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Role of *Snana* (Bathing) in the Preservation and Promotion of Health – A Review

Ashvin Bagde^{*1}, Asha Ramteke², Milind Nimbalkar³ and Saroj Tirpude⁴

¹Dept. of SamhitaSiddhanta, Govt. Ayurved College, Osmanabad, MS, India

²Dept. of Swasthavritta, Y. A. M. P.G. T. & R. C., Kodoli, MS, India

³Dept. of SamhitaSiddhanta, D.M.M. Ayurved College, Yavatmal, MS, India

⁴Dept. of SamhitaSiddhanta, M.G.Ayurved College, Salod, Wardha, MS, India

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of life or longevity based on ancient Indian philosophy. The main goal of *Ayurveda* is to maintain the health and cure of the diseases. To achieve these said goals, *Ayurveda* described *Dinacharya* (daily routine) in detail. These daily routine regimens have good physiological effects on appropriate functioning of the body system thereby maintaining a normal equilibrium of three *doshas* i.e. *Vata*, *Pita* and *Kapha*, *SaptaDhatus* (seven tissues), *Mala* (waste products of the body) and the *Agni* (power of digestion). *Ayurvedic* daily routine includes *Snana* (bath) every day in the morning after *Abhyanga*, *Vyayama*, *Mardana* and *Udvardana*. Its daily and sensible use is having a prime role in maintains of the health. But still, its importance and practical utility does not fully recognized. Hence efforts are made to explain *Snana* in detail as described in *Ayurvedic* literature.

KEYWORDS

Ayurveda, *Dinacharya*, *Daily Routine*, *Snana*, *Bath*, *Health*



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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the science of life with the aim of attaining health and curing diseases of ill. A long healthy life is a wish of every being since antiquity. Daily regimen, night regimen, seasonal regimens and *Sadvritta* (codes & conducts of life) should be followed as mentioned to maintain health. Therefore everyone should always follow those procedures which keep them healthy always. *Dinacharya* is known as daily routine. It helps to create balance in one's constitution. It also normalizes a person's biological clock, promotes catabolism, absorption and assimilation and generates confidence, self-control, peace, happiness and longevity¹. *Dinacharya* starts from *Brahmamuhurtajagrana* (means period One and a half hours before sunrise), *Mala-MutraVisarjana*, *Dantadhavana* (brushing of teeth), *Jihvanirlekhana* (tongue cleaning), *Kavala*, *Gandusha* (gargling) etc along with these things there are some important procedures like *Nasyakarma* (nasal drops), *Tambulasevan* (chewing of betel leaf), *Abhyanga* (medicated oil massage), *Snana* (bath) etc.

Prevention of disease by cleanliness is mentioned in *Ayurveda* and *Purana*. In *Mahabharat*, five types of *Saucha* (cleanliness) are mentioned. They

areas *Mana*, *Karma*, *Kala*, *Sharira* and *VakaSaucha*. *Gita* and *VasisthaSamhita* also mentioned two types of *Saucha* as *BahyaSaucha* (External cleanliness) and *AbhyantaraSaucha* (Internal cleanliness)². Here external cleanliness is to keep the body clean by *Snana*, etc while internal cleanliness is to keep the mind free. The cleanliness is necessary for health, growth and development of the body.

Snana (Bathing) is the last form of cleaning our body. If done in appropriate manner, it will definitely be a therapeutic, rejuvenating ritual for the body, mind and soul. There is no confusion that good baths cleans and rejuvenate our body. Bathing prompts you and makes you ready for the whole day activities. As per *Ayurveda*, regular bathing keeps body healthy, fresh, energetic and rejuvenated for the whole day activities. All of us take bath daily as a formality and as a routine part of our daily schedules.

The method, duration and benefits of *Snana* along with different types of *Snana* have been keenly mentioned in our *samhitagranthas*.

MATERIALS



This is conceptual type of study. All sorts of references are collected from various classics texts of *Ayurveda* like *CharakSamhita*, *SushrutaSamhita*, *AshtangaSangraha*, *AshtangaHridaya*, *BhavaprakashNighantu* and *Yogratnakaraw* with available commentaries on them. Research articles are also searched from websites. All matter is analyzed and attempt has been made to draw some beneficial conclusions.

Definition of Snana

Snana is the regimen that is to be done daily and which clear away *Mala*, *Sweda* and makes the person healthy.

Ideal place for taking Snana-³

According to *manusmriti*, one should use to perform *Snana* daily in *nadi* (river) near temple, *Tirthasthana* (sacred places), *Tadaga* (ponds), *Sarhasu*, *Garta* and *Prastravana*.

Matra of Snana-⁴

Matra of *Snana* is not mentioned clearly but one classical reference gives us the information that *Snana* is performed like *GajavataSnana* (bath like elephant) which means water used to take bath should be more in order to clean the whole body.

Time of Snana -

Acharyas already mentioned that one should take *Snana* early in the morning⁵. Among *Dinacharyas*, bath is explained after exercise as there will be

tiredness after doing exercise and bath is practiced to relieve the tiredness. The morning *Snana* cleans the body from *Malas* that are accumulated during sleeping.

Classes of Snana - There are 3 classes of *Snana*⁶

1. *NityaSnana* – Normal bathing while at home on daily basis.
2. *NaimittakaSnana* – Special occasional bath like death of relative, hair cut etc
3. *KamyaSnana* – Bath for special vows undertaken like in a temple tank etc.

Types of Snana

According to *YagnavalkyaSmrti*, there are seven types of *Snana*. They are as follows.

1. *MantraSnana* - *Snana* by pronouncing *Auponishadi Mantra* is called as *Mantra Snana*
2. *BhoumaSnana*- *Snana* by smearing the whole body with mud is called *BhoumaSnana*
3. *AgneyaSnana*- *Snana* by *bhasma* (ash) i.e. burnt powder of cow dung is called as *AgneyaSnana*.
4. *VayavyaSnana*- *Snana* with dust that arises while cow is walking is called as *VayavyaSnana*.
5. *DivyaSnana*- *Snana* in sun rays or the glare of the sun combined with rain is called as *DivyaSnana*.
6. *VarunaSnana*- *Snana* in river water is called as *VarunaSnana*.



7. **ManasaSnana**- Thinking about the sacred soul is called as *ManasaSnana*.

Benefits or Effects of regular Snana

According to *Acharya Charak* *Snana* is purifying, libido stimulant and prolongs life. It relieves fatigue, removes sweating and dirt from body. It promotes strength and endurance in the body⁷. Taking bath is auspicious, increases virility, longevity, strength, compactness and *Ojas* of the body. It also cures tiredness, sweat and impurities of the body⁸. Bath takes away sleep, burning sensation, tiredness, sweat, itching, thirst and impurities. It is good for heart and purifying all organs and gives satisfaction.

According to *Sushrutaacharya*, regular *Snana* wards off sleep, burning sensation, exertion, perspiration, removes itching and thirst. *Snana* is *Hridaya* (good for the heart), removes dirt, stimulates all the sense organs and mitigates stupor and sins. It gives satisfaction, enhances virility, purifies the blood and improves digestive power⁹.

According to *Acharya Vagbhata*, regular *Snana* improves digestive power, libido stimulant and life promoter. It brings about strength in the body. It removes somnolence, fatigue, sweating, dirt and bodily heat. It checks itching, increases the appetizing power, allays thirst and destroys drowsiness and sin¹⁰.

According to *Yogratnakara*, regular *Snana* is having qualities like - relieves one from all types unwholesome and of sinful acts, destroys the effects of bad dreams and nightmares, removes all dirt and dust of the body), enhance color and complexion of skin, helps in beautification of body, brings pleasing or gives freshness to the body. Improves the digestive fire i.e. appetite. Improves sexual vigour and libido of a man, relieves one from fatigue¹¹.

According to *Bhavprakash*, rubbing the entire body with cloth just after bathing improves color and complexion of the skin, removes itching and various disorders of skin^{12, 13}.

According to *Kalyanakaraka*, bath gives satisfaction, strength, Luster, health, long life, normalcy of the humors and smoothness and also increases gastric fire. It also develops the desire to eat i.e. creates appetite.

Gunas of Snana Sheela Manushya¹⁴

Acharya Manu has explained 10 *Gunas* of *Snana Sheela Manushya*. It increases *Bala* (strength), *Roopa* (enhances beauty), *Swarashudhi* (voice), *Varnashudhi*, *Sparsha* (soft touch), *Gandha* (pleasant odour), *Parishudhatha* (cleanliness), *Shanty* (peace), *Saukumarya* (delicacy), *Uttam Strilaba*.



Health Benefits of having sheetaJalaSnana(Bath with cold water)- 15,16

Bathing with *SheetaJala* (cold water) helps in improving eyesight and in stimulating *agnitha* that helps in the digestion activity, if taken in proper time. Bathing with cold water cures *Raktapitta* (bleeding disorders). Bathing in extremely cold water, especially during winter season, leads to aggravation of *Kapha* and *Vatadosha*. The sight of a person is rejuvenated by applying cold water to the head at the time of bathing.

Health Benefits of having UshnaJalaSnana(Bath with warm water)-

A bath with *UshnaJala* (warm water) helps in increasing the strength of an individual and pacifies the increased *Vata* and *Kaphadosha*¹⁷. *UshnaJalaSnana* increases strength only when it is used to bathe the body except the head. It means that hot water should not be used for head bath. It should be used down to the clavicle level. If done it decreases the strength and also causes harmful effect to eyes, hairs and heart¹⁸. According to *Sushruta*, during aggravation of *Kapha* and *Vatadosha*, one can use luke warm water bath for head as medicine⁽²⁰⁾. Warm water bath should not be taken during summer since it imbalances *Pitta dosha*. The warm bath

has stimulation action on the skin and reflex excites the heart and circulation.

Rules for taking Snana -

1. The general rule is not to take bath at night.
2. *Snana* should be performed in the morning and before the morning meal.
3. *Snana* should not be done without clothes.
4. Clothes should be changed after each bath.
5. One should bath two times daily.
6. One should wash the head first while bathing. One should not bath without washing head, in less quantity of water and with very cold water.
7. Bath in cold water or in a source with scanty water is not advisable.
8. If you are taking bath in river then *Snana* should be performed against the tide of the river.
9. In religious literature, taking bath during night is strictly prohibited. However, on special occasions like eclipses, bath is permitted during night.
10. *Acharya Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* have advised to use hot water below the shoulder and cool water for the neck, head and face.
11. *Hemadri*, a very great scholar and commentator of *Vagbhata*, says that it is not advisable to use hot and cold water at



the same time in one bath, as might be deduced above.

Indications of *Snana*-²⁰

Bathing in cold water mitigates the aggravation of *Rakta* and *Pittadosha*. Warm water bath strengthens body and reduce aggravations of *Vata* and *Kaphadosha*. While bathing pouring hot water over the head is not good for eyes but it is beneficial in aggravation of *Vata* and *Kapha*.

Conditions where *Snana* is prohibited-

^{21,22}

Snana is contraindicated for persons who are suffering from *Atisara* (diarrhoea), *Ardhita* (facial paralysis), *Aadhmana* (distension of the abdomen), *Pinasa* (rhinitis), *Bhuktavat* (immediately after consuming food), *Jwara* (fever), *Karna Shoola* (ear ache), diseases caused by *Vata* dosha, *Arochaka* (loss of taste) and *Ajeerna* (indigestion). Even persons suffering from *Netraroga* (eye disease) and *Karna Rogas* (ear diseases) contraindicated to take bath.

A person should not bath when he had enough food, diseased, at mid night, with much cloth and near unknown ponds.

CONCLUSION

Snana plays an important role in Indian tradition, customs and rituals. Every

person belonging to Hinduism will complete the ritual daily 1-3 times. It is supposed to be an act of purification not only of physical body but also of mind. It is deemed necessary for the internal purification. Bathing is necessary not only for cleanliness of skin but also for their action on the internal organ as it helps in circulation. It is a preventive modality for maintaining overall health. When *vata* and *kaphadoshas* are vitiated luke warm water can be used for head bath. Taking head bath with hot water is injurious to eyes and cold water is good for eyes. Hot water applied to head drains strength from sense organs. *Snana* has promotive, protective and curative effect on the body. In the end we can say that it should be practiced as a prophylactic measure to attain its benefits and to maintain health.



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