

Ayurvedic Specific Condition Review: Cervical Dysplasia and Cancers of the Artava Vaha Srotas

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Three common cancers of the female reproductive tract, ovarian, cervical, and uterine, are differentiated based on their site of localization in allopathic medicine. These are viewed by Ayurvedic medicine as attributable to the same disease process, and thus the same general treatment strategy is recommended for all three. The *rasa dhatu agni* (the transformative metabolic process within the non-serum fractions of the blood) is responsible for maintaining the health of the *artava vaha srotas* (the female reproductive channel). According to Ayurvedic theory, these three diseases of the *artava vaha srotas* begin, as do most diseases, with the accumulation and provocation of *doshas* in their major seats in the digestive tract (*kapha* in the stomach, *pitta* in the small intestines, or *vata* in the colon). The aggravated *doshas* affect the *agni*, or digestive fire, and create *ama*, a toxic morbid substance. If these imbalances are not resolved, if the resulting *ama* cannot be properly evacuated from the body, then in time the toxic *doshas*, carried by *vata*, begin to spread throughout the body's tissues, finally localizing in a place of weakness and manifesting as an identifiable disease. In the case of ovarian, uterine, and cervical cancers, the *khavaigunya* (defective space wherein pathological lesions take place) is in the *artava vaha srotas*. *Ama* enters the *artava vaha srotas* and blocks the channels.

In Ayurvedic thought, all types of cancers result from a complex derangement involving all three *doshas*. Thus, for example, if *vata* pushes *kapha* into the ovaries or uterus and localizes there, the disease which manifests may become benign tumor-like ovarian cysts or uterine fibroids. However, if *vata* pushes *pitta*, and *pitta* pushes *kapha* into the *artava vaha srotas*, then the involvement of all three *doshas* together may ultimately result in a cancerous process. Since the female reproductive tract lies within the theater of the body governed by *apana vata*, the resulting cancer cells can travel through the *artava vaha srotas* from one site to another (e.g., from cervix to uterus to ovaries) or through other signal pathways governed by *apana vata* to the bladder or rectum.

Each of the three *doshas* plays a role in the genesis of this process. *Vata* causes dryness, *pitta* causes inflammation, and *kapha* is responsible for discharge. This interaction of the three *doshas* can be illustrated, for example, in the case of cervical dysplasia, where *vata* pushes *pitta* down into the vaginal area and creates inflammation of the cervix. When this process occurs chronically, the hot, sharp, penetrating quality of *pitta* causes cervical erosion and cytopathological changes. *Kapha*, in the form of mucous or white blood cells, may then come to the area in response to infection or tissue degen-

eration, thus creating a type of serosanguineous discharge associated with cancerous changes.

TREATMENT

In Ayurvedic medicine, the individual herbal formulation and other treatments recommended to a patient must include medicines and/or strategies which are both antagonistic to the provoked *dosha* (*dosha pratyanika*) and antagonistic to the disease (*vyadhi pratyanika*). However, it should be understood that *chikitsa*, or Ayurvedic treatment, comprises more than the administration of appropriate medicines. The physician must determine both the *prakriti*, or innate constitution, of the patient, and the *vikriti*, or pattern of doshic imbalances underlying the disease condition. He or she must try to establish the causes for the imbalanced pattern, which may include genetic predisposition, emotional or physical trauma, relationship patterns, infectious organisms, previous medical conditions, the season, the climate, and dietary and lifestyle factors. It is therefore a highly individualized process, one which may include dietary and lifestyle changes, *pancha karma* to remove toxins, Yogic practices or ceremonial methods, and the administration of appropriate medicines. When both toxins and the cause have been removed, the

patient is given *rasayana*, or rejuvenation therapy. Only then is Ayurvedic treatment said to be complete. The following discussion of medicine should be understood in this context.

The designation "cancer" as a general group of diseases is a modern one not used in ancient Ayurveda, which recognized and described individual types of malignant disease occurring in various *dhatus* and channels in the body and recommended treatments for these separate diseases. In modern times, various herbs and mineral preparations used in Ayurveda have been reputed or clinically demonstrated to have anti-tumor properties in various types of cancers. Among them are turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), manjistha (*Rubia cordifolia*), jasmine, ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), saffron (*Crocus sativus*), licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), gold basma, and sesame oil.

The Four Fragrants Formula, composed of equal parts of cardamon (*Elettaria cardamomum*), bay leaf (*Laurus nobilis*), nagkeshar (*Mesua ferrea*), and cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*), is said to act as a preventative for patients from cancer-prone families. Channel openers, such as triphala (*Emblia officinalis*, *Terminalia bellerica*, and *T. chebula*) and various guggulus are also typically employed to cleanse the body of abnormal accumulations.

In the cancers of the *artava vaha strotas*, the main dosha responsible is pitta. Thus, some herbs which in general reduce pitta, such as guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), sandalwood (*Santalum album*), or licorice root, can be selected for inclusion in the formula. Finally, appropriate herbs and medicines that have the *karma*, or action, of localizing in the female reproductive tract, such as *shatavari* and *ashoka*, and those with more general effects on *apana vata*, can be used. To clear *ama* (digestive toxins) from the gastrointestinal tract, the woman should take ½ to 1 teaspoon triphala with warm water at night. A general formula for management of cancerous changes occurring in the *artava vaha strotas* is as follows:

Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*) 500 mg
Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*) 400 mg
Ashoka (*Saraca indica*) 300 mg
Manjistha (*Rubia cordifolia*) 200 mg
Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) 300 mg

Combine and take ½ teaspoon t.i.d. (before breakfast, lunch, and dinner in order to work on *apana vata*), with organic aloe vera gel.

For cervical dysplasia or cervical uterine cancer, *uttar vasti*, or vaginal douching, is recommended. For at least the first month of treatment, a clearing formula should be used: 1 tablespoon trifala, boiled in one pint of filtered water for 3 minutes, and then strained, cooled, and applied. This should be done 2 times per week, on Sunday and Thursday evenings (procedures for the preparation of medicated oils can be found in Lad and Frawley, 85). The licorice ghee can be applied overnight, using organic unbleached cotton tampons or sterile unbleached cotton balls soaked in the warm ghee and inserted inside the vagina. However, in a clinic staffed by three practitioners (Alakananda Devi, Sarasvati Buhman, and Patricia Hansen), it was noted that many of our cervical dysplasia patients told us they had preferred to directly massage the cervix with the warm licorice ghee (after carefully washing hands), rather than to use the tampons. This method of application also seemed to be effective in reversing the dysplasia, although the amount of ghee applied and the area accessed by this method is probably less.

A pitta-reducing diet should be followed: sour and acidic foods, hot spices, red meat, caffeine, yoghurt, alcohol, soda pop, chlorinated water, and fried foods should be strictly avoided. Except where the patient is weak or emaciated, other meats and fish should be avoided as well, since cooking them usually results in the formation of mutagenic compounds. Exposure to environmental toxins should be avoided wherever possible. Milk, eggs, and ghee used in the diet should be organic. A wide variety of non-pitta aggravating, easily digestible vegetable, berry, and pomegranate juices, can be very

helpful. The best grains are barley, basmati rice, and quinoa. If easily digestible, Ayurvedic *kichari* (a rice and mung bean dish) is also recommended.

Because it is important that the digestive tract be free of *ama*, it is critical that the patient eat only those foods that are easily digestible to her individually; foods that cause constipation, diarrhea, gas, bloating, or belching should be avoided. Snacking between meals and the consumption of milk with meals should also be discontinued. If organic milk is desired, it can be taken warm, with cardamom and honey, before bed.

A non-dairy almond milk to strengthen the immune system can be taken for breakfast: 15 blanched almonds and 20 organic raisins should be soaked overnight in 12-16 oz. filtered water. In the morning, the water, raisins, and almonds, can be blended together, along with ¼ teaspoon fennel, ¼ teaspoon cardamom, ⅛ teaspoon of black pepper, and honey to taste. Strain the mixture before drinking. The almond milk can be taken for 5 days, discontinued for 2 days, and then resumed following the same pattern.

Intercourse during menstruation should be avoided, and women should rest and avoid strenuous activities during the first 3 days of menstruation. When not menstruating, yoga asanas can promote circulation and healing; those poses specifically recommended for cancerous and pre-cancerous conditions of the *artava vaha strotas* are the cat-cow series, camel, cobra, bow, boat, and bridge poses. These should be learned from a yoga teacher rather than from a book. *Ashvini mudra*, where the woman inhales a full and deep breath, and while holding the breath rhythmically contracts and releases the anal sphincter muscle, then relaxes the muscle and exhales slowly and smoothly, will strengthen *apana vata* and gently massage the cervix. It can be done 10 times on an empty stomach. Meditation is highly recommended, as is the avoidance of highly stressful relationships.

CERVICAL DYSPLASIA CASE STUDIES

1. Kamala, a 46-year-old yoga teacher of pitta constitution, was diagnosed with cervical dysplasia, which had progressed to Stage IV. Her Indian gynecologist was supportive of her wishes to try Ayurvedic medicine, and monitored her progress throughout the course of her Ayurvedic treatments. She reported some gas in the colon and her Ayurvedic pulse diagnosis also indicated congestion of the ovaries and uterus. She was given a douche of licorice root, tumeric, and triphala tea, which she used for 14 days, and an internal formula of dashmula ("Ten Roots"* decoction), guduchi, jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), and shatavari, with aloe vera gel, and warm triphala tea at night. Her pap tests became normal after a few months of treatment. Four years later, the problem recurred, but again responded to treatment, and she has been symptom free for the last 2 years.

2. Barbara, 28, with vata-kapha constitution, sought treatment for abnormal

pap smears that had persisted for 6 months, during which time she had adamantly refused a biopsy. She reported low energy and showed signs of low *ojas* and vata provocation. She was treated internally with triphala, shatavari, bala (*Sida cordifolia*), vidari (*Ipomoea digitata*), tumeric, manjistha, cinnamon, cardamon, nag keshar, bay leaf, ashoka (*Saraca indica*), chitrack (*Plumbago rosea*), and jasmine; and given licorice ghee with which she massaged her cervix daily. Three months after beginning treatment, she had her first normal pap smear; they remained normal during the next 6 months that we monitored her progress.

3. Judy, 41, of pitta constitution but with slight provocation of all three doshas as indicated by her pulse readings, had two progressively abnormal pap smears at the time she came to us for treatment. Although her digestion was good, she reported feeling low energy ever since the birth of her child 18 months previously. She was treated internally with a formula of manjistha, ashwagandha, shatavari,

jasmine, fennel, berberis, myrrh, and four fragrances, to be taken with aloe vera juice and a pinch of ginger. Her clearing douche, performed every evening for 2 weeks, was a tea made from fig leaves, triphala, and tumeric; this was followed by the licorice ghee application. Her next pap was normal.

*Ten roots is a combination of the roots of hrasvapancha mula and vrihat pancha mula. (Nadkarni, 612). Hrasvapancha mula: 1. *Hedysarum gangeticum* (Shalaparni). 2. *Uraria lagopoides* (Prasniparni). 3. *Solanum jacquinii*, *S. xanthocarpum* (Kantakari). 4. *Solanum indicum* (Brahati) 5. *Tribulus terrestris* (Gokshura). Vrihat pancha mula: 1. *Aegle marmelos* (Bilva). 2. *Colosanthus indica*. 3. *Gmelina arborea* (Gambarai). 4. *Stereosperma suaveolens*. 5. *Premna obtusifolia*, *P. spinosa* (Agnimantha).

REFERENCES

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