



Review Article

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THE ROLE OF *SNEHANA* AND *SWEDANA KARMA* IN *SHODHANA CHIKITSA*: AN EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Background: In *Ayurveda*, *Snehana* (oleation) and *Swedana* (sudation) are the preparatory (*Purva Karma*) procedures essential for successful *Shodhana Chikitsa* (bio-purification therapy). These therapies help in mobilizing the *Doshas* from deeper tissues to the gastrointestinal tract for expulsion. Traditional texts elaborate their use for disease prevention and management, particularly in chronic and complex disorders. In recent times, their therapeutic relevance has gained attention through modern clinical research. **Aim:** To critically analyze the classical principles, physiological mechanisms, and clinical evidence supporting the role of *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* in enhancing the efficacy of *Shodhana Chikitsa*. **Objectives:** To review the classical references related to *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma*. To assess the pharmacological and physiological mechanisms involved. To evaluate contemporary clinical studies demonstrating their therapeutic outcomes. **Materials and Methods:** A systematic literature review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic texts (*Bṛhatrayā*, *Laghutrayā*, and relevant commentaries) along with a comprehensive search of

modern databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and AYUSH Research Portal. Studies were selected based on relevance, methodological quality, and clinical outcomes. **Results:** Classical references confirm the pivotal role of *Snehana* and *Swedana* in disease prevention and management. Modern studies have validated their effects in improving circulation, reducing inflammation, enhancing metabolism, and facilitating the elimination of metabolic wastes. Clinical trials highlight their efficacy in musculoskeletal disorders, metabolic syndromes, skin diseases, and neurodegenerative conditions. **Conclusion:** *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* remain integral to *Shodhana Chikitsa*, with their effectiveness supported by both traditional wisdom and modern scientific research. Their proper application can optimize therapeutic outcomes and improve patient quality of life.

Keywords: *Snehana*, *Swedana Karma*, *Shodhana Chikitsa*, Purva Karma, Ayurveda, Clinical Evidence

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes not only curative but also preventive and promotive health care. Among its various therapeutic modalities, *Shodhana Chikitsa* (bio-purification therapy) holds a unique place for the complete eradication of *Dosha* imbalances, addressing the root cause of diseases. For the successful implementation of *Shodhana*, the preparatory procedures—*Purva Karma*—comprising *Snehana* (oleation) and *Swedana* (sudation), are indispensable. These therapies are designed to loosen and mobilize morbid *Doshas*, facilitating their expulsion through the main cleansing procedures like *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Basti*, *Nasya*, and *Raktamokshana*.¹

Snehana Karma involves both internal and external administration of unctuous substances like medicated oils and ghee, aimed at lubricating the body's tissues, alleviating dryness, and pacifying aggravated *Vata Dosha*. By softening the body channels (*Srotas*) and dislodging the adhered *Doshas*, *Snehana* enhances the bioavailability of therapeutic agents and prepares the body for detoxification. On the other hand, *Swedana Karma* induces perspiration through various techniques, thereby dilating channels, relieving stiffness, and promoting the downward movement (*Anulomana*) of *Doshas*. Both procedures synergistically enhance the efficacy of the subsequent *Shodhana* therapies.²

Contemporary research has begun to validate the physiological and therapeutic effects of *Snehana* and *Swedana*. Clinical studies have demonstrated their benefits in improving

peripheral circulation, reducing inflammatory markers, relieving pain, and enhancing metabolic function. These findings highlight their relevance not only as preparatory steps but also as stand-alone therapies in musculoskeletal, metabolic, dermatological, and neurological disorders. Additionally, mechanistic studies have explored their role in modulating neuroendocrine function, stress responses, and detoxification pathways.³

Given the increasing global interest in integrative and holistic medicine, revisiting and critically analyzing the role of *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* is imperative. This review aims to bridge classical Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific evidence, highlighting their significance in *Shodhana Chikitsa*. It also endeavors to elucidate the underlying mechanisms, therapeutic indications, and clinical outcomes associated with these time-tested therapies.⁴

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To critically evaluate the role of *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* in *Shodhana Chikitsa* based on classical Ayurvedic principles and contemporary evidence.

Objectives

1. To review the classical textual references and theoretical foundations of *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma*.
2. To understand the pharmacological and physiological mechanisms underlying *Snehana* and *Swedana* actions.
3. To analyze the therapeutic indications and contraindications described in classical texts.
4. To assess the outcomes of recent clinical and experimental studies validating the efficacy of *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma*.
5. To explore the integrative applications of *Snehana* and *Swedana* in modern clinical practice, especially in chronic and lifestyle disorders.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A comprehensive review methodology was adopted to collect, analyze, and synthesize information related to *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* in the context of *Shodhana Chikitsa*. Classical Ayurvedic texts, including the *Brhatrayi* (*Charaka Samhita*, *Susruta Samhita*,

Astanga Hridaya) and *Laghutrayi*, along with authoritative commentaries such as *Chakrapani*, *Dalhana*, and *Arunadatta*, were reviewed to gather traditional concepts and indications.⁵

For modern perspectives, an electronic literature search was performed using databases like PubMed, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Keywords used included *Snehana*, *Swedana*, *Shodhana Chikitsa*, Ayurveda, Panchakarma, and clinical trials. Peer-reviewed clinical studies, observational studies, systematic reviews, and experimental research articles published between 2000 and 2025 were included.⁶

CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON SNEHANA THERAPIES-

Snehana refers to the administration of unctuous substances (*sneha dravyas*) internally or externally to produce oleation of the body. It is one of the principal *Purva Karma* (preparatory procedures) in *Shodhana Chikitsa*, aimed at loosening vitiated *doshas*, lubricating the *srotas* (body channels), and facilitating the movement of *doshas* towards the gastrointestinal tract (*koshta*) for expulsion.⁷

Types of Snehana

1. Bahya Snehana (External Oleation)

- *Abhyanga* (massage with medicated oils)
- *Murdha Taila* (head oleation therapies such as *shirodhara*, *shirobasti*)
- *Parisheka* (pouring medicated oil/decoction)
- *Pichu*, *Lepa*, and *Upanaha* (application of medicated poultices or pastes)

2. Abhyantara Snehana (Internal Oleation)

- *Snehapana* (oral intake of medicated ghee or oil)
- *Sneha in basti* (oleaginous enema therapies)

Pharmacological and Physiological Basis

Snehana substances are mainly *snigdha*, *guru*, *mrita*, and *picchila* in properties, which pacify *vata dosha* and help dislodge aggravated *doshas* from the deeper tissues (*dhatu*s). They provide lubrication, nourish the tissues, and prepare the body for *swedana* and *shodhana* therapies.⁸

From a modern perspective, *snehana* therapy improves tissue flexibility, enhances microcirculation, reduces inflammation, and modulates the neuroendocrine and immune systems. Oral oleation has been observed to promote gastrointestinal health, improve absorption, and may play a role in lipid metabolism regulation.⁹

Indications

- *Vata* predominant disorders (neurological, musculoskeletal conditions)
- Skin disorders (*kushta*)
- Degenerative diseases (*sandhigata vata*, *kati vata*)
- Preparatory phase for *vamana*, *virechana*, and *basti*

Contraindications

- Digestive impairment (*agnimandya*)
- Severe *ama* (toxicity accumulation)
- Acute inflammatory conditions
- Obesity (*atisthaulya*)
- Certain cardiac conditions

PROCEDURE OF SNEHANA

Snehana Karma can be administered in two primary ways — *Abhyantara Snehana* (internal oleation) and *Bahya Snehana* (external oleation). The procedure follows specific steps to ensure the desired therapeutic effect.¹⁰

1. Abhyantara Snehana (Internal Oleation)

a. Deepana-Pachana

- Before starting *Snehapana* (internal oleation), the patient's digestion (*Agni*) is improved using *Deepana* (appetizer) and *Pachana* (digestive) formulations to prevent *Ama* (toxins).

b. Selection of Sneha Dravya

- Commonly used substances: *Ghrita* (ghee), *Taila* (oil), *Vasa*, *Majja*, or combinations based on *Dosha*, disease condition, and patient constitution (*Prakriti*).

c. Matra (Dosage)

- Determined by factors like *Rugna Bala* (patient strength), *Agni Bala*, *Roga Bala*, and *Koshtha*. *Mridu*, *Madhyama*, and *Adhika Matra* can be selected as per tolerance.

d. Duration

- Usually continued for 3 to 7 days (*Samyak Snehana Lakshanas* should be monitored).

e. Monitoring Samyak Snehana Lakshanas

- Symptoms like softness of body, increased strength and appetite, clarity of complexion, and oily stools indicate proper oleation.

2. Bahya Snehana (External Oleation)¹¹

a. Abhyanga (Massage)

- Application of medicated oil/ghee over the whole body or specific parts.
- Direction and technique vary according to body part and disease condition.

b. Murdha Taila (Head Oleation)

- Includes *Shirodhara*, *Shirobasti*, *Shiro Pichu*, or simple oil application.

c. Parisheka

- Pouring of warm medicated oils or decoctions over the body or specific parts.

d. Pichu, Lepa, and Upanaha

- Local application techniques for targeted therapeutic effects.

Precautions During Snehana

- Patient should be in a relaxed, stress-free environment.
- Monitoring for intolerance symptoms like heaviness, indigestion, or nausea.
- Avoidance of heavy food, daytime sleeping, and strenuous activities during the therapy.

Samyak Snehana Lakshanas (Signs of Proper Oleation)¹²

1. Oily skin and softness in the body.
2. Increased strength and flexibility.

3. Enhanced digestion and appetite.
4. Lightness of body and clarity in mind.

Ayoga, Atiyoga, and Hina Yoga Lakshanas

- **Ayoga (Insufficient oleation):** Dryness, stiffness, poor flexibility.
- **Atiyoga (Excessive oleation):** Nausea, heaviness, indigestion, oiliness in stool and urine.
- **Hina Yoga (Inadequate dose):** Absence of *Samyak Snehana Lakshanas*, dryness persists.

Benefits

- Dislodges and mobilizes *doshas*
- Improves flexibility and mobility
- Nourishes tissues and promotes strength
- Enhances the efficacy of *swedana* and *shodhana*
- Reduces pain, stiffness, and dryness

CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON SWEDANA THERAPIES

Swedana refers to the process of inducing sweating by using various methods to open up the body channels (*srotas*), remove blockages, and facilitate the expulsion of aggravated *doshas*. It is considered an essential *Purva Karma* (preparatory procedure) in *Shodhana Chikitsa*, performed after *Snehana* to enhance the loosening and movement of *doshas* towards the *koshta* for elimination.¹³

Types of Swedana

1. Based on the Source of Heat

- *Agni Swedana* (with the use of fire or heat)
- *Anagni Swedana* (without the use of direct heat)

2. Based on the Mode of Application

- *Snigdha Sweda* (unctuous sudation — e.g., *pinda sweda*, *patra pottali sweda*)
- *Ruksha Sweda* (dry sudation — e.g., *valauka sweda*, sand bag sweda)

3. Based on Procedure

- *Sankara Sweda* (bolus sudation)
- *Nadi Sweda* (tube steam sudation)
- *Bashpa Sweda* (steam bath)
- *Upanaha, Parisheka, Avagaha, Prastara*, and others

Pharmacological and Physiological Basis

Classical Ayurvedic principles describe *Swedana* as promoting the liquefaction (*vilayana*) of aggravated *doshas*, softening of tissues, and dilation of *srotas*. This process facilitates the movement of *doshas* towards the *koshta* for expulsion through *Shodhana*.¹⁴

From a modern scientific perspective, *Swedana* therapy increases blood flow, enhances metabolism, reduces muscle stiffness, and promotes detoxification through sweating. It may also induce relaxation by modulating the autonomic nervous system, reducing pain perception, and improving joint mobility. Studies suggest benefits in improving skin health, circulation, and even supporting lymphatic drainage.¹⁵

Indications

- Musculoskeletal disorders (arthritis, stiffness, paralysis)
- Neurological disorders (*vata vyadhi*)
- Skin diseases (*kushta*)
- Obesity and metabolic syndrome
- Respiratory conditions with *kapha* dominance
- Preparatory procedure before *vamana*, *virechana*, and *basti*

Contraindications

- Severe weakness or dehydration
- Pregnancy
- Acute infections or high fever
- Severe cardiovascular disorders
- Bleeding disorders

PROCEDURE OF SWEDANA

Swedana Karma is performed after *Snehana* to induce sweating, open up body channels (*srotas*), liquefy morbid *doshas*, and facilitate their movement towards the *koshta* for expulsion.

1. POORVA KARMA (PRE-PROCEDURE)¹⁶

a. Patient Assessment

- Evaluate *Prakriti*, *Vikriti*, age, disease condition, strength (*bala*), and *agni* status.
- Identify any contraindications (e.g., dehydration, pregnancy, severe weakness).

b. Snehana

- *Bahya* or *Abhyantara Snehana* must be done prior to *Swedana* to mobilize *doshas* and soften body tissues.

c. Preparation of Materials

- Selection of appropriate *Swedana* type: *Snigdha* (unctuous) or *Ruksha* (dry) depending on *dosha* and disease.
- Selection of *swedopakarana* (materials and herbs for fomentation) based on *dosha predominance* and condition.

2. PRADHANA KARMA (MAIN PROCEDURE)¹⁷

a. Positioning

- Patient is made to sit or lie in a comfortable position depending on the type of *Swedana*.

b. Application

- **Types of *Swedana* commonly used:**
 - *Bashpa Sweda* (steam bath)
 - *Nadi Sweda* (localized steam application using a tube)
 - *Pinda Sweda* (*Patra Pottali Sweda*, *Valuka Sweda*)
 - *Parisheka* (warm decoction pouring)
 - *Avagaha* (medicated bath)

- *Upanaha* (medicated poultice)

c. Duration

- Typically 10 to 30 minutes, depending on patient's condition, tolerance, and type of *Swedana*.

d. Monitoring

- Continuously observe for signs of proper sweating and patient comfort.
- Therapy is stopped if signs of intolerance like dizziness, excessive sweating, or breathlessness occur.

3. PASHCHAT KARMA (POST-PROCEDURE)¹⁸

a. Rest

- The patient should rest in a warm, draft-free room.

b. Light Diet

- Easily digestible, warm, light food (*laghu ahara*) should be advised.

c. Avoidance of Exposure

- Patient should avoid exposure to cold wind, strenuous activity, and heavy meals immediately after the procedure.

Samyak Swedana Lakshanas (Signs of Proper Sudation)

1. Relief from heaviness, stiffness, and coldness.
2. Increased flexibility and lightness in the body.
3. Improved movement of affected body parts.
4. Reduction in pain and discomfort.
5. Softening of *dosha* accumulation.

Ayoga, Atiyoga, and Hina Yoga Lakshanas

- **Ayoga (Insufficient sudation):** Persistence of stiffness, heaviness, and coldness.
- **Atiyoga (Excessive sudation):** Excessive thirst, fatigue, fainting, dryness, or burning sensation.

- **Hina Yoga (Inadequate sweating):** Minimal or no relief in symptoms.

Benefits

- Facilitates movement and expulsion of *doshas*
- Relieves stiffness, heaviness, and pain
- Enhances flexibility and joint mobility
- Improves skin texture and blood circulation
- Supports detoxification and metabolic processes
- Complements and enhances the efficacy of *Shodhana Chikitsa*

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- Classical texts confirm that *Snehana* and *Swedana* are essential *Purva Karma* therapies to mobilize *doshas* and prepare the body for *Shodhana*.
- Physiologically, they improve flexibility, circulation, metabolism, and help in *dosha vilayana* and *srotoshodhana*.
- Clinical studies show efficacy in musculoskeletal, neurological, metabolic, and dermatological disorders with significant improvement in pain, stiffness, and inflammation.
- Both therapies have a strong safety profile when applied as per classical guidelines.
- They are now widely integrated into modern wellness and therapeutic practices.

DISCUSSION

Snehana and *Swedana Karma* hold a foundational role in *Ayurvedic Shodhana Chikitsa*. Classical texts emphasize that without proper *Purva Karma*, the effectiveness of *Shodhana* procedures like *Vamana*, *Virechana*, and *Basti* diminishes significantly. *Snehana* softens and mobilizes aggravated *doshas*, while *Swedana* dilates the *srotas* and facilitates the movement of these *doshas* toward the gastrointestinal tract for elimination. The synergistic effect of these two therapies ensures that the main cleansing procedures can act efficiently and safely.¹⁹

From a physiological standpoint, *Snehana* enhances tissue lubrication, flexibility, and cellular nourishment. Modern studies correlate these effects with improved microcirculation, anti-

inflammatory activity, and modulation of the neuroendocrine system. *Swedana*, by inducing therapeutic perspiration, helps in the elimination of metabolic waste, reduces musculoskeletal stiffness, and promotes relaxation through autonomic nervous system balancing. These mechanisms validate the age-old Ayurvedic principles with contemporary biomedical understanding.²⁰

Clinical research has demonstrated the efficacy of *Snehana* and *Swedana* in conditions like osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, cervical spondylosis, sciatica, obesity, skin disorders, and neurological conditions. Statistically significant improvements in pain, mobility, metabolic function, and quality of life have been reported. These findings support their application not only as preparatory therapies but also as independent or adjunct treatments in chronic disease management.²¹

Despite their benefits, the importance of proper patient assessment, individualization of therapy, and adherence to classical procedural guidelines cannot be overstated. Inappropriate selection of patients, incorrect dosage, or duration can lead to adverse effects. However, with careful application, *Snehana* and *Swedana Karma* offer safe, effective, and holistic therapeutic options that bridge traditional wisdom with modern evidence-based practice.²²

CONCLUSION

Snehana and *Swedana Karma* are indispensable preparatory therapies in *Shodhana Chikitsa*, deeply rooted in Ayurvedic tradition and increasingly validated by modern research. These therapies not only facilitate the mobilization and elimination of vitiated *doshas* but also provide therapeutic benefits in their own right, including improved circulation, flexibility, pain relief, and metabolic balance. Clinical studies have demonstrated their efficacy in a range of chronic musculoskeletal, neurological, and metabolic disorders. When administered following classical principles and individualized assessment, *Snehana* and *Swedana* are safe, effective, and contribute significantly to holistic patient care. Their integrative application bridges ancient wisdom with contemporary healthcare needs, offering promising avenues for both preventive and curative strategies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE FO SUPPORT –NONE

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