



CONCEPT OF MARMA MASSAGE IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT:

Marma Massage is an *Ayurvedic* technique that involves applying *snehadravyas* over the body with a precise amount of (very mild) pressure in particular directions while also stimulating the underlying *Marma*. It may be used locally or across the body. According to *Ayurveda*, *Marma* are body spots that should be protected from *Sastra*, *kshara*, and *agnikarma*. The role of *Vata dosha* is seen as being of utmost importance in the management of *Marma* related disorders, and all therapeutic measures are done for maintaining the normalcy of *Vata*. The tenets of *Ayurveda Marma* Massage use a variety of therapeutic massage techniques to balance the *Dosha* in the living body. Numerous techniques are employed for rejuvenation, *Dosha* balance maintenance, health maintenance, and the treatment of numerous conditions with musculoskeletal and neurological origins. The assumption behind treatment effectiveness is that it will normalise *Vata Dosha* movement and control and channel the life force (*Prana*) in the body. Because *Vata* is the primary energy type in the living body. The connective tissues that support the muscles and many other sections of the body as well as assist keep these tissues elastic are gently stretched during a *Marma* massage. After *Marma Abhyanga* is used, the structure is nourished and adjusted. *Marma Chikitsa* employs indigenous methods and techniques in a methodical manner to address musculoskeletal damage, although it still requires in-depth research. The use of indigenous resuscitation techniques (*Adangal Prayogam*) is yet another area that can be improved. Despite obstacles, *Marma* practise has recently developed into a more robust form that incorporates information from both traditional and modern realms.

KEYWORDS: *Marma*, *Marma* Massage, *Marma Chikitsa*, *Ayur veda*, *Vata Dosha*.

INTRODUCTION:

Massage therapy is defined as a group of procedures which are usually done with the hands, such as friction, kneading manipulations, rolling and percussion of the external tissues of the body in a variety of ways with a curative, palliative or hygienic object in view. *Marma* Massage is defined as an *Ayurvedic* procedure of application of *snehadravyas* over body with certain amount of (very mild) pressure in specific directions along with the stimulation of the underlying *Marma*. It can be applied to the whole body or locally. The *Marma* physicians have adopted different varieties of massages in different clinical situations based on the age, strength and need of the patient. The varieties are *Thalodal*, *Thadaval*, *Thirummal*, *Theppu*, *Uzhichil*, *Thattal*, *Valikkal*, *Chavittal*, *Kuttal*, *Amarthal* etc. The methods of *Kacchathirummal*, *Sukhathirummal* and *Rakshathirummal* of *Kalarimarmachikitsa* are utilized for care, cure and rehabilitative treatments.¹ The methods of strokes in *Marma* Massage vary from patient to patient. Though no direct references are found to indicate the direction of strokes in different body parts, the same can be inferred from the types of *Chedana* in different sites of the body as mentioned in the *Samhitas*. The Rate, Rhythm, Pressure and other variations are components of massage therapy. These determine whether these are stroking, kneading, tapotement or

shaking manipulations. In Ayurveda massage the different modalities of massage are *Abhyanga*, *Mardana*, *Samvahanam*, *Tadanam*, *Trasanam*, *Padaghata*, *Unmardhana*, *Udwarthana*, *Utsadana*, *Gharshana*, *Udgharshana*, *Peedana*, *Avapeedana*, *Paripeedana*, *Vimlapanam*, *Lepana*, *Lathaveshtanam*, *Phenakam* etc. The different strokes mentioned in *Kalari Nadi Marma Chikitsa* are *Nervari*, *Kiruvvari*, *Villuvattam*, *Konu*, *Paadu*, *Koottadakkam* etc. In *Varma Chikitsa*, the *Marmas* are manipulated in the following different ways which are *Anukkal*, *Asaithal*, *Pidithal*, *Nazhukkal*, *Thattal*, *Thadaval*, *Oondral*, *Amarthal*, *Padhukkal*, *Karaka*, *Pinnal*, *Yeanthal* etc. The massages and manipulations in *Ayurveda* are usually administered with the selected medication as *Tailam*, *Kuzhampu*, *Lepam*, *Choornam* and others. In *Marma Chikitsa* special medicines are used for specific purposes like *Murivenna*, *Ashavenna*, *Shashtikataila* etc. Various special *Pinda Swedas* is also used as therapies. In short, *Marma Massage* deals with all traumatic and repeated stress injuries of *Marmas*, acute or chronic musculoskeletal conditions predominantly, involving circulatory or neurological complications which the patient suffers. In *Marma Chikitsa* massage therapy is utilized both as a preventive as well as curative modality.

There is a quote which states the importance of *Abhyanga*:

आबाधवर्जनं नित्यं स्वस्थवृत्तानुवर्तनम् |

उत्पन्नार्तिविघातश्च मर्मणां परिपालनम् | | १० | |

(Ch.Si.9/10)²

These principles imply the following ideas clinically:

ABADHAVARJANAM: is related to avoidance of those *Nidanas*, which bring about *Marmaghata*. Thus, relates with preventive aspect.

SWASTHAVRITHANUVARTANAM: relates with the maintenance of health of *Marma* in day-to-day life.

UTPANNARTHIVIGHATA: treating the diseases affecting the sites of *marma* i.e. In conditions where physician has already come across the tenderness of *Marma* before the complete onset of a disease. A right treatment towards such *Marma*, may avert the ensuing illness. Thus, treating the patient before the disease sets in. This also includes caring of *Marma* in conditions where the *Samchaya*, *Prakopa* etc., stages of vitiated *Dosha* have already involved the *Marma Sthanas*. The affliction of *Marma* in many other known diseases is worth to be considered in day-to-day clinics.

CLASSIFICATION OF MARMA MASSAGE³:

FIRST CLASSIFICATION:

1. SUKHATIRUMMAL:

Massage techniques used to improve immunity

2. RAKṢĀTIRUMMAL:

Massage techniques used in therapeutic management (e.g., in muscle wasting)

3. KACCATIRUMMA:

Massage techniques used to improve flexibility and to improve the movement of joints.

SECOND CLASSIFICATION:

1. ANULEPANAM:

Massaging technique for group of muscles (e.g., flexors and extensors) usually done from origin to insertions.

2. AVAPĪDANAM:

Technique applied for one particular muscle. E.g., deltoid muscle in deltoid wasting.

3. PĪDANAM:

Bony hard massage usually done with base of hand; usually high pressure is applied.

4. UDGHARṢAṆAM:

Massage technique applied to a particular limb. Massages carried out from downward to upward direction.

5. UDVEṢṬANAM:

Massaging is done in kneading manner, which gives circular force to the muscle, the muscles are lifted and kneading is done.

6. PARIPIDANAM:

Massaging is done by creating pain on the area. It is done to those who can withstand high pressure. It improves the strength and flexibility. *Pādaghāta* is included under *Paripidanam*.

7. LATĀVEṢṬANAM (half region massage):

Massaging technique starts from upper part of the body, moved to the middle part, circular movement of hand is applied in the middle part and then return back to upper part. The massage is applied in a rhythmic way. It can be done as a pre-event massage in sports medicine.

8. SANDHICALANAM:

Massaging technique done over joints and is usually done after *Latāveṣṭanam*. It is done to improve the flexibility and movements of joints.

9. AKṢARATIRUMMAL:

Usually done in a particular area where there is repeated strain. E.g., fibromyalgia. Perpendicular pressure is applied with index, middle and ring finger in tender points, then counting is done up to 10. After that pressure is released. The procedure is repeated for three times and later stretching is done with three fingers. Index, middle and ring finger corresponds to *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

10. GHARṢAṆAM:

Massage technique done to improve the blood circulation especially the arterial circulation. The massage is done in the direction of blood flow and with a pressure of 1/2 or % Ghana. This type of massage will remove the arterial obstruction and increase the blood flow to the particular part. E.g., in Volkmann ischemic contracture, there will be brachial artery occlusion. So *Gharṣaṇam* is done over the radial and ulnar artery to improve the blood circulation of the affected part and it helps to manage the contracture. *Gharṣaṇam* is contraindicated in varicose veins as there is a risk of venous thrombus formation.¹

Note: *Latāveṣṭanam* is a massage which is done as both pre-event and post-event massage. Pre-event massage will improve flexibility of muscle. Due to friction, the body temperature gets increased by one or two degrees, which improves the relaxation of muscles.

It's usually done in post event massage, i.e., in cool down phase to remove waste product in the form of *Sukha Tirummal*.

MARMA:

The word *Marma* is formed from three syllables — Ma, R and Ma. 'Ra' symbolizes Agni or fire and 'Ma' symbolizes the Soma or moon'. Thus, the word *Marma* means sites where the *Agni* is ensheathed/enveloped or protected by the *Soma*. According to *Ayurveda*, the body is a functional equilibrium of the three *dosa*, which are also the derivatives of *Agni* and *Soma* (the duality of hot and cold) which are balanced by the *Vayu*.

मांसास्थिस्नायुधमनीसिरासन्धिसमागमः ।

स्यान्मर्मेति च तेनात्र सुतरां जीवितं स्थितम् । ।

बाहुल्येन तु निर्देशः षोडशं मर्मकल्पना ।

प्राणायतनसामान्यदैक्यं वा मर्मणां मतम् । ।

(A.H.Shareer 4/38-39)⁴

Acharya *Vagbhata* says *Marma* is the conglomeration (meeting place) of the five elements of the body namely - *Mamsa* (muscles, flesh), *Sira* (blood vessels, arteries, and veins), *Snayu* (ligaments, tendons, and nerves), *Asthi* (bones) and *Sandhi* (joints). As a natural phenomenon, the *Pranas* (life element) are seated at these places of conglomeration. Therefore, any injury to these places leads to serious consequences depending on the structure or structures predominantly involved in the *Marma*.

TYPES OF MARMA:

There are total 107 *Marma*, in which 11 in each *Shakha* (44), 3 in *Kostha*, 9 in *Uras*, 14 in *Pristha* and 37 in *Jatru urdhva* are present.

सप्तोत्तरं मर्मशतम् तेषामेकादशादिशेत् ।

पृथक्सक्थोस्तथा बाह्वोस्त्रीणि कोष्ठे नवोरसि । ।

पृष्ठे चतुर्दशोर्ध्वं तु जत्रोस्त्रिंशच्च सप्त च ।

(A.H.Shareer 4/1-2)⁵

PROCEDURE OF MARMA MASSAGE:

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

1. Oil/medicated oil:100-150 ml
2. Droni/massage table
3. Vessel :200 ml capacity
4. Tissue paper/soft towel: Q.S.
5. Green gram powder/medicated Snana Choorna/medicated soap: Q.S.
6. Masseurs:(Whole body-2, Ekanga-1, For children below 10-1)

PURVAKARMA (PRE-PROCEDURE):

Oil in *Kharapaka* or *Madhyamapaka* should be selected according to climate, *Prakriti* and disease condition of the patient. The oil is heated up to 38°C-44°C.

PRADHAN KARMA (PROCEDURE):

Patient should be seated on the *Droni*/table, with leg extended. The oil with optimum temperature should be applied on nasal openings, posterior aspect of the head, between the eyebrows, inside the ear, in the depression above the suprasternal notch, between the lips, centre of the chest, navel and at the centre of each foot. Then both the hands are to be rubbed together to make them warm before starting the massage. The oil heated should be applied uniformly by two therapists on both sides of the *Droni*/ table. Start massaging scalp, head and move down to neck, upper back, shoulders, upper arms, forearms & hands; then chest, abdomen, low back, lower limbs. While massaging downwards more pressure is given in downward direction and while massaging upwards, minimal/no pressure is applied. Over the head region, massage is started from occiput and then continued to the front. With fingers tapping or pounding is to be done on the head. At last, the massage is stopped by bringing the hands towards the posterior aspect of neck and then hands are pulled apart. On the chest region, massage is done with circular movements and with mild pressure, and comparatively more pressure can be applied at manubrium of sternum. On the hands, massaging is done from the posterior aspect of upper arm and up to downwards to the wrist in a spiral manner. Limb joints should be massaged in circular manner and muscles in linear manner. Umbilical region is massaged in circular manner. *Abhyanga* should be done in sitting, supine, right lateral, left lateral positions. Prone position can also be adopted in the case of low back ache. Avoid prone position in patients with chronic diseases of lung, heart, GIT. Upper back should be massaged in upward down direction.

Supine position: Massaging is first done from neck to the hip and then from hip downwards. At the naval region, oil is poured and circular clockwise massage is done around the navel without giving too much pressure.

Lateral positions: During massage in the lateral position maximum importance is given to manipulations of hip and ribs. The manipulations are mainly done with more pressure and with the thumb. In left lateral position massage is done usually for less time to avoid undue pressure on the Hridaya.

At the end of the procedure, the medicine on the body should be wiped off with tissue paper/towel.

DURATION OF MASSAGE: Usually 45-60 minutes.

RATE, RHYTHM AND PRESSURE OF MASSAGE:

The massage consists of varieties of techniques. The speed with which strokes are carried out per minute can be understood as the Rate. This in turn determines the Rhythm. Based on this, massage can be fast, medium and slow. The methods of strokes in *Marma* Massage vary from patient to patient. Though no direct references are found to indicate the direction of strokes in different body parts, the same can be inferred from the types of *Chedana* in different sites of the body as mentioned in the Samhitas. The rate, rhythm, pressure and other variations are components of massage therapy which determines whether it is stroking, kneading, tapotment or shaking manipulations. The Vaidya has to thus design the massage as per necessity and execute it with skill.⁶

The pressure applied for the massages will be 1/2 Ghana, 3/4 Ghana and 1 Ghana. Ghana is a unit of pressure and one Ghana denotes the maximum amount of pressure that can be used safely for that patient. Grading of pressure: 1ghana>3/4ghana>1/2 ghana. The Rate, Rhythm and pressure is decided by the concerned physician.

PASCHAT KARMA (POST PROCEDURE):

Patient should take complete rest for 15 minutes in comfortable position. Patient can take bath in lukewarm water with suitable medicated soap or *Snana Choorna*. *Rasnadi choorna* should be applied on head after bath. When the patient feels appetite, take light food according to illness, digestive power & *Satmya*. If the patient is indicated for *Swedana*, proper *Swedana* should be done immediately after *Abhyanga* before bath.

NOTE: It is better to record body temperature, blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate etc. before and after the procedure. Biochemical and Pathological investigations are also to be carried out.

PRECAUTIONS:

1. Avoid excess pressure in painful areas / joints.
2. Care to be taken to avoid burns during the procedure by hot oils.

3. Time and season of administration should neither be too hot nor cold and sky should not be cloudy.

COMPLICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT:

1. In case of burns apply *Shatadhouta Gritam* to the part.
2. In case of allergic reactions like rash, itching etc., stop the procedure and ask the patient to take bath. Inform the Vaidya immediately.
3. Vertigo
4. Vomiting
5. Desensitization of body part
6. Severe pain
7. Unconsciousness

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Marma massaging techniques plays a crucial role in preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative domains of the patient life. A fruitful application of *Marma* Massage can help to enhance the speed as well as efficiency of clinical practice and great scope for application in sports medicine, emergency medicine, pain management and so on. *Marma* Massage provides a gentle stretching action to both the muscles and connective tissues which support the muscles and many other parts of the body and which help to keep these tissues elastic. After the application of *Marma Abhyanga*, the structure gets nourished and modulated. *Marma Chikitsa* is one of the popular trauma care practices in Southern India having its roots in *Ayurveda*, *Kalari* and *Tamil Varma Kalai*. There is rich literary resource, which gives a firm foundation to this practice. The practical aspects are preserved and still practiced in South India due to its close relation to martial arts tradition. A large population in India often resort to traditional practitioners as they provide cost effective treatment and comparable results. However, the potential of trauma care through traditional methods are overlooked in recent times, owing to the technological advancements in the modern parallel. *Marma Chikitsa* uses a systematic strategy to approach musculoskeletal injury with indigenous methods and techniques, and needs extensive study. Indigenous resuscitation methods (*Adangal Prayogam*) are yet another contributable field. Despite challenges, *Marma* practice is evolving in recent times to a more robust form imbibing knowledge from both conventional and modern realms.

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