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Ancient water-centric yogic practices: A holistic approach to digestive wellness

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Abstract

Over 5,000 years ago, the ancient Indian medicinal science known as Ayurveda was developed. It is regarded as an Atharva Veda upveda. The Rigveda, the world's oldest known written literature, mentions the use of herbs as medicine. Ayurveda is actually a compound word made up of the words Ayu and Veda. Veda is the science, and Ayu is life. As a result, Ayurveda is a science of life rather than just illness. "Swasthasya Swasthya rakshnam, aturasya vikara prashaman," or the spread of health and the eradication of disease, is the stated goal of Ayurveda. The human body is composed of approximately 60% water, as per medical science. According to theories found in ayurvedic and yogic texts, the human body is composed of the *Panchamahabhutas* i.e. Ether, Air, Fire, Water & Earth. The basic components of the body and the cornerstone of naturopathy treatment are known as the *Panchamahabhutas*. The body is revitalized and the immune system is strengthened by these nutrients. Many treatments have been carried out in the past and even now with the use of natural ingredients. For example, in the present era, the practice of using water to clear the nasal passages has been transformed into a nebulizer approach. Enema and many others now insert water at the anus. In the last century, yoga was recognized as a form of therapy. It is no longer associated with sanyasis and saints for their salvation or to get Kaivalya, it is now a means of wisdom and redemption. Numerous naturopathy and yoga centers employ natural materials and methods to enhance and revitalize their clients' lives. In order to improve digestive health, this study work will examine, discuss, and present therapeutic knowledge of yoga practices based on hydrotherapy.

Keywords: Shatkarma, dhauti, basti, enema, naturopathy, shankhprakashalana, ayurveda

Introduction

Water-based treatment is a centuries-old traditional medical method; it is not a recent development. Naturopathy holds that nature itself is a doctor, and that every health issue may be resolved by utilizing nature or its components. For ages, therapists and medical professionals have used these principles to treat patients. As it states that regular maintenance of the machinery would lead to proper functioning, these ingredients are used in various yogic techniques in yogic science or practices to cleanse the entire system.

The medical practice of naturopathy is founded on the belief that nature has the ability to heal. Understanding the body, mind, and spirit of the individual can help determine the cause of disease, as naturopathy is a holistic approach. Naturopathy is centered on two main goals: enhancing people's health and assisting the body's natural healing capacities to adopt the necessary lifestyle adjustments for optimal health. Treatment, diagnosis, and prevention of human disease and disability are the main goals of naturopathy. It prioritizes disease prevention, patient education, health maintenance, and patient responsibilities in addition to treating the whole person rather than just the symptom.

Naturopathy, in contrast to the majority of other health care systems, is based on the philosophy of life, health, and illness known as *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*, or "nature's healing force." The result of the entire organism's innate and natural ability, or "desire," to be in the best possible condition is true healing. It is a science of health founded on universal concepts and fundamental understandings of the relationship between the mind and body as well as the natural laws that govern all human development. The fact that this age-old Vedic knowledge is now gaining increasing traction is encouraging.

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Literature Review

In 2021, a team of researcher did research on 'Health and therapeutic benefits of shatkarma: A narrative review of scientific studies' and found that dhauti practices is very beneficial in digestive disorders. In 1992, Giridhar Yogeshwar conducted research on "Kunjara - The Yogic Stomach Wash." He discovered that this practice treats a variety of conditions, including constipation, biliousness, indigestion, cough, asthma, rickets, tonsillitis, and teeth problems. It also acts as a reflex, which is highly beneficial for correcting malfunctioning liver, kidneys, and intestines. In 2019, a different research team investigated the effects of yogic colon cleansing (Laghu sankhaprakshalana kriya) on bowel health in healthy individuals. They found that since yogic colon cleansing (Laghu sankhaprakshalana kriya) tends to improve bowel health, it is frequently recommended as a cleansing modality in naturopathic and yoga treatments.

Research Methodology

The entire foundation of this study project is secondary data. Subjects from a variety of research papers and publications, websites such as research gate, PubMed, Wikipedia, ncbi, and books about yoga, therapy, and naturopathy were selected for this purpose.

Concept of Hydropathy

Originally called hydropathy and water cure, hydrotherapy is a form of naturopathy and alternative medicine that uses water as a healing medium. Hydrotherapy goes under many names, some of which are pool therapy, balneotherapy, aquatic therapy, and water therapy. The idea behind hydrotherapy is that different types of water, at different temperatures, can affect different bodily systems in different ways.

Since the beginning of human civilization, numerous cultures and traditional medical systems have made use of this idea to create new cures. Modern hydrotherapy is the application of water in any form-stream, ice, or water-internally or externally for the aim of treating or enhancing health in a range of settings with variable temperatures, pressures, durations, and places.

While the word "therapy" seems to suggest the use of specialized medical equipment and the requirement for a counselor or therapist to be present at all times, hydrotherapy also includes seemingly insignificant practices like using a steam room or taking a hot bath, which people can and have been doing on their own without supervision. However, a skilled and knowledgeable teacher or therapist is essential to the process when using more specific therapy approaches. An illustration would be aquatic therapy, a type of physical therapy in which exercises are done for therapeutic purposes, fitness, relaxation, and physical rehabilitation in water (Usually a pool). Throughout the entire session, a qualified aquatic therapy practitioner is present to offer the customers advice.

Introduction of Digestive System

Meals make up everybody. All of the body's cells and organs are made of food. Every day, new cells are formed, and every second, energy is released from each cell. Food is therefore necessary for our bodies to function properly. Food and the body work together like fuel and machinery to perform several activities and procedures, including development, growth, maintenance, and others. Essentially, the digestive system provides a way to break down complex food

components into simpler ones. The transformation is made possible via digestion, the chemical reaction that takes place between food and digestive secretions. The process consists of the following five stages: ingestion, digestion, absorption, assimilation, and egestion. Ingestion stands for eating, and putting food in one's mouth, as food is being broken down, it breaks down into smaller parts. The blood then absorbs the digestive juices and distributes them throughout the body during the process of absorption. The transfer of broken-down food molecules into the body's cells for usage is known as assimilation. Egestion is the process of removing undigested food particles from the alimentary canal. The entire process takes place in the digestive system, which is comprised of organs extending from the mouth to the anus and is around nine meters long. The mouth, food pipe, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum, and anus make up the digestive system's main organs. In addition to it, a number of other organs, including the liver, gallbladder, pancreas, salivary glands, and others, are also referred to as auxiliary organs and are linked to the digestive process. The five phases of digestion based processes that were previously mentioned occur due to these organs.

The digestive tract consists of a long tube from the mouth to the anus called the alimentary canal, which includes the esophagus, stomach, and small and large intestines. The walls of the digestive tract are made of specialized muscles arranged in layers. When the intestinal muscles contract, a rippling movement results and peristalsis occurs. The contents of the digestive system are pushed forward through the digestive tract towards the anus. This rippling contraction resembles the movement of an earthworm. As with other systems or pieces of machinery, you must examine your own churning machine to make sure it is functioning properly. If not, what steps ought to be done to bring this system back to its prior degree of efficacy?

Water based Yogic Practices for Digestive Health

Yoga is more than just performing poses and breathing exercises. This ancient and conventional approach to well-being is ancient. Yoga is the practice of integrating two or more concepts or components, since the word "Yuj" (which means "to combine" or "to join") came from the Sanskrit language. It is a condition of combined physical, mental, and social well-being, according to the W.H.O. Yoga is described as a way to unite oneself with the supreme in yogic texts. Yoga, according to the Bhagavad Gita, is the journey of the self via the self to the self. Numerous more topics pertaining to yoga are covered in the sacred texts.

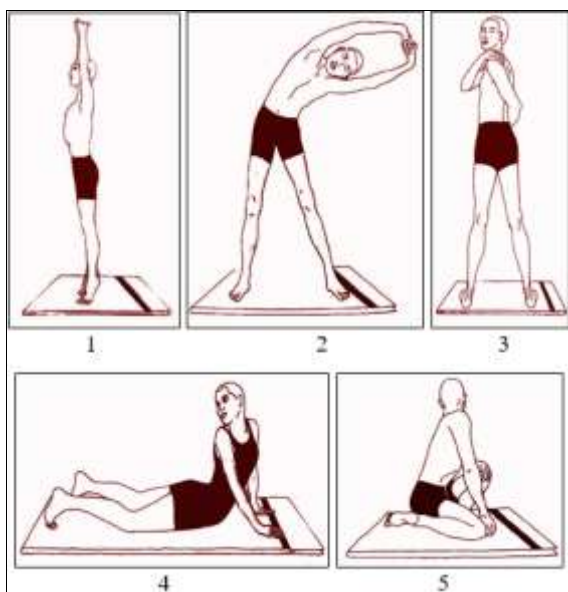
It is possible to state that it incorporates many elements of mental, spiritual, and physical disciplines in the physical context.

One of the most well-known texts based on Hatha yoga, the *Gheranda Samhita*, states that purification is crucial to releasing the body and mind from illness and afflictions. For this reason, Gheranda Saint emphasizes Shodhanam, or purification, which is only possible through Shatkarmas. Six different types of procedures, known as shatkarma, are used to purify, cleanse, and rid the body of sickness. The three maladies produced in the body, vata, wind, pitta, bile, and kapha, mucus, are likewise balanced by the shatkarmas. There are six different categories of cleansing techniques: *Dhauti* (Cleaning of the stomach and digestive tract), *Basti* (Cleaning of the lower abdominal organs), *Neti* (Cleansing of the nasal passages), *Lauliki/Nauli* (Related to massaging the abdominal organs), *Trataka* (Cleansing of the eyes), & *Kapalbhati*

(cleansing techniques pertaining to respiratory system) but they also aim to purify the inside, according to Saint Gheranda, in addition to the outside. Internal diseases are eliminated and optimal health is attained when the body is cleansed. Water is employed as a cleansing tool in many shatkarma yoga practices; however, the focus of this research is exclusively on water-based yoga activities related to the health of the digestive system.

Varisara Antar Dhauti: Antar dhauti, which means internal cleansing, and Varisara, which denotes the essence of water. Thus, varisara is a method that uses water to internally cleanse our digestive systems. *Shankhprakashalana* is another name for Varisara. Conch is translated as "shankha" in Hindi & Sanskrit, whereas "prakshalana" means "to wash or clean." With a single entrance at the top, a belly section, and a single exit point at the bottom, our entire alimentary canal resembles a conch in many ways. This procedure is called *shankhprakashalana* because it uses water to thoroughly cleanse our digestive tract.

One should quickly down two glasses of lukewarm salty water in order to adhere to this practice. The next five poses are then executed multiple times each, dynamically, in this order: first *Tadasana* (palm tree pose), at second *Tiryak Tadasana* (swaying palm tree pose), then *Kati Chakrasana* (waist rotating pose), *Tiryak Bhujangasana* (twisting Cobra pose) followed by *Udarakarshanasana* (abdominal stretch pose).



There is only one round in this. After consuming two additional glasses of the lukewarm, salted water, five asanas are repeated again multiple times each in a dynamic manner. By completing this task four or five times, the practitioner can urge his excrement to pass through the digestive system first, followed by liquid waste. Pitta is then expelled by the yellow-colored water that emerges next. Additionally released are hidden fragments of dehydrated, ancient feces that had grown adhered to the intestinal walls over years. Drink more water and keep doing the asanas until practically clear water comes out after 16 to 20 glasses, or until clear water is evacuated. This shows that the alimentary canal has been cleared of all mucus and debris. A team of researchers from R.G.G.P.G. Ayurvedic college & Hospital Kangra, Himachal Pradesh found in their research in 2020 that varisara alleviates digestive problems such as indigestion, acidity and

constipation. In 2022, a team of researchers examined that varisara stimulated and washed the whole alimentary canal, thus relieving digestion-related issues such as acidity, flatulence, indigestion and constipation. Malshe (2018) hypothesized that SP washes out the sludge if formed in the gallbladder which may prevent the formation of gall bladder stones. It also aids in dispelling intestinal worms from the gut. A clean and healthy gut also leads to a calm and balanced mental state.

Danda Dhauti: "Danda" means "stick." The practitioner advised drinking some lukewarm, humid water before beginning this technique. Next, the practitioner must hold his or her breath while facing the ceiling, insert a catheter—a hollow rubber tube—from the mouth as deeply as possible, and attempt to twist the tube slowly. Rather, the mucus and other waste products are spit out once the stem is cut off. In 2018, S.K. Ganguly from G S College of Yoga & C S Kaivalyadham, India discovered that dandha dhauti aids in the regulation of proprioceptor and autonomic neuromuscular systems. It aids in Dhatu Vairagya balancing. It has voluntary control over the various visceral-abdominal responses. Patients with asthma benefit from the Dandi Dhatu's unique elevation of adreno-cortical activity and Urosporositis. It promotes the secretion of mixed acid and inhibits the secretion of free acids; in particular, all the Dhatus greatly aid in laying the groundwork for effective pranayama practice. Sunil kumar yadav and Niyanta Joshi in 2021 found that all kinds of Hrid Dhauti (Vaman, Danda & Vastra Dhauti) eliminate excessive mucus from the stomach, hence kills coughs, leprosy diseases even asthma as well. It flushes out food residue from the stomach.

Vaman Dhauti: Vaman simply means to puke out. There are two types of vaman dhauti according to Gheranda Saint: *Kunjla Kriya* and *Vyaghra Kriya*. *Kunjla kriya* is done on an empty stomach and *Vyaghra kriya* is done after meals.

Kunjla Kriya: Drink at least six glasses of heated water rapidly, one after the other, while standing up straight, until your stomach can contain no more. The need to throw up will come on autopilot when the stomach is full. Maintaining your torso parallel to the ground, bend forward. The right index and middle fingers should be inserted as far back on the tongue as feasible while the mouth is open. Gently touch and massage the back of the tongue while softly advancing and retracting the fingers. There won't be any more work required to release the water.

Vastra Dhauti: Vastra dhauti is the practice of using a vastra (A length of cloth) to clean the stomach, esophagus, and neck. For this technique, you will need a soft, very thin cotton cloth that is at least six meters long and four fingers wide. The practitioner should keep the water and dip their clothing in it after sitting in a squatting stance. Holding the cloth by one end, fold its two corners so that it becomes slightly pointed, making it easier to travel down the neck. To make it easier to swallow, slowly chew the pointed end in your mouth. Using your thumbs and index fingers, grasp the cloth. Chew the cloth gently, taking three to six centimeters at a time, so that saliva lubricates the material without tearing it. After it has been sufficiently chewed, take a sip of warm water and continue to swallow the cloth along with the water. Once more, a mouthful of three to six centimeters of cloth is taken, chewed, lubricated, and then swallowed with a sip of water.

This makes it easier for the cloth to go down the throat. Vastra Dhauti treats splenomegaly, fever, gastrointestinal disorders, skin conditions, and pitta and kapha illnesses. Regular practice will bestow upon him health, strength, and sustenance. According to Aparna Surendra and others, it is also helpful for indigestion, skin issues, stomach ulcers, asthma, and bronchitis. In 2017, Sanjib Kumar Patra, a different researcher, discovered that Vastra dhauti aids in clearing the upper gastrointestinal tract (GIT) of excess phlegm.

Basti: The second of the shatkarmas is called Basti. Book written by *Saint Gheranda* mentions two types of basti: *Jala Basti* and *Dry (Sthala Basti)*. Basti is a basic intestinal cleansing and washing technique. It is comparable to an enema.

Jala Basti: To perform utkatasana as well as possible, stand in deep, pure flowing water up to your navel. The steps of Utkatasana are straightforward: stand up straight, slightly spread your feet, bend your knees, lean forward, and rest your hands on your thighs. Because Utkatasana is a half-squat, half-standing pose, it is easier to fully and totally compress and expand the anus in sync with the breath. In order to promote the inward flow of water, the sphincter muscles are gradually expanded to their utmost throughout this activity. The large intestine gets cleansed when the water is released because it carries with it solidified, dry waste that has accumulated inside. According to Avvinish Narine, Gopesh Mangal and his team, Basti is not only curative in nature but it is disease preventive and health promotive as well.

Conclusion

Following the comprehensive discussion of the several water-based activities mentioned in hatha yoga, it is evident to state how historically and now helpful these practices were for the optimal health and lifespan of humans as well as for the proper functioning of the digestive system. There are numerous psychological and physiological advantages to this age-old, religious yogic practice. These customs date back thousands of years, when people realized that they could employ every element of nature to their advantage. Though time has changed, these notions have endured, and even now, these activities are carried out using contemporary tools and equipment, and they undoubtedly will be in the future as well.

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