



LEPA'S: TOPICAL APPLICATION OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

The goal of medicine is to prevent the disease, restore health and suffering. Understanding and appropriately treating pain is an important component of this goal. Pain is universally recognized as a signal of disease or injury and is a common reason for patients to seek the medical care. Analgesics given in the form of topical application is said to provide the therapeutic benefits by reaching the local tissue and with minimal side effects like irritation of the skin etc. Apart from relieving the pain, topical application is also useful in treating various skin lesions, ulcers. Ayurveda, a science of life and traditional system of medicine native to India is also a form of Alternative medicine. Ayurveda also called as Astanga Ayurveda contains eight branches such as kayachikitsa (internal medicine), shalya tantra (surgery), shalakya tantra (ENT), agada tantra (toxicology and forensic medicine), bhutavidya (treatment of psychic diseases), kaumarabhrutya (paediatrics), rasayana tantra (rejuvenation treatment) and vajikarana (aphrodisiacs). Ayurveda, an ancient science has vast description of these topical applications in the name of lepa described both as the chikitsa of various disease conditions and for beauty.

Keywords: Lepa, Pain, Topical application, Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

The American Pain society and the American college of Rheumatology also have recommended topical capsaicin or topical methyl salicylates.¹ Multicentric pilot studies of the lidocaine patch 5% used as monotherapy in low back pain and osteoarthritis have yielded positive results.² Evidence from a recent study Galeotti *et al* suggests a mechanism of analgesia for menthol, a common ingredient in over-the-counter preparations that may actually cause the activation of kappa-opiate receptors.³ Topical analgesics play an important role in the management of pain in the musculoskeletal and the neuromuscular disorders. The mechanism of the action of topical analgesics is largely within the peripheral system. Despite ongoing research and therapeutic advances, most who treat pain recognize that significant challenges remain.⁴ There are many studies on the role of capsaicin, menthol, eucalyptus etc used in the form of topical application and showed to be effective as an alternative medicine. Therefore here an effort has been made to explore the Ayurvedic aspects of lepa and its application that can be made used for further clinical trials.

Definition

The medicines that are in the form of a paste and used for external application are called as lepas.⁵

Synonyms

Lipta, lepa, lepana, alepa

Types of Lepa

Sushruta⁶ (pralepa, pradeha, alepa) and Sharangadhara.⁷ (doshagna, vishagna and varnya) both categorise lepas into 3 separate varieties.

Pralepa- this is the sita (cold) lepa prepared with sita guna dravyas without heating. It is applied as a tanu (thin layered) lepa, may or may not be dry and indicated in pittadosa pradhana twak rogas.

Pradeha- this is usna (lukewarm) lepa prepared with usna virya dravyas and applied bahula (thick), useful in vata and slesma dosaja twak rogas (skin diseases).

Alepa- the action, thickness etc of this lepa will be moderate and is useful in rakta and pittadosa pradhana skin diseases.

Doshagna lepa- is prepared by finely powdering the punarnava, daruharidra, sunthi, sarsapa and sigru bija

separately, then mix together and preserve. While using, mix with aranala (fermented gruel) and apply. This is indicated in sotha.

Vishagna lepa- is prepared by pounding the ingredients sirisha twak, yasti moola, tagara khanda, chandana moola (wood), ela beej, jatamamsi (rhizome), haridra (rhizome), daruharidra khanda, bala moola, kustha moola and ghrta all in equal parts into fine powder and preserved. While using, mix it with ghee and hot water, make the paste and apply in pratiloma gati. Indicated in jwara, sotha, visarpa and kustha.

Varnya lepa- is prepared by pounding the ingredients rakta chandana, manjistha, lodhra, kustha, priyangu, vatankura and masura dhal. While using add lemon juice/milk/egg-albumin, prepare the paste and apply it to the face. Indicated in vyanga, improves colour and complexion of the skin.

General method of preparation

The drugs are first made into a fine powder and then mixed with some liquid media like water/ cow's urine/ oil/ ghee/ swarasa/decoction etc. to obtain the paste form. This paste is applied over the skin.⁵

Doshagna lepa- Here, the powder has to be mixed with aranala (fermented gruel) as the media.

Visaghna lepa- Here, ghee mixed with hot water should be used as the media.

Varnya lepa- Here, lemon juice/ milk/ egg-albumin should be used as the media.

Rules of application of Lepa and mechanism of its absorption

Lepas should always be applied in the opposite direction of the hair follicles. The drugs get absorbed through hair roots, sweat glands and capillaries.

While applying the lepas, snehas are said to be added. Their quantity has to be decided as per the dosha vitiated.

The lepa should not be left in situ after drying. It must be removed as soon as it dries up. Because lepas in wet state help to cure the diseases and on drying, they lose their potency and causes the irritation of the skin.

Lepas should be prepared and used fresh.

Lepas should be applied only once and should not be applied over the previous one.⁵

Thickness of Lepa

Doshagna lepa- 1/4 angula

Visaghna lepa- 1/3 angula

Varnya lepa – ½ angula

General actions of Lepa

Vrana shodhaka, vrana ropaka, daha shamaka, kanduhara, sandhanakara in bhagna, sothahara, shoolahara and stambhaka.

Indications of Different Lepas

Doshagna lepa- Shotha, kustha etc diseases

Visaghna lepa- Jwara, shotha, visarpa, kustha etc.

Varnya lepa – vyanga, for improving colour and complexion.⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Pain is the most common complaint affecting the population, being acute or chronic, musculoskeletal or neuropathic, but the role of topical preparations in providing analgesia is growing. Topical analgesics may be effective in reducing pain and improving function in patients with a variety of neuropathic and non-neuropathic pain states either when used alone or in combination of many drugs. These provide a viable alternative or adjunct to systemic analgesics and have fewer side effects and therefore can be used regularly.

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Though the lepas described in Ayurveda are effective, they are less known and used in a limited way. Knowledge of different varieties of lepas available in different forms may help the future research scholars and the physicians to use it an appropriate way.

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