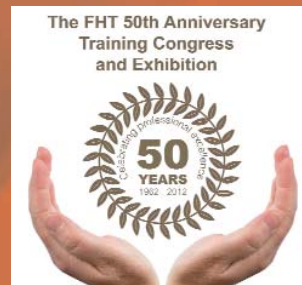


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Ayurvedic approach to Arthritis



Arthritis is a common condition affecting millions of people to varying degrees, even to the point of disability. Although for many this is a hereditary weakness, many cases of arthritis are lifestyle-related, as we shall explore.

Modern medicine has worked wonders in helping to relieve inflammation and killing pain but despite all the research there is no known cure. Ayurveda on the other hand is not only able to offer a detailed understanding of this condition but various herbal formulas to treat the root cause to alleviate suffering. It aims to prevent the manifestation of the condition from a true understanding of its prodromal symptoms and pathogenesis.

According to Ayurveda, arthritis is primarily a vata (air) disorder; however, it is a necessity to understand the involvement of the doshas on a case by case basis.

How it all starts

Ancient Ayurvedic scriptures from 5,000 years ago explain various forms of joint-related disorders that mirror modern science. Arthritis starts with a vitiation/increase of 'vata' (the ether/air quality in the body), coupled with an excess of 'ama' (toxins) due to a weakened digestion commonly caused by improper dietary habits and a sedentary lifestyle. This causes toxins to create problems in the colon (the home

of vata) and then circulate and accumulate in the joints, resulting in discomfort, pain and immobility. The main body tissues affected in most arthritic conditions are plasma, blood, muscles, tendons, ligaments and bone and when these tissues get aggravated by a dosha (usually vata), metabolic pathways break down and circulation to the channels of the joints become blocked and arthritis can manifest.

There are numerous varieties of arthritis described in the ancient scriptures and the most common ones can be narrowed down to three.

Many of the common causative factors associated with amavata and sandhigata vata include:

- ☉ Irregular eating patterns, particularly eating before the previous meal has digested
- ☉ Lack of physical exercise
- ☉ Excessive intake of water and/or foods
- ☉ Eating of incompatible foods (e.g. dairy and fish/fruits)
- ☉ Many women with a history of emotional stress have been known to suffer from arthritic conditions

Signs and symptoms

The onset of arthritic conditions produces early signs relating to the digestion such as:

- ☉ Loss of appetite
- ☉ Foul smell in stools and flatus
- ☉ Stickiness in stools
- ☉ Excessive urination
- ☉ Flatulence and bloating
- ☉ Body ache and fatigue
- ☉ Arthritis is known to be preceded by anaemia.

Other signs would depend on which dosha is dominant, vata type would be more throbbing and sharp with symptoms such as constipation, gas, nervousness, insomnia. Pitta type would be more inflamed, red and hot to touch, with increased thirst and irritability. Kapha would be a dull aching pain, with more lethargy.

When an arthritic condition has set in, symptoms would include swelling or inflammation in joints, morning stiffness, difficulty and pain in movement, weakened muscles surrounding the joints, loss of appetite and energy, fever, headaches and fatigue.

Treatment and prevention

Early diagnosis is the key to combating this chronic condition and therefore preventative measures are of course better than curative. Ayurveda tackles the root cause rather than just suppressing the symptoms and provides a long-term solution that can help to decrease pain,

protect the joints and delay its progression. The line of treatment and herbal medication taken would vary based on the type of arthritis that is being treated as well as the various doshas involved, so every patient would need a personalised treatment plan.

As an overview of treatment in Ayurveda, the first stage of treatment would be 'langhana' (reduction therapy) to bring lightness to the body, 'deepana' to strengthen the digestive fire and improve metabolism along with 'pachana' to digest and reduce toxins and separate them from mixing with the doshas. This is a process of deep cleansing through a specified diet, herbal medications and physical therapies. Deepana pachana is done mainly through fasting, fomentation and use of bitter and pungent herbs for detoxification, purgation, internal oleation with castor oil and dry ginger tea and decoction enemas. In case of gouty arthritis, bloodletting would be the choice of purification. Externally the joint swelling would be fomented with dry heat such as hot sand in the case of amavata.

Diet and lifestyle

You can prevent the onset yourself at home by observing the following preventative measures:

- ☯ Avoid indulgences in incompatible, vata-provoking and fatty foods
- ☯ Do not exercise after heavy meals, but do take daily light regular exercise
- ☯ Eat meals at regular times with at least 3 hours between each meal
- ☯ Avoid chilled drinks, ice etc especially with or after food instead opt for hot water to aid digestion
- ☯ Avoid heavy-to-digest foods such as curds and meats
- ☯ Drink ginger tea in the morning
- ☯ Cook with digestive spices such as cumin, ginger, asafoetida, coriander, black pepper, turmeric, fennel, garlic, fenugreek, lemon



Ama Vata	Here ama is involved along with vata to produce an inflammatory arthritis resembling rheumatoid arthritis.
Sandhigata Vata	The disturbed vata settles at the joints causing swelling, pain, stiffness etc. This is a more degenerative condition and is comparable to osteo arthritis.
Vata-Rakta	Here the vitiated vata coupled with vitiated rakta (blood) produce pain in the joints resembling gouty arthritis.

- ☯ Avoid exposure to cold climates and rain
- ☯ Avoid emotional and mental stress, grief, tension, fear and worry – seek guidance of meditation and breathing techniques for relaxation.

Local treatments

In amavata, apply fomentation with dry heat and avoid oil application. Vaaluka sweda (sudation to the joint using heated sand bags) and lepa (medicated pastes are anointed to the affected joints) are useful in all types of arthritis as the herbs can be varied according to type of arthritis.

In sandhigata vata, various options including janu vasti (oil pooling around the knee joints in a well constructed around the joint), patra pinda sweda (sudation to the joint pain using poultice with medicated leaves), shastika shali pinda sweda (sudation with a poultice of processed rice) are useful. Regular massage (with warm medicated oils) and fomentation would be advisable.

Home remedies

- ☯ To alleviate arthritic pain at home drink a daily cup of hot water with 2 tsp honey and 1 tsp of cinnamon before breakfast. Honey, cinnamon and water can be mixed into a paste and applied to painful joints for instant and natural relief.
- ☯ Prevent arthritis from occurring by doing daily self-massage before taking a bath.
- ☯ Drink hot lemon water every morning to prevent toxins from building as well as pacify vata and kapha dosha.
- ☯ Daily intake of herbs and spices help to keep digestion, metabolism and the immune system ticking over nicely. For example, garlic detoxifies and boost immunity, turmeric is an anti-inflammatory, cinnamon help relieve joint pain.
- ☯ Seek professional advice to check which dosha is involved and the most suitable line of treatment. **CHW**

© As a member of the APA, Geeta Vara is a fully qualified Ayurvedic Practitioner working in Central & South East London providing consultations, treatments and corporate workshops. For more information about management of arthritis or other health concerns, please email: geetavara@gmail.com, call on 07956 521601 or visit, www.geetavara.co.uk.

