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## THE THERAPEUTIC ESSENCE OF *SHIROBASTI KARMA*: AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** *Shirobasti Karma* is an ancient *Ayurvedic* therapy that involves retaining medicated oils on the head to balance the *Doshas*, especially *Vata* and *Pitta*. Recognizing the head as the body's central control unit, this treatment supports neurological, psychological, and dermatological health.

**Materials and Methods:** The procedure involves a pre-operative phase of assessment and preparation, including shaving the head and collecting the necessary materials, medicated oils, black gram flour, and a *Shirobasti* cap. The patient is seated in an armchair, and the procedure begins with applying a black gram paste, followed by sealing the cap with medicated oil. Post-treatment, the oil is removed, and a soothing massage is given.

**Results and Discussion:** The therapeutic effects of *Shirobasti* are attributed to the lipid-soluble oils that penetrate the scalp's layers, facilitating both local and systemic effects. The absorption of medicinal oils through the scalp's rich blood supply and sweat glands ensures therapeutic benefits throughout the body. The heat applied during the procedure promotes vasodilation, improving blood circulation and absorption.

**Conclusion:** *Shirobasti* effectively addresses conditions such as insomnia, facial palsy, head stiffness, myopia, and various head-related disorders. It enhanced mental clarity, reduction in pain, and improvement in psychological and neurological health.

**Keywords:** *Shirobasti*, *Uttamang*, Scalp, *Panchkarma*, Neurological health

## INTRODUCTION

In the ancient system of Ayurveda, the human body is conceptualized as being made up of six primary components, a concept referred to as "Shadang Sharir." This classification of the body underscores the intricate balance between various elements and their roles in maintaining health and well-being. Among these components, the head is given paramount importance. According to the great, *Acharya Charaka*, the head is called "Uttamang"<sup>[1]</sup>, where "Uttama" means the "best" or the "most superior," highlighting the significance of the head in both physical and mental functions.

One of the time-honored therapeutic procedures in Ayurveda designed to address various health concerns, particularly those associated with the head, is *Shirobasti Karma*. This treatment is classified under the broader category of *Murdhni Taila* <sup>[2]</sup>, which refers to techniques involving the application of medicated oils to the head. *Shirobasti*, derived from two Sanskrit words - *Shira* (meaning "head") and *Basti* (meaning "retention") - essentially refers to the practice of retaining medicated oils on the head for a prescribed duration of time.

In *Ayurveda*, the head is regarded as the seat of consciousness, the central point where mental, physical, and emotional energies converge. Given this centrality, many Ayurvedic therapies are focused

Main features of *Poorva Karma*: Descriptive Table-1

Feature	Description
<b>Optimal Season for <i>Shirobasti</i> Treatment</b>	According to <i>Sharangadhara Samhita</i> , it can be done in all six seasons. "Sarvakaleshu Yujyate"
<b>Seasonal Timing (<i>Kala</i>) for <i>Shirobasti</i> Therapy</b>	According to <i>Sushruta Samhita</i> – Afternoon <i>Vagbhatta- Dinante</i>
<b>Recommended Conditions for Performing</b>	Patient is advised to sit in a place which is

on balancing the energies within the head. *Shirobasti*, in particular, aims to restore harmony by balancing the body's internal energies, known as the *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) of these three *Doshas*, *Shirobasti* is especially effective in addressing imbalances in *Vata* and *Pitta*.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

**Aim:** To investigate the efficacy and underlying mechanisms of *Shirobasti Karma* as a therapeutic intervention for brain, mental health, and skin disorders using medicated oil retention on the scalp.

### Objective:

To analyze indications, contraindications, methodology, and underlying mechanisms, while providing evidence-based guidance on dosage, duration, and patient-specific modifications for optimal outcomes.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### **Poorva Karma (Pre-Operative Procedure)**

The procedure begins with a comprehensive assessment of the patient's *Prakriti* (body constitution) and *Dosha* imbalances.

<b>Shirobasti Karma</b>	free from direct wind.
<b>Preparation of the patient</b>	It is recommended to have the patient's head shaved cleanly to promote optimal absorption of the medicinal treatments. Prior to <i>Shirobastikarma:Shiroabhyanaga</i> , <i>Swedana</i> and <i>Shodhana</i> should be carried out.
<b>Sambhar Samgraha (Collection of Instruments)</b>	Rexene/Leather <i>Shirobasti</i> Cap (Both ends opened): 1 piece Black Gram Flour: 250 grams Medicated Oil: 1.5 liters Cotton Cloth: 5 cm x 60 cm (2 pieces) Gas Stove: 1 unit Hot Water Bath: 1 unit Vessels: 3 units <i>RasnadiChurna</i> : 5 grams Arm Chair: 1 unit Attendant: 1 Medicated Oils: Oils commonly used include- <i>Brahmi Taila</i> , <i>Kshirabala Taila</i> , <i>Mahamasha Taila</i> , <i>Chandanadi Taila</i> etc. Additional oils may be used based on the specific condition of the patient, as recommended by the physician.
<b>Dietary Regimen:</b>	A light diet, consisting of liquids and semi-solid foods, is recommended during the therapy.

### Indications and Contraindications

- According to the *Astanga Hridayakara* [3], this treatment is indicated for conditions such as *Prasupti* (numbness), *Ardita* (facial palsy), *Jagara* (insomnia), *Nasa Shosha* (dryness of the nose), *Ashya Shosha* (dryness of the mouth), *Timira* (myopia), and various *Shiropogas* (head-related disorders). The commentator *Aadamalla*, in the *Deepika* of the *Sharangadhara Samhita*, mentions that it is particularly effective in treating *Vata* disorders, such as *Shirokampa* (head stiffness), and can also be used for conditions involving *Vata* in combination with *Pitta* and *Kapha*.
- *Chakradatta* also suggests that this treatment helps in preventing the onset of

*Shiropogas*, alleviates pain in the *Hanu* (jaw), *Manya* (neck), and *Akshi* (eyes), and can be useful in conditions like *Ardita* (facial palsy) and *Murdhakampana* (head tremors).

- However, it is contraindicated in conditions predominantly caused by *Kapha*, such as *Kapha Pradhana Vyadhi*, where there is *Avashishta* (residual) *Kapha* following *Nasya*, *Vatanubandha*, or *Kevala Kaphaja Vyadhi* (purely *Kapha*-based disorders).

### **Pradhana Karma (Operative Procedure):**

The patient is seated comfortably in an armchair. A strip of cloth, smeared with a paste of black gram powder, is wrapped around the head about 2 cm above the

eyebrows. It should be snug enough to prevent any leakage of oil but should not cause discomfort. A *Shirobasti* cap (12 *Angula* in height [4]) is then placed over the cloth, and the edges are sealed with a paste of black gram. To ensure the

junctions are leak-proof, another layer of cloth, also smeared with the paste, is applied over the cap. (As shown in Figure-1)



Figure No. 1

Medicated oil, heated slightly above body temperature, is then poured slowly inside the cap onto the head, ensuring the process is comfortable for the patient. The oil should reach a height of 1 *Angulas* [5] above the scalp. The duration of the procedure depends on the predominance of the *Dosha* or the

appearance of specific *Samyak Snigdha Lakshana* [6], such as salivation (*Vaktrastrava*), nasal discharge (*Nasikotklesh*), or ear discharge (*Karna Strava*).

The time allotted for the procedure based on *Dosha* predominance is as follows [7]:

Table -2

S.No.	Dosha	Time (Matra)	Time (Minutes)
1.	Vataja Vyadhi	10,000	53 minutes
2.	Pittaja Vyadhi	8000	43 minutes
3.	Kaphaja Vyadhi	6000	31 minutes

4.	Swastha(Healthy)	1000	5 to 6 minutes
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The temperature of the oil should be maintained by adding warm oil at regular intervals.

#### **Paschat Karma (Post-operative Procedure):**

At the end of the procedure, the oil is removed by soaking a cotton pad and squeezing it into a container to collect the oil. Once this is done, the cap is removed, and the oil is gently wiped off with a clean, dry towel. A soothing massage is then performed on the shoulders, neck, forehead, and back. Following this, *Rasnadi Churna* is applied to the scalp. The patient should rest for an hour before taking a bath with lukewarm water.

#### **Duration and Time:**

Typically, the course of therapy lasts for 7 days and is usually administered in the afternoon or evening [8]. In *Ayurveda Deepika*, *Adamalla* commented as, the treatment duration may be extended till disease gets pacified. The procedure is typically continued for about 45 minutes.

#### **How Shirobasti Therapeutic Oils Are Absorbed in the Body**

##### **Key Route of Entry: The Scalp**

The scalp's rich vascular network, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands enhance the absorption of medicated *Dravya*. Its semi-permeable skin structure allows lipid-soluble substances, such as *Sneha*, to permeate effectively.

##### **Dermal Uptake**

The scalp is composed of five layers: the skin, connective tissue, aponeurosis, loose areolar tissue, and pericranium[9]. Among these, the dense subcutaneous connective tissue contains the highest blood supply in the body. The medicinal oils used in *Shirobasti* are lipid-based, allowing the lipid-soluble components to penetrate the cell membrane through phospholipids, facilitating both local and systemic therapeutic effects.

The arterial supply to the scalp comes from both the internal and external

carotid arteries. When medicine is absorbed through the scalp, it reaches the bloodstream via various veins that drain the scalp, particularly through the emissary veins, which connect to the dural venous sinuses. This ensures that the active ingredients in the oil ultimately enter the circulation and are transported to their sites of action throughout the body.

The heat applied during the procedure causes vasodilation, which improves blood flow and circulation, enhancing the absorption and distribution of the medicinal oil. Another key route of absorption is through the shunting mechanism, where molecules are absorbed through the sweat glands, sebaceous glands, and hair follicles [10].

#### **Determinants of Transdermal Drug Permeation:**

Transdermal absorption efficacy is governed by multiple pharmacokinetic variables: administration methodology, anatomical site selection, contact duration, thermal conditions, vehicle composition, and molecular parameters of the active pharmaceutical ingredient of particular clinical relevance is cutaneous application site - regions exhibiting reduced stratum corneum thickness (notably facial, scalp, cervical, and volar wrist dermatomes) demonstrate enhanced passive diffusion kinetics. These anatomical zones facilitate superior drug bioavailability secondary to diminished epidermal barrier function and decreased keratinocyte density, rendering them pharmacologically optimal for transcutaneous delivery systems.

#### **Temperature and Pressure Dynamics:**

The medicated oil (*Dravya*) is pre-warmed to a physiologically optimal range (37–39°C), which:

- Reduces viscosity by weakening intermolecular bonds, enhancing fluidity.

- Increases kinetic energy of drug molecules, accelerating diffusion across the stratum corneum.
- Induces vasodilation, improving scalp perfusion and systemic delivery of active compounds.

The mild pressure exerted by the pooled oil in the *Shirobasti* cap may also contribute to absorption by promoting contact with the skin and stimulating local microcirculation.

### **Marma and Srotas Interaction in Shirobasti Therapy**

Warm *Dravya* (medicated oil) penetrates these *Marmas*, stimulating *Prana Vayu* and modulating neural pathways for localized and systemic effects. The absorbed therapeutics then enters *Rasavaha* (plasma) and *Raktavaha* (blood) *Srotas* (microchannels), facilitating deep tissue nourishment and neurotherapeutic action.

Key Aspects:

- *Marma* Activation: Targets neurovascular junctions
- *Srotas* Pathway: Ensures systemic drug distribution
- Neurotherapeutic Focus: Direct brain-nourishing effects

### **Fatty acid absorption rationale:**

SCFA (short chain fatty acid) and MCFA (medium chain fatty acid) exhibit superior cutaneous permeability due to their smaller molecular size, making them ideal for topical therapies. *Ayurvedic* scholars empirically recognized this principle, as evidenced by their selection of natural substances like *Ghee* (clarified butter), milk, and plant-based oils for *Shirobasti*.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The action of medicinal substances administered through the scalp extends beyond localized effects, potentially influencing systemic health as well. Since the head serves as the central control unit of the body, imbalances in this area

can lead to both physical and psychological disorders. The oils used in *Shirobasti* have pharmacological properties, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antidepressant, neuroprotective, and antimicrobial effects. As these oils are absorbed into the bloodstream, they exert therapeutic actions throughout the body.

From an *Ayurvedic* perspective, the absorption and efficacy of *Shirobasti* are facilitated by the *Guna* (properties) of the oils and other substances used in the treatment. The absorption primarily takes place through the *Twak* (skin), which is the seat of *Vata dosha* and *Bhrajaka pitta*. The *Kesha* (hair) and *Loma* (body hair) are intrinsically connected to the *Twak* (skin), allowing for efficient absorption. In *Ayurvedic* terms, the *Pachana* (metabolism) of the drugs occurs through *Bhrajaka pitta*, which activates the absorption process through the abundant hair follicles into the *Tiryak Dhamani* (horizontal channels of circulation).

*Shirobasti Karma* is an *Ayurvedic* treatment that supports holistic healing by balancing vitiated *Doshas*, nourishing the nervous system, and improving mental clarity. This safe and natural therapy effectively addresses neurological, psychological, and dermatological issues, promoting both physical and mental well-being.

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