



Shirobasti: A Comprehensive Review of an Ayurvedic Therapeutic Procedure

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Shirobasti is a specialized Ayurvedic therapy involving the application of warm, medicated oil to the scalp using a leather cap. This procedure is designed to address various head and neurological disorders by balancing the Vata and Pitta doshas. Indications for Shirobasti include chronic headaches, migraines, insomnia, stress, anxiety, depression, and certain neurological conditions. The therapy not only alleviates these conditions but also promotes overall mental well-being and cognitive function. The application of warm oil stimulates blood circulation in the scalp, nourishes hair follicles, and enhances the absorption of therapeutic compounds. This process aids in the rejuvenation of the nervous system and supports the body's natural healing mechanisms. By integrating Shirobasti into Ayurvedic treatment plans, individuals can experience a holistic approach to healing that emphasizes the interconnectedness of physical and mental health.

Keywords: Shirobasti, Panchkarma, Shira, Ayurveda, Murdhni Taila, Shirotata Roga, Sneha Retention, Shiras (Head), Basti (Retention)

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Introduction

Acharya Charak has defined *Snehana* as the treatment, which produces viscosity, solubility, and *kleda* in the body.[1]

Snehana is one among the *Shadvidhopakramas*. There are two routes to administer the *Sneha* viz. external and internal. External by *Abhyanga*, *Murdh Taila* etc., and internal by *Pana*, *Basti*, *Nasya* etc. The word “*Moordha*” is derived from “*Moohatye Smminnahate Iti Moordha*” which denotes “*Shira*”.

The head is called *Uttamanga* by Acharya Charaka. [2] He has described head as the root of the body and explained the diseases related to *Shira*. *Basti* is the procedure that can perform various functions. *Shirobasti* is a soothing treatment where oil is gently kept on the head for a specific duration.

This therapy serves as an aid in the management of excessive *Vata dosha* while promoting equilibrium in *Pitta* and *Rakta* as a whole.

According to Acharya Sushruta: Serious head dise. can be easily cured by using *Shirobasti*, which also has beneficial effects similar to *Murdha-Tailika*.

According to Acharya Sharangdhara[3]: Through this process, stubborn diseases *Vata*, *Shirakampa*, etc., can be permanently cured.

According to Chikitsasara Samgraha[4]: This treatment not only controls *Vatika Shiroroga* but also addresses jaw, neck, eye and ear disorders, as well as facial paralysis and head tremors.

According to Yoga Ratnakara[5]: *Shirobasti* treatment is effective in curing *Vataja* diseases of the head, jaw, neck, eyes and ears, as well as Bell's palsy and tremulous head.

Indications of Shirobasti in Ayurvedic Texts

Charaka Samhita	Bhel Samhita	Sushruta Samhita	Ashtanga Samgraha
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ardhavabhedaka Suryavarta Kaphaja Shiroroga Ardita Anantavata 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suryavarta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pakshaghata Vatabhishyanda Darunaka Dantaharsha Vatika Karnasshoola 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darunaka Prasupti Nidranasha Nasashosha Asyashosha Timira

Materials and Methods

Procedure of Shirobasti

Appropriate season for Shirobasti Karma

According to *Sharangadhara Samhita*, *Shirobasti* can be done in all the six seasons of the year. “*Sarvakaleshu Yujiyate*”[6]

Kala of Shirobasti Karma:

According to *Sushruta Samhita*, *Shirobasti* should be done in the afternoon.

According to *Vagbhata*, *Shirobasti* should be done at “*Dinaante*”.[7]

Sharangadhara Samhita suggests that *Shirobasti* is to be done in the morning, while the patient has not taken his food.[8]

Materials Required

A) *Charampatta* (leather) - 1

B) *Masha* (black gram flour) - 250 gm

C) *Taila* - 1.5 to 2 litres

D) Utensils such as spoon, container

E) Cotton ribbon (2 strips)

F) *Taila* for *Abhyanga*

G) Towel

H) Armed Chair (with the height equal to the patient's knee with a soft seating base)

I) Therapist

According to Sushruta Samhita

Purvakarma: (Pre-therapeutic measures)

Snehana, *Swedana*, *Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Nasya*

Pradhana Karma: (Main procedure)

After administering purgatives and emetics as needed, the patient should follow a suitable diet based on their illness. In the evening, they should sit upright with an animal bladder (often a goat bladder) filled with the appropriate *Sneha* placed on their head and securely fastened with a bandage.

The bladder filled with Sneha should be kept on the head for a duration that is ten times longer than what is needed for the *Tarpana* measure, based on the type of illness.[9]

Quantity of Sneha

The level of *Sneha* poured in *Shirobasti Yantra* should be two fingers above the top of the head according to *Dalhana*.

Duration of Shirobasti according to different Acharyas

Acharya	Dosha		
	Vataja Vikara	Pittaja Vikara	Kaphaja Vikara
Sushruta	10,000 Matra	8000 Matra	6000 Matra
Ashtanga Sangraha[10]	10,000 Matra	6000 Matra	5000 Matra
Chakradatta[11]	1000 Matrakala	800 Matrakala	500 Matrakala
Vangasena[12]	1000 sec	800 sec	500 sec

Paschata Karma: (Post-therapeutic measure)

The *Sneha* poured on head is head is taken out from *Shirobasti Yantra* after the completion of its desirable duration. Thereafter, *Shirobasti Yantra* is removed. Then the patient's head, shoulder, neck, forehead, face etc. are gently massaged. After that patient is allowed to take bath with hot water and then he is allowed to take a meal.

Shirobasti is a *Snehana* procedure. So, the patient should strictly follow the restrictions stated in *Snehapana Vidhi* starting with *Ushnodakopacharisayate*.[13]

Mode of Action

Anatomy of Scalp[14]

The scalp is made up of five layers (from superficial to deep)

1. Skin: The skin of scalp is thick and hairy except over the forehead. Being hairy, it contains maximum number of hair follicles and associated sebaceous glands. It also contains numerous sweat glands.

2. Superficial fascia: The superficial fascia of the scalp is made up of dense fibrous connective tissue that firmly binds the skin to the underlying occipitofrontalis and its aponeurosis. The blood vessels and nerves of the scalp lie in this layer.

3. Deep fascia: This layer is formed by occipitofrontalis muscle and its aponeurosis.

4. Loose areolar tissue: This layer is made up of loose areolar tissue.

This layer is traversed by Emissary veins connecting veins in the second layer of scalp with intracranial dural venous sinuses.

5. Pericranium: The fifth layer of scalp is formed by the periosteum of bones of vault of skull called pericranium.

Arterial supply of Scalp and Superficial Temporal Region[15]

In front of the auricle, the scalp is supplied from before backwards by the

- A) Supratrochlear - Branches of the Ophthalmic artery which is a branch of internal carotid artery.
- B) Supraorbital - Branches of the Ophthalmic artery which is a branch of internal carotid artery.
- C) Superficial temporal arteries - Branch of the external carotid artery

Behind the auricle, the scalp is supplied from before backwards by the

- D) Posterior auricular - Branches of the external carotid artery
- E) Occipital arteries - Branches of the external carotid artery

Thus, the scalp has a rich blood supply derived from both the internal and external carotid arteries, the two systems anastomosing over the temple.

Anatomy of Skin[16]

The skin is the largest organ in the body, covering its entire external surface. The skin has 3 layers the epidermis, dermis, and hypodermis.

Epidermis

The epidermis, the skin's outermost layer, is composed of several strata and various cell types crucial for its function.

Layers of epidermis: From deepest to most superficial, epidermal layers are stratum basale, stratum spinosum, stratum granulosum, stratum lucidum, and stratum corneum.

Stratum corneum has 20 to 30 cell layers and occupies uppermost epidermal layer. Stratum corneum is composed of keratin & dead keratinocytes (anucleate squamous cells) that form horny scales.

Dermis

The dermis is connected to the epidermis by the basement membrane.

This layer consists of dense connective tissue composed of collagen fiber bundles. The dermis houses the sweat glands, hair, hair follicles, muscles, sensory neurons, and blood vessels.

Hypodermis

The hypodermis, also known as the subcutaneous fascia, is located beneath the dermis. This layer is the deepest skin layer and contains adipose lobules, sensory neurons, blood vessels, and scanty skin appendages, such as hair follicles. The SC fat tissue located below the dermis is composed of the cells that contain large quantities of fat, making the cytoplasm lipoidal in character.

Pathways for Skin Penetration[17]

The process of percutaneous absorption can occur via 2 different routes:

1. Transepidermal Pathway (consists of intercellular and intracellular) intracellular pathways).
2. Transappendageal Pathway

The trans epidermal pathway involves the absorption of substances through the stratum corneum, the outermost layer of the epidermis.

This layer consists of dead, keratinized cells that provide a barrier but also allow for the absorption of certain substances, including oils. The lipophilic nature of the stratum corneum enables oils to penetrate this barrier, facilitating their absorption into the skin.

The trans appendageal Pathway involves penetration through the stratum corneum via a "shunt" pathway provided by the hair follicles or sweat glands. In this pathway, hair follicles play a major contributor due to high follicular distribution and extending deep tissues up to 2000 micrometers. The trans appendageal pathway involves the penetration of oils through hair follicles and sebaceous glands. This pathway provides a direct route from the dermis to the skin surface, bypassing the stratum corneum. During treatments like *Shirobasti*, oils rich in essential fatty acids, vitamins, and antioxidants are absorbed through this pathway, delivering nutrients directly to the hair follicles and scalp tissues. This method is particularly effective for delivering lipophilic (fat-soluble) compounds to the deeper layers of the skin, providing deep hydration and nourishment. Diagrammatically illustrated in figure no.1.

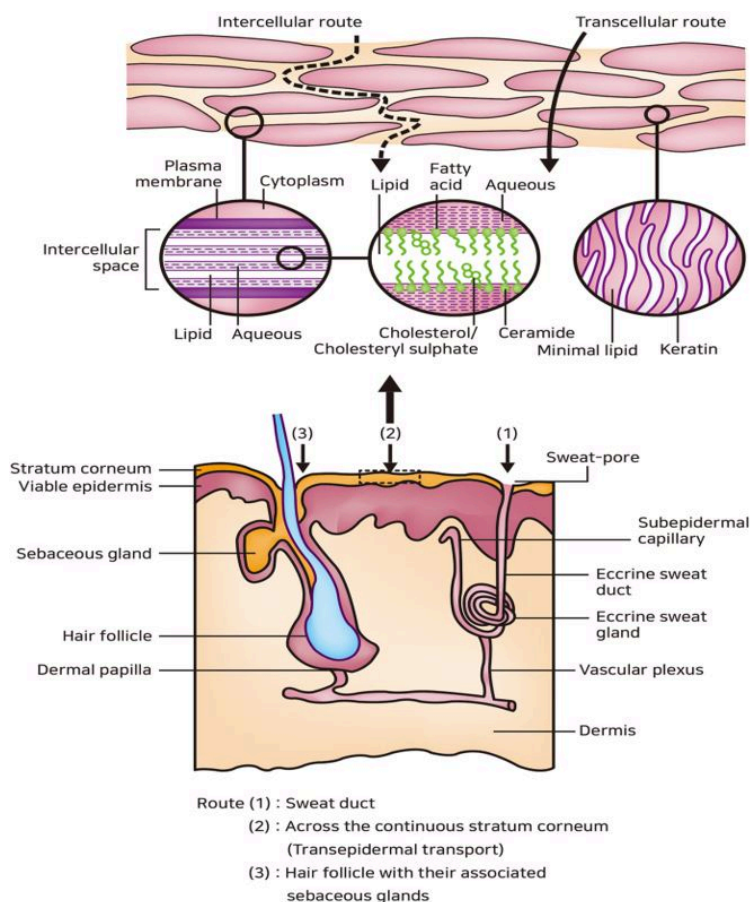


Figure 1: Pathway of oil absorption.

Discussion

Shirobasti is a unique and ancient *Ayurvedic* treatment that involves the application of medicated oils on the head to address various health conditions, particularly those related to the head and mental health. This procedure is part of the broader *Panchakarma* therapy, which aims to cleanse and rejuvenate the body. The primary objective of *Shirobasti* is to balance the *Vata Dosha*, which is often associated with neurological and mental health disorders. By keeping the oils on the head for an extended period, *Shirobasti* helps in nourishing the scalp and brain, promoting relaxation, and alleviating stress and anxiety.

The calming effect of *Shirobasti* on the nervous system is another important aspect to consider. The continuous flow of warm oil over the head can stimulate the release of endorphins, which are natural painkillers and mood enhancers. This can lead to a sense of relaxation and well-being, making *Shirobasti* a holistic treatment for both physical and mental health. The warmth of the oil plays a crucial role in opening up the pores and hair follicles, further aiding the absorption process. As the blood vessels dilate, the skin becomes more receptive to the oils, facilitating the delivery of essential fatty acids, vitamins, and antioxidants directly to the hair follicles and scalp.

According to *Ayurvedic* texts, *Shirobasti* is indicated for a variety of conditions, including headaches, migraines, insomnia, and even more severe conditions like Bell's palsy and facial paralysis. Anatomically, the scalp consists of multiple layers and the rich vascular supply and the presence of hair follicles and sebaceous glands make the scalp an ideal site for treatments like *Shirobasti*. The oils used in *Shirobasti* penetrate the skin through both trans epidermal and trans appendageal pathways, delivering essential nutrients and therapeutic compounds to the deeper layers of the scalp and brain.

Conclusion

Shirobasti stands as a distinctive and holistic therapeutic modality within the *Ayurvedic* tradition, offering targeted intervention for a spectrum of head-related disorders - ranging from neurological imbalances and psychosomatic conditions to dermatological and stress-induced ailments.

Its unique approach of medicated oil retention over the scalp not only facilitates localized action but also promotes systemic equilibrium through enhanced absorption, neurovascular modulation, and psychophysiological relaxation.

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