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Oil pulling – Unraveling the path to mystic cure

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Abstract

The oil pulling or oil swishing is an age old practice discussed in ancient medical literature. This paper outlines the usefulness of this traditional Indian folk remedy to prevent tooth decay, oral malodor, bleeding gums, dryness of throat, cracked lips and for strengthening teeth, gums and jaws. Scientific action of oil pulling in improving oral health is discussed here. The simplicity and effectiveness of this modality makes it exciting. The need for further scientific research and evaluation of this ancient health practice is stressed in this article.

Keywords: Dentistry, Ayurveda, Natural oils.

Introduction:

There may have been great therapeutic advances in the health care sector but it is important not to lose sight of basic protocols of patient care. No matter how sophisticated dental techniques and procedures may have become, preventive dentistry remains the foundation of oral health care. Dental health care professionals need to put home oral hygiene at the core of their advice on preventive practices. There are umpteen numbers of indigenous natural medicinal products which deserve recognition for their contribution to improving oral health.

In recent years Complementary and alternative medicine is gaining popularity over conventional allopathic medicine due to reasons like- Products and practices used are natural and safe. There is provision of self-treatment, it is cost effective, increase in prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes,

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hypertension, coronary artery diseases etc, and finally lack of success of current modality of treatment.⁸

Ayurveda is one of the popular and well accepted modality of Complementary and alternative medicine. It is defined as the system of traditional medicine native to Indian subcontinent and practiced in other parts of the world as a form of alternative medicine.¹

Oil Pulling:

Oil pulling or oil swishing is a ayurvedic practice that involves swishing of oil in the mouth for oral and systemic health benefits. The concept of oil pulling is not new. It has been discussed in the ayurvedic text “Charaka Samhita”(around 3000 BC) where it is referred to as “kavala graham” or “kavala gandoosha”.^{1,2} It was Dr.F. Karach who refamiliarized the concept of oil pulling in 1990s in Russia.^{3,4}

Oils Used:

Most commonly sesame seed oil which is known for several medicinal properties and desirable health benefits is used. Other refined edible oils such as sunflower oil can also be used.¹⁰

Procedure:

A table spoon (10ml) of sesame seed oil is taken in the mouth, it is sipped, sucked and swished in the mouth between the teeth for 10 to 15 minutes until the oil loses its viscosity and becomes milky white in colour. Then it is spit out and mouth is rinsed thoroughly with water for several times. There are several instructions to be followed during the practice of oil pulling. It is preferably practiced during early morning hours, on empty stomach, after brushing the teeth and cleaning the tongue. It is practiced in sitting position with chin upright. It can be done for a maximum of three times in a day in case of acute diseases. There is no contraindication for the practice of oil pulling except for the children below the age of 5 years due to the dangers of

aspiration and swallowing. It can be practiced during pregnancy and menstruation also.³

Mechanism Of Action:

The exact mechanism of the action of oil pulling therapy is not clear. It was claimed that swishing of oil in the mouth activates enzymes and draws the toxins out of the blood. The bottom line is that the oil pulling actually cannot pull the toxins out of the blood because oral mucous membrane does not act as a semipermeable membrane to allow the toxins to pass through. Sesame seed oil has a high concentration of polyunsaturated fatty acids and is a good source of vitamin. The antioxidants present in it are namely sesamin, sesamol and sesaminol. These lignans have certain actions on the living tissues like- Detoxification of toxins, antioxidant effect, potentiates the action of vitamin E, prevents lipid peroxidation and antibiotic effect in that it helps in the destruction of microorganisms. Sesamin has found to inhibit the absorption of cholesterol as well as its production in the liver, reduces lipogenesis and exhibits an antihypertensive action.^{7,8}

Uses:

Oil pulling is claimed to prevent and heal a wide spectrum of oral and systemic diseases like diabetes, migraine, hypertension, ischemic heart disease, liver, respiratory and renal disorders etc.⁵

Role In Oral Health:

A few studies have been carried out in the literature regarding the role of oil pulling therapy in the maintenance of oral health. Amith et al (2007) have shown that oil pulling therapy with sunflower oil significantly reduced plaque scores after 45 days.¹² Another study carried out by Sharath et al (2009) showed that oil pulling therapy was very effective against plaque induced gingivitis both in the clinical and microbiological assessment.¹¹ The mechanism by which the oil pulling therapy causes plaque

reduction is not known. The viscosity of the oil probably inhibits bacterial adhesion and plaque co-aggregation. Other possible mechanism might be saponification or the 'soap-formation' process that occurs as a result of alkali hydrolysis of fat.⁸ Sesame oil is a vegetable fat and when it is acted upon by the salivary alkali like bicarbonates, the soap forming process is initiated. Soaps are good cleansing agents because they are effective emulsifying agents. Emulsification is the process by which insoluble fat like sesame oil is broken down into minute droplets and dispersed in water. Emulsification greatly enhances the surface area of the oil there by increasing its cleansing action. Sesame oil is relatively high in unsaponifiable substances. The unsaponifiable fraction, a class of substances not found in other fats (sesamin and sesamol) can probably protect the oral cavity from infection and inflammation by its antioxidant property.¹⁰

Another study conducted by Asokan et al (2008) showed a definitive reduction in the Streptococcus mutans count in plaque and saliva after oil pulling therapy.⁹ So, oil pulling therapy has shown to reduce the incidence of dental caries. It is also known to prevent halitosis, xerostomia and cheilitis.^{3,5}

Advantages of Oil Pulling:

What makes this method so exciting and innovative is that it is extremely simple to practice, no buying of complex products, mixing products like an alchemist or taking zillions of supplements. Other advantages of oil pulling over commercially available chemical preparations include- it does not cause staining of teeth, it does not leave behind a lingering taste and also does not result in allergic reactions.

Conclusion:

In spite of all the advances in the field of health science, traditional healing methods still have a major role to play. These methods are born out

of native wisdom of very high intellectualism. They are untouched and unspoiled. If they are analysed on scientific backgrounds they stand the test of time. Hence oil pulling is one such method which improves the oral health and benefits various systems as well. Sufficient scientific research has not been carried out to evaluate the effect of oil pulling therapy on oral health and these needs to be explored.

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