



Review Article

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AN AYURVEDIC APPROACH TO PREVENT EYE DISEASES: A REVIEW

Mamta Mittal *

Resident Medical Officer, Government Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Patna, India

Received on: 13/03/17 Accepted on: 24/04/17

***Corresponding author**

E-mail: drmamantania@gmail.com

DOI: 10.7897/2277-4343.083133

ABSTRACT

Eyes are the windows to the mind. A pair of sparkling eye is the most important attractive factor in a person. Now-a-days changed work expectations requiring prolonged working hours in front of computers, nutritional deficiency, pollution, stress, indiscriminate use of topical ocular drugs and increased incidence of allergic disorders etc. lead to eye diseases. Out of that some are curable but some are not. So emphasis should be laid on the prevention of these as eye is most important and sensitive of five sense organs in human body. Ayurveda is the first and oldest medical science existing since or before the human creation. Its aim is not only to cure the disease but also to relieve the humanity from all physical, mental, intellectual, or spiritual miseries. The basic principle of ayurveda is based on tridosha and in case of eye, tejas (alochaka pitta) is considered as the main factor. Acharya Vagbhata gives an resemblance of the netra with the metallic weapon. Just like the weapons originate (extracted) from stones, their sharpness is maintained by stone (whetstone) and they are destroyed by the stones, similarly the netra (drishti) originates from tejas, its sharpness (chakshrendriya kriya, vision) is maintained by the tejas (alochaka pitta) and even it is destroyed by the tejas (excessive and unwarranted exposure to irritants). In this article Ayurvedic view related to cause of netra roga (eye diseases) and its prevention specially in form of pathya and apathya, aahara (diet) and vihara (daily regimen) is discussed.

Key words: Netra roga, Alochaka pitta, Chakshushya Aahara- Vihara

INTRODUCTION

Eyes are greatly valued by ancient Indians and much importance has been given to their protection by saying that all efforts should be made by men to protect the eyes throughout the period of life. For the man who is blind, this world is useless, the day and night are the same, though he may have wealth.¹ So everyone do every effort for the prevention of eye diseases.

DISCUSSION

Basic dosha in eyes

The basic principle of Ayurveda is based on tridosha (vata, pitta and kapha) which is responsible for normal functions of body and when vitiated lead to disease. The role of doshas is different from organ to organ, so etiological factors for vitiation of doshas are also different for different organs. In the eye alochaka pitta is considered as responsible factor for visual perception i.e. of all the mahabhootas, tejas dominates² (in composition of eyes) so the eyes are specially susceptible to kapha.³ That's why the factors which are vitiating pitta or kapha will lead to eye diseases.

Samprapti of netra roga

In Ayurveda, the Acharyas described a generalized samprapti for all eye diseases. The Doshas vitiated by indulgence in foods and habits particularly harmful to the eyes (Achaksusya aahara-vihara) propagate through the channels (Sira) towards uttamanga (the head) and enter the parts of the eye to produce diseases.^{4,5} In traumatic lesions, vitiation of Doshas succeed the disease.

Causes and preventive measures

According to Acharya Sushruta, measures calculated for the removal of the causative factors of the disease is Chikitsa.⁶ On recognizing the possibility of development of disease, a proper course of prophylactic treatment should be given according to the affection of Doshas. Despite the avoidance of the etiological factors, if the disease reaches its vyakta (manifestation of disease) stage, then it should be treated by counteracting the increased Vata and other doshas and restoration of the doshic equilibrium.

Ayurvedic literature lays great stress on the preventive aspect of treatment, more so in ophthalmology because inadequate prophylaxis of the ocular diseases may even lead to blindness. Therefore, the first step in treating a disease should be aimed towards withdrawal of the disease contributing factors. In form of these factors ancient medical scholars prescribed aahara (specific diet), aushada (drugs), and vihara (daily regimen). Out of these three, aahara and vihara play a central role in the prevention of eye diseases.

Ahara (Dietary factors): Diet is the basis of all functions of the body. The dietary factors which adversely affect the eyes are called as achakshushya aahara (apathya for eyes) and these are as following-⁷

- Sour items like curd, pickles etc., vidahi and ushana virya aahara (hot items) which vitiates pitta.
- Virudha aahara (like milk with fish, cooled and hot items together)
- Adhyasanam (eating before digestion of previous meal) will derange normal digestion mechanism, dushita agni which derange the properties of raktadhathu and in turn its

functional capacity becomes defective. This develops the stage of abhishyanda which is the initial pathological change in the development of any eye disease.

According to modern science also overeating predisposes to premature ageing which is an impediment to longevity. Now a days the major causes of blindness are cataract, corneal scarring and retinal diseases (ARMD) which are age related⁸, so intake of restricted diet is advised because it slows not only the rate of ageing but also delays the onset of age related diseases as well as physiological deterioration of various organs and systems. Restricted food intake either

- Increases the efficiency of cellular metabolism or
- May act by lowering the blood glucose levels or
- Decreases the activity of so called free radicals –the toxic by- products of normal metabolism so can prevent from age related diseases.

Pathya aahara

The persons who are fond of their eyes healthy should always adhere to the following dietary products like grains such as yava (barley), godhoma (wheat), lohitsali (red rice), shastika, mudaga (green gram) etc. which are old and which mitigate kapha and pitta mixed with more of ghrít(butter fat), vegetables, meat of animals of jangala desh (meat of animals dwelling in forests), dadima (pomegranate), sita(sugar), saindhava (rock salt), triphala (*Terminalia chebula*, *Terminalia bellerica*, *Emblica officinalis*), draksha (grapes), rain water(i.e. pure cold water) for drinking.

Rasayan therapy

For the use of triphala, Acharya Vagbhata has advised that triphala along with honey and ghrít(butter fat) should be consumed at nights daily for strengthening of eye sight.⁹ Any other things which are good for promoting / maintaining health and cure of eye diseases (Chakrushya Aahara) can also be consumed habitually.

Vihara (Habitual and occupational factors): Certain habits and occupational factors directly influence the eyes. These in turn may lead to eye diseases as:⁷

- Hot water head bath and excessive smoking by vitiating pitta.
- Day time sleep and night awakening by disturbing the normal functions of rods and cones causing eye strain
- Looking at too small or too distant objects, continuous watching of moving object (TV & computer) reading in moving vehicle or in incorrect posture (i.e. too near or at too distant) putting too much eye strain.
- Suppression of urges especially of nidra (sleep) & ashru (tears) affect the normal function of lacrimal gland and there by moistening of the eye.
- Cold water bath when body is hot & using too high pillows causes circulatory disturbances which in turn affect the mechanism of nutrition and it leads to eye diseases.
- Air pollution and too much light are also the main causative factors of eye diseases. Travelling in high speed vehicles exposes eyes to currents of air and dust particles. Also eyes get tired due to constantly adjust to the changing directions, a cause of traumatic and Vataja diseases in the eye.

So we should try to prevent ourselves from all these leading factors of eye diseases.

To keep the eyes healthy some practices for daily regimen are advised in Ayurveda as

Use of anjana (collyrium)

Anjana is applied by using shalaka. It should be applied from inner canthus to outer canthus. It cleans the human eyes which makes them shine like the bright moon in the clear sky¹⁰. Daily practice of Souveeranjana (as dincharya)¹¹ is advised as best simple ophthalmic medication to prevent eye diseases and to maintain the visual power properly.

Use of nasya (Nasal drops)

Specially Anu taila nasya (in the form of pratimarsa nasya)¹² is advised because it cleans the srotas by its action and in turn prevents the accumulation of vitiated kapha in the srotas of the eye. It plays very important role in delaying aging process so also in age related eye disorders.¹³

Proper sleep

Sleep is a key part of healthy life style. Daily sleep for 6-8 hrs. is necessary for a normal adult. During sleep eyes retain functional capacity due to complete rest to eyes.

Care of feet

Regular massage of feet is advised because it is assumed that in the centre of feet (soles) 2 siras are situated which are greatly connected to the eyes. These are vitiated by the accumulation of the mala, assault, trauma from stone or foreign particles and bring about the abnormalities of the eyes. Medicines applied over the feet, feet massage,³ external application of oil etc. transmit the benefit to the eyes. Hence feet should be kept clean, healthy and away from heat by using foot wear, washing them well and massaging with oil.¹⁴

Eye wash

Regular eye wash with Triphala and yashtimadhu kwath with the use of eye wash cup is also beneficial for eye health.

Eye exercises

Movements of both eyes in up-down, sideways (right- left), rotational (clockwise-anticlockwise) directions, followed by palming is very effective in preventing refractive errors.

Shatkarmas

Neti and tratak are the best for eye among the shatkarma. Neti is performed by a thin thread of 32 angulas, inserting it through one nostril and taking out through mouth. It destroys kapha dosha and gives clear vision.¹⁵ Jala neti (with pinch of salt mixed in luke warm water) is also in practice now a days.¹⁶ Tratak is the continuous looking at some small object till eyes tear. It destroys all eye disorders and supposed to confer divine sight (divya drishti).¹⁷

In short following dietetic and regimental do's and don'ts for maintaining the ocular well being are described in Ayurvedic literature:

Table 1: Pathya and Apathya for eye

Pathya (Do's) (Chakshushya Aahara- Vihara)		Apathya (Dont's) (Achakshushya Aahara- Vihara)	
Ahara (food)	Vihara (regimen)	Ahara (food)	Vihara (regimen)
Purana yava (old barley), Godhoom (wheat)	Eye wash with Triphala	Vidahi (causing burning sensation)	Vega Vidharana (suppression of urges)
Lohitshali dhanya (Red rice), Mudga (green gram)	Blood letting	Masha (Horse gram)	Krodha(anger)
Shaka (Vegetables), Dadima (pomegranate)	Purificatory measures (e.g. Panch karma),	Adhyashana (over eating)	Shoka(sorrow)
Jangla mansa (meat of animals dwelling in forests) Shakuna mamsa	Regular use of Anjana (collyrium) and Nasya (Nasal drops)	Curd, pickles	Diva Svapana (day sleep)
Triphala (<i>Terminalia chebula</i> , <i>Terminalia belerica</i> , <i>Emblica officinalis</i>), Draksha (grapes)	Looking after the health of one's own feet e.g. Foot massage and bath, maintaining hygiene, wearing footwear),	Atimadyapana (excess consumption of alcohol)	Ratri jagrana (night awakening)
Sita (sugar), Saindhava (rock salt), Ghee (butter fat)	Using umbrella		Seeing very shining, fast moving and minute objects.
Nabhas jala (rain water), other Kapha-pitta suppressive agents	Maintaining general cleanliness.		

CONCLUSION

Eyes play a vital role in our day to day lives and are perhaps the most precious gift we have. This world is visible to us because we are blessed with eyesight. Good eyesight is very important for our daily activities like reading, watching television, internet surfing, driving etc. So those who wish to have prolonged healthy vision should keep the value of practices and daily regimen prescribed by ancient scholars because "Prevention is better than Cure."

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Cite this article as:

Mamta Mittal. An Ayurvedic approach to prevent eye diseases: A review. Int. J. Res. Ayurveda Pharm. 2017;8(3):5-7
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7897/2277-4343.083133>

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

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