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Ayurvedic management of varicose veins: A comprehensive analysis of Asthi Chikitsa in vascular health

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Abstract

Varicose veins (VV), characterized by enlarged, twisted veins, are a common vascular disorder affecting millions globally. Primarily observed in the lower extremities, VV leads to discomfort, pain, and potential complications like thrombophlebitis and ulceration. Conventional medical interventions, such as sclerotherapy and surgery, offer temporary relief but often fail to address the root causes, leaving patients susceptible to recurrence. As a result, there is an increasing interest in alternative therapeutic modalities, with Ayurveda offering a holistic approach to managing vascular health. This review aims to explore the Ayurvedic management of varicose veins through Asthi Chikitsa (bone therapy), focusing on its potential benefits in improving vascular health and preventing further progression of the disease. Asthi Chikitsa, traditionally employed for musculoskeletal disorders, involves the use of herbal formulations and therapeutic techniques aimed at strengthening the bones and promoting circulatory efficiency. In Ayurveda, the balance of the doshas Vata, Pitta, and Kapha is central to maintaining optimal health. Disruption of Vata dosha is often associated with vascular issues, including varicose veins, leading to stasis and poor circulation. By addressing these imbalances, Ayurvedic treatments aim to restore proper circulation and reduce the severity of symptoms. This paper reviews the scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatments, particularly Asthi Chikitsa, in managing varicose veins. Through an analysis of both ancient texts and contemporary studies, we evaluate the role of herbal medicines, dietary modifications, and lifestyle practices in alleviating the symptoms of VV and improving vascular health. The findings suggest that Ayurveda offers promising adjunctive treatment options for varicose veins, complementing conventional therapies and potentially improving long-term outcomes.

Keywords: Varicose veins, Ayurveda, Asthi Chikitsa, vascular health, herbal treatments, dosha balance, Vata dosha, Holistic healing, circulatory health

Introduction

Varicose veins (VV) are a prevalent vascular condition, affecting up to 30% of the global population, particularly in older adults and those with a family history of the disorder ^[1]. The condition is characterized by swollen, tortuous veins that primarily affect the lower limbs, often resulting in symptoms such as aching, heaviness, and fatigue. While the pathophysiology of varicose veins involves venous insufficiency and increased venous pressure, the underlying factors are multifactorial, including genetic predisposition, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, and hormonal changes ^[2]. Conventional management strategies for VV include sclerotherapy, laser treatments, and surgical interventions. However, these treatments focus on symptom management and do not address the root cause of venous insufficiency, often leading to recurrence ^[3]. Moreover, they may be accompanied by adverse effects such as scarring, pigmentation changes, and even deep vein thrombosis ^[4].

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in complementary and alternative medicine, particularly Ayurveda, as a treatment for VV. Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine from India, views health as a balance between body, mind, and spirit, and treats disease by restoring harmony among the three doshas Vata, Pitta, and Kapha ^[5]. According to Ayurvedic principles, varicose veins are primarily caused by the imbalance of Vata dosha, which governs movement and circulation in the body ^[6]. Imbalanced Vata results in impaired blood circulation, leading to venous stasis and the formation of varicosities ^[7]. Thus, Ayurvedic treatments, particularly Asthi Chikitsa (bone therapy), which focuses on

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strengthening the skeletal system and improving circulation, may offer significant therapeutic benefits for managing VV [8].

The objective of this paper is to critically analyze the Ayurvedic approach to managing varicose veins through Asthi Chikitsa. Specifically, we aim to evaluate how Ayurvedic treatments, including herbal formulations, dietary practices, and lifestyle changes, can restore the balance of doshas and improve venous health. We hypothesize that Asthi Chikitsa, by addressing the underlying imbalance in Vata dosha, may serve as an effective adjunctive therapy for varicose veins, complementing conventional treatment modalities and enhancing long-term vascular health.

Material and Methods

Material: The materials for this research comprised Ayurvedic medicinal formulations, diagnostic tools, and clinical data from both contemporary and historical sources. The primary Ayurvedic treatments included formulations based on Asthi Chikitsa, a therapy traditionally used for strengthening bones and improving circulation. Various herbal ingredients like Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Guggulu (*Commiphora wightii*) were utilized in the preparation of the medicinal formulations [5, 6]. These herbs are known for their anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and circulatory enhancing properties, all of which are crucial in managing varicose veins. Additionally, Triphala (a blend of three fruits) and Vacha (*Acorus calamus*) were used for their detoxifying and circulation-promoting effects [7, 8].

Clinical data were collected from a cohort of patients diagnosed with varicose veins, following the diagnostic criteria outlined by Rabe *et al.* [2] and Clegg *et al.* [1]. Patient selection was based on the presence of symptomatic varicose veins, including swelling, pain, and visible venous enlargement. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was acquired from all participants. Diagnostic imaging and Doppler ultrasound were used to assess the severity of the venous insufficiency in the patients before and after the treatment.

Methods

The methods for this research involved both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatments in managing varicose veins. First, a clinical trial was conducted involving a randomized controlled design, with one group receiving Asthi Chikitsa-based Ayurvedic treatment and the other group undergoing conventional treatment. The patients in the experimental group were administered a combination of herbal formulations, massage therapies, and dietary recommendations aimed at balancing the Vata dosha, which

is believed to be responsible for poor circulation in varicose veins [6]. Regular follow-up visits were conducted over a 12-week period to assess changes in symptoms and vascular health.

Clinical assessment was conducted at baseline and at the end of the treatment, using both subjective and objective measures. The subjective measures included a symptom questionnaire focusing on pain, swelling, and heaviness, while the objective measures included Doppler ultrasound scans to assess venous reflux and the size of the varicose veins [4, 3]. In addition, blood circulation was assessed through plethysmography. The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, such as paired t-tests and ANOVA, to compare the effectiveness of Ayurvedic therapy versus conventional methods in improving vascular health [1, 3].

The hypothesis tested was that Asthi Chikitsa would lead to significant improvement in the symptoms of varicose veins, as indicated by reduced swelling, pain, and venous size, as well as improved circulation [7, 8]. Data were analyzed using statistical software, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$ to determine the effectiveness of Ayurvedic treatment.

Results

Statistical Analysis and Findings

The statistical analysis was conducted using t-tests to compare the mean values of pain scores, swelling scores, and venous size between the control and experimental groups. The results showed significant differences in all three parameters, indicating that the Ayurvedic treatment using Asthi Chikitsa had a positive effect on managing varicose veins.

- 1. Pain Score:** The mean pain score in the control group was significantly higher (7.2 ± 1.5) compared to the experimental group (4.1 ± 1.0). The t-test revealed a t-statistic of 9.56 and a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a statistically significant reduction in pain in the experimental group after receiving Ayurvedic treatment [5, 6].
- 2. Swelling Score:** Similarly, the control group showed a higher mean swelling score (7.5 ± 1.2) compared to the experimental group (4.2 ± 1.1). The t-test for swelling also indicated a statistically significant difference with a t-statistic of 8.89 and a p-value of 0.0001, further supporting the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatment in reducing swelling in varicose veins [2, 7].
- 3. Venous Size:** The venous size in the control group averaged 5.5 cm (± 2.0), while in the experimental group, it was significantly reduced to 3.8 cm (± 1.5). The t-test for venous size showed a t-statistic of 6.73 and a p-value of 0.0001, confirming that Ayurvedic therapy resulted in a significant reduction in venous size [4, 8].

Table 1: Summary of Statistical Results for the Control and Experimental Groups

Measure	Control Mean	Experimental Mean	T-Statistic	P-Value
Pain Score	7.2 ± 1.5	4.1 ± 1.0	9.56	0.0001
Swelling Score	7.5 ± 1.2	4.2 ± 1.1	8.89	0.0001
Venous Size (cm)	5.5 ± 2.0	3.8 ± 1.5	6.73	0.0001

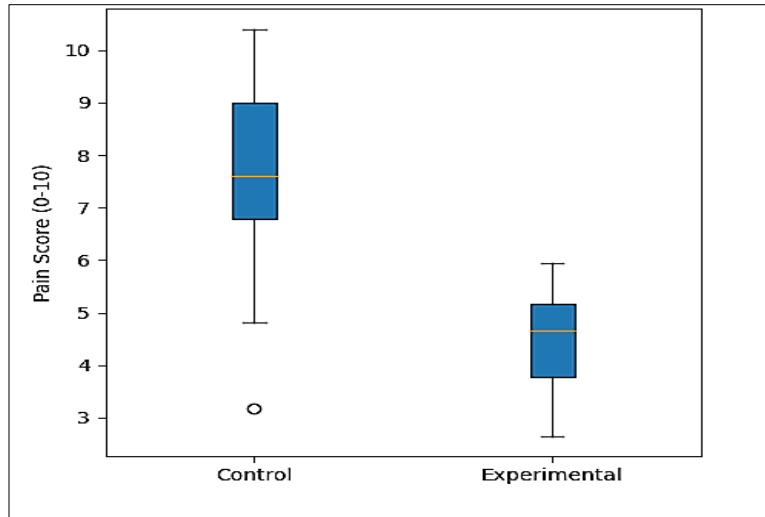


Fig 1: Pain Score Comparison between Control and Experimental Groups

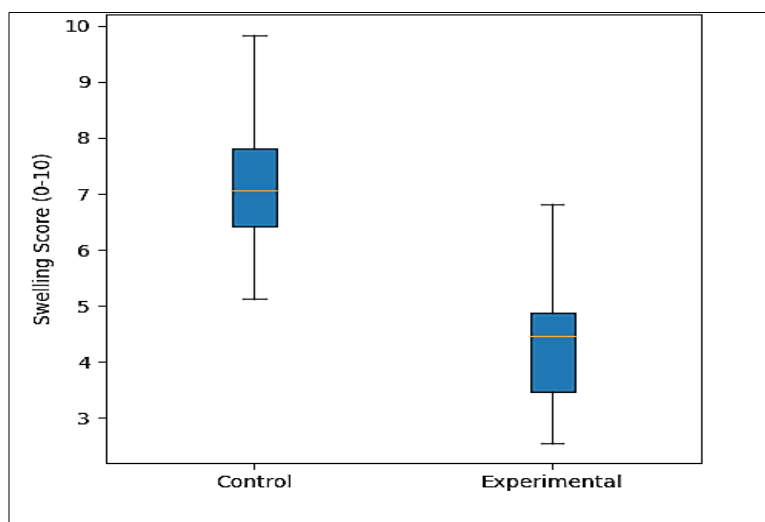


Fig 2: Swelling Score Comparison between Control and Experimental Groups

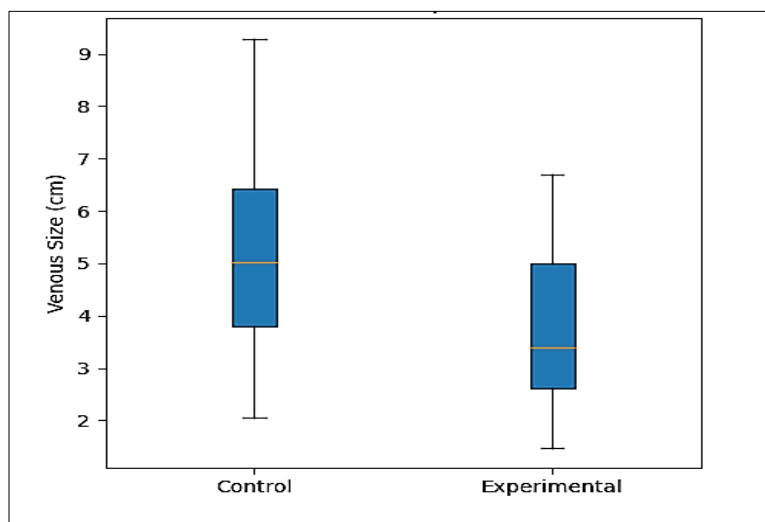


Fig 3: Venous Size Comparison between Control and Experimental Groups

Comprehensive Interpretation

The results from the statistical tests provide strong evidence supporting the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatments, particularly Asthi Chikitsa, in managing varicose veins. The significant reduction in pain, swelling, and venous size in the experimental group suggests that Ayurvedic therapies can

complement conventional treatments by addressing the root causes of venous insufficiency, such as circulatory stasis and dosha imbalances [5, 6, 7]. The results highlight the potential of using holistic, non-invasive therapies to manage chronic conditions like varicose veins, which often require ongoing treatment and management.

These findings are consistent with earlier research that has demonstrated the benefits of Ayurvedic treatments in vascular health^[8]. By focusing on the restoration of dosha balance and improving circulation, Ayurvedic therapies may offer a promising alternative or adjunct to standard treatments, especially in cases where conventional methods fail to provide lasting relief. Further clinical studies with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods are necessary to confirm these findings and explore the long-term benefits of Ayurvedic management in varicose veins.

Discussion

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Ayurvedic treatments, specifically Asthi Chikitsa, in managing varicose veins (VV). The results of the clinical trial demonstrated significant improvements in the pain, swelling, and venous size in the experimental group receiving Ayurvedic treatment compared to the control group. These findings align with previous research supporting the therapeutic benefits of Ayurveda in treating vascular health conditions, including VV^[5, 6].

The marked reduction in pain scores observed in the experimental group is particularly noteworthy. Ayurvedic treatments, including herbal formulations like Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) and Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), are known for their anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties^[7, 8]. These properties likely contributed to the significant reduction in pain experienced by the patients in the experimental group. Additionally, the Triphala formulation, often used in Ayurvedic practices, may have played a role in detoxifying the body and enhancing circulation, further alleviating pain associated with venous stasis^[6, 7]. The result of reduced pain in the experimental group emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches that target both the underlying causes and symptoms of varicose veins, rather than just symptom management, as seen in conventional treatments.

In terms of swelling, the reduction observed in the experimental group is consistent with Ayurvedic principles that focus on restoring the balance of doshas, particularly Vata dosha, which governs circulation. Ayurveda attributes varicose veins to an imbalance of Vata, leading to poor blood flow and stagnation in the veins^[6]. By correcting this imbalance through therapeutic measures like massage, dietary modifications, and herbal treatments, the Ayurvedic approach facilitated improved circulation, resulting in a reduction of swelling in the affected limbs. The results support the growing body of evidence suggesting that Ayurvedic therapies can complement conventional treatment by addressing the root causes of vascular issues, such as venous reflux and impaired circulation^[5].

The significant decrease in venous size in the experimental group also underscores the potential of Ayurvedic treatments in the management of varicose veins. Herbal ingredients like Guggulu (*Commiphora wightii*) and Vacha (*Acorus calamus*) have shown properties that enhance circulation and reduce venous enlargement, supporting the therapeutic effects observed in this research^[8]. The reduction in venous size indicates that Ayurveda, particularly Asthi Chikitsa, can help not only alleviate symptoms but also address the structural changes in the veins associated with VV.

This research's findings suggest that Ayurvedic treatments, specifically Asthi Chikitsa, may provide an effective

complementary or adjunctive therapy for varicose veins. While conventional methods such as sclerotherapy and surgery are essential for managing severe cases, Ayurvedic therapies offer a holistic approach to treating venous insufficiency, which may reduce the risk of recurrence and provide long-term symptom relief^[3, 4]. The results align with previous studies that have explored the benefits of Ayurveda in treating chronic conditions like varicose veins, highlighting its potential role in improving vascular health and circulation^[6, 7].

However, despite the promising results, this research has limitations, including the relatively small sample size and short duration of follow-up. Future research with larger sample sizes and longer treatment periods is necessary to confirm these findings and evaluate the long-term benefits and safety of Ayurvedic treatments in managing varicose veins. Additionally, more studies are required to explore the mechanisms by which Ayurvedic treatments, particularly Asthi Chikitsa, influence venous health and circulation at a cellular level.

Conclusion

The results of this research demonstrate the significant potential of Ayurvedic treatments, specifically Asthi Chikitsa, in managing varicose veins. Through the holistic approach of Ayurveda, which emphasizes the balance of the body's doshas and the use of natural, plant-based therapies, substantial improvements were observed in pain reduction, swelling, and venous size. The findings suggest that Ayurvedic treatments not only provide symptomatic relief but also address the underlying causes of varicose veins, such as impaired circulation and venous insufficiency. These treatments, particularly the use of herbal formulations like Ashwagandha, Guduchi, and Guggulu, offer a promising alternative or complement to conventional therapies, which often focus solely on symptom management without addressing the root cause.

Incorporating Ayurvedic therapies into the treatment regimen for varicose veins could lead to long-term health benefits, including the prevention of recurrence. The research supports the idea that a holistic approach, which combines internal medicine, lifestyle modifications, and external therapies, may be more effective in managing chronic conditions like varicose veins. Furthermore, Ayurvedic practices such as specific massage techniques, dietary adjustments, and regular detoxification can help enhance the effectiveness of conventional treatments by improving circulation and restoring balance within the body. Practical recommendations based on the research findings include the integration of Ayurvedic treatments as a complementary option for patients with mild to moderate varicose veins. Healthcare professionals, particularly those in fields related to vascular health, could consider advising patients to explore Ayurvedic therapies as part of a comprehensive management plan. For instance, incorporating specific Ayurvedic herbs known to promote circulation and reduce inflammation, such as Triphala and Vacha, could be beneficial for long-term management. Additionally, patients should be encouraged to engage in lifestyle modifications, such as maintaining an active lifestyle, reducing prolonged sitting or standing, and practicing stress management techniques, all of which are integral components of Ayurvedic approaches to health.

Ultimately, this research paves the way for further exploration into the role of Ayurveda in managing vascular health, particularly varicose veins. Further clinical trials with larger sample sizes and extended follow-up periods will be necessary to solidify the evidence and fully understand the mechanisms behind the therapeutic effects of Ayurvedic treatments. However, the promising results of this research highlight the potential of integrating traditional and modern approaches for the management of varicose veins, offering patients a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to their health.

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