

The Role of *Marma Chikitsa* in Musculoskeletal Health: An Anatomical Perspective

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Abstract:

Marma are known as “*Shalya Vishayardha*” in Ayurveda. There are in all 107 *marma* points mentioned in the *Samhitas*. According to *Acharya Sushrut* in *Sharir Sthana*, *marma* are defined as an anatomical site where *mansa*, *sira*, *snayu*, *asthi*, and *sandhi* merge. It is said to be the vital spot and also a fatal spot, as “*Prana*” resides at that point. It helps regulate the blood circulation and the flow of energy throughout the body, ensuring that the energy is unobstructed. Hence, injury to that spot disrupts the flow of *Prana* and can cause deformity or death. The musculoskeletal system consists of muscles, cartilage, bones, tendons, joints and ligaments, and other connective tissue that bind and support the structure to stay together. Musculoskeletal impairment involves difficulty in movements, pain, inflammation, stiffness, or any nerve compression causing numbness or pain. Hence, stimulating these specific *marma* points of that region helps to maintain *vayu* or energy in that specific part, which enhances healing and faster recovery. **Methodology:** The present case study assesses the efficacy of *marma chikitsa* in a very rare genetic progressive neuromuscular degenerative disorder called Neimann's Pick type-C disease, proving that *marma chikitsa* helps to reduce *vata dosha*, boost circulation, and promote mobility of joints. **Results:** After *marma chikitsa*, significant improvements were noticed in many parameters like pain, speech, voluntary movements, stiffness, etc, which can be concluded that *marma chikitsa* has promising results in *vata vyadhi* or other *vata-related* disorders.

Key words: Joints, Marma chikitsa, Mobility, Musculoskeletal health, Pain management

Introduction:

According to *Acharya Sushrut* in *Sharir Sthana* 6/15, *Marma* is an anatomical site where *mansa*, *sira*, *snayu*, *asthi*, and *sandhi* merge. It is a site where 'Prana' resides.⁽¹⁾ *Marma* are not just anatomical markers, but also locations where the *Tridosha*, *Prana*, *Ojas*, *Tejas* (*Agni*), reside in their subtle forms.⁽²⁾ Each *marma* point is associated with one or more of the 3 *doshas* in the body. Stimulating these points helps to balance those *doshas* and promote overall well-being, enhances circulation, and reduces pain. The *Prana* (vital energy) present in *marmas* may be directed to eliminate blockages (even in distant locations) and promote energy flow.⁽³⁾ *Ayurveda* is a living science that believes in treating the mind, body, and spirit to achieve absolute health. *Marma Chikitsa* is the art of stimulating *marma* points for treating ailments, and enables the human body's natural ability to cure itself.⁽²⁾ Adequate pressure on the right *marma* can restore normal *Prana* functioning (in the affected body parts), but inappropriate manipulation can result in extreme discomfort, incapacity, deformity, and even death.

In *Ayurveda*, musculoskeletal impairments are often understood through the lens of *dosha* imbalances, particularly involving *vata dosha*. The musculoskeletal system, which includes bones, muscles, joints, and connective tissues, can be affected by various factors leading to impairments. Here's how *Ayurveda* views these conditions:

- *Vata* imbalance:

Vata dosha, characterized by qualities like dryness, lightness, and mobility, is primarily responsible for movement and function in the body. An imbalance can lead to issues such as joint pain, stiffness, and muscle spasms.

- *Aam* accumulation:

Aam refers to undigested food or toxins that accumulate in the body due to poor digestion. This can lead to inflammation and blockages in the joints and muscles, contributing to conditions like arthritis.

- *Dhatu kshaya*:

Dhatus are the seven tissues of the body, and *asthi* (bone) and *mamsa* (muscle) *dhatus* are directly related to the musculoskeletal system. Weakness or depletion of these *dhatus* can result in conditions like osteoporosis or muscle wasting.

- *Kapha* and *pitta* Involvement:

While *vata* is primarily involved, imbalances in *kapha* (leading to heaviness and swelling) and *pitta* (leading to inflammation and heat) can also contribute to musculoskeletal impairments.

Vayu regulates the transmission of energy from one point to another. Among the *Trimarma*, *Shira* is considered as

Uttamanga and one among the *Dasa-pranayatana* (10 vital points). Hence, any obstruction of *Prana* (energy) causes *vata dosha* imbalance and ultimately leads to *vata vyadhi*. In this case study, the patient was diagnosed with Niemann's Pick type C disease, which is a genetic neuromuscular degenerative disease. In this, the vitiation of *vata dosha* can be assumed to occur during the foetal or infantile period, which eventually affects the neuromuscular system, causing spasticity and stiffness of joints and limbs, low muscle tone, range of movement, and hampered voluntary actions (like speech and walking). Here, *Marma Chikitsa* becomes an important step to regulate the flow of *Prana*, as *Prana* is connected to most of the *Vata* disorders, including *shiropradesh*.

Case report:

We present the case of a 10-year-old female with chief complaints of loss of muscle strength, unable to move hands and legs, unable to speak, bedridden, frequent seizures, neck holding reduced.

History of present illness: The patient was diagnosed with Niemann-Pick type C disease (a rare genetic progressive

neuromuscular degenerative disorder) at the age of 7 years. she has recently started to experience seizures along with loss of voluntary movements, dysphagia, paralysis, dysphasia, and was on naso-gastric (NG) feeding. Patient also had disturbed sleep with no physical activity and involuntary gut and bladder control. She had been put on antiepileptic syrups, antipyretic drugs, and multivitamins with no significant relief.

Family History: None. On further detailed history taking it was noted that parents of this child were married in the same family (close relatives).

CNS Examination: Patient has spasticity of muscles, very low muscle power, voluntary movements, and slurred speech. As the patient was severely handicapped, further examination was not possible.

Other Examination: Vitals were normal. Cardiovascular system and per abdomen examinations showed no deformity

Pathological Examination: Complete blood count of the patient was normal, and parameters were within limits.

TREATMENT PROTOCOL:

Table 1: Marma chikitsa

<i>Marma</i>	Location	
Adhipati marma	Placed right on the top of the head.	1. All these <i>marma</i> points were pressed 6 times in a set, for 3-4 times a day. 2. A steady and moderate pressure was applied slowly and gently, depending on the strength of the patient. 3. Panchkarma: <i>sarvang abhyang</i> with <i>Bala tail</i> and <i>Shiropichu</i> with <i>Medhya ghrut</i> were given alternate days. 4. All these procedures were done for a month with no break.
Seemanta marma	Five joints located over the head	
Shankh marma - both sides	Temple of the head	
Apaang marma - both sides	The outer angle of the eye, near the outer part of the eyebrow on each side (outer canthus)	
Aavarta marma - both sides	Ends of the eyebrows	
Sthapani marma	Between the eyebrows	
Ansa marma - both sides	Upper back, one on either side of the vertebral column at the junction of the shoulder and neck	
Bruhati marma - both sides	One on either side of the spine	
Kakshadhara marma - both sides	In the upper limbs, near the axilla	
Lohitaksha marma - both sides	The root of arms and thighs	

After continued treatment for a month, within the first 15 days, the patient was able to move her hands, make voluntary movements, with reduced muscle and joint stiffness (Figure 2).

After another 15 days of the same treatment, the patient started speaking bi-syllabic words like ma-ma, da-da, and started responding to questions asked in yes & no. She was able to call people through actions.

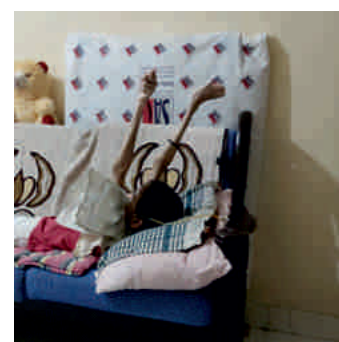
Table 2:

Symptoms	Before Treatment	After Treatment
Spasticity	Present	Reduced
Muscle strength	Absent	Improved
Voluntary movements	Absent	Improved
Speech	Very Slurred	Improved

Figure 1: Before treatment: Patient was totally bedridden, unable to move hands and limbs, on NG feeding.



Figure 2: After treatment: (a) Neck holding, able to sit, (b) voluntary movements like joining hands, (c) stretching hands



Discussion:

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the point where *mamsa*, *sira*, *snayu*, *asthi*, *sandhi*, and *Prana* meet is called *marma*. *Vayu* (energy/air) regulates through those points. The probable mode of action, even according to modern science and anatomical perspective, is stimulating *marma* points that trigger ionic exchange in that area, leading to reflexes in sensory neurons. It signals the hypothalamic-pituitary axis.⁽⁴⁾ This creates a relaxing effect, and a healing process is initiated at that site, ultimately improving the movement of joints and limbs.⁽⁴⁾

This case of Neimann-Pick Type C disease, which is a neuromuscular degenerative disease that can be considered under *vata vyadhi*, and *marma* can give promising results in it. The main motive here is to control aggravated *vata dosha*.

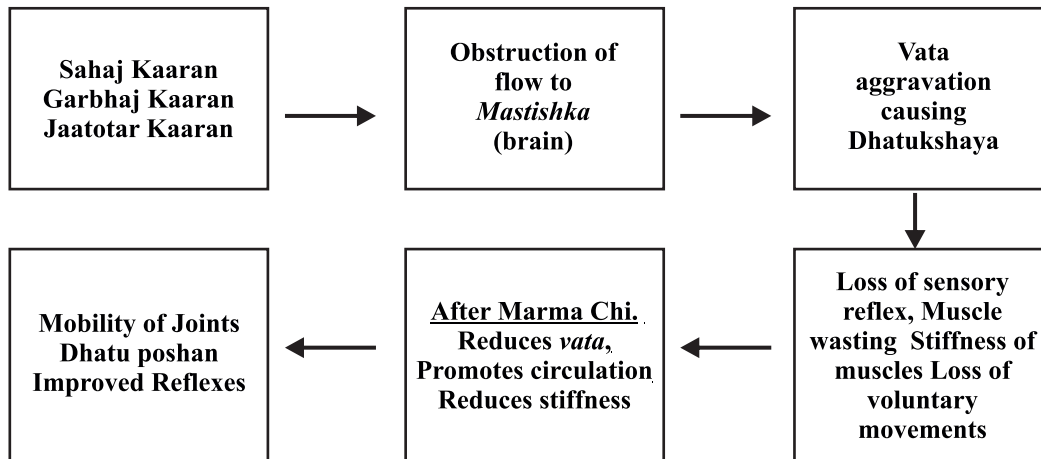
Karyan-karan bhaav: In this case, disease manifestation —

- Parents of this child were married in the same family (Consanguine marriage). As also in *Ayurveda*, *Acharyas* have contraindicated marriage in the same *Gotras*,
- Genetic Mutation
- *Sahaja Karan*
- *Kulaj Karan*

This is caused by vitiation of *vata* along with *pitta* and *kapha*, causing obstruction and *Dhatukshya*, which eventually affected the Neuromuscular system.⁽⁵⁾

Karya

As *marma chikitsa* helps to balance all three *doshas* and *trigunas*, and it pacifies *vata*, which is the root cause of *vyadhi*. It clears obstruction by reducing *aam*, thus developing physical and mental flexibility.



In this case, we focused on the *Shiromarma / Urdhvajatrugat marma* and some of the *shakha marma*, focusing on improving mobility of joints, muscle strength, speech, and neck holding. Due to the NG feeding patient was not able to take any internal medication, hence *Marma chikitsa* was majorly brought into focus and followed religiously and accordingly, changes were observed.

Conclusion:

"A *Marma* point is the junction between physiology and consciousness," as stated by Ed Danher, Director of the Panchakarma department at the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. From a biochemical perspective, touching the *marma* sites releases radicals, which in turn signal the body to produce relevant rejuvenating elements such as hormones and neurochemicals that promote healing of the body, mind, and consciousness. *Marma chikitsa* pacifies *vata*, reduces *aam* which causes blockages, improves circulation, and maintains the flow of energy (*Prana*), especially *vyan vayu*, which controls the autonomic nervous system, are the basic guidelines for treatment in musculoskeletal disorders.

They can be used to diagnose and cure illness, or they can be utilized to promote overall health and lifespan. *Marma chikitsa* is very precise and has given promising results in *vata vyadhi* and other muscular problems to many ayurveda practitioners.

Through this also, it can be concluded that *Marma* therapy has promising results in musculoskeletal disorders, it is cost-effective, feasible and can be applied anytime, with no side effects if applied properly and almost no special infrastructure is required. It can be a universally sustainable type of science that can be used for therapeutic and preventive aspects of health, especially in the Panchakarma stream as a super-specialised treatment protocol.

Source of Support: Nil

Conflict of Interest: Nil

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