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A SYSTEMIC REVIEW ON GRIDHASI (SCIATICA) -AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Low back pain is a common condition that significantly impacts individuals' quality of life, especially during their most productive years. Approximately 60% of those affected by low back pain suffer from severe pain, which is often classified under the broader condition known as Sciatica syndrome. In contemporary medicine, the symptoms and signs associated with "Sciatica" closely resemble those of a condition described in Ayurveda called Gridhrasi. Gridhrasi is one of the eighty Nanatamaja Vyadhi (specific diseases) recognized in Ayurvedic medicine. This discussion delves into the general principles and treatment procedures for managing Gridhrasi (Sciatica) as outlined in various Ayurvedic texts.

Keywords – Gridhrasi, Sciatica, Low back pain

Introduction

Gridhrasi (Sciatica) is one of the eight Vatavyadhi (neurological disorders) mentioned in various Ayurvedic texts, caused by an aggravated Vata Dosha. It is primarily a painful condition (Ruja Pradhana Vyadhi). Based on the symptoms of Gridhrasi, which include Toda (sharp pain), Spandana (pulsation), Graha, Stambha (stiffness), and radiating pain from the lower back (Kati-Pradesha) to the foot (Padanguli), it is comparable to the modern medical condition known as Sciatica. Sciatica is characterized by symptoms such as pain resulting from the compression of spinal nerve roots or the sciatic nerve, with patients typically experiencing pain in the lower back and hip that radiates down to the thigh.[1]

In modern medicine, the management of Sciatica often involves the use of NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), botulinum toxin injections, steroids, anticonvulsants, and other medications. However, there is no permanent cure for Sciatica in contemporary medical practice.

Ayurveda, on the other hand, offers a range of treatments for managing Gridhrasi. These include Bheshaja (oral medications) in the form of Vati (tablets), Churna (herbal powders), and Kwath (herbal decoctions). Additionally, treatments such as Snehana (oleation therapy), Swedana (fomentation therapy), Siravedha (venepuncture), Agnikarma (application of heat, either directly or indirectly), and Basti (medicated enema) are employed to alleviate symptoms and manage the condition effectively.[2]

The symptoms (Rupa) of Gridhrasi include Ruk (pain), Suhuspandan (pulsation), Stambha (stiffness) in the Spik-kati (hip region), Uru (thigh), Janu (knee), Jangha (calf), and Pada (foot). Other symptoms are Suptata (numbness and tingling sensation) and Gaurava (heaviness). According to Acharya Sushruta, the condition restricts the ability to extend the leg due to severe pain, described as Saktanakshepam nigrahnayat. Acharya Vagbhata has compared Gridhrasi (Sciatica) to Viswachi (Brachial neuritis), noting that the primary difference is the location of the pain.[3]

In modern medicine, Sciatica, also known as sciatic neuritis, refers to a collection of symptoms caused by the compression or irritation of spinal nerve roots or the sciatic nerve. This condition is characterized by pain in the lower back and hip that radiates down to the

thigh. Additionally, individuals may experience numbness, muscular weakness, tingling sensations, and difficulty moving the leg.[4]

Definition

Sciatica is characterized by pain resulting from irritation of the fourth and fifth lumbar and first sacral roots, which form the sciatic nerve. This pain primarily extends down the posterior and anterolateral aspects of the leg and into the foot.[5]

Causes of Sciatica[6]

- Degenerative Disease of Intervertebral Discs
- Disc Degeneration
- Disc Prolapse or Herniation
- Osteoarthritis of the Lumbosacral Spine
- Osteophytes causing spinal canal stenosis
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Subluxation or Dislocation of the Lumbosacral Spine
- Spondylolisthesis
- Fracture-dislocation

Symptoms[7]

Pain: The primary symptom of Sciatica, characterized by:

- Aching pain in the back.
- Deep pain in the hip and thigh.
- Pain radiating to the leg and foot, exacerbated by coughing and sneezing.
- Aggravation of Pain: Pain worsens with general and specific activities and is relieved by rest.
- Relief of Pain: Most patients find some relief by lying in a hip-knee flexed position.

Investigations

Routine Investigations:

- Blood tests: Hemoglobin (Hb%),

- Total Leukocyte Count (T.L.C.),
- Differential Leukocyte Count (D.L.C.),
- Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (E.S.R.)
- Urine analysis: Routine and microscopic examination
- Biochemical blood tests: Blood sugar, serum uric acid, serum calcium
- Tests for infections and other conditions: HIV, VDRL, HBsAg, and rheumatoid factor (RA factor)

Radiological Examination:

- X-ray of the lumbosacral spine (anteroposterior, lateral, and oblique views)
- MRI

Specific Tests for Sciatica:

- Straight Leg Raising (SLR) Test
- Lasegue's Sign
- Bragard's Sign

Line of Treatment in Ayurvedic Literature

General Line of Management for Vatavyadhi[8]

1. Nidan Parivarjana:

- Avoidance of factors that aggravate Vata and Kapha Doshas is crucial.

2. Samshamana:

- Among the six therapeutic measures (Shad Upakramas), Swedana (fomentation), Snehana (oleation), and Brimhana (nourishing therapy) can be used as needed. If the Dosha imbalance (Dosha Prakopa) is mild, Langhana (fasting) therapy is sufficient. For moderate Dosha Prakopa, both Langhana and Pachana (digestive) treatments are recommended. Severe Dosha Prakopa requires Shodhana (purification) treatment.

3. Samshodhana:

- Treatments such as Vamana (emesis), Virechana (purgation), and Basti (medicated enema) are recommended for Gridhrasi. Raktamokshana (bloodletting) is also indicated. The general management for Vatavyadhi applies to Gridhrasi as well, including therapies like Snehana, Swedana, Utsadana (massage with herbal paste), Parisheka (pouring of medicinal liquids), Asthapana (therapeutic enema), and Anuvasana Basti (oil enema). Basti is considered especially effective for Vata Dosha.

Specific Treatment for Gridhrasi[9]

Shamana Chikitsa:

- This includes treatments to pacify the Doshas. When Gridhrasi is caused by aggravated Vata and Kapha Doshas, Kaphahara Chikitsa (therapies to reduce Kapha) should be combined with Vatahara Chikitsa (therapies to reduce Vata).

Siravedha:

- Acharya Charaka recommends Siravedha (venesection) at the site between the calcaneus tendon and the ankle joint. Acharya Sushruta and Vagbhata advise Siravedha four fingers above and below the knee joint. Acharya Bhela also mentions Raktamokshana as an effective treatment for Gridhrasi.

Agnikarma:

- Various Acharyas suggest Agnikarma (application of heat) for Gridhrasi. According to Acharya Charaka, the site for Agnikarma is between the calcaneus tendon and the ankle joint. Acharya Sushruta specifies the site as four fingers above and below the knee joint.

Pathya (Diet) and Apathya (Foods to Avoid)[10]

Pathya (Beneficial Foods):

- Rice, wheat, horse gram (Kulattha), ivy gourd (Paravala), drumstick tree (Shigru), Indian phalsa (Phalasa), lemon, grapes, clarified butter (ghee), etc.

Apathya (Foods to Avoid):

- Chickpeas (Chanaka), black gram (Kalaya), millet (Shyamaka), wild rice (Nivara), bajra (Kangu), rajmash (kidney beans), all Trina Dhanyas (millet varieties), lablab beans (Nishpavabija), ivy gourd (Bimbi), etc.

Yoga-Asana for Preventing Sciatica

Yoga poses should be performed under expert guidance and include:

- **Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)**
- **Setu-bhandhasana (Bridge Pose)**
- **Pawanmuktasana (Wind-relieving Pose)**
- **Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)**

Discussion

Gridhrasi, in Ayurvedic terms, can be correlated with the modern condition known as Sciatica syndrome, which arises due to spinal nerve compression. This condition is characterized by pain that originates in the buttock and radiates down the posterior aspect of the thigh, calf, and to the outer edge of the foot. Modern medicine offers various treatments for Sciatica, such as conservative management and epidural steroid injections, as well as surgical interventions, which can be quite complex. The Ayurvedic approach to treatment is considered superior in improving patients' quality of life. Key Ayurvedic treatments include Nidana Parivarjana (avoiding causative factors), Shodhana Chikitsa (purification therapies such as Snehana (oleation), Swedana (fomentation), Virechana (purgation), Basti (medicated enema), and Raktamokshana (bloodletting)), and Shamana Chikitsa (palliative treatments).[11]

Conclusion

Gridhrasi is a painful condition for which no definitive modern therapy exists. It is comparable to Sciatica in contemporary medicine. Ayurvedic treatment starting with Abhyanga (massage with medicated oil) followed by Swedana (fomentation) can serve as the initial line of therapy for Gridhrasi. In cases of severe pain, Agnikarma (application of heat) and Raktamokshana (bloodletting) are beneficial. Basti therapy (medicated enema) is

considered one of the best treatments for Gridhrasi. Preventing further progression of the disorder through Nidana Parivarjana (avoiding causative factors) is crucial. Overall, the various treatment modalities available in Ayurveda provide long-term relief for patients suffering from Gridhrasi.

Conflict of Interest -Nil

Source of Support- None

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