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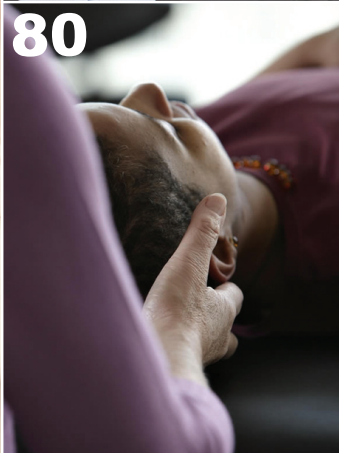
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Ayurvedic approaches to asthma

Asthma, commonly known as ‘shwasa’ in Ayurveda, is a condition where there are obstructions and inflammation in the respiratory channels. The air passages become blocked and make it difficult for the patient to breathe. The Sanskrit word ‘shwasa’ is derived from the root of the term ‘shwasa prinane’ indicating difficulty in the entry of ‘prana’, the life force energy, into the prana channels.

Asthma has become a condition requiring more and more emergency medical attention. On average, bronchial asthma affects 10-20% of the population in developed countries. With the continual changes to our environment, whether intentionally or unintentionally, our exposure to chemicals, pollutions, processed and genetically modified foods, unwholesome diet and lifestyle is increasing. Furthermore, acute attacks of asthma are often a result of all allopathic drugs such as beta-blockers, aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

Modern medicine examines the physiological changes in bronchial constriction and fluid retention in the lungs that lead to the symptoms of asthma. Ayurveda further explores the mental and behavioural patterns that influence the manifestation of such a condition and the root cause by understanding the dosha imbalance.

Although the symptoms and severity of symptoms vary, asthma is a condition that is generally characterised by:

- Paroxysmal dyspnoea
- Tightness in the chest
- Increased respiration per minute with breathing difficulties
- Breathlessness
- Coughing
- Inflammation or allergy

- Wheezing caused by spasmodic contractions of the bronchi.

Some causative or aggravating factors in shwasa according to Ayurveda can include:

- Continued inhalation of dust or poisonous smoke
- Excessive exposure to dry air/wind
- Exposure to chemical dyes, colours, petrol fumes
- Working in a damp and cold atmosphere
- A decrease in the body's natural immune and defence mechanisms
- Weakened or imbalanced nervous system activity
- Dry, cold and heavy foods
- Poor diet with stale, fermented and unnatural foods leading to the build-up of toxins in the stomach and subsequently in the airways
- Vata and kapha aggravating foods and lifestyle
- Debilitating conditions such as heart, brain, kidney disease
- Depletion or loss of blood, plasma or ojas
- Emotional/physical trauma or emotional suppression and mental stress.

In the Ayurvedic assessment and diagnosis of asthma, the type of asthma is very relevant in the Ayurvedic treatment plan. There are four types of shwasa outlined in Ayurveda. Three of these are



very serious and often a result of complications of other diseases and one type is due to minor causes such as overeating and drinking. Tamaka shwasa is what we commonly know today as bronchial asthma. Tamaka shwasa can be further categorized by the dominant dosha involved – vata, pitta and kapha.

Most asthmatic conditions starts with a vitiation of vata (ether/air) and kapha (water/earth) doshas coupled with low digestive fire. This leads to a build-up of vata and toxins that lodge in the weakened respiratory channels. The excess formation of sticky and slimy substance lodges in the respiratory channels causing obstruction and leads to shwasa.

Treatment for shwasa

Like most chronic health conditions, the Ayurvedic approach to treatment would be through deep purification techniques (pancha karma) to treat the root cause, performed under the guidance of an Ayurvedic practitioner. Further treatment includes shamana – pacification of the causative factors of shwasa by dietary and lifestyle management and herbs. Oleation and sudation to the chest is the ideal way to pacify during an acute attack. You can use warm sesame oil with rock salt to the chest and apply steam to the local area. This process helps to liquefy the mucous in the respiratory tract and it can then be expelled. For internal oleation,





sesame oil or ghee can be taken with a little decoction of liquorice.

For vata-dominant shwasa

- ☞ Increase fluid intake as this will reduce the dryness in the body
- ☞ Follow a vata-pacifying diet with more warm, grounding and moist foods
- ☞ Avoid dry and cold, rough or raw foods, dairy and nuts
- ☞ Keep the head, neck and chest covered from exposure to wind
- ☞ Massage the body daily with warm sesame oil
- ☞ Use relaxing pranayama such as ujjaya and nadi shodhana to help relieve anxiety and stress. Meditation to relax and calm the deeper mind.

For pitta-dominant shwasa

- ☞ Drink plenty of water
- ☞ Maintain proper meal times, avoiding food after 10pm
- ☞ Avoid fried, spicy and excessively sour foods, meats
- ☞ Eat lots of water-based fruits and vegetables
- ☞ Reduce exertion in the heat
- ☞ Favour spices such as turmeric, Echinacea, dandelion, neem that can help reduce inflammation and infections
- ☞ Adopt relaxing and calming breathing and meditation techniques to help calm stress and anger.

Vata	Pitta	Kapha
The air element is dominant, resulting in more of a dry type of asthma	Fire element is dominant and asthma of this type would be an infectious type	A water/earth type and in this type of asthma there would be more congestion or mucous
Usually affects individuals who are thin-framed, sensitive to cold climates, suffer from dry skin or constipation	Usually affects those who are of medium frame, get hot quickly and sweat easily, and those who may suffer from skin conditions or are prone to infections	Usually affects those with a larger frame, prone to colds and congestive sinuses, sensitivity to cold, humid or damp climates, tendency to gain weight easily or retain water

For kapha-dominant shwasa

- ☞ Avoid kapha-increasing foods such as dairy, wheat, refined sugars
- ☞ Favour foods with a sweet, sour and salty taste
- ☞ Opt for bitter, astringent and pungent-tasting foods as these foods help to reduce the build-up of mucous and prevent congestion
- ☞ Do a local massage to chest and back with mustard oil
- ☞ Regular daily exercise is recommended to encourage circulation
- ☞ Follow a kapha-pacifying diet and daily regimen including avoiding meals before 10am and after 6pm. This will maintain a healthy digestive fire
- ☞ Keep head, neck and chest covered against exposure to cold and damp weather
- ☞ Drink plenty of warm water or herbal spiced tea.

A practitioner can advise on the best line of therapeutic treatment based on the strength of the patient, predominance of the dosha (usually vata or kapha) and best approach for attack and post-attack treatment. This treatment is almost always followed by the very important process of 'rasayana', a rejuvenation process to prevent the imbalance of vata and kapha and the onset of future attacks.

In general it is advised to follow anti-vata and anti-kapha Ayurvedic principles for managing shwasa, especially where this condition in some cases can only be managed and not cured.

Sufferers of tamaka shwasa can follow the advice below:

- ☞ Deep pranayama breathing exercises are really beneficial for exercising the respiratory channels. Pranayama slows and deepens the breath and increases the capacity for prana and calmness of the mind. Pranayama involves the practice of controlled inhalation, retention and exhalation of the breath and not simply holding the breath or failing to breathe. Using these age-old yogi techniques creates balance of energy, giving immediate results and increasing vitality over time.

- ☞ Include simple spices in the diet to help keep the chest clear: ginger, turmeric, black pepper, garlic, cumin, cardamom, honey are all useful ingredients.

- ☞ Adopt a diet consisting of warm water, mature rice and wheat, goats milk and cheese, green gram, mature honey, chicken, mature ghee, garlic, lemon, loofa gourd, pomelo, spinach, and alcoholic preparations in moderation.

- ☞ Avoid newly harvested grains including rice, black gram, sugars, milk and milk products, fried and processed foods, overeating, and fruits such as guava, papaya, watermelon and banana as these foods tend to produce and encourage accumulation of mucous.

- ☞ Application of heating oils such as cinnamon, eucalyptus, clove oil in a sesame base oil can be helpful in clearing a vata-type shwasa and a base oil of mustard for kapha-type shwasa.

- ☞ Maintain a dust-free environment to prevent potential allergens aggravating the condition.

- ☞ Dhatura (*Datura stramonium*) is the medicine of choice for bronchial asthma. Some classical herbal formulations are also very useful for this condition and include sitopaladi churna, kumari asava, kanaka asavaswaskuthar rasa.

- ☞ Home remedies that make great tonics include: a teaspoon of fresh ginger juice mixed with a cup of fenugreek decoction and honey to taste. Also, 50 ml water and 50 ml milk boiled with long pepper for vata dominance or with black pepper for kapha dominance. Consult a practitioner for the exact process as it is advised to take in incremental doses for a week and then to reduce again over a week. Chywanprash is one of the richest forms of vitamin C, 1 tsp taken three times a day before food can help to increase the gap between attacks.

We are all inherently different with a range of constitutional influences and lifestyle patterns. Treatments would therefore be tailored to your specific condition when you consult a practitioner. With this profound knowledge of imbalances and causative factors we are able to manage and control tamaka shwasa and in many cases significantly reduce the number of attacks a patient with this condition will suffer. **CHW**

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