

The Concept of *Bhej* (*dushita kapha*) and its role in Women's Health

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Kapha is derived from the earth and water elements, so it has heavy, slow, static, oily, soft, sticky and dense qualities. *Kapha* molecules have a tendency to adhere or coagulate, are growth-promoting (anabolic) and give shape and form to our cells, tissues and organs. If *kapha* is balanced and properly formed, it fulfils its functions of providing lubrication, nourishment, water electrolyte balance, stability, strength and stamina. If *kapha* is in excess or improperly formed, then the above-mentioned functions are compromised and physiological imbalances begin to arise.

Ayurvedic practitioners are familiar with such textbook descriptions of *kapha dosha* and its associated qualities. However, in the clinical context, a particular aspect of *kapha* becomes relevant, which is usually not that well understood: *dushita kapha*. In order to explain this in more detail, let us briefly review the physiological formation of *kapha*:

When *jathar agni* (digestive fire) functions properly, consumed food is initially broken down into chyle or *ahara rasa* and then transformed into the first tissue, i.e. plasma (*rasa dhatu*). In this transformation process three products are created: plasma (*rasa dhatu*), its sub-tissues menstrual fluid (*artava*) and breast milk (*stanya*), and its waste portion (*mala*) called *poshaka kapha*, which nourishes and lubricates all *kapha* systems. If digestive fire is weak, however, less plasma (*rasa dhatu*) and more *poshaka kapha* are produced, and both are also formed improperly. Low digestive fire thus compromises *kapha* production quantitatively and qualitatively, leading to excess formation of physiologically ineffective *kapha* that is *dushita* (= corrupted, spoiled, polluted).

In the lineage in which I am trained, *dushita* or corrupted *kapha* is also called *bhej* – a Gujarati term for mucus. We find it helpful to use this word in order to clearly distinguish between physiologically viable *kapha* and obstructive mucus, which is a pathological by-product of improper plasma (*rasa dhatu*) formation due to vitiated digestive fire. Consuming heavy-to-digest *kapha* foods does not necessarily lead to *bhej*: this channel-blocking mucus is only produced when *agni* is too weak to process such foods effectively. Therefore, when *bhej* is detected by a practitioner (in the pulse or through other diagnostic means), correction of the digestive fire and clearing of channels are the main lines of treatment.

Bhej can be easily detected while reading the pulse: the skin in the pulse area feels moist and humid to the touch, similar to a damp wall. It is a feeling of clamminess (rather than stickiness or sweatiness), which can also often be felt on palms, fingers and forehead.

Depending on the strength of *vata* and how it is moving, *bhej* can be pushed into different areas of the body. However, there are two main



sites where *bhej* tends to accumulate and cause pathologies associated with blockage: the respiratory and the reproductive systems. If upward-moving *vata* drags *bhej* along, it can lead to conditions of the lower and upper respiratory tracts such as cough, bronchitis, sinusitis or other ENT disorders characterised by symptoms of obstruction, discharge, expectoration etc.

Bhej and Women's Health

In the context of women's health, *bhej* is carried by *vata* (specifically *apana* in the pelvic area and *vyana* in the circulatory system) into the reproductive organs where it lodges in tissues and can cause various imbalances such as uterine or ovarian cysts, anovulation, excessive white discharge or clotting of the menstrual fluid. Women with these conditions always have a characteristic '*bhej pulse*' (as described above) and usually also digestive issues that result from a weakness of the digestive fire.

Correcting imbalances in the reproductive organs are not only important for preserving a woman's fertility, but are also vital for her overall well-being.

Although all three *doshas* are present in every tissue, the female reproductive organs are mainly governed by the fire principle (*agneya*). *Pitta* is therefore the predominant *dosha* in these organs. In the context of ovulation for instance, the hot, sharp and penetrating qualities (*ushna tikshna gunas*) of *pitta* enable an ovum to mature and rupture from a follicle. However, if the ovaries have become encased by *bhej*, its mucoid quality prevents the sharp, penetrating qualities of *pitta* from acting effectively. As a result, maturation or rupturing of the ovum does not occur, which can lead to anovulation. *Bhej* can also enter the follicle space and cause the formation of ovarian cysts (fluid-filled sacs). When *bhej* lodges in the endometrial lining, menstrual fluid tends to become heavier and clots appear in the discharged blood.

Correcting imbalances in the reproductive organs are not only important for preserving a woman's fertility, but are also vital for her overall well-being. In *Ayurveda* it is believed that the centre of a woman is her uterus; it is her emotional core from where she connects to her inner self, her intuition and her feminine power. It is a vessel that holds her creativity, vital energy and life-giving *prana*. The uterus and ovaries give a woman her rhythm, her connection to the moon and her link to life's cycles, phases and transitions. A woman's state of mind and emotions strongly influences

the health and alignment of her uterus and vice versa. When emotions like fear, grief, pain and shame are held within, they fester in the uterus. Such unexpressed energies prevent the flow of *prana*, agitate *vata* and allow sticky, mucus-like *bhej* to settle in and congest the reproductive tissues. Ovarian cysts, for instance, are also considered sacs of 'unwept tears' of pain and grief.

General Treatment Principles (*chikitsa*)

The causative factors on physical, but also mental and emotional levels that have vitiated the digestive fire and lead to the accumulation of *bhej* need to be identified. The treatment approach is to mitigate or avoid these factors and to restore balance to *doshas* and digestive fires, eliminate *bhej* and improve tissue circulation by cleansing female reproductive (*artavavaha*) and plasma (*rasavaha shrotas*) channels. This approach will enliven cellular consciousness (flow of *prana*), so that healing of the affected tissues can occur.

Diet

It is advisable to avoid *agni*-depleting, mucus-increasing foods that are cold and damp (raw vegetables, dairy products, cold foods, raw fruits in winter), foods with sticky and heavy qualities (wheat, hard cheese, refined sugar), and especially yogurt as this dampens the digestive fires and promotes *bhej* due to its *abhishyandi* (water-retaining, channel-blocking) property. Avoid also refined, processed and microwaved foods, which are *agni*-depleting, toxic *ama*-producing and devoid of *prana*. Cleansing for 2-3 days on simple meals of mung soup and green leafy vegetables is a wonderful way to begin clearing channels of excess *doshas* and mucus.

Lifestyle

Avoid daytime sleep (increases *kapha*). Practise regular, gentle exercise. Time management is important, i.e. plan ahead so that cooking and eating fresh food becomes an achievable reality. Spend time in nature and consciously reconnect to its rhythms and cycles in order to restore inner rhythm and awaken cellular consciousness. Take time out to rest, reflect, dream and create: 'come home' to the creative, intuitive power of the uterus. Go into silence – a woman meets her real Self when she goes within.

Herbs

Excellent preparations that can be included in a treatment plan are:

1. Gokshuradi Guggulu which balances all *doshas*, causes downward-clearing and scraping (*lekhana*) action on adhesions and accumulations of *bhej* in the reproductive system, enkindles tissue digestive fires, removes water retention and rejuvenates tissues that have become depleted due to obstruction.

2. Kanchanar Guggulu a predominantly *kapha*-reducing remedy that kindles the digestive fire, breaks down and eliminates growths, adhesions and toxic *ama* as well as *bhej* associated with cysts, clots and uterine fibroids.

3. Mix ½ tsp. turmeric powder, 1 tsp. cumin powder, ¼ tsp. celery seeds powder, 1 tsp. fennel seed powder, 1 pinch asafoetida and 1 tsp. fresh ginger juice in 1 cup boiling water. Cover and leave to steep for 5 minutes, then stir and drink.

Take 1 cup three times daily. This remedy helps in the treatment of bulky uterus, anovulation, uterine cysts and excessive clotting of menstrual fluid.

4. Other herbs useful for removing *bhej* and benefiting women's reproductive health are guggul, chitrak, punarnava, dry ginger, cinnamon, fenugreek, ashoka and triphala.

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Ashoka

Pukka product review



Chywanaprash is a delicious traditional Indian food supplement blended with fruits, honey, herbs and spices. Our Organic Chywanaprash tastes fantastic and is made using the finest organic ingredients, without synthetic preservatives or refined sugar. One or two teaspoonfuls can be taken each day with hot milk, herbal tea or is delicious spread on toast!

It is made using the traditional method of slowly mixing the specially selected Indian herbs together over several days, the powdered herbs and the freshest amla fruit (also known as Indian 'Gooseberry') are decocted together first. Then jaggery (a natural source of sugar including its nutritional minerals), cinnamon and cardamom are added to the mix before it is sealed.

Developed thousands of years ago in India by the sage *Chywana*, the story or legend goes that at the age of 80 he had completed 30 years of meditation and had attained a state of pure consciousness. However one day he saw a beautiful girl whom he immediately fell in love with. Aware of his slight infirmity from so much hardship in the jungle he was worried that he would be unable to fulfil her youthful needs. So, he set about developing a rejuvenation elixir of fruits, herbs, spices and honey. The result is Chywanaprash or literally '*Chywana's jam*'.

Chywanaprash is great for strengthening the body and mind, it can be used by all the family when there is lack of energy, any debilitation or low immunity, especially as a preventative to colds and 'flu in the winter months. This really is the ultimate elixir of life! It is also great for children over 5 years old.

Recipe

Immune Tonic Soup (serves 3-4)

Add 1/2 cup organic pearl barley
Add root vegetables: Beetroots, carrots, potato
Add leeks, onions garlic
Add 6 shitake mushrooms
Add seasonal greens - kale, spinach, nettles
Add ginger, rosemary, thyme, turmeric
Add 1-2 sticks kombu/ wakame
simmer for 45 mins
Add 1-2 tsp hemp seed oil per person at end

Adjust quantities and water as desired
Add any particular favourite vegetables or herbs

Eat broth in convalescence. Eat 1-2 x/ week for general immune tonification.

Benefits digestion, allergies, fatigue, inflammatory conditions.

