



Review Article

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AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW OF DARUNAKA (*PITYRIASIS CAPITIS*): ETIOLOGY, PATHOGENESIS AND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Darunaka is one of the most common scalp disorders described in Ayurveda and is characterised by Rukshata (dryness), Kandu (itching), Twak sphutana (cracking of skin), and Keshacyuti (hair fall in chronic cases). It is primarily caused by the vitiation of Vata and Kapha Dosha and mainly affects the scalp. The condition closely resembles *Pityriasis capitis* (dandruff) in contemporary medicine and has become increasingly prevalent due to urbanisation, unhealthy dietary habits, improper lifestyle, stress, environmental exposure, and the excessive use of chemical-based hair care products. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the Ayurvedic concept of Darunaka with special emphasis on its etiology, pathogenesis, clinical features, and management. Information was compiled from classical Ayurvedic texts and relevant research articles. The review highlights that Ayurvedic management is based on the principles of Nidana Parivarjana, Shodhana, Shamana, and external therapeutic procedures, along with appropriate diet and lifestyle modifications. These interventions help restore Dosha balance, improve scalp health, relieve symptoms, and reduce recurrence. This review suggests that Ayurveda offers a holistic and effective approach for the management of Darunaka by addressing its root cause rather than providing only symptomatic relief.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Darunaka, Kshudra Roga, Kapalgat Roga, Dandruff, *Pityriasis capitis*

INTRODUCTION

Darunaka is described differently by various Ayurvedic classics. Ashtanga Hridaya ¹ describes Darunaka under Shiroroga, while Sharangadhara Samhita ² classifies it as a Kapalgata Roga (disease affecting the scalp). Sushruta Samhita ³, Chakradatta ⁴, Yogaratnakara ⁵, and Bhavaprakasha ⁶ describe Darunaka under Kshudra Roga (minor diseases). Although Charaka Samhita does not specifically mention Darunaka, its pathogenesis can be understood from the description of Shirah-Kapalgata Roga in Chikitsa Sthana.

From the modern perspective, the scalp undergoes continuous physiological desquamation in which dead epidermal cells are shed and replaced by new cells. In dandruff, this process becomes excessive, resulting in visible white or grey flakes on the scalp and hair. The condition is commonly associated with itching, mild erythema, and recurrent scalp scaling. *Pityriasis capitis* (dandruff) affects nearly half of the global population and is more prevalent among adolescents and young adults.⁷ Increasing urbanisation, stress, environmental pollution, unhealthy dietary habits, and frequent use of chemical-based hair care products have further increased its prevalence.

According to Ayurveda, the etiological factors responsible for Shiroroga are also implicated in the development of Darunaka. The disease mainly results from the vitiation of Vata and Kapha Dosha, leading to the impairment of Rasa Dhatu, Rakta Dhatu, and Swedavaha Srotas. This pathological process manifests clinically as Rukshata (dryness), Kandu (itching), Twak Sphutana (scaling or cracking of the scalp), and Kesha Chyuti (hair fall).⁸

Ayurvedic management focuses on correcting the underlying Dosha imbalance through Nidana Parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors), Shodhana (purificatory therapy), Shamana (palliative therapy), and Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa (external therapies). These therapeutic measures, along with appropriate diet, lifestyle modification, and regular scalp care, help relieve symptoms and reduce recurrence.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Darunaka is a common scalp disorder characterised by dryness, itching, scaling, and, in chronic cases, hair fall. According to Sushruta Samhita, the disease is mainly caused by the vitiation of Vata and Kapha Dosha and presents with Rukshata (dryness), Twak Sphutana (cracking or scaling of the scalp), and Kandu (itching). Acharya Videha also mentions the possible involvement of Pitta along with Kapha in the pathogenesis of the disease.⁹

Ashtanga Hridaya describes Darunaka with the clinical features of Kandu (itching), Kesha Chyuti (hair fall), Rukshata (dryness), and Twak Sphutana (scaling or cracking of the scalp), indicating that Vata and Kapha Dosha play a predominant role in its manifestation.

Nidana Panchak

Nidana (Etiological Factors)

The etiological factors of Darunaka described in Ayurvedic classics can be broadly classified into Ahara (dietary), Vihara (lifestyle), Manasika (psychological), Bahya (external, hair care),

and environmental factors. These factors predominantly aggravate Vata and Kapha Dosha, leading to the development of Darunaka. (Table 1)

Poorva Rupa (Prodromal Features)

Poorva Rupa refers to the early or premonitory symptoms that appear in an incomplete form before Vyaktavastha (the full

manifestation) of a disease. However, classical Ayurvedic texts do not provide a specific description of Poorva Rupa for Darunaka.

Rupa (Clinical Features)

The cardinal symptoms of Darunaka are described in Table 2.

Table 1: Nidana (Etiological Factors) of Darunaka

Category	Nidana (Cause)	Effect	Predominant Dosha
Ahara (Dietary)	Amla Ahara (sour food)	Aggravates Kapha and Pitta → causes itching (Kandu)	Kapha, Pitta
	Guru Ahara (heavy food)	Leads to Agnimandya → formation of Ama	Kapha
	Hima Ahara (cold food) and cold water	Vitiates Dosha and reduces digestion	Vata, Kapha
	Harita Ahara (green leafy vegetables, excess)	Causes aggravation of the Dosha	Vata
Vihara (Lifestyle)	Atimathuna (excessive sexual activity)	Causes depletion and aggravation	Vata
	Atiswapna (excess sleep)	Increases heaviness and stagnation	Kapha
	Jagarana (night awakening)	Causes dryness and imbalance	Vata, Kapha
	Vegavarodha (suppression of natural urges)	Leads to Vata Vaigunya and skin disorders	Vata
Manasika (Psychological)	Manastaapa (mental stress)	Triggers and aggravates scalp disorders	Tridosha
Bahya (External)	Shiro Abhighata (head injury)	Directly affects scalp health	Vata
	Krimi (infection/infestation)	Causes irritation and scalp issues	Kapha
	Desha-Kala Viparyaya (Unsuitable climatic and seasonal conditions)	Seasonal/geographical changes disturb the Dosha balance	Tridosha
	Meghagama (cold/cloudy climate)	Increases moisture and aggravation	Kapha
Hair Care Factors	Lack of Shiro Abhyanga (head oil massage)	Causes excessive scalp dryness	Vata
	Abhyanga Dvesha (aversion to oiling)	Increases roughness and dryness of the scalp	Vata
Environmental	Exposure to heat, sun, dust, fumes	Increases sweating → aggravates Rakta and Pitta	Pitta, Rakta
	Pragvata Sevana (exposure to cold wind)	Produces scalp dryness and aggravates Vata	Vata

Table 2: Rupa (Clinical Features) of Darunaka

Rupa (Clinical Features)	Description	Predominant Dosha
Kandu (Itching)	Itching occurs mainly due to the accumulation of mala on the scalp and excessive sweating. Though associated with both Kapha and Pitta, in Darunaka, it is predominantly due to Kapha vitiation.	Kapha (primarily), Pitta
Kesha Chyuti (Hair Fall)	Hair fall occurs due to poor nourishment of the hair follicles. Continuous itching and thinning of the scalp weaken hair roots, making them loose and unhealthy. Hair becomes dry, rough, thin, and brittle due to reduced Snigdhata.	Vata and Pitta
Swapa (Altered Sensation)	Refers to partial or temporary loss of touch sensation due to vitiation of Vata Dosha.	Vata
Rukshata (Dryness)	Dryness of the scalp occurs due to aggravated Vata. Lack of oiling (Abhyanga) and other Vata-aggravating factors increase roughness.	Vata
Twak-Sphutana (Scaling/Cracking)	Characterized by flaking or splitting of scalp skin due to scratching and abnormal keratinization of epidermis.	Vata

Upashaya and Anupashaya (Therapeutic Differential Diagnosis)

Upashaya refers to the relief obtained from symptoms after the use of appropriate medicine, diet, or lifestyle modifications. In contrast, Anupashaya denotes factors that aggravate or worsen the symptoms.

Upashaya is considered an important diagnostic tool in Ayurveda and plays a key role in understanding and differentiating diseases. However, classical Ayurvedic texts do not specifically mention the Upashaya of Darunaka (dandruff). Therefore, the Nidana (causative factors) described for the disease can be regarded as Anupashaya, while their opposites (wholesome diet, proper scalp care, and balanced lifestyle) can be considered as Upashaya.

Samprapti (Pathogenesis)

Nidana Sevana leads to the vitiation of Kapha and Vata Dosha, which affects Rasa Dhatu and Rakta Dhatu, causing dysfunction of Rasavaha, Raktavaha, and Swedovaha Srotas. This results in Srotorodha due to Kapha accumulation and Vata Prakopa, leading

to abnormal Sweda Pravritti. The vitiated Dosha localises in the Kapala (scalp) and Lomakupa, causing Swedovaha Srotodushti. This manifests as Kandu, Rukshata, Twak Sphutana, and ultimately leads to Darunaka.

Sadhyasadyata (Prognosis)

Darunaka is considered a curable disease as it is confined primarily to the Twak (skin). However, even though it responds well to treatment, recurrence is quite common. This is mainly due to factors such as poor scalp hygiene, continued exposure to Nidana Sevana (causative factors), and improper lifestyle practices.

TREATMENT MODALITIES OF DARUNAKA

Ayurveda plays a significant role in the management of Darunaka, as it offers long-term results through its unique treatment approaches. The three main principles of treatment are: Nidana Parivarjana (Avoidance of causative factors)

Shodhana Chikitsa (Purification therapy)
Shamana Chikitsa (Palliative therapy)
Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa (External therapeutic procedures)
Along with these, local therapies such as Lepa (application) and Dhavana (washing) are important for symptom relief and nourishment of the scalp.

Nidana Parivarjana (Avoidance of causative factors)

In Darunaka, it is essential to avoid a Kapha-aggravating diet, excessive accumulation of dirt or oil on the scalp, exposure to dust, excessive bathing, use of drying substances, night awakening, and mental stress. Avoiding these factors helps prevent aggravation of Kapha-Vata, scalp dryness, itching, and recurrence of flaking.

Shodhana Chikitsa (Purification therapy)

Shodhana refers to the elimination of vitiated Dosha through Urdhva and Adho Marga. Acharyas have emphasized Shodhana therapy in Darunaka. Rakta Mokshana by Siravedhana is commonly advised after Snehana and Swedana of the scalp.¹⁰ Both Acharya Chakradatta and Acharya Vagbhata have described the Lalata Sira as a Vedhya Sira in Shiroroga.¹¹

Shamana Chikitsa (Palliative treatment)

Shamana therapy includes:

Abhyantara Chikitsa: Internal medications

Bahya Chikitsa: Shiro Lepa, Shiro Abhyanga, Shirovasti, Shiro Prakshalana

Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa (External therapeutic procedures).

Shiro Lepa (Application of medicated herbal paste)

Shiro Abhyanga (Head oil massage)

Shiro Basti (Retention of medicated oil over the scalp)

Shiro Prakshalana (Therapeutic scalp cleansing)

These procedures improve scalp nourishment, reduce dryness and itching, decrease scaling, and help maintain healthy scalp physiology.

Shiro Lepa (Application of medicated herbal paste)

Shirolepana is an important modality of Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa, in which medicated pastes are applied externally to alleviate locally vitiated Dosha. This therapy involves the topical application of herbal formulations over the scalp, thereby helping to control the pathological changes seen in Darunaka. Various Lepa have been described in the classical texts for the management of this condition, as outlined below:

Priyalabeejadi Lepa – A paste prepared from Priyala beeja along with Yashti, Kushta, and Saindhava is applied over the scalp. The same formulation is also described with the addition of Masha and is advised to be applied using honey as the medium.¹¹ In Ashtanga Samgraha and Ashtanga Hridaya, Sarshapa is included in this formulation.

Masha Lepa – A paste of Masha, soaked in Kanji for three weeks, is recommended for topical application on the scalp to relieve Darunaka.¹²

Neelotpaladi Lepa – Amalaki kalka is mixed in equal proportion with the paste of Neelotpala keshara, Yashti, and Tila. Regular application of this Lepa is said to be effective even in chronic cases of Darunaka.¹²

Amradi Lepa – A paste prepared from Amra beeja (mango seed) and unripe Haritaki, triturated with milk, is applied to the scalp.¹³

Khaskhasabeeja Lepa – A paste of Khaskhasa beeja ground with milk is used for application over the scalp.¹³

Lakshadi Lepa – A formulation made from Laksha, leaves of Aragvadha (Amaltas), flowers of Edgaja, and fruits of Amalaki is prepared and applied with honey over the scalp.¹³

These formulations possess Kandughna (anti-pruritic), Keshya (hair-promoting), and Twachya (beneficial for skin) properties, which help in alleviating the symptoms of Darunaka.

Shiro Abhyanga (Head Oil Massage)

Shiro Abhyanga holds significant importance in the management of Darunaka, as the condition is predominantly associated with Rukshata, resulting from the aggravation of Vata Dosha. To counteract this dryness and restore scalp health, various medicated oils (Taila) have been recommended by the Acharya for regular application over the scalp. The commonly prescribed oils are as follows:

Gunjadya Taila – This formulation is prepared using Gunja beeja and Bhringaraja swarasa and is applied over the scalp to alleviate symptoms of Darunaka.¹²

Bhringarajadya Taila – This formulation consists of Bhringaraja, Lohakitta, Triphala, Sariva, and Neelakamala, and is indicated for scalp application.¹²

Triphaladya Taila – Prepared with Triphala, Jatamansi, Bhringaraja, Neelakamala, and Saindhava, this oil is described under Darunaka Chikitsa and is particularly recommended in cases of Arunshika.¹²

Chitrakadya Taila – This oil is formulated using Chitraka, Dantimoola, and Koshataki. It is especially beneficial in relieving Kesha Kandu (itching of the scalp).¹²

Malatyadi Taila – Prepared from Malati, Karvira, Chitraka, and Karanja, this Taila is considered highly effective in conditions such as Darunaka, Indralupta, and Arunshika.¹²

Prapaundarikadhya Taila-Prepared from Pundaria, Mulethi, Pippali, Lalchandana, and Nilofar, and prepared the oil in Amla juice.¹²

Marichayadam Taila- The formulation, prepared by processing Mirch powder and Saffron in a Taila base, is reported to alleviate Darunaka within a short duration of administration.

Sarivadya Taila-Gadanigrahakar mentioned the Sarivadya Taila in the management of Darunaka.

Shirobasti (Retention of medicated oil over the scalp)

Shirobasti has been described as an effective therapeutic procedure in the management of Darunaka.¹⁴

Shiro Prakshalana (Therapeutic scalp cleansing)

Kodroksarajalprakshalana¹

Role of Nasya in Darunaka

Nasya Karma is performed to eliminate vitiated Kapha Dosha and Mala from the head region. As Nasya is considered the gateway to Shirah, Avapida Nasya is especially recommended in the treatment of Darunaka by various Acharyas.¹²

According to Acharya Vagbhata, in the condition of Darunaka, Prapaundarikadi Taila is recommended for administration through Pratimarsha Nasya.¹⁵

Pathya (Recommended Diet and Lifestyle)

A light, easily digestible, and Dosha-balancing diet is beneficial in Darunaka.

Green vegetables (including drumsticks), fruits like mango, pomegranate, coconut, and lemon provide nourishment and antioxidants.

Moderate use of ghee reduces dryness and enhances scalp lubrication.

Vitamin E-rich foods (almonds, pine nuts, peanuts, spinach, flaxseed oil) support scalp health and reduce oxidative stress.

Omega-3 fatty acids (flaxseed, walnuts, sardines, salmon, soy, tofu) maintain scalp moisture and reduce flaking.

Drinking lukewarm water improves digestion and prevents Kapha aggravation.

Adequate sleep, stress reduction, and a simple lifestyle are also essential.

Apathya (Avoidable Factors)

Incompatible foods (e.g., fish with milk, milk with sour fruits) aggravate Dosha and worsen scalp conditions.

Excessive oily, fried, spicy, and sour foods increase Kapha and Pitta, leading to itching and flaking.

Cold drinks and cold water increase Kapha and scalp oiliness.

Sugar, bakery items, and processed foods increase inflammation. Late nights, stress, and excessive use of hair dyes, gels, and sprays worsen scalp sensitivity.

DISCUSSION

Darunaka is a common scalp disorder described in Ayurveda and is predominantly caused by the vitiation of Vata and Kapha Dosha. The classic symptoms, including Rukshata (dryness), Kandu (itching), Twak Sphutana (scaling or cracking of the scalp), and Kesha Chyuti (hair fall), closely resemble the clinical features of *Pityriasis capitis* (dandruff) described in contemporary medicine. This similarity suggests that the Ayurvedic description of Darunaka has significant clinical relevance in the present era.

The pathogenesis of Darunaka involves the aggravation of Vata and Kapha Dosha, resulting in impaired functioning of Rasavaha, Raktavaha, and Swedavaha Srotas. Vata predominance causes excessive dryness, roughness, and scaling of the scalp, whereas Kapha contributes to itching and accumulation of flakes. Persistent Dosha imbalance eventually affects the nourishment of hair follicles, leading to hair fall in chronic cases.

Modern lifestyle factors such as unhealthy dietary habits, psychological stress, environmental pollution, irregular daily routines, and excessive use of chemical-based hair care products may further aggravate the disease. These factors are comparable to the Nidana (etiological factors) described in the Ayurvedic classics, highlighting the continued relevance of Ayurvedic principles in understanding the disease.

The management of Darunaka should focus not only on symptomatic relief but also on correcting the underlying Dosha imbalance. Ayurvedic interventions, including Nidana Parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors), Shodhana Chikitsa (purificatory therapy), Shamana Chikitsa (palliative therapy), and Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa (external therapeutic procedures), collectively improve scalp health and reduce the likelihood of recurrence. In addition, adherence to an appropriate diet, healthy lifestyle practices, regular Shiro Abhyanga (head oil massage), and stress management play a significant role in the long-term prevention and management of Darunaka.

Thus, the Ayurvedic approach provides a comprehensive and holistic strategy for the management of Darunaka by addressing both the underlying pathogenesis and the clinical manifestations of the disease.

CONCLUSION

Darunaka is a common scalp disorder described in Ayurveda and is primarily attributed to the vitiation of Vata and Kapha Dosha. The disease manifests with characteristic features such as Rukshata (dryness), Kandu (itching), Twak Sphutana (scaling or cracking of the scalp), and Kesha Chyuti (hair fall), which closely resemble the clinical presentation of *Pityriasis capitis* (dandruff). Contemporary lifestyle factors, including unhealthy dietary habits, stress, environmental pollution, and the excessive use of

chemical-based hair care products, may further aggravate the condition.

The present review highlights that Ayurvedic management focuses on correcting the underlying Dosha imbalance rather than providing only symptomatic relief. Therapeutic measures such as Nidana Parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors), Shodhana Chikitsa (purificatory therapy), Shamana Chikitsa (palliative therapy), and Bahiparimarjana Chikitsa (external therapeutic procedures), along with appropriate dietary and lifestyle modifications, play an important role in improving scalp health and reducing recurrence.

Therefore, Ayurveda provides a safe, holistic, and sustainable approach for the effective management of Darunaka. However, further well-designed clinical studies are required to strengthen the scientific evidence regarding the efficacy of these Ayurvedic interventions and to facilitate their wider clinical application.

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