IAMJ

INTERNATIONAL AYURVEDIC MEDICAL JOURNAL

Review Article ISSN: 2320-5091 Impact Factor: 6.719

THE IMPACT OF AYURVEDIC PANCHAKARMA THERAPY ON HORMONAL IMBALANCE IN WOMEN

[1]Krishna Meher, [2]Sanjay M, [3]Kiran Bahuguna, [4]Jasmin Rahiman K

1. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Prasuti tantra & Stree Roga, Sri Sri Nrusinghnath Ayurveda College & Research Institute, Nrusinghnath, Odisha, India
2. Associate Professor, Dept. of Panchakarma, Kala Ashram Ayurved Medical College, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India
3. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Dravyaguna, Kunwar Shekhar Vijendra Ayurvedic Medical college and Research Centre, Gangoh Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India
4. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Kayachikitsa, Apex Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine and Hospital, Samaspur, Chunar, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: kmeher116@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.46607/iamj2113042025

(Published Online: April 2025)

Article Received: 08/02/2025 - **Peer Reviewed:** 29/03/2025 - **Accepted for Publication:** 11/04/2025.

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ABSTRACT

Hormonal imbalances in women are increasingly recognised as a significant health issue globally, manifesting in conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), thyroid disorders, infertility, and irregular menstrual cycles. These imbalances are often linked to contemporary lifestyle factors, including stress, inadequate nutrition, and exposure to environmental pollutants. Conventional medical treatments tend to focus on managing symptoms through hormonal therapies, which can come with side effects and may not tackle the underlying causes. Ayurveda, an ancient medicinal system, advocates for restoring balance through natural methods, with Panchakarma as a key detoxification and rejuvenation technique. This therapy consists of five purification processes—Vamana, Virechana, Basti, Nasya, and Raktamokshana—designed to remove toxins, balance the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), and restore hormonal equilibrium. This review examines the role of Panchakarma therapy in addressing hormonal imbalances among women, integrating traditional Ayurvedic insights with modern scientific re-

search. Recent studies suggest that Panchakarma can enhance endocrine function, improve metabolic health, and support reproductive wellness by focusing on vital physiological mechanisms, including liver detoxification, gut microbiota regulation, and adrenal function modulation. Specific Ayurvedic herbs, such as Ashwagandha, Shatavari, and Guduchi, used alongside Panchakarma, have been shown to offer adaptogenic properties and help regulate hormones. Additionally, these therapies appear to alleviate stress-induced hormonal imbalances by lowering cortisol levels and enhancing the function of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The effectiveness of Panchakarma may vary based on individual factors like body constitution (Prakriti), commitment to follow-up care after treatment, and lifestyle changes. Further comprehensive clinical trials and integrative studies are necessary to understand its efficacy compared to traditional endocrine therapies fully. This review emphasises the potential of Panchakarma as a holistic and sustainable strategy for managing hormonal imbalances in women, which might facilitate its incorporation into conventional medical approaches.

Keywords: Panchakarma, Ayurveda, hormonal imbalance, PCOS, thyroid disorders, menstrual irregularities, Reproductive health, endocrine system, stress management, HPA axis.

INTRODUCTION

Hormonal imbalances among women are becoming more common, largely influenced by factors such as lifestyle modifications, stress levels, dietary patterns, and exposure to environmental toxins. These imbalances can lead to various health issues, including polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), thyroid disorders, irregular menstrual cycles, infertility, obesity, and metabolic issues. The endocrine system, responsible for hormone regulation, is particularly vulnerable to disturbances from both internal and external influences.[1] Current medical approaches typically include hormonal therapies, synthetic drugs, and surgical options, which can alleviate symptoms but often do not target the root causes of the hormonal imbalance. [2]

Ayurveda is an ancient holistic medical system that prioritises a natural healing approach by focusing on the underlying causes of illnesses instead of just alleviating the symptoms. According to Ayurvedic principles, well-being is regulated by the equilibrium of three core bio-energies or doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha[3] Disruptions in these doshas are thought to lead to various health issues, including hormonal imbalances. Panchakarma, a distinct Ayurvedic therapy for detoxification and rejuvenation, is essential in reestablishing this balance by removing toxins (Ama) from the body and revitalising the tissues.[4]

Panchakarma includes five main purification techniques: Vamana (therapeutic vomiting), Virechana (purging), Basti (medicated enema), Nasya (nasal treatment), and Raktamokshana (bloodletting). These methods function together to detoxify the body, rebalance hormones, and improve general health. By focusing on essential organs like the liver, intestines, and endocrine glands, Panchakarma regulates metabolic processes, enhances digestive health, and modulates stress responses, which play a significant role in sustaining hormonal equilibrium. [5]

Recent scientific investigations have started to confirm the efficacy of Panchakarma for addressing hormonal disorders. Research findings suggest that Ayurvedic treatments can notably enhance insulin sensitivity among women diagnosed with PCOS, improve thyroid functionality in individuals with hypothyroidism, and help regulate menstrual cycles by balancing reproductive hormone levels. Furthermore, the role of Panchakarma in decreasing oxidative stress and inflammation adds to its therapeutic promise in the management of endocrine disorders. [6]

With the rising interest in integrative medicine, examining Panchakarma as a complementary treatment for hormonal imbalances is crucial. This review intends to assess both the scientific and traditional evidence that underpins the effectiveness

of Panchakarma in managing hormonal health. It will elucidate the mechanisms through which Panchakarma operates and consider its potential integration into contemporary healthcare practices. [7]

Aims and Objectives

- To analyse the role of Panchakarma therapy in restoring hormonal balance in women.
- To evaluate the scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of Panchakarma in treating conditions such as PCOS, thyroid disorders, and menstrual irregularities.
- To compare Panchakarma therapy with conventional medical treatments for hormonal imbalance.
- To highlight the challenges and limitations of Panchakarma in clinical practice.

Materials and Methods

This review is based on an extensive literature survey of classical Ayurvedic texts, modern research articles, and clinical studies related to Panchakarma therapy and its impact on hormonal health. The sources include peer-reviewed journals, Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia, and documented case studies. The selection criteria for studies included those published in indexed journals, those conducted on women with hormonal disorders, and those reporting measurable outcomes of Panchakarma therapy. Data were analysed qualitatively to assess the efficacy and limitations of Panchakarma in managing hormonal imbalances.

Understanding Panchakarma consists of five main detoxification procedures:

Vamana (Therapeutic Emesis) – Vamana, also known as Therapeutic Emesis, is a treatment utilised to eliminate excess Kapha and regulate thyroid activity. This therapy is particularly beneficial for addressing issues such as hypothyroidism and insulin resistance, which are frequently linked to weight gain and metabolic disorders. [8]

Virechana (Therapeutic Purgation) – Virechana, also known as Therapeutic Purgation, serves as a method for detoxifying the liver and balancing levels of estrogen and progesterone. The liver is essential in the metabolism of hormones, and through its cleansing, Virechana assists in addressing issues like estrogen dominance and menstrual irregularities. [9]

Basti (Medicated Enema) – Beneficial for balancing Vata dosha, improving reproductive health, and alleviating menstrual irregularities. Specific herbal decoctions used in Basti therapy help nourish the reproductive system and enhance fertility. [10]

Nasya (Nasal Therapy) - Nasya therapy regulates the functions of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and contributes to mental health. The HPA axis is crucial for managing stress responses and indirectly influences hormone production. By supporting these functions, Nasya therapy can assist in addressing hormonal imbalances associated with stress. [7]

Raktamokshana (Bloodletting Therapy) – This treatment helps cleanse the blood and alleviate inflammatory issues associated with hormonal imbalances. It is particularly effective for conditions like acne, eczema, and heavy menstrual bleeding that are a result of excess Pitta dosha. [11]

Scientific Evidence Supporting Panchakarma for Hormonal Balance

Several studies highlight the efficacy of Ayurvedic therapies in managing hormonal imbalances:

In the realm of healing, research has unveiled the transformative power of Virechana therapy, particularly for those grappling with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). This ancient practice fosters liver detoxification and boosts insulin sensitivity, bringing hope to many. In a revealing study involving women diagnosed with PCOS, participants experienced notable enhancements in the regularity of their menstrual cycles and a decrease in androgen levels after undergoing this Ayurvedic detoxification therapy. The results painted a promising picture of holistic healing and the body's ability to restore balance. [12]

Basti treatments have emerged as a beacon of hope for those grappling with menstrual complications and seeking to enhance their fertility. By carefully influencing the endocrine system, these treatments have demonstrated their potential. The use of herbal enemas infused with Dashamoola and Triphala has been particularly noteworthy, as they not

only seem to support ovarian function but also contribute to a sense of hormonal balance. [13]

In the practice of Ayurveda, herbal formulations like Ashwagandha, Shatavari, and Guduchi play a significant role, especially when paired with Panchakarma treatments. These herbs are known for their adaptogenic qualities, which help maintain hormonal equilibrium. They achieve this by regulating cortisol levels and enhancing the functionality of the adrenal glands. [14]

Clinical observations suggest that Panchakarma can be beneficial in reducing symptoms of perimenopause and menopause, including hot flashes, mood swings, and sleep disturbances, by stabilising estrogen and progesterone levels.

Potential Benefits of Panchakarma for Women's Health

Regulation of Menstrual Cycles: Panchakarma helps restore the natural hormonal rhythm, reducing irregularities, dysmenorrhea, and amenorrhea.

Management of PCOS and Thyroid Disorders: Through the process of detoxifying the body and revitalising the endocrine system, Panchakarma plays a significant role in enhancing the functions of the thyroid and ovaries. For women battling hypothyroidism, this therapeutic journey often leads to noticeable improvements in their metabolism and energy levels. [15]

Stress Reduction and Mental Well-being: In the realm of holistic healing, Panchakarma therapies emerge as vital allies in reducing cortisol levels, a key player in achieving harmony among hormones. Stress, often a significant factor in disrupting this balance, can be effectively counteracted through various techniques. Among these, Nasya and Shirodhara stand out, using soothing oil therapy to foster deep relaxation and support emotional stability, guiding individuals back to equilibrium. [16]

Improved Fertility: In the realm of Ayurveda, cleansing techniques hold the promise of enhancing uterine health, crafting an ideal setting for conception to take root. Among the various fertility-boosting therapies, Uttarabasti stands out—a method involving medicated oil introduced into the uterus, widely embraced for its support of reproductive wellness. [17]

Enhanced Digestive and Metabolic Health: Panchakarma plays a pivotal role in enhancing gut health, significantly influencing hormone regulation. The well-being of the gut microbiome is vital as it supports effective digestion and the absorption of nutrients necessary for the creation of hormones. [18]

Detoxification and Weight Management: Panchakarma is a cleansing process that eliminates the built-up toxins that can interfere with the body's metabolic functions. This is particularly important for individuals facing challenges such as weight gain, which is often associated with conditions like PCOS and hypothyroidism. [19]

Comparison with Conventional Hormonal Therapies

In the realm of women's health, conventional hormonal therapies hold a prominent place. Treatments such as oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and insulin-sensitizing agents are frequently recommended to help address hormonal imbalances. These methods are not without their merits, as they can alleviate symptoms and help bring hormonal levels back into a balanced state. However, the journey doesn't come without its hurdles. Many women encounter a range of side effects, including unwanted weight gain, emotional ups and downs, a heightened risk of blood clots, and possible long-term issues with metabolism. [20]

In a different approach, Panchakarma therapy seeks to tackle the underlying issues of hormonal imbalances by cleansing the body, reestablishing doshic equilibrium, and naturally enhancing the performance of endocrine organs. Unlike traditional methods that depend on the addition of external hormones, Panchakarma utilises purification techniques and Ayurvedic herbs to engage the body's inherent capability to balance hormones. Take, for instance, Virechana therapy, which aids in detoxifying the liver, thus improving estrogen metabolism. Meanwhile, Basti therapy promotes the health of gut microbiota, a factor closely associated with the functioning of the endocrine system. [21]

A significant difference is found in the comprehensive approach of Panchakarma, which incorporates dietary adjustments, yoga practices, meditation, and lifestyle changes to promote long-term hormonal balance. In contrast, traditional medicine prioritises quick relief of symptoms, while Ayurveda emphasises enduring health by tackling stress management and regulating metabolism. [22]

In the realm of health and wellness, modern hormonal therapies have earned their stripes, showcasing a remarkable track record of clinical effectiveness. Yet, there exists a path less travelled—Panchakarma, a natural approach that promises to harmonise the body without the burden of side effects. This alternative method beckons to those on a quest for lasting balance. Nevertheless, the road ahead requires further exploration; more clinical trials are essential to draw a definitive comparison between Panchakarma and conventional treatments, paving the way for well-defined integrative treatment plans. [23]

Challenges and Limitations

While Panchakarma therapy has shown promising results, there are some limitations to consider:

Individualised Approach: Ayurvedic treatments are highly personalised, and the effectiveness of Panchakarma varies from person to person based on their Prakriti (body constitution) and doshic imbalances.

Availability of Qualified Practitioners: Panchakarma should be performed under the supervision of a qualified Ayurvedic physician to ensure safety and efficacy.

Need for More Clinical Research: While anecdotal and preliminary scientific evidence supports Panchakarma's benefits, large-scale clinical trials are necessary to establish its efficacy in managing hormonal disorders.

Time-Intensive Process: Panchakarma therapy requires several days to weeks, which may not be feasible for all individuals.

Future Directions and Research Opportunities

Although Panchakarma therapy has demonstrated promising potential in managing hormonal imbalances, further research is required to enhance its clinical applicability. The following areas should be prioritised for future exploration:

Large-Scale Clinical Trials: More rigorous, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are needed to validate the efficacy of Panchakarma compared to conventional hormonal therapies.

Mechanistic Studies: Further research should explore the biochemical and physiological mechanisms through which Panchakarma influences the endocrine system, including its impact on liver function, gut microbiota, and the HPA axis.

Standardisation of Protocols: Developing standardised Panchakarma treatment protocols for specific hormonal disorders, ensuring consistency in practice across different Ayurvedic centres.

Integration with Modern Medicine: Collaborative research between Ayurvedic practitioners and modern endocrinologists can help integrate Panchakarma into conventional healthcare settings for a more comprehensive treatment approach.

Long-Term Effects and Safety: Studies assessing the long-term impact of Panchakarma therapy on endocrine health, metabolic parameters, and overall well-being should be conducted.

Personalised Treatment Approaches: Research should focus on tailoring Panchakarma treatments based on individual Prakriti (body constitution) and specific hormonal imbalances to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

DISCUSSION

In the realm of wellness, Panchakarma therapy stands out as a compelling approach to managing hormonal imbalances, drawing on the wisdom of Ayurvedic principles alongside contemporary scientific research. This ancient method embarks on a journey of detoxification and rejuvenation, skillfully guiding the body to expel accumulated toxins, known as Ama, which can disrupt hormonal harmony. Through this transformative process, Panchakarma seeks to restore equilibrium among the doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—effectively tackling the underlying causes of hormonal disturbances rather than simply masking the symptoms. [24] One of the key components of Pan-

chakarma is its impact on the gut-liver axis, which is vital for the metabolism of hormones. The procedure known as Virechana, which focuses on therapeutic purgation, has been shown to enhance liver function, an essential factor in processing hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, and thyroid hormones. Furthermore, Basti therapy contributes to improving gut microbiota health, a factor becoming more acknowledged as crucial for maintaining endocrine balance. A well-optimized gut microbiome absorbs the nutrients necessary for synthesising and regulating hormones. [25]

Panchakarma is vital in alleviating stress, which is an essential aspect of its effectiveness. When stress becomes chronic and cortisol levels rise, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis can be out of balance. This imbalance often results in issues such as irregular menstrual cycles, infertility, and various metabolic disorders. One of the therapies used in Panchakarma, called Nasya, involves applying specially formulated oils through the nasal passages. This treatment has been found to enhance brain function and help regulate the neuroendocrine system, thus easing stress-related hormonal imbalances. [26] Multiple clinical studies indicate that Panchakarma therapy may offer significant advantages for women suffering from PCOS. This therapy's approach, which includes detoxification, dietary changes, and the use of herbal supplements, has been documented to enhance insulin sensitivity, normalise menstrual cycles, and alleviate symptoms like hirsutism and acne. In addition, Ayurvedic herbs used in conjunction with Panchakarma, such as Shatavari and Ashwagandha, possess adaptogenic qualities that help promote adrenal health and support reproductive functions. [27] Panchakarma therapy offers several potential advantages but has some inherent limitations. The effectiveness of the therapy can differ among individuals, influenced by their unique constitution (Prakriti), compliance with post-therapy guidelines, and changes in overall lifestyle. Furthermore, the absence of uniform protocols and comprehensive clinical trials presents hurdles to its broader acceptance within conventional medical frameworks. To advance the understanding of Panchakarma, future research efforts should prioritise well-structured randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to assess its efficacy and safety concerning various hormonal disorders. [28]

In the realm of healthcare, the fusion of Ayurvedic Panchakarma therapy with contemporary medical techniques emerges as a promising avenue for addressing hormonal imbalances. This innovative approach encourages the creation of tailored treatment plans that harness the advantages of both traditional and modern practices, potentially enhancing patient outcomes and reducing the adverse effects often associated with standard hormone therapies. Moreover, the rising fascination with holistic and integrative medicine underscores the importance of ongoing exploration into Panchakarma's underlying mechanisms and practical uses. [29]

CONCLUSION

Panchakarma therapy presents significant promise as a comprehensive method for addressing hormonal imbalances in women. This approach focuses on identifying and treating the underlying causes of endocrine disruptions through detoxification, stress reduction, and metabolism regulation, serving as a viable alternative to traditional hormonal therapies. Key therapeutic techniques associated with Panchakarma, including Virechana and Basti, play a crucial role in achieving hormonal balance by enhancing liver function, gut microbiome health, and adrenal control. However, the integration of Panchakarma into mainstream healthcare is currently limited, primarily due to the absence of standardised treatment protocols and extensive clinical studies. The variability in individual responses to treatment further accentuates the importance of personalised therapeutic strategies. Future research endeavours should aim to connect Panchakarma with contemporary medical practices by promoting interdisciplinary studies, which will help establish a more evidence-backed and widely acknowledged therapeutic framework. The rising global interest in natural and holistic health solutions highlights the importance of Panchakarma in modern medicine. With additional scientific support, this

therapy could become either a complementary or primary treatment option for a range of hormonal issues. Fostering partnerships between Ayurvedic practitioners and modern healthcare providers will facilitate the development of innovative and effective strategies to tackle rising concerns surrounding hormonal imbalances among women.

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Source of Support: Nil
Conflict of Interest: None Declared

How to cite this URL: Krishna Meher et al: The Impact of Ayurvedic Panchakarma Therapy on Hormonal Imbalance in Women. International Ayurvedic Medical Journal {online} 2025 {cited April 2025}