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Marma Points in Ayurveda: A Comprehensive Exploration of Mode of Action and Therapeutic Applications



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ABSTRACT

Marmas, integral to *Ayurveda*, constitute pivotal convergence points of diverse tissue types, such as muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints. *Marmachikitsa* is a separate branch of science that has the innate ability to restore the appropriate flow of energy levels throughout the body, allowing physical ailments to heal on their own. This research delves into the concept of *Marma* points as elucidated in the Ayurvedic classics of *Charak*, *Sushruta*, and *Vagbhatta*. *Marma*, referring to vital points of the body where the life force resides, holds a central position in *Ayurvedic* philosophy. This study comprehensively explores the mode of action and therapeutic application in addressing various pathological conditions.



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INTRODUCTION:

Marmas, integral to *Ayurveda*, constitute pivotal convergence points of diverse tissue types, such as muscles, veins, ligaments, bones, and joints. This article explores the wealth of knowledge on *Marma* points offered by *Charak*, *Sushruta*, and *Vagbhata*, encompassing their distribution, roles, and practical applications. *Marma* points are regarded as reservoirs of life force and play a significant role in maintaining bodily equilibrium. Notably, the classical texts outline 107 *Marma* points, each holding distinct anatomical significance.

Marma:

Vagbhata defines *marma* as the convergence point of *Mamsa* (muscles), *Asthi* (bones), *Sira* (veins), *Snayu* (ligaments), *Dhamani* (arteries), and *Sandhi* (joints), where the *Prana* (life force) is palpable. It is also stated that *Marma* is characterized by unusual pulsations and tenderness upon pressure.¹ Acharya Charaka identifies three significant *Marma* points in the body, one of which is the *urdwanga* (upper body above the neck) in the *Chikitsa sthana* (section on therapeutics). Additionally, there are six *marma sthanas* among the *dasapranayatanas* (ten vital areas) in the *Sareera sthana* (section on anatomy).^{2,3} A significant importance is attributed to *Marmasthanas*, which are regarded as *pranasthanas* (vital points) associated with various anatomical elements and nerves. Consequently, any injury to these *marma* points can have grave consequences.

Marmachikitsa:

Marmachikitsa is a separate branch of science that has the innate ability to restore the appropriate flow of energy levels throughout the body, allowing physical ailments to heal on their own.

Marma in Sanskrit means hidden or secret. By definition, a *Marma* point is a junction on the body where two or more types of tissue meet, such as muscles, veins, ligaments, bones or joints. *Marma* is a subtle energy that regulates proper functioning of air, blood and heat flow in the body, thus preventing the affliction of disease occurrence. It brings equilibrium of *tridoshas* *vatta*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

Historical Perspective:⁴

The *Marmachikitsa* was primarily a derivative of the *Dhanurveda*, an *upaveda* of the *Yajurveda* that was concerned with the art of warfare. Due to the prevalence of injuries

during martial arts training and warfare, this area developed parallel along with other medicinal sciences like Ayurveda.

The words Marma and Varma are extensively found even in Vedic literature and the concept of Marma as a therapeutic system was present during the period of Mahabharata⁵. The word Varma is mentioned five times in the Rigveda and is mostly used in the meaning of a protective covering whereas the word Marma is used mostly as a vital point or a body part that when injured leads to death.⁵

Three main schools of Marma at present practice-

1. The Marma practice in Ayurveda was widely used by the surgical schools of Ayurveda. Historical documents describing various surgeries performed during the British era, including painless tooth extraction, still include remains of this expertise. References to Duryodhana being murdered by Bhimasena by striking his Orvi Marma are invariably found in Puranas such as the Mahabharata.

2. The second one is the Tamil classics on Varmasastra, where Varma is known in Tamil as Varmam. This tradition is believed to have been originated from Lord Siva and been spread throughout the world by the sage Agastiyar and his followers, including Tirumlar. According to this system, there are 108 marma points (manas as the 108th Varma) which are primarily divided into two groups, called paduvarmmam and toduvarmmam, which have 12 and 96 points, respectively. It has a prominent role in Tamil Nadu's culture and is intimately related to the Siddha system of medicine.

3. The Kulayanamarma or Kulābhyasamarma system of Marma, which is connected to the practice of the historic martial art of Kalari, is the third legacy of Marma that is well-known in the state of Kerala. This philosophy is thought to be a part of Dhanurveda and is thought to have originated from Parasurama, the manifestation of Lord Viṣṇu.

Despite the fact that these systems are each described separately, there are significant commonalities among all three methodologies and practices.

Marma Therapy and Therapeutic Applications:

The therapeutic potential of Marma points is harnessed through Marma Chikitsa, a therapeutic regimen that includes techniques like Swedana, Abhayanga, Pizhichil, and Kizhi. These treatments have demonstrated efficacy in alleviating prevalent issues such as

headaches, musculoskeletal discomfort, and joint pain. Of particular interest is the Kizhi therapy, involving the application of heated herbal boluses to specific Marma points, followed by targeted manual manipulation. This therapeutic approach proves non-invasive and serves to stimulate blood circulation, enhance neuro-muscular functioning, and tonify surrounding musculature.

Variability of Marma Points:

While the Sushruta Samhita outlines 107 Marma points, distinct traditions offer varying enumerations. Tamil traditions recognize 108 points, while the Kalari tradition of Kerala employs a more expansive system of 365 Marma points. This diversity underscores the intricate understanding of Marma points within Ayurvedic and traditional practices.

Marma Massage Technique:

Marma points establish a vital connection between the physical body and its subtle energy pathways, through Nadis. This therapy focuses on stimulating specific organs and systems, releasing blocked energy, and improving flexibility. During a Marma therapy session, a specific massage technique is adopted with a form of passive yoga therapy, and mild heat on specific areas to alleviate tension, optimize energy flow, and enhance blood circulation. As a specialized form of Ayurvedic massage, its objective is to invigorate the body by revitalizing Marma points, including sub-marmas, thereby revitalizing organs and tissues while inducing relaxation and relieving tension. Each session leaves individuals feeling energized and vibrant. Therefore, the Marma massage technique holds significant potential for managing acute or chronic musculoskeletal conditions involving circulatory or neurological complications.

Correlation on Marma Massage Techniques: ⁶

In Ayurveda, Marma massage techniques can be correlated with various types of abhyanga techniques as follows:

1. Anulepanam: involves a massaging technique targeting groups of muscles, such as flexors and extensors. It is typically performed from the origin to the insertions of the muscles.
2. Avapidanam: a specific massaging technique applied to a particular muscle, such as the deltoid muscle in cases of deltoid wasting.

3. **Pidanam:** refers to a firm and intense massage technique performed using the base of the hand. It involves applying high pressure and is commonly used for bony areas.
4. **Udveṣṭanam:** is a kneading technique that applies circular force to the muscles, lifting and kneading them. This technique promotes therapeutic benefits for releasing stiff points.
5. **Paripidanam:** Involves a massage technique that deliberately creates pain in the targeted area. It is suitable for individuals who can tolerate high pressure and aims to improve strength and flexibility.
6. **Lataveṣṭanam:** This is a semi-regional massage method that follows a specific sequence starting from the upper body, progressing to the middle, employing circular hand movements, and finally returning to the upper part. This rhythmic massage holds potential as a pre-event sports medicine massage.
7. **Sandhicālanam:** Specializes in joint massage and is commonly administered subsequent to *Latāveṣṭanam*. Its primary objective is to improve joint flexibility and mobility.

This correlation provides a valuable framework to comprehend and utilize the therapeutic benefits of Marma massage.

Mechanisms of Action:

Marma therapy's mechanisms of action revolve around augmenting blood flow to afflicted neuro-muscular junctions, thereby promoting enhanced cellular oxygenation and nutrient delivery. Furthermore, these interventions aim to fortify the adjacent muscular structures, thus contributing to overall structural integrity and functional balance.

Conclusion:

This research provides a comprehensive overview of Marma points, their historical significance, therapeutic applications, and underlying mechanisms. The insights gleaned from Ayurvedic classics and traditional practices underscore the pivotal role Marma points play in holistic well-being. Marma therapy's non-invasive nature and capacity to address a diverse array of health conditions mark it as a valuable adjunct to modern medical practices.

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