

IMMUNITY - THE AYURVEDA NOTION

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda offers thoughtful understanding towards the concept of immunity and elaborates it under the heading of 'Vyadhikshamatva'. It proposes multidimensional considerations to decide the effectiveness of resistance like place & time of birth, health of the mother during pregnancy, nutrition of the new born, weather conditions where the individual grows up, types of food being consumed and the nature of daily activities. The spotlight of *Ayurveda* is on plans for acquiring and enhancing immunity; viz. *Rasayana* [ways to gain excellent quality of *Rasadi Dhatu* (body tissues)], *Vyayama* (exercise) and *Satmya* (aptness). The influence of these aspects on *Vyadhikshamatva* (immunity) is discussed in this article. *Karma* (the subtle deeds) reveals the roots of idiopathic diseases.

KEYWORDS: *Ayurveda, Vyadhikshamatva, Ojas, Oja, Rasayana, Bala, Autoimmunity*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ¹*Vyadhikshamatva* (immunity) in *Ayurveda* is a captivating subject. Body's resistance is of remarkable importance in daily welfare of living beings. For prevention as well as rapid recovery from diseases, *Vyadhikshamatva* (immunity) plays a key role. This is very much witnessed in the current scenario of COVID 19. ²It can be observed that among a group of people exposed to a given disease, only some will be afflicted, while others are left without any effect. This phenomenon itself illustrates two important points - that the pathogenic factors require some essential favourable conditions to flourish and that the individual needs to be susceptible to the disease. To avoid both the situations the

individual's immunity has the foremost role in safeguarding and maintaining a fair state of body & mind.

The Factors responsible for immunity – Ayurveda going over

Ayurveda puts forth the concept of ³*Ojas* – the essence of *Saptadhatu* (body tissues which support the body). It is considered the decisive factor in defense mechanism of the body. In the conditions like *Madhumeha* (one of the types of *Prameha* – the urine disorder mostly correlated with diabetes mellitus) and *Pandu* (deficiency disorder usually linked with malnutrition), where loss of *Ojas* is a major pathology, people are known to be susceptible to various degenerative diseases and recurrent

opportunistic infections. As a general observation, those who indulge in an irregular routine and eat unsafe food or consume insufficient nutrition tend to suffer poor strength. Conversely; those who maintain a regular, healthy routine and take nutritious foodstuff continue to be healthy.

Ayurveda presents multi-faceted and profound explanations for this phenomenon. Intake of wholesome food and a regular routine alone are not enough to prevent disease.⁴ Additional factors such as unsteady mental status and inappropriate discernment by senses like sound, touch, vision, taste and smell are also responsible for the onset of disease. Depending on these factors, diseases manifest as mild or severe, acute or chronic, easily curable or difficult to cure or even incurable.

Types of immunity in *Ayurveda* classics are explained under the heading of ⁵*Bala* (potency/power). It is classified into 3 type viz. *Sahaja Bala* means congenital or natural immunity; '*Kalaja Bala*' means immunity according to time, season and age. '*Yuktikruta Bala*' means immunity acquired or gained by special efforts like exercise, *Yoga* and *Pranayama*.

DISCUSSION

⁶*Sahaja Bala* comes from the parents and is inherited. Today in our society, many children are born with deformities, and appear to be weaker than their parents. These inherited qualities come from their ancestors. If two parents' genetic makeup is healthy, the same health is seen in the offspring, whereas if their genetic makeup includes susceptibility to certain diseases, those diseases will be carried over into the next generation. The effect will be at the cellular, nuclear or chromosomal level. As

these traits are inherent, there is not much one can do to correct these deformities.

In case of ⁷*Kalaja Bala*, the time of day, season, and one's age are important factors for deciding immunity. Strength is greater in the early morning of the day, spring season among seasons, and young age if the age criterion is considered; than that in rest of the time in respective conditions. *Kalaja Bala* depends on one's time period of the birth and place of birth. Healthy and pleasant season promotes foundation for strong immunity.⁸ It was observed that there are variations in absolute numbers of cord blood immune subsets with season of birth. Overall leukocyte numbers were generally highest in children born during winter and lowest in those born during summer or fall. Certain places have healthier climatic and environmental conditions. For example, places with an abundance of natural resources and pleasant climatic conditions are *Kapha*-dominating areas and contribute to vigorous immunity.

⁹*Yuktikruta Bala* represents acquired immunity, in which disease can be prevented through rational advance towards the health. *Ayurveda* focuses on three plans for acquiring and enhancing immunity *Rasayana*, *Vyayama* and *Satmya*.

Rasayana [ways to gain excellent quality of *Rasadi Dhatu* (body tissues)] is health promoting factor and rejuvenates the whole physiology, producing resistance against disease physically, mentally and spiritually. If a person has a strong mind which results in tough will-power, even serious diseases can be conquered by the person.¹⁰ It was found that improving willpower beliefs by way of intervention may help to shed more light on logical course and ways to rise

above the barriers to habitual physical activity.

Vyayama is exercise. Daily exercise of up to 50% of one's exertion capacity enhances digestion, strengthens tissue metabolism and promotes immunity.¹¹Evidences suggest that regular moderate physical exercise is beneficial for enhancement of immunity and reducing the risk of illness. Regular work out has an in general anti-inflammatory manipulate mediated through several pathways. Epidemiologic studies constantly show decreased levels of inflammatory biomarkers in adults with elevated levels of physical activity and fitness, even after alteration for potential confounders such as BMI - Body Mass Index.

¹²*Satmya* is aptness. Giving up unwholesome substances which are habitual since long time & adapting to wholesome substances also promotes immunity. Also,¹³avoidance of dietary deficit seems the most realistic advice. This can be achieved with a *Shad-Rasa Ahara* (balanced diet). Including the *Shad-Rasa Ahara* (balanced diet) may help make sure enough intakes of vital nutrients with modest risk of excess intake of any single nutrient. Supplementation with *Eka-Rasa Ahara* (individual nutrient) is usually not recommended.

Additional factors which influence immunity in the body:

Health of mother: A healthy mother gives birth to a healthy child. If mother's health is not well, it may affect the health of the baby.

¹⁴A study suggests the first manifestation in humans that prenatal anxiety alters adaptive immunity in the infant.

Nutrition after birth: Wholesome, adequate and timely nutrition in infancy plays an important role in developing immunity.¹⁵It

was found that nutritional harm suffered in early life leads to long-term impairment, and might also affect future generations. Its avoidance will probably bring about significant health, educational, and financial benefits. Chronic diseases are especially common in malnourished children.

Prakruti means body constitution of a person. Generally, *Kapha Prakruti* (one among the seven types of body constitutions explained in *Ayurveda*) people have stronger immunity than *Pitta* and *Vata Prakruti*. This may be because the properties of *Kapha Prakruti* attribute towards the stability of body, mind & spirit.

Mind: A strong mind oriented toward positive thinking increases one's *Ojas* and therefore is a major factor in one's immunity. *Yoga* and meditation are the paramount techniques to stabilize the mind. Meditation is continuous thought on optimistic theme. Orienting the mind towards spirituality naturally brings about greater self-awareness and positive thinking, thereby enhancing mental strength and overall immunity.¹⁶A study reveals the differences between an experimental group that practiced meditation for a period of 14 weeks and a control group that did not meditate, as the meditation group experienced fewer symptoms of aching muscles or joints and as well less use of drugs and tranquilizers.¹⁷In another study it was observed that *Yoga* resists the autonomic changes and impairment of cellular immunity seen in examination tension.

Karma (subtle deeds): In cases where an individual has a strong and healthy body constitution, healthy genetic makeup, and lives in accordance with nature through

intake of wholesome foods and regular routine, yet succumbs to a severe illness. It is called idiopathic in contemporary science. But *Ayurveda* has better version of understanding towards the occurrence and management of idiopathic diseases. *Karma* (subtle deeds) factor is said to have connections in developing such diseases. It is mentioned in¹⁸*Charakasamhita* – the most admired reference book of Ayurveda that *Karma* (subtle deeds) has a role in producing the diseases. One of the examples is in the chapter where¹⁹*Acharya Charaka* explains the skin diseases – The *Kushtha*. Not only the cause is narrated but the resolutions are also quoted in Ayurveda classics; the root of which lies in ancient Indian literature treasure i.e. in²⁰*Atharvaveda*. Thus *Karma* (subtle deeds) may reveal having a prominent impact on immunity.

CONCLUSION

-Immunity is an essential aspect for the well-being of an individual for both avoiding the disease conditions and also getting rid of the same.

-*Ayurveda* has elaborated the concept of immunity in the form of *Vyadhikshamatva* and offers multi-dimensional and profound rationalization for this phenomenon.

-*Vyadhikshamatva* depends on numerous factors like place & time of birth, health of the mother during pregnancy, nutrition of the new born, weather conditions where the individual grows up, type of food being consumed and the nature of daily activities.

-*Karma* (subtle deeds) reveals the roots of idiopathic diseases.

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