

Herbal medicines and dentistry: An Indian Art

TEXT: Dr. Saurabh Lall

The sole purpose of any branch of medicine is to strive to make human life happier and healthier. To achieve this we must use every possible resource available. From time immemorial, we have been using our natural resources to attain the state of well-being.



Herbal medicines are drugs of plant origin used to treat diseases or to attain or maintain a condition of improved health. Herbs with medicinal properties are a useful and effective source of treatment for various disease processes. Many drugs used in Western medical science (called allopathic medicine) have their origin in medicinal plants. Through this article, an attempt has been made to describe Ayurvedic resources to attain 'Dantaswasthyam'. The word 'Ayurveda' is derived from: 'Ayu' meaning 'life' and 'veda' meaning 'knowledge'. In its true sense, Ayurveda literally means the science that imparts all the knowledge of life.

Basics of Ayurveda

The body of man and all the objects in the universe are composed of some base elements, namely earth, water, energy, air and space. 'Vata', 'Pitta' and 'Kapha' molecules are the three biological elements which constitute the cells and tissues of all the living organisms in the universe. The biological combination of earth and water gives rise to 'Kapha', water and energy to 'Pitta' and air and space to 'Vata'. Kapha molecules make up the main structural units of the body. Pitta molecules represent the various enzymes and hormones and are responsible for digestion and release of energy impulses and all the movements of the body. When quantitatively and qualitatively normal,

these three doshas (Vata, Pitta and Kapha) constitute the three pillars that stabilize life. But in a state of imbalance, the same three elements are responsible for disease, or even death.

Folk tradition in healthcare dates back to the origin of Homo sapiens on earth. The intimate relationship of nature with mankind, like a mother with her child, has always been promoting the atmosphere in which all the needs of man are met. However, the disturbance in equilibrium of the various forces within the human body and the surrounding atmosphere gave rise to diseases, which were healed by mother nature through adjustments within the body itself, assisted by the use of certain natural herbs and plant products. India, with its rich diversity of natural resources and strong traditions, even today has an enormous potential for good health in the form of medicinal plants, verbal traditions and written texts as the Ayurveda. Ayurveda uses a wide range of herbs, minerals and biological products, both singly and in combination formulations to attain the state of well-being.

Dantaswasthyam

= Health and hygiene of the teeth.

Ayurveda has imparted a lot as far as dental health is concerned. Our main aim is to utilize all the given knowledge and plant products (herbs) to improve our



standard of living by keeping free from diseases. Ayurveda is an evolved system of medicine in India and it is a rich reservoir even for dental science.

Toothbrush or 'Datun'

A soft brush can be made by biting and chewing the tips of fresh stems of 'Akra', 'Catechu', 'Banyan', 'Karanja' or 'Arjuna'. Mastication of stem acts as a good exercise for the teeth and gums. The stems should be healthy, soft, straight, without any leaves and knots and picked from a tree growing in a clean surrounding. The stems should not be dry, sticky or foul smelling. The stem should be one finger in breadth, ten to twelve fingers in length and should have a bitter, pungent or astringent taste. The stem should be chewed until it is broken up. Fresh twigs of the following trees are used as Datun: neem, babul, mango, guava, roots of pillu and dandrasa. Vata is predominant in the monsoon and summer seasons, Pitta in monsoon and autumn and Kapha in spring and winter season. So, one should select the stem suited to the season.

Toothpowder and Toothpaste

One can use powders of triphala (amalaka, haritaki and bibheetaka) or trijataka (cinnamon, cardamom and tamal patra) with honey and saindhava salt for persons with Kapha and Pitta con-

stitutions. Massaging the gums daily with triphala mixed with til oil maintains them in a healthy state. Toothpowder consisting of equal quantities of ginger, pepper, pippali, cinnamon, cardamom, tamalpatra, tejovati, triphala, catechu and saindhava salt, which can be used as a paste after mixing with til oil maintains them in a healthy state.

Interestingly, apart from the effects on the gums and teeth, the fresh juices in various stems when digested and absorbed, exert their beneficial effects on different tissues of the body. Contraindications for brushing teeth with stems: fever, cough, breathlessness, diseases of lips, tongue, teeth, mouth and palate, indigestion, constipation, trushma (diseases characterized by excessive thirst), diseases of eyes, head and neck, facial palsy, diseases of heart, bleeding disorders and syncopic episodes.

However, in these conditions saindhava salt may be used to clean the teeth since it neutralizes all the three doshas and is good for the heart. Saindhava being light and not hot, stimulates the appetite but does not cause hyperacidity.

Gargling of the mouth or 'Mukh Prakshalan'

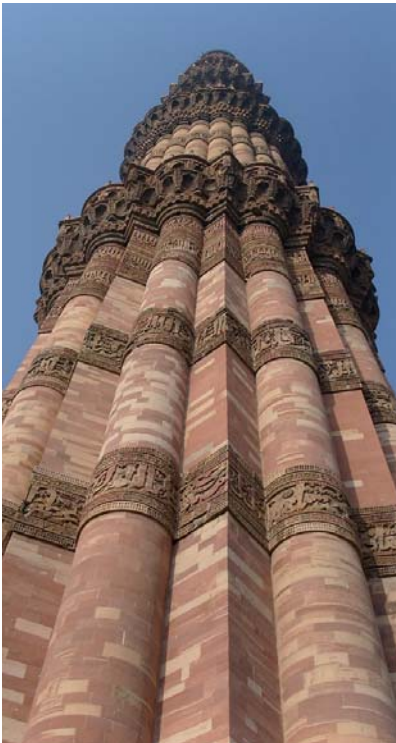
It is important to gargle the mouth after meals and after brushing the teeth. One should use cold/hot water, til oil or cold milk for gargling. Gargling with hot water exerts cleansing action on the mouth, teeth, gums and the tongue. It imparts a light and fresh feeling to the mouth. Gargling with cold milk has a cooling and cleansing action on the mouth and is useful in stomatitis. Gargling with til oil exerts a cleansing and strengthening action on the tongue, gums, teeth, etc. It also prevents stomatitis and is helpful in curing hypersensitivity of the gums to sour foods. It also improves the sense of taste. Contraindications for gargling: bleeding disorders, unconsciousness, poisoning, general weakness, conjunctivitis and miasmatic persons.

Cleaning the Tongue

A thin plate of gold, silver, copper, a leaf or a thin wooden plate may be used to clean the tongue. It should be soft and smooth with rounded edges. Its length should be about equal to ten fingers. The main purpose of cleaning the tongue is to get rid of waste products and foul odour emanating from the oral cavity. It also improves the sensation of taste and exerts a tonic effect on the tongue. It also reduces the bacterial flora in the mouth.

Conclusion

Our main aim is to explore and use the rich heritage of Ayurveda. Use of plants and herbs for dental care is a very common indigenous system of medicine and we must include it in our day-to-day life.



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Dr. Saurabh Lall graduated in Dental Surgery from Meerut University, India, and acquired a Certificate in Aesthetic & Cosmetic Dentistry in 2009. With over a dozen scientific presentations and two dozen publications to his credit, he writes for several national and international journals. Currently, he is pursuing his post-graduation (MDS) in Periodontics & Implantology at K. D. Dental College & Hospital, Mathura, India. Dr Saurabh Lall is the recipient of many national and international awards. He is a member of the Indian Dental Association, Indian Society of Periodontology and an Executive Life Member of the Indian Academy of Aesthetic & Cosmetic Dentistry.

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