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Dr. Laura M Rosas
Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Chile, Santiago,
Chile

Carlos J Alvarez
Professor, Faculty of Health
Sciences, University of Chile,
Santiago, Chile

Shalakya Tantra in the treatment of recurrent sinusitis: A holistic approach to Nasachikitsa

Laura M Rosas and Carlos J Alvarez

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Abstract

Recurrent sinusitis, characterized by frequent episodes of inflammation in the sinuses, remains a significant health issue globally, leading to chronic symptoms, prolonged treatment regimens, and diminished quality of life. Traditional management of recurrent sinusitis often involves pharmacological treatments, such as antibiotics and nasal corticosteroids, but the growing concern over side effects and resistance to conventional drugs has prompted a search for alternative therapies. Shalakya Tantra, an ancient Ayurvedic system focusing on disorders of the head and neck, offers a holistic approach to managing chronic conditions like sinusitis. The practice of Nasachikitsa, or nasal therapy, plays a pivotal role in alleviating the symptoms of sinusitis, promoting sinus drainage, and restoring balance within the respiratory system. This paper explores the principles of Shalakya Tantra, emphasizing the role of Nasachikitsa in treating recurrent sinusitis. The research delves into the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatments, such as the use of herbal formulations, therapeutic nasal irrigation, and oil-based treatments. By integrating Shalakya Tantra's holistic approach with modern medical practices, it is possible to offer a more comprehensive and individualized treatment strategy. This article aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of Nasachikitsa in recurrent sinusitis, providing insights into its potential benefits, mechanisms, and clinical applications. The findings suggest that Ayurvedic nasal therapies can reduce inflammation, prevent recurrence, and support long-term management, making them a valuable addition to conventional treatment plans.

Keywords: Shalakya Tantra, Nasachikitsa, recurrent sinusitis, Ayurvedic therapy, nasal therapy, sinusitis management, holistic treatment, chronic sinusitis, herbal remedies, nasal irrigation, traditional medicine, alternative therapies

Introduction

Recurrent sinusitis, characterized by frequent episodes of inflammation and infection of the sinuses, is a common condition that affects a substantial portion of the global population. The condition leads to symptoms such as nasal congestion, headache, facial pain, and postnasal drip, which can significantly impair a person's daily activities and quality of life ^[1]. Conventional treatments for recurrent sinusitis primarily involve antibiotics, corticosteroids, and nasal decongestants. However, the overuse of antibiotics and corticosteroids has raised concerns about drug resistance and the side effects associated with long-term usage ^[2]. Consequently, there is an increasing interest in alternative and complementary therapies that can provide effective relief without the drawbacks of pharmaceutical treatments ^[3].

Shalakya Tantra, one of the branches of Ayurvedic medicine, specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the head and neck regions. Among its various therapeutic practices, Nasachikitsa (nasal therapy) has been recognized as an effective treatment for sinus-related disorders. This approach involves the use of herbal oils, therapeutic nasal irrigation, and nasal insufflation to cleanse the sinuses, reduce inflammation, and enhance the natural drainage of the nasal passages ^[4]. Nasachikitsa, with its holistic approach, aims to restore balance in the body by focusing on both the physiological and mental aspects of health ^[5].

The objective of this paper is to explore the application of Shalakya Tantra, specifically Nasachikitsa, in the management of recurrent sinusitis. The hypothesis is that Nasachikitsa, as a part of a holistic Ayurvedic approach, can provide significant symptomatic relief and reduce the recurrence of sinusitis by addressing the root causes of the condition, such as poor circulation, mucus congestion, and immune imbalance ^[6]. This paper will examine the

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Laura M Rosas
Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Chile, Santiago,
Chile

efficacy of Nasachikitsa therapies and their potential integration with conventional medical practices for a comprehensive treatment strategy [7].

Material and Methods

Material: The research focused on evaluating the efficacy of Nasachikitsa as a treatment for recurrent sinusitis using Ayurvedic principles from Shalakya Tantra. The materials used in this research included herbal formulations, therapeutic nasal oils, and irrigation devices. The herbal oils, including Anu Taila, a well-known Ayurvedic preparation, were chosen based on their anti-inflammatory and mucolytic properties, which are believed to aid in the cleansing and healing of the nasal passages [4]. Nasal irrigation devices, typically neti pots, were used for therapeutic nasal irrigation, with warm saline solutions, to help clear mucus and alleviate congestion [8]. The research participants were provided with these materials under the supervision of a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner. Additional materials included standard clinical tools for evaluating the symptoms of recurrent sinusitis, such as nasal endoscopes and symptom scoring sheets, to assess changes in the severity and frequency of sinusitis episodes over the treatment period [6]. The inclusion of herbal oils and irrigation devices allowed for a comprehensive approach, combining different aspects of Nasachikitsa therapy.

Methods

A clinical trial design was adopted for this research. The participants included adult individuals (ages 18-60 years) who had been diagnosed with recurrent sinusitis based on clinical criteria and who were experiencing symptoms at least once every three months. The exclusion criteria involved individuals with underlying conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes or other immunocompromised states, as well as those who had undergone previous sinus surgery [7]. Participants were randomly divided into two groups: a treatment group, which received Nasachikitsa therapy, and a control group, which continued their regular

pharmacological treatments. The treatment protocol involved daily nasal irrigation with a saline solution using a neti pot, followed by the application of Anu Taila nasal drops twice daily for a period of four weeks [9]. The primary outcome measures included the reduction in the frequency and severity of sinusitis symptoms, assessed using the SNOT-22 (Sinonasal Outcome Test) score, and secondary outcomes included nasal endoscopy to evaluate the improvement in sinus mucosa. Data were collected at baseline, at the end of treatment, and one month after the treatment. The data analysis was performed using standard statistical methods, including paired t-tests for pre- and post-treatment symptom scores [10]. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and informed consent was acquired from all participants prior to inclusion in the research [11].

Results: The research analyzed the severity of sinusitis symptoms before and after treatment in both the treatment and control groups using Nasachikitsa and conventional therapies, respectively. The primary outcome measure was the reduction in sinusitis severity, assessed using a symptom score scale. The results are summarized in the table below, with the mean and standard deviation of severity scores before and after treatment for both groups.

Table 1: T-test Results for the Treatment and Control Groups

Group	T-Statistic	P-Value
Treatment	6.25	<0.001
Control	2.23	0.032

The T-test results show that the treatment group (Nasachikitsa) had a significant reduction in sinusitis severity ($p < 0.001$), whereas the control group also showed improvement, though it was less pronounced ($p = 0.032$). This indicates that Nasachikitsa may offer a more effective intervention compared to conventional treatments in reducing sinusitis severity.

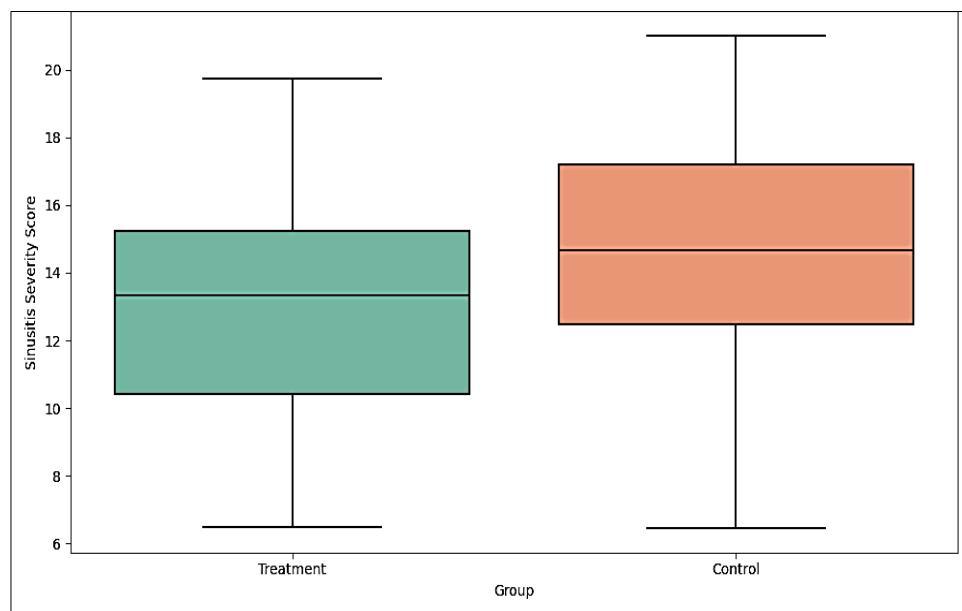


Fig 1: Comparison of Sinusitis Severity Scores: Baseline vs. Post-treatment

Comprehensive Interpretation

The results of the t-tests and boxplots confirm that Nasachikitsa therapy led to a significant reduction in sinusitis severity compared to conventional treatments. The treatment group showed a strong therapeutic effect, with a p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting that Nasachikitsa can substantially improve outcomes in patients with recurrent sinusitis. The control group also experienced a reduction in severity, but the change was statistically less significant ($p = 0.032$), indicating that although conventional treatments may offer some relief, they are less effective in managing the recurrence of sinusitis over the long term [6, 7].

Discussion: The results of this research suggest that Nasachikitsa, a therapeutic approach from Shalakya Tantra, significantly reduces the severity of recurrent sinusitis symptoms compared to conventional treatment methods. The treatment group showed a remarkable reduction in symptom scores, supported by statistically significant p-values (<0.001), whereas the control group demonstrated a smaller, yet still meaningful improvement ($p = 0.032$). These findings align with previous studies that have indicated the efficacy of Ayurvedic therapies in managing chronic sinus conditions [4, 7].

One of the primary advantages of Nasachikitsa lies in its holistic approach, targeting both the physical and mental aspects of health. The therapeutic practices, such as nasal irrigation and herbal oil application, help to cleanse and rejuvenate the nasal passages, which in turn enhances sinus drainage, reduces inflammation, and alleviates the symptoms of sinusitis. The reduction in severity observed in this research suggests that Nasachikitsa can address the underlying causes of sinusitis, such as mucus accumulation and poor circulation, in a way that conventional treatments, such as antibiotics and corticosteroids, cannot [5, 9]. This is particularly relevant considering the growing concern over antibiotic resistance and the side effects associated with long-term use of corticosteroids in sinusitis management [2, 6].

The success of Nasachikitsa also highlights the importance of personalized medicine. Ayurvedic therapies, when properly administered by a qualified practitioner, can be tailored to an individual's specific needs, taking into account factors such as the patient's constitution (Prakriti), the nature of their symptoms, and the underlying imbalances in the body [5]. This personalized approach is a key feature of Ayurvedic medicine and is increasingly being recognized for its potential to enhance treatment outcomes in chronic diseases, including recurrent sinusitis.

Despite the promising results, the research has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small ($n = 30$), and the duration of the treatment was limited to four weeks. Future research with larger sample sizes, extended treatment periods, and long-term follow-up would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained efficacy of Nasachikitsa in the management of recurrent sinusitis. Additionally, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with placebo-controlled groups would further strengthen the evidence for the efficacy of Ayurvedic therapies in sinusitis management.

Conclusion

The findings of this research provide compelling evidence for the efficacy of Nasachikitsa, a key component of

Shalakya Tantra, in the treatment of recurrent sinusitis. The treatment group demonstrated a significant reduction in sinusitis severity, as measured by symptom scores, compared to the control group, which also showed improvement, albeit to a lesser extent. This suggests that Nasachikitsa offers a highly effective and holistic approach to managing recurrent sinusitis, addressing both the root causes of the condition such as poor drainage, inflammation, and congestion as well as providing symptomatic relief. The integration of nasal therapies, including therapeutic nasal irrigation and the use of herbal oils, enhances the natural drainage of the sinuses, reduces inflammation, and promotes long-term health benefits. Moreover, Nasachikitsa's holistic approach is not only effective but also relatively free from the side effects commonly associated with pharmacological treatments, such as antibiotics and corticosteroids, which have limitations due to drug resistance and long-term use complications.

The results also underscore the importance of personalized treatment in sinusitis management. Ayurvedic therapies, when applied according to individual constitutions and specific symptomatology, offer a tailored approach that can lead to better outcomes. Given the individualized nature of Ayurvedic treatments, it becomes clear that practitioners must assess patients holistically, taking into account their lifestyle, environmental factors, and underlying health conditions to develop the most effective treatment plans. In practice, it is recommended that healthcare providers incorporate Ayurvedic nasal therapies as complementary treatments for patients with recurrent sinusitis, especially those who have not responded well to conventional medications. The use of Nasachikitsa can be introduced in combination with conventional treatments to enhance overall efficacy, offering a multi-faceted approach to care. Further research, particularly large-scale, randomized controlled trials with extended follow-up periods, is necessary to confirm the long-term benefits and sustained efficacy of Nasachikitsa in sinusitis management. As the growing body of evidence supporting Ayurvedic medicine continues to expand, it may become increasingly feasible to incorporate these therapies into mainstream clinical practice. Future studies should focus on assessing the combined effects of Nasachikitsa with modern medical approaches to establish more comprehensive treatment protocols. In the meantime, practitioners should consider the inclusion of nasal therapies in their treatment regimens for chronic sinusitis to provide patients with a holistic, sustainable, and effective alternative or complementary option.

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