

The Use of Vyāyāma or Physical Exercise, Prescribed in Ayurveda

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Abstract: Ayurveda also gives an importance to the physical exercise for the maintenance of good health. According to Ayurveda the consequences resulting from physical exercise are not only lightness of the body capacity for work, collectedness, power of enduring hardship; but also it removes of all imperfections and augmentation of the digestive fire. Therefore, vyāyāma has both the values: preventive and curative.

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Introduction

Vyāyāma or Physical Exercise is essential for a person to maintain his normal health. It also helps to carry out daily tasks with energy and attentiveness, without undue tiredness, and with ample vigor. Vyāyāma (Vi + Ā + Yam + Ghañ)⁸ is the term, especially used in Ayurveda for the physical activities, which can be identified with the 'physical exercise' in the present time. Ayurveda, the medical system of India, has also prescribed vyāyāma in connection with both measures: preventive and curative. The use of vyāyāma is, therefore, has been discussed in this paper from the point of view of Ayurveda only.

Sources for the discussion made here, are mainly the *Vṛddhatrayī*, namely the *Carakasamhitā* (CS)², the *Suśrutasamhitā* (SS)³ and the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* (AH)⁹ and from among the Sri Lankan medical texts, the *Sārārthasaṅgrahaya* (Sārā)⁷, written in Sanskrit in the 3rd Century A.C.; the *Bhesajjamañjūsa* (BM)⁶ written in Pali, the *Yogāṃavaya* (Yogā)⁵ and the *Prayogarātnāvaliya* (Prayo)⁴, written in Sinhala in the 13th century A.C.. Therefore, these four are the oldest treatises on medicine so far found in Sri Lanka. The phrase 'Sri Lankan Medical Texts' is used here to distinguish them from the Indian Ayurvedic texts only. Otherwise, Sri Lankan medical system is nothing but Ayurveda though it has some distinctive features.

The history of vyāyāma can be traced from a remote past, even from the primitive societies. We have, at least, more than three thousand years old written evidence for the use of vyāyāma and as the *Carakasamhitā* and the *Suśrutasamhitā* took their present form exactly before the 2nd century A.C., we have nearly two thousand years history of medical perspective of vyāyāma. Nevertheless, there is no scope to discuss the long history of vyāyāma in this paper.

The definition of vyāyāma has been given in the *Carakasamhitā*, thus:

“sarīra ceṣṭā yā ceṣṭā
sthairyāthā balavardhinī,
dehavvyāyāmasaṅkhyātā
mātrayā tām samācaret.” (CS.1.7.31)

(That exertion of body which is productive of good consequences to the body itself, which conduces to concentration of mind and increases strength is called physical exercise. One should have recourse to it in due measure). This verse is the aphorism of vyāyāma given in the *Carakasamhitā*, and according to this definition, vyāyāma promotes the perfect health which includes both the body and mind.

Importance of vyāyāma

In the aphorism “mithyāhāravihārābhyām”,² āhāra comes first and vyāyāma comes under Vihāra to emphasize the importance of physical