

# Ayurvedic Psychological Interventions in Cancer Care

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**Abstract:** *Ayurveda, an ancient Indian system of medicine, recognizes the importance of psychological well-being in overall health, including Cancer care. Individuals affected with cancer as well as those ongoing the treatment for cancer faces a lot of psychological issues, not addressed in a satisfactory manner through any system of medicine. Cancer patients frequently present with anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder. Ayurvedic psychological interventions for cancer patients aim to support their mental and emotional well-being, reduce stress and anxiety, improve coping strategies, and enhance overall quality of life. These interventions may include counselling and psychotherapy, stress management techniques, lifestyle and dietary recommendations, herbal remedies, and lifestyle modifications. Counselling and psychotherapy may involve providing emotional support and facilitating healthy coping strategies. Stress management techniques such as meditation, mindful journaling, and relaxation techniques may help patients manage stress and anxiety. Lifestyle and dietary recommendations may focus on maintaining a healthy daily routine, adequate sleep and a nourishing diet. Herbal remedies & herbs may be used to reduce stress and anxiety. Lifestyle modifications may involve regular exercise, spending time in nature, and engaging in enjoyable activities. Thousands of herbal and traditional compounds are being screened worldwide to validate their use as anti-cancerous drugs. The science of Ayurveda is supposed to add a step on to the curative aspects of cancers that have resemblance with clinical entities of Arbuda and Granthi mentioned in Sushruthasamhita. However, Ayurvedic psychological interventions should be used as complementary or supportive therapies in conjunction with conventional cancer care. Further research and clinical studies are needed to establish the safety and efficacy of Ayurvedic psychological interventions in cancer care and to better understand their mechanisms of action.*

**Keywords:** *Ayurveda, Cancer care, Arbuda, Granthi, SushruthaSamhita, Psychological interventions & Stress management techniques*

## 1. Introduction

The prevalence of Cancer is so high in the Indian population and almost 70 - 90 per lakh of individuals. It is a miserable condition to the individual as far as his physical, mental as well as social health is concerned, but the extent varies as per the individual, as well as the type of cancer. The diagnosis itself affects all the enthusiasm, hope as well as happiness in the life. Psycho-oncology is an extensive approach which tends to manage the emotional, social, and spiritual distress which often accompanies cancer. All aspects of health care moreover affected at the very onset of diagnosis itself, than in any other disease.

Traditional systems of medicines always played vital role in meeting the global health care needs in past, continuing at present and shall also play key role in future. India is well known for its rich, centuries-old heritage of traditional medicinal systems i.e. Ayurveda. Ancient Vedas and other scriptures point out the practice of traditional medicines in India.

### Psycho - Oncology:

The Cancer is an illness, which is associated with severe emotional disturbances and distress. Psycho-Oncology deals with impact of cancer on psychological functioning and also the role that psychological and behavioural variables take part in cancer risk and survival. Sadness and grief are key reactions to a cancer diagnosis. Such a person

faces many stressful issues such as changes in body image and self-esteem alterations in day to day living, mindset of denial or despair, trouble in sleeping, loss of appetite, anxiety or worry about the future and also the ultimate fear of death apart from the economical and legal concerns.

### Body - Mind relation – Ayurvedic view:

Both mind and body are explained as the substratum of the disease and they are inseparably related. Ayurveda have explained the mind and its affection in many of the diseases affecting the mind as well as the body. The management of these conditions opens wide scope for handling stress and associative problems and efficacy have been reported at the clinical level. Body is being explained as a psychosomatic entity and many curative as well as preventive measures are mentioned for a sound mind. Apart from *saareerika* (somatic) and *maanasa* (psychic) diseases, there is another classification - *saareeramaanasikavyaadhie*. those presenting with physical problems associated with psychological factors such as *soka*, *krodha* etc.

Mental agonies come under the context of “*Mano - vikaara*” as per Ayurveda. The derangement of doshas of the mind - the *rajas* and *tamas*, leads to different types of conditions affecting mind such as *chittodvega*, *vishada* etc. The derangement of doshas of the body - *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* have to be rectified before the management of doshas of the mind, which signifies the importance of Panchakarma or *sodhana* in Psychiatry.

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**Ayurvedic Approach to Psychological Conditions:**

The mental strength (*satvabala*) of an individual is the primary factor that determines the health as well as the vulnerability to mental disorders. Sadvritta, *Aachararasayana* (ethical code of conduct), *Dinacharya* (Daily routine) etc are explained to be followed so as to lead a peaceful life. Similarly the *Vegas* (impulses) in relation with mind have to be controlled or regulated, for the promotion of mental health and avoidance of mental infirmity. These are all the steps mentioned as a part of preventive psychiatry and seem noteworthy.

The mental strength was enhanced or modified and the various diseases of mind were managed by adopting the non-pharmacological techniques (*adravyachikitsa*) and psychotherapy (*Satvaavajaya*). Medicines were not given prime priority in the management in Ayurvedic - Psychiatry. *Yuktivyapaasraya* i. e. conditional use of *sodhana* as well as appropriate internal medicines for preventive as well as curative aspects are done as well.

**Non - Pharmacological Approach in Psycho - Oncology:**

*Satvavajaya* techniques are designed to achieve equilibrium of the human mind in dealing with the environmental stressors as well as the emotional stressors. *Charaka* has advised to manage the psychological illness with the five-fold methodology - *jnaana, vijnana, dhairya smriti and samaadhi*.

*Satvavajaya* acts on modifying the areas of mental processes such as regulation of the thought process, reframing of ideas, channelization of presumptions, correction of objectives and ideas, proper guidance and advice for taking the prompt decision. Such techniques can be adopted in cancer patients as per the condition. Such methods including psychotherapies and relaxation techniques are of real importance in the management of psychological aspects of cancer. Along with the same, *Rasayana* therapy is also adopted for enhancement of immune status. Such drugs are having adaptogenic, immune enhancers, as well as antioxidant properties. The herbs such as Amalaki, Guduchi, Pippali, Ashvagandha, and combinations such as Brahma - Rasayana, Chyavanaprasha are advised to be used.

**Cancer treatment by Ayurveda:**

Cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide and chemotherapy is the commonly used treatment method. The dose-limiting toxicity and development of drug resistance hamper the treatment with chemotherapeutics in the clinic. Cancer patients, who are crippled with this disease and suffering from harmful side effects from chemotherapeutic drugs are turning back to natural remedies hoping for a better cure. Natural therapies such as Ayurveda, make use of plant-derived products in cancer treatment, which may reduce adverse side-effects. This traditional Indian medicine of plant drugs has been successfully used in cancer treatment from ancient times. Cancer treatment with Ayurveda goes back to 7th century BC, where *Atreya* and *Dhanwanthari* used herbal medicines for treating early stages of cancer. Ayurveda describes cancer as inflammatory or non-inflammatory swelling and mention them as either *Granthi* (minor neoplasm) or *Arbuda* (major neoplasm). Herbal decoctions consisting of various herbs with

anticancer property are commonly used in Ayurveda. Many of the herbs used in Ayurveda have scientifically proven for their anticancer properties, e. g., *Andrographis paniculata*, *Annona muricata*, *Phyllanthus niruri*, *Piper longum*, *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Tinosporacordifolia*, *Semecarpusanacardium* etc.

To control the harmful side effects of chemo and radiotherapy, Ayurvedic anticancer medicines can be used as adjuvants to improve the quality of life. The Ayurvedic semi-solid pharmaceutical preparation *Rasayanaavaleha* improves the quality of life, if taken as adjuvant along with chemo or radiotherapy. Ayurvedic drugs such as *Ashwagandha Rasayana*, *Brahma Rasayana*, *Chyavanprasha*, *Narasimha Rasayana*, and *TriphalaChurna* were found to be radio-protective in cancer treatment.

**Pharmacological Management of Psycho - Oncological Issues:**

There are lots of Ayurvedic formulations as well as single drugs which are found to be effective in managing the emotional or psychological problems associated with any conditions, including cancer. The *dosha* status of the clinical presentations is to be assessed prior to fixing the medicines. Anxiety and associated problems are either of *Vata* dominant or of *Vata - Pitta* while depression associated conditions are of *Kaphadominant* or of *Vatakaphaja*. Also relaxation techniques such as *yogasana* and *pranayama* are found to be effective in enhancing the psychological status and also improving the quality of life in cancer patients as per published studies.

In severe psychological presentations, an inpatient treatment is planned, after considering the *bala* or general health status of the affected individuals, as they may be ongoing several medicines or therapies for cancer. The protocol is designed as per the clinical presentation. e. g. In the presentation of depression, one have to adopt the *Vatakaphaharachikitsa*, which includes *snehapana* followed by *Vamana* or *sodhananasya*. In anxiety or phobia, the protocol will be framed for *Vataand Pitta* which includes *snehapana* followed by *virechana, ksheeravasthi* and *samananasya*.

Add on therapies are advised usually without disturbing the main therapy. Treatments such as *abhyanga*, selected *swedana, panchakarma* procedures such as *virechana, vasti, nasya* etc. can be planned as per the condition. The treatments for the head such as *siropichu, sirodhara* and even *sirovasthi* works in a very effective manner in all psychological conditions, even in the case of cancer. Selected *Rasayanas* such as *pippali, chitraka, kanmada, sankupushpi* are administered after the *sodhana* therapies, after prior assessment of the clinical status. Dietary management with a *satwika* diet and also cognitive enhancer food such as *ghee, gooseberry, raisins, ash gourd* etc. are advised. The combined approach of pharmacological as well as non-pharmacological management with dietary regulation seems highly beneficial in clinical practice.

**2. Conclusion**

Ayurveda stands for a holistic mode of healthy living and also an absolute management of the disease. Its basement is

on a psychosomatic axis for health. This science strictly recommends good mental health in the maintenance of good physical health and vice versa. Today the modern science in the field of psycho - neuro - immunology is proving the relation between one's mental health and immunity; while Ayurvedic science has already established this relationship a bit earlier. Ayurvedic science is also participating in improving the quality of cancer patients nowadays. Ayurveda can help the distressed patients in a safe and friendly manner through medicines and a healthy way of life.

Mental health issues should be included in the training of health care professionals in all areas of medicine, psychology and social work to meet the demands of cancer patients. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of different psychological and psychopharmacological interventions in psycho - oncology. Such studies are the need of the hour from the Ayurvedic point of view with appropriate methodologies of research and the whole medical world is expecting much from the Ayurveda in psycho - oncology.

The collaboration between traditional medicinal systems such as Ayurveda and contemporary western biomedicine would be more advantageous for treating complex disease such as Cancer (Psychological interventions in Cancer Care) in a more efficient manner.

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