prevents ageing, and provides positive health and mental faculties.

Acharya Charaka has mentioned four *medhya rasayana* viz. *Mandukparni*, *Yashtimadhu*, *Guduchi* and *Shankhapushpi* help influence and boost intellect or cognitive power, thereby acting as a nervine tonic.

Besides, regular consumption of *ghrita*, *kshira*, and other *kaphavardhak ahara* helps build Musculoskeletal tissues and postpone menopause (*rajonivritti*).

Guda, *tila*, *jeerak*, and soyabeans are good sources of phytoestrogen that help combat poor ovarian function.

Achara rasayana: Avoidance of intoxicated drinks like alcohol, bringing about positive changes in mindset, character and activities, adoption of qualities, fortitude, truthfulness, charitable nature, forgiveness, service mind, and absence of greed.⁷

All these measures of *Achara Rasayana* may prove beneficial in tackling certain early features of menopause like irritability, depression etc.

Panchakarma

Basti may relieve the discomfort in *rajonivritti* by pacifying *vata*. *Acharya Charaka* mentioned *basti* as *vayasthapita*, i.e. stabilises age, promotes *sukhayu* (disease-free lifespan), enhances *bala*,

varna, *medhya* etc. Hence, *basti* may be beneficial to get rid of various menopausal symptoms.

Nasya involves the instillation of medicated oil, *ghrita*, *churna* or *swaras* in the nostrils. The nasal passage (*nasa*) is considered the gateway to the brain (*shirsha*). It helps cleanse airways and sinuses, drain excess mucous, alleviate oedema in the cervical region and headaches, improve sleep, and provide mental stability.

Shirodhara therapy derives from two Sanskrit words- "*shiro*", meaning the head and "*dhara*", meaning flow or pour. It involves slowly pouring medicated oil, *kshira* or other liquid onto the patient's forehead. This will help eliminate various mental and psychological problems in menopause (*rajonivritti*) like headache, fatigue, insomnia, and stress, thereby balancing and stabilising the mind, body and soul.

Inculcation of Swasthavritta

- Timely and adequate sleep of not less than 7 hours a day.
- Practising meditation or dhyana for improving cognitive and concentration power.
- Performing *yogasanas* like *sukhasana*, *vajrasana*, *pavanmuktasana*, *tadasana*, *badhakonasana*. These practices elevate the mood, fill it with positive high prana, and make the body strong enough to bear the changes it is going through during *rajonivrittikar awastha*.⁸

Nidan parivarjan

Avoid smoking, alcohol, caffeine, junk food, fatty meals, and spicy and processed foods.

Intake of all these results in hot flushes, disturbed lipid profile, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, limiting and doing away with their consumption is advised if possible.

CONCLUSION

Rajonivritti or menopause is otherwise a physiological phenomenon in women's lives. It sometimes brings in a host of problems and, causes significant distress, hampers women's health and daily activities. This study has tried to emphasise the significance of *Ayurveda* in combating this crisis faced by menopausal women. *Ayurveda* is more a preventive science; thus, by various approaches mentioned in the *Ayurvedic* texts, i.e., by following *Acharya Rasayana*, *panchakarma*, *yoga* etc., along with the adoption of *dinacharya* and *ritucharya*, it has been found beneficial in promotion as well as preservation of both mental and physical health during menopause (*rajonivritti*).

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