The Use of Vyāyāma or Physical Exercise, Prescribed in Ayurveda

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Abstract: Ayurveda also gives an importance to the physical exercise for the maintenance of good health. According to Ayurveda the consequences resulting from physical exercise are not only lightness of the body capacity for work, collectedness, power of enduring hardship; but also it removes of all imperfections and augmentation of the digestive fire. Therefore, vyāyāma has both the values: preventive and curative.


Introduction

Vyāyāma or Physical Exercise is essential for a person to maintain his normal health. It also helps to carry out daily tasks with energy and attentiveness, without undue tiredness, and with ample vigor. Vyāyāma (Vi + Ā + Yam + Ghaṭ) is the term, especially used in Ayurveda for the physical activities, which can be identified with the 'physical exercise' in the present time. Ayurveda, the medical system of India, has also prescribed vyāyāma in connection with both measures: preventive and curative. The use of vyāyāma is, therefore, has been discussed in this paper from the point of view of Ayurveda only.

Sources for the discussion made here, are mainly the Vṛddhatrayā, namely the Carakasamhita (CS)², the Susrutasamhita (SS)³ and the Asāṁgharādayasāṁhitā (AH)⁹ and from among the Sri Lankan medical texts, the Sāṟṟhasāṁgrahaya (Sāṟṟa)⁷, written in Sanskrit in the 3rd Century A.C.; the Bhesajjamanjusa (BM)⁶ written in Pali, the Yogāmavaya (Yogā)⁶ and the Prayogaratnāvaliya (Prayo)⁴, written in Sinhala in the 13th century A.C.. Therefore, these four are the oldest treatises on medicine so far found in Sri Lanka. The phrase 'Sri Lankan Medical Texts' is used here to distinguish them from the Indian Ayurvedic texts only. Otherwise, Sri Lankan medical system is nothing but Ayurveda though it has some distinctive features.

The history of vyāyāma can be traced from a remote past, even from the primitive societies. We have, at least, more than three thousand years old written evidence for the use of vyāyāma and as the Carakasāṁhitā and the Susrutasāṁhitā took their present form exactly before the 2nd century A.C., we have nearly two thousand years history of medical perspective of vyāyāma. Nevertheless, there is no scope to discuss the long history of vyāyāma in this paper.

The definition of vyāyāma has been given in the Carakasāṁhitā, thus:

"sarīra ceṣṭā yā ceṣṭā
tahairāthā balavardhini,
dehavyāyāmasaṁkhyātā
mātraya tāṁ saṁcāret." (CS.1.7.31)

(That exertion of body which is productive of good consequences to the body itself, which conduces to concentration of mind and increases strength is called physical exercise. One should have recourse to it in due measure). This verse is the aphorism of vyāyāma given in the Carakasāṁhitā, and according to this definition, vyāyāma promotes the perfect health which includes both the body and mind.

Importance of vyāyāma

In the aphorism "mithyāhaṁvīhārābhāyām", āhāra comes first and vyāyāma comes under Vihāra to emphasize the importance of physical
exercise. Ayurveda as the science of life, which is based on the principles of nature, focuses on the balance of the physiological functions to maintain perfect health. The doṣas (vāta, pitta and kapha) represents the variations, improper interaction of sense and sense objects; unwholesome acts performed by body and mind are all responsible for the disturbance of doṣas. Āhāra (diet) and vihāra (physical exercise) play a crucial role towards maintaining the body in a state of perfect health. Moreover, the person indulges in the physical exercises should consider the seasons also - CS.1.6.3. 2 or it should not be continued in the same way throughout the year as the natural changes overpower the health. Physical exercise done in the proper time, considering the season improves not only strength and complexion but also happiness and span of life - CS.1.6.3. Ayurveda, therefore, advises the avoidance of vyāyāma in two seasons: grīṣma (summer) - CS.1.6.3.2; AH.1.3.27⁹ and varṣā (monsoon) - CS.1.6.29²; AH.1.3.27⁹. Ayurveda advises the physician to examine the 'vyāyāmaśakti' or capacity for physical exercise while examining a patient. It should be ascertained from the capacity for action.

"vyāyāmaśaktisetcet; vyāyāmaśaktirapi karmaśaktyā pariṃksyā." - CS.3.8.12¹

The judgment on three kinds of strength viz. superior, middling and inferior, is done in the same way - AH.1.1.12ff ⁸.

vyāyāma as a Therapy

vyāyāma, in Ayurveda, is used even as a therapy; in both aspects, preventive and curative. The foundation of Ayurvedic treatment lies on vāyu, pitta and kapha. These are the three 'Bio-regulating principles' present inside the body and are known as tridoṣa, which controls the various physiological functions of the body;

"sarveṣāmeva rogānāṃnīḍāṇāṃkupitā malāḥ" - AH.1.1.12ff ⁹; SS.1.21¹ (for all the diseases, the causes are the aggravated doṣas).

Ayurveda, therefore, advises the avoidance of vyāyāma in two seasons: grīṣma (summer) - CS.1.20.10²; AH.1.3.19⁸; Sārā. 1.115⁷. Again, the Carakasāraṇītā, in the section of Vīmāna, has recommended the physical exercise as a treatment for phlegm. There, it prescribes running (dhāvana), jumping (langhana), leaping (plāvana) walking about (parisaraṇa), night-keeping (jāgaraṇa), pugilistic combat (boxing- niyuddha) and athletic exercise etc. for the disturbed phlegm - CS.2.6.18²; AH.1.3.10⁹. The way vyāyāma works against the phlegm can be understood in the following description too given by Caraka:

"evamāsayamanupravīṣyorogatāṃ kevalam vaikārikam ślesmamūla mūrdhvamuktispāti, tatrāvajite ślesmanyaśi sarīrāntartatāḥ ślesivākārāḥ prasāntimāpadyante, yathā bhinne kedāraśeṣu sālīyavas ṣṭikādi nyanabhīṣyāntamānāṃvyambhāśa raśomaṇāṃ padyante tadvaditi" - CS.1.20.19³.

(As paddy, barley and other crops are dried up when water collected in the field escapes upon through the ridges enclosing it being broken; even
so diseases caused by the phlegm are destroyed upon the root of the phlegm being thus destroyed.

As already mentioned above, the reasons for the advice given in Ayurveda for indulgence in physical exercise during four seasons namely Śarata (autumn) Śīśrā (winter) Hemanta (early winter) Vasanta (spring) are clear. According to the law of nature, water becomes cold, clear and heavy and the Sun’s rays are mild during Hemanta. The water and vegetables part taken of in Hemanta season give rise to an accumulation of kapha in the body on account of their heaviness and cold nature - BM. 1.54.6. This accumulated kapha finds expression in spring season and so brings about kapha type of disease - SS. 1.6.11.3. Therefore, in this aspect vyāyāma acts as a preventive measure.

Moreover, the Aṣṭāṅghaḥṛdayasamhitā has prescribed the “anekarūpyāvyāyāma-exercises of different kinds” - AH.1.3.11.9, as a therapy for the diseases of kapha. Even the Bhesajjarādjū-sā has mentioned the vyāyāma as a therapy for the same diseases - BM.1.108.6 vyāyāma is one of the treatments mentioned for the suppression of vomiting - BM.4.14.6; AH.1.4.18.9.

According to another explanation given in the Aṣṭāṅghaḥṛdayasamhitā, the therapy is of two kinds; i.e. brāhha (stoutening) and laṅghana (thinning, slimming) santarpana and apatarpana are also used as their synonyms respectively. Brāhha nourishes the body while laṅghana makes the body light - AH.1.14.1.2.9. Laṅghana is of two kinds: śodhana and śamanā. Vāgṛha includes the vyāyāma among the seven kinds of śamanā - AH.1.14.6.7.9. According to Caraka too the vyāyāma is listed under laṅghana.

"catusprakāra satīsuddhih,  
pipāśā marutātapau,  
pācanyupavāsāsa  
vyāyāmaśceti laṅghanam." - CS.1.22.18 2

It also shows the importance of the vyāyāma as a therapy in both measures: preventive and curative.

Besides, sveda or Sudation without the agency of fire is suitable for diseases of vāta inactivated by medas and kapha. Vyāyāma is also one of the methods used in this connection - BM.1.77 6; AH.1.17.28 9. Further, both traditions, Ayurveda and Sri Lankan, have prescribed the vyāyāma for diseases arising from the decrease of sveda (sweat) - BM.1.79 6; AH.1.11.33. Caraka prescribes various exercises.

"vyāyāmayogair vividhaṁ prapaṇḍhīṁ" - CS.3.6.50 2

What does vyāyāma do?

One may ask the question: " If the vyāyāma causes the increase in both the vāta and pitta while decreasing the ślesma, then, how vyāyāma makes the balance of doṣas or Bio-regulating principles?" In fact, what vyāyāma does is the increasing of the digestive fire (pā cakāgni). When the digestive fire is in its good conditions, all types of foods become easily digested. Then, there is no doubt in the increase of vāta or pitta. On the other hand, according to Suśruta, pitta is also identical with the elemental fire. He says; “pitta is the same as fire, since such symptoms, as a burning sensation, digestion and all other characteristics of fire can never exhibit themselves in the human body without the intervention of pitta. Pitta, therefore, is called internal fire" - CS.6.6.49 2. And vyāyāma contributes for the digestion of food - BM. 6.33 8. Even Vāgṛha has mentioned about the excess of physical exercises too - AH.1.1.15 9 as causes for the aggravation of pitta,

The ativyāyāma or excess of physical exercise causes diseases based on both, vāta - AH.3.1.15 9 and pitta, whereas the proper physical exercise causes good health. Further the excess correlation of vyāyāma may cause
"śramah klamah kṣayastraṇān
raktapitta pratāmakaḥ,
ativāyāmataḥkāso
jvaraśārdiśca jāyate." - CS.1.7.33²; BM.20.1; Sārā.10.1; Yogā.p.101³; Praya.p.141

And it causes the kāṣya or loss of flesh - SS. 1.15.39 ³. According to the Ayurvedic texts, the kāṣya or thinness is better than sthāulya (fattiness).

"atyantagarhitavetau sada
sthulakfote aur, narau,
sreṣṭo madhyasaśrastu
krśaḥ sthulātu pūjitaḥ" - SS. 1.15.39º

Even Vāgbhaṭa says that the emaciation (kāṛṣya) is better than corpulence (sthāulya) because there is no treatment for the obese, for, neither ṇṛmaṇa nor laṅghana is capable of vanquish excess of fat, digestive activity and vāṭa.

"kāṛṣyameva vararisthaulyāt na
histhūlasya bheṣajam,
brmhaṇaṁlaṅghanaṁ
välamatimedognivāṣajit." - AH. 1.14.31; Sārā.1.139-141⁸

**Limitations**

The person who is thin (kṛṣa) should not practise the vyāyāma - SS. 1.15.39³. If he does, it is called injudicious correlation of vyāyāma (mithyāyoga) and it causes diseases. Further, the Bhēṣajamaṇīṣu and the Aṣṭāṅghāda-yasmāṁḥīṣu mentions that "persons suffering from diseases of vāṭa and pitta; children, the aged and those having indigestion should avoid vyāyāma. According to the Yogāmaṇya, patients who are suffering from upadarṣa (venereal diseases) too should avoid vyāyāma - Yogā.p.171⁹.

"vāṭapittāmayī bālo vuddho sāmo ca taṁ caje, ativāyāmato kāso jaro caddhi ca jāyat, raktapittāṁ padamako khayo taṁhā ca vaḍhati." - BM.3.10⁶

Therefore, even though the vyāyāma is essential for the good health, there should be certain limitations. Because the person, who indulges in physical exercises, laughter, talking, walking, sexual congress and night-keeping excessively, though these are necessary, over indulgence in them one soon meets with destruction like an elephant that assails a lion - CS.1.7.35². Even according to Suṣrutasamhitā, physical exercise etc. though recommended should not be inordinately indulged in - SS.4.24.16³. The limitation of physical exercise depends upon the tiredness. Therefore, Caraka says;

"prākritamānvyāyāmavanṣyāt" - CS.1.8.18².

Vyāyāma should be stopped before one becomes tired. Otherwise, according to the Aṣṭāṅghaḍaḥasyamāṁḥīṣu, vyāyāma should be done by a person using only half of his strength.

"Persons who are strong and who indulge in fatty foods, in cold seasons and spring seasons, should do vyāyāma consuming half of their strength only while others and in other seasons should do it mildly" - AH.1.2.11,12 ⁶. The Bhēṣajamaṇīṣu differs to some extent in this regard, from the Aṣṭāṅghaḍaḥasyamāṁḥīṣu;

"śīrakale vasante ca so sebbo adṛṣṭaṣṭiṣyā
aṁṇakāle yathāṣṭiḥ ācāre mandaṁeva vâ" - BM.3.9⁸

It is to be done saving half of strength in cold season and in spring. In the other seasons one should follow it according to one’s strength. Not only ativāyāma or excess of correlation of physical exercise, but also rest correlations: absence of correlation and injudicious correlation of ativāyāma are causes of diseases - CS.11.39-41².

Absence correlation of vyāyāma is also included among the causes for twenty types of disease based on kapha; such as:
1. **trpti** - Sense of fullness in the stomach without having eaten anything.

2. **tandā** - Drowsiness

3. **nirdādhikya** - Excessive sleep

4. **staimitya** - Rigidity

5. **gurugārata** - Heaviness of the body

6. **ālasya** - Lassitude. Letharginess of the body

7. **mukhamādhurya** - Presence of a sweet taste in the mouth

8. **mukhasrava** - Excessive salivation from the mouth

9. **slesmodgfrana** - Mucous expectoration

10. **balasaka** - Loss of strength

11. **apaktih** - Inability to digest the food taken

12. **hrdayopalepa** - Sensation of the heart

13. **kathopalepa** - Secretion of excessive mucous in the throat

14. **dhamanipraticaya** - Heaviness of the veins and nerves

15. **galaganda** - Enlargement of the glands of the neck

16. **atisthaulya** - Excessive obesity

17. **śtāgnitā** - Suppression of the digestive power; Loss of appetite

18. **udarda** - Urticaria, a kind of Erysipelas

19. **svetāvabhāsata** - Pallor of the skin

20. **svetamātra-netra varcasva - Whiteness of urine, eye and complexion**

According to *Suśruta*, the absence of vyāyāma causes fattiness of the body (sthāulya) - SS.1.15.38. The *Bhesajjaratja* considers the absence of vyāyāma as a cause for many diseases - BM.1.54,55.

Therefore, not only should the ativyāyāma be avoided but also injurious exercises or physical exercises which are injurious be refrained. The physical practices which are injurious to the body, should be avoided. But it is not easy to stop them all at once, if it has been practiced for a long time. It is still possible to abstain from such injurious practices if we do it gradually.

Caraka, therefore, prescribes both 'gradual abstaining' and 'gradual practicing'. Caraka says; "An intelligent man should abstain gradually from all habitual practices that are injurious and adopt gradually practices that are beneficial." What is meant by 'Gradually' or 'krama' also has been explained thus: 

"prakṣeppacaye tābhīyām
dvāṃśīka bhavet,
ekāntaram tataścordsdhvam
dvāntaramatvāh." - CS.1.7.37

Progressive procedure or the 'krama' of abstaining from the injurious practices and getting accustomed to the healthy practices is called 'pādāṃśīka'; that is one - fourth, half and three fourth. Caraka's this theory which is called 'pādāṃśīka' has been explained by Cakrapāṇidatta, the well versed commentator to the *Carakasamhita*, in his commentary with an example; thus:

"apatyāvayakādayo bhastāste tyā yābraktaśā
lyā dayaḥpathyā anabhyastāste sevyāḥ; tatra
prathama dineyavakapadatrayam raktśānā
mekāḥ pādāḥvītiye divase dvau pathyasya pa
dau dvāvapathyasya, evam trīye, evam
dvītiyaḥpādāḥvīto dvāntaro bhavati; caturthe
trayāḥ pādāḥ pathyasya ekoḥpathyasya evam
pañcamā sāṣṭhē ca,"
evam trityapāda-bhāyāsastrantarā bhavati;
saptadīna prabṛti tu catuspāda pathyābhyaśāḥ
-CS.p.51

(Yavaka (barley) etc. which is unwholesome should be abandoned though they have been practised; red-rice (raktāsālī) etc. which are wholesome should be practised though unaccustomed. For the first day three fourth of the unwholesome and one fourth of the wholesome is to be practised. For the second day half of the unwholesome and the rest half to be filled with wholesome. The same for the third day. For the fourth day one fourth of unwholesome and three fourth of wholesome. The same for the fifth and sixth days. From the seventh day the wholesome only is to be practised. In this way one should get rid of faults gradually, and good habits be acquired gradually. Suśruta also prescribes the same method.

"anucitamapseveta kramāso
na caikāntataḥpādahīnat" - SS.4.24.17

A bad habit should be gradually discontinued and a good one even when beneficial to health should similarly be gradually inculcated by a quarter only and at once. In this way are faults to be got rid of by the good, never to return and healthful habits are acquired without ever losing them again.


krameṇāpacitā dosaḥ kramenopacitā
gunāḥ, santo yāntyapunarbhāvam prakampyā bhavanti ca"CS.1.7.38

Vyāyāma is not mere external physical exercise.

Taber's cyclopedic medical Dictionary has defined the term physical activity and exercise as follows "A general term for any sort of muscular effort but especially the kinds intended to train condition or increase flexibility of the muscular and skeletal systems of the body". Nevertheless, according to the discussion made above, it is clear that the vyāyāma or physical exercise mentioned in Ayurveda is not mere external physical exercise which supports the muscular and skeletal systems of the body.

Vyāyāma works for the perfect health or 'physical fitness' which provides "the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigor and alertness, without undue fatigue and with ample energy to enjoy leisure-time pursuits and meet unforeseen emergencies". The definition on 'exercise and physical conditioning' done in the Encyclopedia Britannica: "the training of the body to improve its function and enhance its fitness." is the aim of vyāyāma in Ayurveda.

Both these traditions, i.e. Indian and Sri Lankan, have shown the result of vyāyāma in a similar way.

The Carakasamhitā:
"Lāghavam karmasāmartyam
sathyaiṃ duḥ khasaḥśrutā,
dosākṣayaṅ nirvṛddhīṣca
vyāyāmadupajāyate. CS.1.7.32

The consequences resulting from physical exercise are lightness of body, capacity for work, collectedness, power of enduring hardship, removal of all imperfections and augmentation of the digestive fire.

The Āṣṭāṅghahrdayasamhitā
"Lāghavam karmasāmartyam
dīptiṅ nirmedasa kṣayaḥ
vibhaktaghanagatravṛṃ
tyāyāmadupajāyate" - AH.1.2.10

( Lightness of the body, ability to do hard work, keen digestion, depletion of excess fat and stable and distinct physique accrue from vyāyāma).

The Bhaṣajyamāṇīṣā:
Aggino dīpanammedakkhayo
kammasamathatā
Lāghavam ghanadehattam
tyāyāma upajāyate - BM.3.8.6

Vyāyāma is not mere external physical exercise.
(Keen digestion, depletion of excess fat, ability to do hard work, lightness of the body and stable physique from physical exercise).

Conclusion

We, therefore, conclude here that Ayurveda also has given an importance to the physical exercise or vyāyāma concerning the maintenance of good health. The consequences resulting from physical exercise are not only lightness of body, capacity for work, collectiveness, power of enduring hardship; but also it removes all imperfections and augmentations of the digestive fire, which is very much needed for the balance of three humors which otherwise causes illness. Nevertheless, the intelligent person should never indulge in physical exercise as, according to Ayurveda, it results in fatigue, faintness, loss of vigor, thirst asthma, consumption, fever and attacks of cold. Further, the time, when the physical exercise to be done, should also be highly considered.

The use of the physical exercise, according to Ayurveda, can be included in both preventive and curative methods.

“āhārācārācestāsu
sukhārthī pratyca cehaca,
paramprayātraṇāmālīṣṭḥed-
buddhimān hitasevane.” - CS.1.7.60

(One endowed with intelligence and desirous of happiness both here and hereafter, should, bent upon achieving what is beneficial, bestow great care upon everything connected with food, deportment and physical practices).

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