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SWASTHAVRITTA - A RESTORATIVE INTERVENTION IN EYE HEALTH

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Abstract

The ancient science of Ayurveda is an integral form of medicine and healthcare which primarily aims at the prevention of disease and promotes positive well-being. Its holistic approach towards lifestyle and health makes it vital in the modern-day scenario. The condition free from disease is Swastha i.e. Healthy and regimens followed to keep one self-healthy is 'Swasthavritta'. There are five sense organs i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. Among these sense organs, Ayurveda gives prime importance to the eye because 80% of sense we gain through eyes. It says "*Sarvendriyaanam Nayanam Pradhanam*". They are the windows to the soul and yet most people do not pay much regard to their care. The eyes usually get attention when there is a problem. With the expanding urbanizations and prompt economic development, we are loaded with work and often forget to take care of our bodies. Inappropriate working patterns, lifestyle changes, extreme use of multimedia mobile and working on computers and habits have resulted in the rise of lifestyle-related diseases in alarming proportions. In this fast-paced and advanced life, we rarely pay attention to the health and well-being of one of our most precious organs - our eyes. Ratio of eye disorder (myopia etc.) in child age group(above 7 yrs) is more than 14 % nowadays. In Ayurveda, selected classical daily regimens like *Netraprakshalna* (eye wash), *Anjana* (Collyrium), *Snana* (Bath), *Padabhyanga* (Foot massage with oil), *Nasya* (nasal application of drugs), wholesome and unwholesome dietetic are promoted as high-end measures for the maintenance of eye health. Various *Netra Vyayamas* (eye exercises), *Yogasanas*, *Pranayamas*, *Neti* and *Trataka* are also said to be beneficial for the same cause. Major Ayurvedic promotive measures and perceptions regarding maintenance of eye health and prevention of eye disorders are explored in this article. The aim of this review is to spread the awareness of simple visual health promotive procedures in Ayurveda.

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INTRODUCTION

Equilibrium of dosha-dhutu, mala, agni, mind, indriyas with atman is known as health status Prakriti, predominance of doshas at the time of conception is one of the main factor for healthy status of an individual.

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“Indra aatma tasya sadhanam Indriyam”

Indriyas (sensory organs) are device that is acknowledging the brain via sensory & motor stimulus. According to Ayurveda indriyas are sadhan of ‘ubhayatmak mana’.¹

There are five sense organs i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. Among these sense organs, Ayurveda gives prime importance to the eye because 80% of sense we gain through eyes.

Vedic science offers many safe, effective and simple techniques for maintaining visual health. These primitive approaches can be easily practiced in everyday life to prevent lifestyle related eye disorders. Shalaky Tantra is one of the eight clinical specialties of Ashtanga Ayurveda, devoted to eye care and management. According to Ayurveda, three factors being responsible for the causation of all type of diseases including ophthalmic problem too.

- I. Incompatible contact of eye with visual objects (Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga)
- II. Misuse of intellect (Pragyaparadha)
- III. Abnormal cycles of seasons (Rituviparyaya)

In the present time, eye diseases have become a major threat to the mankind. Hence significance of multi-disciplinary approach becomes mandatory. Integration of Ayurvedic concepts of promotive & preventive ophthalmology and principle of yoga are essential to tackle eye problems. Person should make constant efforts to protect their eyesight. Refractive error in children in India is a major public health issue and requires intensive efforts from various stakeholders including the health care workforce, education professionals and parents, to manage this problem.²

Many of the eye problems can be eliminated by avoiding faulty lifestyles. Smoking, tobacco and alcohol consumption, high fat diet and junk food, chronic stress, prolonged exposure to bright light from computer and TV screens are a few examples that damage the eye health. Clinical conditions like diabetic/hypertensive retinopathy, computer vision syndrome, may occur as a result as well.

According to description, Following are rules of Swasthaviritha for one who wants to prevent diseases. By following rules of daily regimen, seasonal regimen, good moral conducts as preventive measures and following panchankarmas and rasayan dravyas, one can attain strength and can achieve anti-ageing effect and sharpness of eyes too. According to theory of Panchamahabhuta, everything in this world is made up of pancha-mahabhuta. Netra is also formed by Prithvi(muscular part), Agni (raktvarna), Vayu (krushna bhag), Jala (sweta bhag) and Akash (lacrimal duct).

Ayurveda explains that Pitta dosha (fire and light) controls eyes. It helps to absorb images and colours, allowing us to see. Alochaka pitta is certainly sited in eyes, which helps in darshan kriya. When it is in balance, our eyes are healthy, radiant and vision is clear. If dosha get imbalanced, one can face severe eye diseases. The best cure is to keep the dosha in balance with Swasthavritta guideline and proper ahar-vihara.

Concept of Dincharya to maintain good health:

According to Swasthavritta guidelines, dincharya is most important concept to maintain healthy life. *Dinacharya* and *Pathya -Apathya* regarding the maintaining of eye health is vividly described in Ayurveda. If one follows proper regimen, he/she will endowed with *Suprasendiyata*, *Balalabha*, *Ayushalabha*, and *Sowmanasyata*. The daily regimen can be summarized in more realistic manner as follows.³

- 1.) **‘Bhramhe muhurute uttistheta.** ‘The one who wants *dirghayu and sukhayu*, should get up in bhramha period. (Period of 3 hours before sunrise.)
- 2.) After considering the condition of the body, one has to attend for the natural urges. Acc to Vagabhat, healthy person should eliminate the natural urges facing north in the morning hours and south in night. Suppressing natural urges leads vitiation of *vata*, which in turn causes number of diseases.

- 3.) **Danta dhavan:**one should attend to the acts of cleansing after considering the condition of body. He should brush his/her teeth with the twigs of arka, *nyogrodha*, *khadira*, *karanja*, *kakubha* etc. In hridaya, netra and karna roga danta dhavan is prohibited.
- 4.) **Kaval-Gandushavidhi:** Holding the liquid drug in buccal cavity for a specific period without moving the drug is known as Gandusha. Whereas in *kavala*, *kalaka dravya* is used and it is allowed to move in the oral cavity for a specific period. The *samyak yoga* of both *kavala* and *gandusha* include *indriya prasadan*, which clearly explain the importance of the both concept.
- 5.) **Anjana:**As eye associated with *tejo mahabhuta*predominantly, continuous use of *sauveer anjana* provokes *kapha dosha*. There are two types of *Anjana*, mainly practiced in daily regimen- (A) Medically processed antimony sulphide (*Sauveer anjana*) & (B) Solid extract of *Barberisaristata (Rasananjna)*. The *Sauveeranjana* type of collyrium is applied to eyelashes every day and *Rasanjana* is used once at interval of five or eight nights for stimulation and secretion. The eye vision is predominantly associated with *tejasguna* and as such especially susceptible to *kaphadosa*. Hence, the measures alleviating *kapha* are beneficial for clear vision. *Anjana* removes the *dosas* and *malas* in the form of tears & provide cleanness to eyes.

Daily habit of *Anjana* practice found not only useful for good appearance of eyes but also removes burning sensation, itching, dirt (excretion), moistness and pain of eyes, accommodation to high and low light and prevent diseases development. Action of *Anjana* can be attributed for dissolving the accumulated vitiated *kapha* and draining it out. It dilates the blood vessels, increases the blood flow and maintains the integrity of *netrasrotas*.

- 6.) **Nasya:** The procedure in which medication are applied to the nostril in a specified manner to nourish the organs above the clavicle known as *Nasya*. Nasal cavity structures have direct communication with the sensorineural structures of brain and this is a natural gateway to brain. Due to anatomical communication, the medicine applied through nasal cavity reaches to “*Sringataka Marma*” (cavernous sinus) which is the seat of all the centers of vision, hearing, smell, and taste. One who practices *Anutaila* as *Pratimarsh Nasya* (small dose of medicated oil) 1-2 drop in each nostril, gets a better vision and power of other sense organs remain intact and defects free.
- 7.) **Dhumapana – Inhaling Smoke:** A prudent person should always inhale smoke for the prevention of the origin of diseases of the parts above the clavicle due to the derangement of *kapha* and *vata* and also for the cure of such diseases, which have appeared already. One should inhale medicated fumes daily after bathing, eating, sneezing, *nasya*. It helps in case of *Akshishula*.

It is contra indicated in case of *timira*.⁴

- 8.) **Feet wash (Padaprakshalana), Oil Massage on feet (Padabhyanga) and Foot wearing (PadatraDharana):**As per literature, two *siras* (vein) are situated in the center of feet (soles) which are significantly connected to eyes. These transmit the effect of medications applied over the soles in the form of oil massage and promote the eye health and prevent the diseases. These veins vitiated by the accumulation of *malas* (dirt, assault of soles by hard substance and stone) or over pressure bring about abnormality of eye.⁵
 1. **Padaprakshalan-** Washing of feet with clean water confers clear vision.
 2. **Padavyanga-** Application of oil over soles always bestows sleep comfort and maintains vision.
 3. **Padatra Dharan-** Walking without foot wear on irregular surface causes harm to eye so use of footwear is beneficial for eye sight. Hence, every person should perform massage over soles with oil, washing them well & should use foot wears as simple preventive and promotive approach for eye problems.
- 9.) **Abhyang – oil massage:** It is one of the most important daily procedures indicated in *Ayurveda* for prevention and promotion of health. Specifically massage to be given to had, ears and feet. One should undertake oil massage every day; this removes old age (arrests the effect of old age), fatigue and *vata*; it also gives strength to clarity and sharpness of vision and nourishment, sound sleep and good skin.

Padabhyanga helps to improve vision and *shirobhyanga* helps in *indriya prasadana*.⁶

- 10.) **Snana – Bath:**Bath stimulates digestive power, is aphrodisiac, increases the life span and enthusiasm and strength, removes itching, dirt, fatigue, sweat, lassitude, thirst, burning sensation. Before taking *snana*, one should apply the paste of the *Krishna taila* which is said to be *vatahara* and *chakshusya*.⁶

CONCEPT OF RATRICHARYA:

After taking dinner, one should wash their hands completely and then touch the eyes with the moist finger tips.

Bhojanottar karma: Triphala churna mixed with honey and ghee should use in night to strengthen vision.

Individual should *sauveeranajana* daily, as it is conductive of eyes. One can use *rasaanjana* in one day of week to remove dirt and dosas from eyes.

CONCEPT OF RITUCHARYA:

To maintain healthy life one should follow ritucharya which is mentioned inayurveda samhita. To maintain physiological effect of tridoshas and their balance in body, one should go through shodhana karama in sadharan ritu (varsha/pravrut, sharad, vasant) respectively. Under samyak yoga of shodhana karama, one can get sharp vision and strengthen indriyas. So one has to take sodhana to maintain normalcy of chakshurendriya.⁷

Yoga practices and eye health:

Purifying procedure like Netikiryā and Trataka help to promote clear eye vision and prevent the dosasanchaya. In yoga asana palming, swinging and shifting movement of eyes & matsyaasana may give relief to eyes and prevent the refractive errors and other problems.

Palming is the technique in which rubbing of own palms and then touching them to eyes. After meal, palming is very useful for prevention of timira.

Blinking Proper blinking is necessary to clean your eyes, relieve the strain and improve eye comfort. You can set aside a few minutes every day.

Pranayama means, extension or expansion of the dimension of Prana. A good balance of mental status is essential for proper functioning of the eyes because sense organs can perceive the objects only in the presence of mind. Proper practices of nadishodhana and bhramri pranayama increases stress tolerance, calm to mind, improve circulation & reduce the muscles tension. All these may have promotive action in the eye health.⁸

Vegodharana and eye health:

Suppression of urges and forceful expulsion always lead to bad effect on health. But suppression of tear and sleep especially leads to diseases of eye. Suppression of urges causes vataprakopa, leading to weakness of ocular tissues and strain to eyes. Prolonged office duties, class room, meetings and watching TV programs and continuous computer work nowadays are part of faulty lifestyle and quite evident for suppression of natural urges. Kshavathu vegadharana leads to indriya daurbalaya, nindra vegadharana causes akshigaurava, Chhardi dharana leads to akshi kandu. Suppression of muta, purisha and vata leads to netra roga.⁹

Trayopasthambha co-relation with eye health:

Ahara (food), Nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya (non celibacy)- are sub pillars of fe, when followed and indulged in a proper manner, maintain the body strongly just as pillars support a building.

A.] Food should be taken at proper time. Suppression of hunger leads to weakness in visual perception.

VirudhaAhara (unwholesome food) may lead to reduced vision and blindness.

B.] Nidra (sleep) revitalizes the mind and body. Sound sleep is absolutely necessary for the eyes. During sleep, the eyes are at complete rest and recollect functional capacity.

C.] Brahmacharya is concerned to self-control of sense organs. Persons undergoing sexual intercourse during the menstrual phase lose their visual health.¹⁰

CONCEPT OF PRAJNAPRADHA:

Prajnapradha means intellectual errors. One should take care of sense organs by avoiding excessive, improper and disuse of sense organs, in context of knowledge about kala, artha and karma.

ROLE OF SHATKARAMA:

Hatha yoga, as described in the early yoga Upanishads, was made up of shatkarmas is a very precise and systematic science. The shatkarmas consist of six groups of purification practices. The aim of shatkaram is to create harmony between the two major pranic flows, *Ida and Pingala*, thereby attaining physical and mental purification and balance.

The six shatkarmas are as follows:

- 1.) Neti, 2.) Dhauti, 3.) Nauli,
4.) Basti, 5.) kapalbhati, 6.) Tratak

In which Tratak is useful for maintaining eyes health.

Tratak: Looking intently with an unwavering gaze at a small point without blink until tears are shed is known as Tratak. There are two types of tratak are [A.] Bahiranga [B.] Antranaga

Benefits: For developing high concentration. It is therapeutic for depression, insomnia, anxiety and memory etc. regular practice of this therapy results in improvement of eyesight naturally. It is helpful in myopia, astigmatism and early stage of cataract.¹¹

A person suffering from glaucoma and epilepsy should not go through this therapy.

Ayurveda therapies which help in maintain health of eyes

- 1.) **Tarpana & Putapaka vidhi:** It is important therapeutic in which small well like structure (pali) formed around orbit of eyes and pour snehana dravya in it in tarpana vidhi. In putapak vidhi, one should use aushadhi dravyas.

In tiredness, inertness of eye, dryness, roughness, in injury, shattered eyelashes, blurred vision, pain, swelling, siraharsa, sirotpata, syanda vyadhi; one should go through this therapy.¹²

- 2.) **Aschotana vidhi:** Aschotanais very useful in the beginning in all diseases of eyes. Medicinal drops put into the eye move into the passage of joints, head, nose and face and evacuates the vitiated dosas move from there.

This prevents pain, pricking pain, itching, friction like feeling, burning sensation and redness of eyes.¹³

- 3.) **Shirodhara:** in this process of pouring liquid type of medicine like taila and takram constantly for 50-60 min in a temple region. It is supportive in curing nervous disorder, insomnia, anxiety, migraine and mental disorder etc.

- 4.) **Shirovasti:** It is procedure of retaining warm water in a cap like structure fitted on the head. Normally this procedure is done for at least 35-50 min for 7 days maximum. This is one of the furthest treatments of head related disorder.¹⁴

- 5.) **Netradhara:** in this process of pouring liquid form of medicine into the inner canthus of eyes from the desired height for recommended number of time as per condition.

DISCUSSION:

Human eyes are extremely delicate organs. These are the organs which should be free from stress, near watching activities for long time and living in polluted environment. But since the present way of life style, our eyes have to bear a lot of stress and limit resistant against eye issues.

As a result, the person suffers from refractive errors, cataract and other eye problems. In India, varied prevalence rates of myopia and hypermetropia have been reported in children. Refractive error comprises a major part of avoidable blindness. If just the two major causes of visual impairment, refractive error and development of cataract are minimized by prevention & promotion of eye health, two third of population eye vision remain intact otherwise it will lead to blindness.

Emphasis on the comprehensive eye care, attention to eliminate avoidable blindness from the country is necessary. Ayurveda has promotive care & restoring measures that neutralize the effect of today's stressed life style over eyes, strengthening eye muscles, making lens fiber elastic. The eye promotive regimen delays the degenerative process in the retina & focal point and nourishes the visual structures. Once a permanent mechanical change develops in the shape of eye ball, then it is not possible to reverse the changes. Eye exercises and Ayurvedic measures are found to be supportive in eye care. A person can attain excellent potentiality of body and sense organs (eye) by the usage of daily regimen in their life.

CONCLUSION:

Ayurveda gives careful consideration on staying away from the components causing diseased state. The ancient science of Ayurveda is an integral form of medicine and healthcare which primarily aims at the prevention of disease and promotes positive well-being. Its holistic approach towards lifestyle and health makes it vital in the modern-day scenario. Intensive eye care is described under "Shalaky Tantra", one of the eight parts of Ayurveda. It also offers numerous safe, effective and simple methods for maintaining ocular health. Although these approaches are primitive, they are viable and can still be easily practiced in our daily lives to avoid lifestyle-related eye disorders. By following Swasthritra guideline in daily life, one can be healthy person in context to balanced dosas and malas of body. One

can also get sukhayu and dirghayu.

'Swasthavritta' is knowledge of maintenance of healthy life (disease free) of an individual, which deals with internal and external beauty via Dincharya (Daily regimen), Ritucharya (Seasonal regimen), Achar Rasayan (Sadvritta), Ashtang yoga, Meditation, Pranayam etc.

Giving emphasis on our daily routine and a few subtle changes in our lifestyle can result in optimum visual health. The prevention modalities encouraged in Ayurveda such as Anjana, Nasya, Snana (Bath), Aschyotana, Padabhyanga, etc. along with a few changes in behaviour at personal, family, and community level including preventive practices are promoted as effective measures for maintenance of visual health and the prevention of ocular disorders in population. Selected Yoga Asanas and Satkriyas are also said to be beneficial for the health of eyes. By including Ayurvedic visual health promotion and preventive measures as integral part of programmes to enhance community awareness may help to attain "The vision 2020: The Right to Sight" Global initiative goal of WHO.

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