



## Panchakarma - A Scientific and Evidence Based Specialty Therapy of Ayurveda

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### Abstract

*Panchakarma* a specialty of *Kayachikitsa* (Internal Medicine) presents a unique approach of *Ayurveda* with specially designed five procedures of internal purification of the body through the nearest possible route. Such purification allows the biological system to return to homeostasis and to rejuvenate rapidly and also facilitates the desired pharmacokinetic effect of medicines administered thereafter. *Panchakarma* provides a comprehensive therapy role as a promotive, preventive, curative & rehabilitative procedure. *Panchakarma* is not merely bio-purificatory therapy as it is understood, but also has wider range of therapeutics such as replenishing, depleting, rejuvenating therapies etc. *Panchakarma*, a comprehensive, and an integral part of Ayurvedic treatment and have its role in every therapeutic condition. Due to its long lasting and radical relief of chronic diseases, it is now developing globally. But *Panchakarma*, the purification therapy expounded in *Ayurveda* is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the *Ayurveda* practices. Due to ignorance, it is often perceived as just another system of oil massage. In today's world more and more people are falling victim to the adverse effects of stress and anxiety, which is leading to diseases like improper digestion, lack of sleep, allergies, heart diseases, diabetes, chronic fatigue, cancer, osteoporosis etc. These diseases are caused mainly due to deep seated toxins. *Panchakarma* eliminates these toxins from the body, allowing permanent healing of tissues and channels and thus normalizes digestion, and mental functions. In this article the scientific and evidence based review of *Panchakarma* has been done.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda; *Panchakarma*; Alternative medicine; Bio-purification therapy

**Abbreviations:** WHO: World Health Organization; TM: Traditional Medicine; PCB: Polychlorinated Biphenyl

## Introduction

*Ayurveda* deals with the preventive and curative aspects of health. It comes under the classification of Traditional Medicine (TM) as per the specifications of WHO and is in the process of acquiring international recognition. Globalization has brought opportunities for exploitation of the global market for traditional medicine and its practitioners. Traditional Medicines have an annual share of millions of dollars in the world market. *Ayurveda* can definitely claim a good share of it, if it meets international standards.

*Panchakarma* a specialty of *Kayachikitsa* (Internal Medicine) presents a unique approach of *Ayurveda* with specially designed five procedures of internal purification of the body through the nearest possible route [1]. Such purification allows the biological system to return to homeostasis and to rejuvenate rapidly and also facilitates the desired pharmacokinetic effect of medicines administered thereafter [2]. *Panchakarma* provides a comprehensive therapy role as a promotive, preventive, curative & rehabilitative procedure. *Panchakarma* is not merely bio-purificatory therapy as it is understood, but also has wider range of therapeutics such as replenishing, depleting, rejuvenating therapies etc. *Panchakarma*, a comprehensive, and an integral part of Ayurvedic treatment and have its role in every therapeutic condition. Due to its long lasting and radical relief of chronic diseases, it is now developing globally [3]. Besides their application in the treatment of the disease, they are also used as preparatory measures before institution of surgery and also before administration of rejuvenation therapy, virility therapy, and palliative medicines. But *Panchakarma*, the purification therapy expounded in *Ayurveda* is perhaps the most misunderstood of all the *Ayurveda* practices. Due to ignorance, it is often perceived as just another system of oil massage.

In today's world more and more people are falling victim to the adverse effects of stress and anxiety, which is leading to diseases like improper digestion, heart diseases, diabetes, cancer, lack of sleep, allergies, chronic fatigue, osteoporosis etc. These diseases are caused mainly due to deep seated toxins. *Panchakarma* eliminates these toxins from the body, allowing permanent healing of tissues and channels and thus normalizes digestion, and mental functions [4]. If the *Dosha* (bio-humors) are excessively aggravated, they produce Ama (toxins) vitiating the digestive fire. This Ama has a tendency to block minute channels. In such condition the bio-purificatory therapy is recommended as the pacification of this level of aggravation is impossible.

## *Panchakarma* (Five Major Bio-Purification Therapies)

- a. *Vamana* (Therapeutic vomiting or emesis)
- b. *Virechana* (Purgation)
- c. *Basti* (Therapeutic Enema)
- d. *Nasya* (Elimination of toxins through the nose/errhine therapy)
- e. *Raktamokshana* (Bloodletting)

### Vamana (Emesis Therapy)

When there is congestion in the lungs causing repeated attacks of bronchitis, colds, cough or asthma, the *Ayurvedic* treatment is therapeutic vomiting, to eliminate the *Kapha*. Therapeutic vomiting is mainly indicated in chronic asthma, chronic sinusitis and skin diseases involving upper part of body, diabetes, chronic cold, lymphatic congestion, chronic indigestion, and edema.

### Virecana (Purgation Therapy)

When excess *Pitta* is accumulated in the liver, gall bladder, and small intestine, it produces biliary vomiting, nausea, jaundice, rashes, skin inflammation, acne, and chronic recurrent fever. *Ayurvedic* classics recommend therapeutic purgation in these conditions.

### Basti (Therapeutic Enema)

*Vata* is a prime factor involved in pathogenesis (disease). If *Vata* is controlled by the use of *Basti*, then it is easier to treat the root cause of the many diseases. The main seat of *Vata* is large intestine, but bone tissue (*Asthi Dhatu*) is also a site for *Vata*. Hence the drugs administered rectally does action on *Asthi Dhatu*. The mucus membrane of the colon is indirectly related to the bone tissue. Therefore, the medicines administered rectally transported into the deeper tissues, like bones, and thus pacifies *Vata* diseases.

*Basti* involves the administration of honey, rock salt, medicated ghee or oil, medicinal paste and herbal decoctions, into the rectum. *Basti* is the most effective treatment in disorders of *Vata*. It cures sciatica, paralysis, backache, Parkinson's diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, constipation, infertility, erectile dysfunction etc. many critical chronic diseases.

### Nasya (Errhine therapy)

The nose is the entrance to the brain. The nasal administration of medication is called *Nasya*. *Nasya* eliminates the excess of *Doshas* (bio-humors) collected in the nose, sinuses, head areas and throat through the nose.

*Prana Vayu*, the life force enters the body through the breath taken in through the nose. *Prana Vayu* is in the brain and controls the sensory functions, motor functions, mental activities, memory, concentration and intellectual activities. Deranged *Prana* leads to improper functioning of all these activities and causes reduced sensory perception, loss of memory convulsions, headaches etc. Thus *Nasya* is indicated for nasal diseases, sinus congestion, migraine headaches, nervous system disorders, convulsions and diseases of eye and ear.

### Raktamokshana (Bloodletting therapy)

Toxins present in the gastro-intestinal tract are absorbed into the blood and circulated all over the body. The basic cause of repeated infections, hypertension and certain other circulatory conditions are cause improper elimination of waste products and the free radicals produced by them. The conditions include skin diseases such as eczema, leukoderma, psoriasis, urticaria, rashes, herpes, acne etc. In these conditions, bloodletting, oral medicines, and external applications are essential. *Raktamokshana* is also indicated for cases of CCF, HTN, pulmonary hypertension, hepatomegaly, splenomegaly and gout. Bloodletting purifies the *Pitta* bio-humor which leads to proper functioning of the spleen & liver which in turn stimulates immune system. Toxins present in tissues are neutralized leading to radical cures in many blood born diseases.

### Misconception about Bio-Purification

#### Bio-purification versus Detoxification

The Detoxification Program comprises of polyherbal formulations designed to specifically target some important organs of the body for Detoxification. Some of the important organs are the Colon (Large Intestine), Kidneys, Liver, Lung, Blood, lymphatic system, and the complete digestive system to name a few. Many people confuse Colon Irrigation, Colon Hydrotherapy, Colonics, Enema, and the Ayurvedic *Basti* offered in many cities in India and the rest of the world as Detoxification. This is really Detoxification of only one organ - the Colon, and not the whole body. This is misconception that the *Panchakarma* does only local purification, rather it is systemic purification of whole body even each cells of the body.

The modern detox therapy comes under palliative therapy and is helpful in some minor conditions. According to *Ayurveda* this detox therapy is beneficial in only when the bio-humors are aggravated in lesser

degree; in case of greater aggravation of bio-humor the only radical way is bio-purification by emesis or purgation therapy.

So from these evidences it is clear that, bio-purification is superior to the detox therapy (Table 1).

Features	Bio-purification	Detoxification
Definition	Process of expelling the toxins or unwanted substances from body	Process of nullifying the toxins without expelling out
Duration required	15 days to 1 month	3 month to 6 months
Type of therapy	Purificatory	Palliative
Therapeutic effect	Radical, permanent and quicker. Also rejuvenates the systems and increases immunity	Toxins are not neutralized completely, Temporary & takes longer time.

Table 1: Differences between bio-purification and Detoxification

#### Toxic matter & elimination

Dr. Vasant Lad opines that according to the nature of the cause, *Vata*, *Pitta* or *Kapha* undergo aggravation or derangement, which affects the digestive fire and produces toxins (*ama*). This *ama* enters the blood stream and is circulated throughout the body, clogging the channels. Retention of toxins in the blood results in toxemia. This accumulated toxicity, once well established, will slowly affect vital life energy (*prana*), and immunity resulting in disease [5].

This is not acceptable, because the toxins produced not only enters into blood but also all the other tissues. The mixing or amalgamation of toxin depends on its affinity towards the vitiated *Dosha* and the specific tissue. So after examining the involvement of the bio-humors and tissues, appropriate *Panchakarma* therapy should be selected. If Dr. Vasant Lad's concept is correct, only bloodletting is used instead of *Vamana* etc. therapy for all diseases to expel the toxic matters from blood.

### Clinical Applications of *Panchakarma*

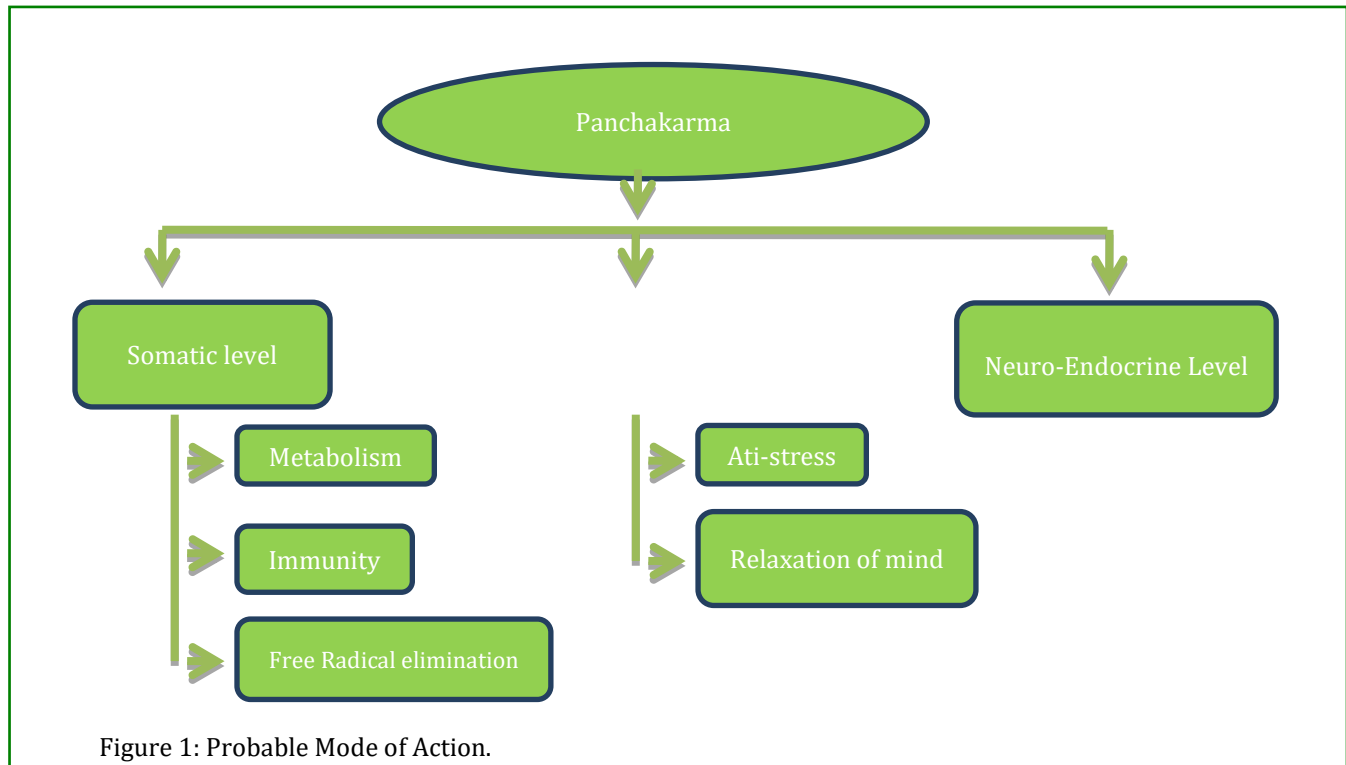
- a. *Panchakarma* plays vital role in the preservation, maintenance & conservation of health & promotion of longevity. They form a part in the regimen of preventive medicine (*Svastha Vritta*) indicated as prophylactic measures in the context of epidemics and pan epidemics.
- b. These measures are indicated as preparatory procedures before the administration of rejuvenation therapy (*Rasayana*) & aphrodisiac therapy (*Vajikarana*).
- c. All diseases occur due to suppression and forceful expulsion of natural urges. *Panchakarma* is the best treatment for the diseases caused by suppression of natural urges (*Vega Dharana*). Suppression of natural urges affects gastrointestinal motility and continence of sphincters and later neuro-humoral control of glands. *Vatanulomana* is the prime line of treatment for diseases due to suppression of urges and *Basti* is best among *Vatanulomana* therapies [6].
- d. Weak digestive fire (*Mandagni*) is the cause for all diseases. For correction of digestive fire (*Agni*), *Panchakarma* is the best treatment.
- e. In diseases due to over nutrition (*Santarpanjanya Roga*) elimination of humors (*Doshavasecana*) is indicated. Most of the diseases are due to weak digestive fire as told by Vagbhata. So *Panchakarma* therapy is best for correction of *Agni*. In a person of disturbed homeostasis, there is impaired anabolism and catabolism resulting in the decreased nutrition and immunity impaired excretion of waste products leading to the collection of metabolic waste. All these leads to formation of free radicals, causing tissue damage and final outcome will be metabolic disorder. In such conditions cleansing of channels (*Srotoshodhana*) is essential which is done by *Panchakarma* therapy.
- f. Bio-purification is potential in emergency conditions because only purificatory drugs possess the property of immediate action. Bio-purification is also administered in chronic poisoning. In the current era also, human being is more exposed to acute & chronic poisoning, pesticide, chemical preservatives etc. so now also there is great need of bio-purification at least twice a year to purify the body from these harmful substances.
- g. In chronic diseases, these will be a severe vitiation of channels (*Srotodushti*), weakness of digestive fire

(*Agnimandya*), improper nourishment of tissues, and decreased immunity (*Ojokshaya*), which warrants the purification of body, so that the nutrients, medicaments, and energy may flow freely in the system as earlier. For this bio-purification through *Panchakarma* is indicated. A chronic disease cannot be managed without the combined and judicious use of *Panchakarma* therapy and rejuvenation therapy (*Rasayana*).

### Research Works

Maharishi *Panchakarma* (PK) administered to human subjects for 3 to 5 days showed usefulness in improving cardiovascular risk factors. Preliminary research shows that the Maharishi Ayurveda *Panchakarma* program is associated with improvements in mental and physical health symptoms, at least in selected human subjects. Thus, this program may help to address current public health demands for efficacious and practical health-promotion and disease-prevention programs. In vitro research with human colon cancer cell lines indicates that many natural vegetable oils, including sesame, contain in vitro antineoplastic properties. Further in vivo and in vitro investigation is warranted in order to assess oils' possible chemotherapeutic potential [7].

Blood samples from both cross-sectional groups were assayed for 17 lipophilic toxicants, including 9 polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) congeners and 8 pesticides and metabolites, such as DDE, a by-product of DDT. The specific PCBs and pesticides that were studied had either been previously linked to major health problems or had been of high concern for their potential toxicity. The results showed that blood levels of PCBs and several pesticides were significantly lower in the detoxification group than in the controls. In the longitudinal study, blood samples from 15 subjects who participated in the Vedic Approach to Health Ayurvedic detoxification procedure were assayed, pre- and post-treatment, by Colombia State University Analytical Laboratory. The results of the two-month longitudinal study showed that PCBs and Beta-HCH levels were reduced by 46 percent and 58 percent respectively in the MVAH detoxification group. Without this intervention, the expected drop in PCBs and Beta-HCH over two months would be only a fraction of one percent. Previously, no method had been scientifically verified to reduce levels of these lipid-soluble toxicants in the human body without causing negative side effects [8] (Figure 1).



## Conclusion

*Panchakarma* a specialty of *Kayachikitsa* (Internal Medicine) presents a unique approach of *Ayurveda* with specially designed five procedures of internal purification of the body through the nearest possible route. Such purification allows the biological system to return to homeostasis and to rejuvenate rapidly and also facilitates the desired pharmacokinetic effect of medicines administered thereafter. *Panchakarma* is not merely bio-purificatory therapy as it is understood, but also has wider range of therapeutics such as replenishing, depleting, rejuvenating therapies etc. *Panchakarma*, a comprehensive, and an integral part of Ayurvedic treatment and have its role in every therapeutic condition.

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