



The science of Rasayana: Unlocking Ayurveda's secret to longevity

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda is the ancient system of medicine in the world. The science of life deals with every aspect of life. Ayurveda has two aims, i.e., maintaining the health of a healthy person and curing the diseased. Rasayana may be employed for fulfilling both of them. Rasayana are the ways of attaining longevity, memory, intelligence, freedom from disorders, young age, excellence of lusture, complexion and voice, ultimate strength of physique and sense organs, wisdom and successful words and brilliance. Rasayana is one among the Ashtanga Ayurveda. Rasayana drugs are those that are capable of importing Rasas to the body and toning up the system of healthy persons. Rasayana aids in increasing natural immunity, enhancing general well-being, improving the functioning of all the fundamental organs of the body and keeping the signs of early ageing at bay. Moreover, it involves two opposite processes that simultaneously come into operation, i.e., growth and atrophy. Ageing represents structural and functional changes of an organism over its entire life span. Rasayana is not a drug therapy, but it is a specialised procedure practised in the form of rejuvenate recipes, dietary regimes and special health-promoting conduct and behaviour, i.e., Achara Rasayana.

Introduction

Ayurveda is a science of life that deals with the physical, psychological, as well as spiritual well-being of an individual. Ayurveda, on one hand, emphasises on maintenance of health, whereas on the other hand, it has very scientific and sound fundamental principles for curing the ailments.^[1] Keeping in view the different areas of expertise required to manage different aspects of health and diseases, Ayurveda is categorised into eight specialised branches.^[2] Among the eight specialities of Ayurveda, Rasayana Tantra is a branch exclusively devoted to nutrition, immunology and rejuvenation.

Word Rasayana is derived from "Rasasya Ayanam Rasayanam", which means the path to vitality or the journey to essence.^[3] Acharya Dalhana has explained the methods that improve youth and enhance longevity by attaining the best quality body tissues are termed as Rasayana.^[4]

The word Rasayana is comprised of two terms, i.e., "Rasa" and "Ayana". The term Rasa has many connotations. It is used for juice, alchemy, taste, essence, vitality, Rasa Dhatu, etc. Word Rasa, in relation to

Rasayana therapy, means the Rasa Dhatu, and Ayana means the path of circulation. Thus, it can be said that Rasayana is related to nutrition and its transportation in the body.

Why is Rasayana needed?

In this fast-moving world, our lifestyle has become very hectic. Stress is an inescapable part of personal and professional life. To achieve the things for better and pleasurable living, there is hardly any time for exercise. Dietary habits have become faulty as many people are into the habit of eating fast food.^[5] Timings of eating have become irregular due to changes in the duties, and more and more people are using stale foods with preservatives and are becoming addicted to alcohol, smoking and drugs.^[6] All these factors are responsible for the vitiation of Doshas and diminution of Agni, thus causing improper nutrition to the tissues, low immunity, fatigue, debility, inability to adapt to stress and premature ageing. Rasayana foods, herbs and regimens help to re-establish this balance.



Classification of Rasayana ^[7]

1. According to the material used

Dravyabhuta Rasayana: When the Rasayana effect is obtained using Dravyas like herbs, minerals, herbo-mineral drugs, food, milk, etc.

Adravyabhuta Rasayana: Where no substance is used, and the Rasayana effect is obtained by good moral conduct, meditation, etc., e.g., Achara Rasayana.

2. According to the scope of use

Kamya Rasayana: These are used in healthy persons for further promotion of health. It is further subdivided into;

- Pranakamya - one which promotes longevity.
- Shrikamya - promotes body lusture.
- Medhakamya - promotes memory & intellect

Naimittika Rasavana: The Rasayana, which is used specifically in the treatment of specific diseases, is termed Naimittika Rasayana. This is the prime area where Rasayana drugs are mainly studied and tested in the present times. Some of the examples are

- Pandu - Loha, Mandura, Swarnamakshika
- Prameha - Haridra, Shilajatu, Amalaki
- Kushtha- Khadira, Tugaraka, Triphala, Bhallataka
- Mutravahasroto Vikara - Gokshura, Punarnava, Shilajatu
- Vata Vyadhi - Shilajatu, Guggulu, Rasna, Bala
- Eye diseases - Triphala, Madhuyashti
- Respiratory diseases- Pippali, Sirisha, Chyawanprasha
- Psychiatric disorders- Ashwagandha, Shankhapushpi, Brahmi

Ajasrika Rasavana: Food substances that we consume in our daily life regularly in moderation for the nourishment of body tissues. Examples are daily usage of milk & ghee.

3. According to the method of administration

Kuti Praveshika Rasayana: This is basically the indoor method of Rasayana administration. As per the textual reference, the person will be made to stay in a specially designed Trigarbha kuti for a particular period, and Rasayana drug will be administered after shodhana with panchakarma. Along with the Rasayana drug, the patient is also advised to follow a strict diet schedule and a specific code of conduct in life. This is the superior method of administering the Rasayana, as maximum benefits can be obtained from this. e.g. Haritaki Rasayana, Brahma Rasayana, Triphala Rasayana

Vatatapika Rasayana: Vata means air and Atapa means sunlight. In this method of Rasayana administration, a person is exposed to air and sunlight, hence it is termed as Vatatapika. In this method, a person will continue their normal daily routine without any disturbance. Here, the diet and lifestyle are flexible as per the lifestyle of the patient and therefore, the outcome of the Rasayana therapy administered by this method is less than the indoor method of Rasayana administration. e.g. Chyavanaprasha, Amalaki, Brahmi, Ashwagandha.

4. Other types of Rasayana

Medhya Rasayana ^[8]

This group of Rasayana have memory and intellect-enhancing properties. They improve the Dhi (intellect), Dhriti (retention power) and Smriti (recalling power). Although all the Rasayana drugs have these properties but four special drugs have been mentioned for improving the higher mental functions. They are Guduchi, Madhuyashti, Mandukaparni and Shankhapushpi.

Achara Rasayana ^[9]

Achara Rasayana is the way for acquiring the Rasayana effect with good personal, moral and social behaviour.

In this type of Rasayana, the ways of living, the role of Satvika diet, what to do and what to avoid have been described. By following the principles of Achara Rasayana, a person can achieve psychological and social satisfaction, which is essential for healthy living.

Mode of action of Rasayana

Our body is made up of Dosha, Dhatu and Mala.^[10] Everyone in this universe cherishes a healthy life and for that, these three elements are essential to remain in a



balanced state. The health of an individual is again dependent on the quality of food he takes and on the status of Agni ^[11], which will help in digestion, absorption and assimilation of the ingested food. Nutrition to the body elements is provided by the Ahara-Rasa, which is the first Dhatu formed in the body during the digestion of food. Rasa nourishes our body, boosts immunity and helps to keep the body and mind in the best of health. Thus, it is very important for the health of a living being that Ahara-Rasa formed after digestion of food must be of the best quality, and it must be circulated in the body unhindered to nourish the body tissues. Thus, Rasayana act at the level of Agni to enhance the nutritional quality of Ahara-Rasa and helps in better circulation and assimilation of the nutrients at the cellular level. The Rasayana improves digestion and enhances the bioavailability of nutrients of Ahara-Rasa, thus helping in attaining longevity, memory, intelligence, health, youthfulness, excellence of lusture, complexion and voice, optimum development of physique and sense organs, mastery over phonetics, respectability and brilliance^[12]

1. **Enhancing immunity** (Vyadhikshamatva): Rasayana strengthens the body's defence mechanisms against illness, improving both innate and adaptive immunity.
2. **Providing antioxidant effects:** Many Rasayana herbs contain polyphenols and other compounds that prevent damage caused by free radicals, which contribute to ageing and disease.
3. **Improving tissue quality (Dhatu):** It nourishes the seven types of body tissues, ensuring they are of high quality, which leads to improved overall health and vitality.
4. **Boosting metabolic function** (Agni): Rasayana improves the body's metabolic processes, ensuring that food is digested and nutrients are properly assimilated.
5. **Improving microcirculation** (Srotas): It helps keep the channels of the body clear, facilitating the unimpeded circulation of nutrients and energy.
6. **Supporting cognitive function:** Some Rasayanas have nootropic effects, which can boost memory, enhance brain activity, and calm the mind.

7. **Acting as an adaptogen:** Rasayana herbs help the body adapt to environmental changes and stress by restoring internal balance and strength.

Biological Effects of Rasayana Drugs: Various studies have been done on different aspects of Rasayana drugs. Some contemporary terminologies can be found that have actions similar to Rasayana, like-

- Immunomodulator
- Adaptogenic
- Antioxidant
- Nootropic

These terms can be understood as follows,

Immunomodulator - A substance that alters the immune response by augmenting or reducing the ability of the immune system to produce antibodies or sensitised cells that recognise and react with the antigen that initiated their production.

Adaptogen – An adaptogen is a metabolic regulator that increases the ability of an organism to adapt to environmental factors and to avoid damage from such factors. Environmental factors can be either physiological (external), such as injury or ageing, or psychological (internal), such as anxiety.

Antioxidant - Antioxidants are defined as 'substances whose presence in relatively low concentrations significantly inhibits the rate of oxidation of targets' being present in serum. These antioxidants circumvent the damage caused by oxygen-free radicals.

Nootropic - These are substances that promote intelligence and the functions of the brain. These drugs can be categorised as Medhya Rasayana drugs.

Time of administration & selection of Rasayana

The ageing starts right from birth. Old cells are replaced by new cells in the growing phase of life. But when the catabolic process dominates over the anabolic process, we start growing old. In today's fast-paced world, stress is an inescapable part of life due to which can lead this degeneration starting early, which can be prevented by Rasayana administration. Acharya Sushruta has said "Purvevayasivamadhaye va manushyanam rasayanam" ^[13] means the best time for administration of Rasayana is in middle age. During the selection of a particular Rasayana, various factors like Desha, Kala,



Vaya, Prakriti, Dhatu, Agni, Dosha, Dushya & Vyadhi should be kept in consideration.

Acharya Sharangadhara has explained that with every decade of life, some important aspect of life is lost.^[14] The order of loss of these ten elements in consecutive order is Balya (childhood), Vriddhi (growth), Chavi (beauty), Medha (intellect), Tvak (skin health), Drishti (visual acuity), Shukra (sexual power), Vikrama (physical strength), Buddhi (wisdom), Karmendriya (locomotor power).

Rasayana drugs mentioned are,

1. Balya – 1 to 10 years – Vacha (*Acorus calamus*)
2. Vriddhi -11 to 20 years – Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)
3. Chavi – 21 to 30 years – Amalaki (*Embllica officinalis*)
4. Medha – 31-40 years – Shankhapushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) and Jatamamsi (*Celastrus paniculatus*)
5. Tvak – 41 to 50 years – Bhringaraja (*Eclipta Alba*)
6. Drishti – 51 to 60 years – Chakramarda (*Cassia absus*)
7. Shukra – 61 to 70 years – Kapikacchu (*Mucuna prurita*) and Munjatata (*Orchis latifolia*)
8. Vikrama – 71 to 80 years – Guggulu (*Commiphora mukul*)
9. Buddhi – 81 to 90 years – Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*)
10. Karmendriya – 91-100 years – Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*) or Triphala

Hence, the selection & administration of Rasayana drugs should be kept in mind considering these stages. Similarly, different Rasayana drugs act at different tissue level, hence the affected tissue should also be kept in mind while selecting Rasayana.

Discussion

Health is a complex phenomenon. To maintain health and to balance mind & body at any time, numerous interrelated physiological, biochemical and hormonal functions need to act together in harmony with great precision. The ancient Ayurvedic physicians have explained the delicate anatomy and physiology of the human body in a very holistic way. They saw the living entity as the total of the physical body, the senses, the psyche and the soul. Ayurveda describes the healthy

person as one whose anatomy and physiology in terms of Dosha, Dhatu and Mala are in a state of balance and who is in a state of sensorial, mental and spiritual well-being.^[15]

Ayurveda describes its objectives in two broad ways: one is the preservation of health, and the second is treating the disease. For preservation of health, there is a detailed description of measures like Dincharya, Ratricharya, Ritucharva, Sadvritta and periodic seasonal Panchakarma. Details about lifestyle, diet, exercise, and personal and social hygiene have been described. Similarly, Rasayana Chikitsa, a separate speciality branch of Ayurveda, is devoted mainly to the preservation and promotion of health by revitalising the metabolism and enhancing immunity. It has therapeutic potential in combating many dreadful diseases of present times, like tuberculosis, diabetes, atherosclerosis, dyslipidemia, stroke, Alzheimer's, cancer, etc.^[16]

However, this holistic science cannot be entirely tested on the parameters of today's science, which has having reductionist approach, but still there has been plenty of research work done on the Rasayana in order to apply them in the modern context. Different studies on Rasayana drugs have proven their efficacy to treat epilepsy, convulsive disorders, and psycho-somatic stress. Rasayana have also shown positive results in alleviating anxiety, apprehension and keeping the mind calm and cool.^[17] Maximum studies on Rasayana have been done on their antioxidant & immune-modulation properties. Studies have concluded that Rasayana regulate the immunological and endocrine systems without damaging the auto-regulative functions of the organisms. Rasayana drugs have been reported to treat generalised weakness and afford protection from cyclophosphamide-induced leukopenia.^[18]

Possible protective mechanism of Rasayana may be by immune-modulation, quenching free radicals, enhancing cellular detoxification mechanisms, repairing damaged non-proliferating cells, inducing cell proliferation and self-renewal of damaged proliferating tissues and replenishing them by eliminating damaged or mutated cells with fresh cells.^[19]

Conclusion

Rasayana is a specialised branch of Ayurveda practised in the form of drugs, diet and special health-promoting conduct and behaviour.



Studies have proven the efficacy of Rasayana drugs mentioned in Ayurvedic texts in the management of various disorders like infections, diabetes, cancers, inflammations, neurodegenerative conditions and atherosclerosis, etc. Rasayana drugs are believed to act as immune-modulators, adaptogens, free radical scavengers, anabolic, nutritive and anti-ageing agents, etc. But still, there is a lacuna in existing knowledge, and a lot of work is required to generate scientific evidence in support. It can be concluded that if worked out in a systematic way, Rasayana drugs will be the future medicine in combating dreadful diseases of current times and the future.

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