Herbal remedies of Madugga tribes of Siruvani forest, South India

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Abstract
Information on 102 plant species and tribal (Maduggas) prescriptions for therapeutic uses of each species and plant parts employed is presented in this paper. As the traditional herbal remedies are based on ancestral knowledge and empiric experiences, these types of ethnomedical survey appeared to be useful for the research on medicinal plants.

Keywords: Herbal remedies, Medicinal plants, Madugga tribes, Siruvani forest, Tamil Nadu, South India.

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Introduction
The man had long struggle to achieve mastery over powerful forces of nature, he has always turned to plants for help, especially when he struck with ailments. Undoubtedly, the plant kingdom still holds many species of plants which contain undiscovered valuable medicinally active phytoconstituents. Screening of medicinal plants provides potential sources of biodynamic substances of therapeutic value in natural product research (Hartwell 1970; Agarwal, 1986; Hussain & Siddiqui, 1987; Satyavati et al, 1987). Hence, large numbers of plants are constantly being screened for their possible pharmacological activities. The present study was undertaken based on this rationale.

The Siruvani forest forms the South West part of Tamil Nadu, India, included in the Coimbatore district and floristically it is one of the richest part of the state. It is inhabited by various ethnic groups such as Maduggas, Ponthatas and Yathrias. The different ethnic groups settled through out this place, have their own way of life style, even in using the plant resources.

The study area selected is in Coimbatore district with approximate area of 105 sq. kms. The land here slopes from West to East and as a result most of the rivers like, Perur, Noyal, Pathi, Yanii, Cholai, Pambaru and others flow through this forest. Rainfall commences during the month of June and comes to an end during August-September. The annual average rainfall is 60-100 cm usually the cold weather begins in the month of December and lasts till the onset of rains. The average annual minimum temperature is 16°C and the maximum is 24-25°C.

The elevation ranges from 300 to 2200 m above sea level. The specific tribal settlement visited include
Seenagapathy, Vellapathy, Poddapathy, Sadivayal, Kalkothi, Jaagir poorathli, Attungal, Paripatti and Perumal kovil.

The Maduggas are one of the primitive hill tribals of Tamil Nadu. They are mainly located in the Siruvani village panchayat. There are totally 40 families and the total population is about 350. The information on the folk medicinal plants were gathered through interviews with local vaidyars (medicine men of Maduggas) and recorded with the help of interpreters. Maduggas speak their tribal language which is mixed with Tamil and Malayalam. These tribal healers maintain their status of medicine men by passing informations from father to son. They worship the goddess Kaliamman.

Materials and Methods

The study area was surveyed five times during March 1998 to January 1999 in different weather condition and along different transects. Interviews were conducted in the villages with the co-operation of the corresponding village chiefs and forest people with their prior informed consents and the data were gathered from native informants who were healers, faith healers, priest and ordinary villagers who had knowledge of the curative property of plants. The mode of preparation of drugs and methods of their administration along with doses were recorded. The quantity of herbs and additives used were measured accurately by the investigators by estimating the amount carefully at the site. Each prescription was considered authentic only after confirmation through three or more informants of districts localities and by cross checking in different times. The plants were identified and authenticated by Dr. Hyath, Professor, Forest College, The Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore. Voucher herbarium specimens were prepared and deposited in the Department of Pharmacognosy, College of Pharmacy, SRIPMS, Coimbatore.

The families and the species within a family are arranged in alphabetical order. Species names are followed by collection number of each plant; English (E), local (Mudugga) names (LN), and the local medicinal uses with doses indicated.

Solanum surattense

Gymnema sylvestre

Boerhaavia diffusa

Wedelia calendulacea

Abutilon indicum
Enumeration

Acanthaceae
Adhatoda zeylanica Medic. syn. A. vasica Nees (COP / PGSY / 207)
E : Vasaka; LN : Adathoda
A decoction of the dried root powder is used to treat respiratory disorders.

Barleria strigosa Willd. (COP / PGSY / 219)
LN : Nilkurnni, Nili
The decoction of root (one teaspoon, 3-4 times a day) is used in cough.

Blepharis linariaefolia Pers. (COP / PGSY / 221)
LN : Naethira poondu
The decoction of root is used as sexual stimulant. Leaf juice is used as an expectorant.

Amaranthaceae
Achyranthes aspera Linn. (COP / PGSY / 205)
E : Prickly Chaff Flower; LN : Nayuruvi
The plant is powdered and mixed with groundnut oil and given orally to treat constipation and the paste of the leaves is used for skin rashes.

Celosia cristata Linn. (COP / PGSY / 226)
E : Cock’s Comb; LN : Mayurshikha
The flowers and seeds are crushed with water and used (2-3 teaspoon thrice daily) in cough and diarrhoea.

Apiaceae
Centella asiatica Linn. (COP / PGSY / 228)
E : Indian Peny Wort; LN : Vellarai
The leaf juice is used for increasing memory and externally used for wounds and burns.

Apocynaceae
Alstonia scholaris R. Br. (COP / PGSY / 209)
E : Devil Tree; LN : Elilppalai
One teaspoon of leaf decoction is used daily to increase lactation in females.

A. venenata R. Br. (COP / PGSY / 211)
LN : Pazha munnipala
About 10ml fruit juice taken daily after meals is used to treat epilepsy.

Wrightia tinctoria R. Br. (COP / PGSY / 296)
E : Pala Indigo Plant; LN : Kodagapulai, Vepalai
The bark and seeds are powdered and mixed with coconut oil and applied on the wounds.10-20ml of decoction is given daily with one glass of milk.

Araceae
Amorphophallus sylvaticus (Roxb.) Kunth syn. Synantheras sylvatica Schott. (COP / PGSY / 285)
LN : Kattakarunai
The seed powder is mixed with water to form a paste and used in tooth ache.

Chrysanthemum coronarium Linn. (COP / PGSY / 230)
LN : Shamanthippu
The bark and flower decoction (one teaspoon, 2-3 times daily) can be used as an anthelmintic and expectorant.

Helianthus debilis Nutt. (COP / PGSY / 247)
LN : Suriyagandhi
The leaf and flower are powdered and mixed with water and the concentrated form is used to treat skin rashes and sore skin.

Asclepiadaceae
Calotropis gigantea (Linn.) R. Br. ex Ait. (COP / PGSY / 227)
LN : Erikku
The root decoction is concentrated into a paste form and used for elephantiasis. The root decoction (10-15ml in divided doses, 2-3 times daily) is used in coughs, colds and in stomach problems.

Gymnema sylvestre R. Br. (COP / PGSY / 243)
E : Periplora of the woods; LN : Adigam
The leaf juice is taken internally to decrease excess urine secretion. It is found to be useful to cure wounds and boils.

Tylophora indica (Burm.f.) Merrill syn. T. asthmatica Wight & Arn. (COP / PGSY / 292)
E : Indian Ipecacuanha; LN : Kagitham, Vallipala
The leaves are bruised and about 5ml decoction is used 4-6 times daily in bronchitis.
**Notonia grandiflora** DC. (COP / PGSY / 265)
LN : Measkathuthali
The decoction of the stem and bark (20-25ml, twice daily for two weeks) is used as a preventive for hydrophobia and as a diuretic.

**Vernonia cinerea** Linn. (COP/PGS/294)
E : Purple Fleabane; LN : Munjal karisalai
The decoction (10-15ml, twice daily) of the entire plant is used as antispasmodic, stomachic.

**Wedelia calendulacea** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 295)
LN : Munjal karisalai
Leaf and flower juices mixed and one teaspoon of it is given (2-3 times) daily in coughs and skin diseases.

**Xanthium strumarium** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 302)
E : Cocklebur; LN : Marlumutta
The decoction of the root is used as tonic and sedative.

**Caesalpiniaeae**

**Caesalpinia bonducella** Flem. (COP / PGSY / 225)
E : Bonduc Nut; LN : Kazarchikkai
The fruit is used in fever.

**Cassia fistula** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 224)
E : Purging Fistula; LN : Sarakonnai
The flowers are powdered and then mixed with honey. One tablespoonful, once a day is taken as a laxative.

**C. torea** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 223)
LN : Thagari verai
The leaves and stem are crushed and applied locally to treat skin rashes.

**Campanulaceae**

**Lobelia nicotianaeafolia** Heyne (COP / PGSY / 259)
E : Wild Tobacco; LN : Kattu pukayilla
The leaf and flower decoctions are used for respiratory disorders.

**Combretaceae**

**Terminalia arjuna** Wight & Arn. (COP / PGSY / 289)
LN : Venmaruthu
The decoction of the bark and leaves are used in ear ache, jaundice and as diuretic.

**T. bellirica** Roxb. (COP / PGSY / 288)
E : Belliric Myrobalan; LN : Tanrick-kay
One teaspoon fruit juice is used 3-5 times in a day in cough. It is also used in eye infection.

**T. tomentosa** Wight & Arn. (COP / PGSY / 287)
LN : Karuchanam, Karuppumarudu
The bark is allowed to macerate with water and the decoction (5ml, 2-3 times daily) is taken internally to cure dysentery and abdominal pains.

**Cucurbitaceae**

**Bryonopsis laciniosa** (Linn.) Naud. syn. **Bryonia laciniosa** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 222)
LN : Iviralli
Leaf and fruit juices (5-10 ml) are given thrice daily in fever with flatulence.

**Trichosanthes dioica** Roxb. (COP / PGSY / 291)
E : Wild Snake Guard; LN : Kombupudalani
The leaf or fruit is dried and powdered, then taken internally for stomach pains and as an anthelmintic.

**Euphorbiaceae**

**Acalypha fruticosa** Forsk. (COP / PGSY / 206)
E : Birch-leaved Acalypha; LN : Kuppaimani
One teaspoon of the decoction of leaves and roots is given 2-4 times a day to treat fever and loss of appetite.

**Bridelia retusa** Spreng. (COP/PGSY/217)
LN : Adamarudu
The bark powder paste is used externally to treat skin rashes.

**Croton tiglium** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 231)
E : Purging Croton; LN : Naevanan kai, Nervalam
About 50g of the seed powder is mixed with 100ml of water and make a decoction. Around 5ml of this is taken early in the morning for three days for treating constipation and worm infection.

**Emblica officinalis** Gaertn. (COP / PGSY / 238)
E : Emblic myrobalan; LN : Nelli
The fruit is treated with butter milk and around 5ml of this is fed daily 1-4 times to children suffering from whooping cough.

**Euphorbia helioscopia** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 239)
E : Sun Spurge; LN : Bethik keerai
One teaspoon of leaf and root decoction is used 1-2 times a day as an anthelmintic.

**E. hirta** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 240)
LN : Amman patcha arisi

**Droseraceae**

**Drosera lunata** Buch.-Ham. syn. **D. peltata** Sm. (COP / PGSY / 236)
LN : Alukannai
The paste of whole plant with water is used externally to remove old age wrinkles and in rheumatism.
The fresh leaf juice (one teaspoon 3-5 times daily) is given in cough and asthma.

**Jatropha curcas** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 256)  
E : Purging nut; LN : Kattumanakku  
The leaf juice mixed with oil is used to treat local inflammation of nerves.

**Phyllanthus urinaria** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 270)  
LN : Shivappu keelar nelli  
The leaf decoction (20 ml twice a day) is used in jaundice. It is also used as a fish poison.

**Fabaceae**

**Abrus precatorius** Linn. (COP/PGSY/201)  
E : Indian licorice; LN : Kuntumani  
The bruised leaves and the decoction are used in cough (one teaspoon thrice a day). It is applied externally for curing dermatitis.

**Dalbergia latifolia** Roxb. (COP / PGSY / 237)  
E : East Indian Rosewood; LN : Itti, Todagati  
The decoction of stem bark (10ml in 2-3 divided doses for three day) is given in diarrhoea and as a stomachic.

**Indigofera pulchella** Roxb. (COP / PGSY / 253)  
LN : Manali, Naringi  
The decoction of root (5-10ml in 2-3 divided doses) is given daily for cough and body ache.

**Icacinaceae**

**Mappia foetida** Miers. (COP / PGSY / 260)  
LN : Arti, Choria  
The leaf is powdered and added with cattle feed (around 5g of leaf powder to 1kg of cattle feed) to increase lactation in cattle and also used to treat open wounds in the skin.

**Loganiaceae**

**Strychnos nux-vomica** Linn. (COP / PGSY / 286)  
E : Nux-vomica; LN : ETTI  
The seeds are boiled with cowdung and 1/8th of the total extract is diluted ten times with ash and used (10-20 g daily) as a stimulant.
The flower, stem and leaf are moistened with water and applied as a solution to cure migraine. *Pavonia odorata* Willd. (COP/PGSY/269)

LN : Peramutti

The decoction of root (5 to 10 ml, 2-3 times a day) is taken as a tonic for dysentery and also as a carminative. *Sida acuta* Burm.f. (COP/PGSY/278)

LN : Vattathrippi

The leaf and root decoction (one teaspoon, 3-4 times daily) is used as diuretic, anti-pyretic and stomachic. *S. cordifolia* Linn. (COP/PGSY/281)

LN : Katturam, Nilatutti

The decoction of the entire plant is used in fevers. Externally used for wound healing.

*S. humicis* Cav. (COP/PGSY/279)

LN : Palampari

One teaspoon, leaf and flower juice is taken daily 2-3 times in diarrhoea.

*S. indica* Linn. (COP/PGSY/280)

LN : Chini

The root and leaf decoction 10-15ml daily one time is used in joint pains and as a febrifuge.

*Urena lobata* Linn. (COP/PGSY/293)

LN : Ottatti, Udiram

The leaf or flower is powdered and mixed with kerosene to treat fungal and bacterial attack and cracks in the foot.

*Marantaceae*

*Maranta arundinacea* Linn. (COP/PGSY/261)

E : Arrow Root; LN : Kuamau

Drug rhizome powder is mixed with cow milk and used in diarrhoea and as a nutrient.

*Melianaceae*

*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss. (COP/PGSY/215)

E : Neem; LN : Vembu

The crushed leaves are applied externally to cure sore skin. The oil extracted from the seeds is used as an anthelmintic.

*Menispermaceae*

*Tinospora malabarica* Miers. ex Hook. f. (COP/PGSY/300)

LN : Potchindil

The fresh leaf and stem juice is used as a tonic and for the body pain.

*Mimosaceae*

*Acacia concinna* DC. (COP/PGSY/203)

LN : Seekai

The decoction of pods and leaves is used to clean the scalp and the leaf powder is applied externally to treat skin diseases.

*A. leucophloea* Willd. (COP/PGSY/204)

E : White Babool; LN : Velvelam

The bark is boiled with water and concentrated, which is used for tooth infections.

*Nyctaginaceae*

*Boerhaavia diffusa* Linn. (COP/PGSY/220)

E : Hogweed; LN : Thaluthama

The crushed leaves are made into decoction and used as a diuretic and anti-rheumatic.

*Oxalidaceae*

*Oxalis corniculata* Linn. (COP/PGSY/267)

E : Indian Sorrel; LN : Puliyarila

The leaf juice (10-15ml, twice daily) is used in fever and as an appetite stimulant.

*Piperaceae*

*Piper longum* Linn. (COP/PGSY/268)

E : Indian Long Pepper; LN : Argadi

The root powder (5g) is given along with *tulsi* leaf powder 5g and sugar 5g to pregnant women to prevent whooping cough.

*Plumbaginaceae*

*Plumbago zeylanica* Linn. (COP/PGSY/273)

LN : Venkodivai

Decoction of the root (10-20 ml twice daily) is used to treat leprosy and piles.

*Polygonaceae*

*Polygonum glabrum* Willd. (COP/PGSY/271)

LN : Katalarle

The leaf extract (about 5ml) is mixed with common salt (1-2g); boiled and used in dysentery.

*Rhamnaceae*

*Ziziphus trinervia* Roxb. (COP/PGSY/303)

LN : Karukava

The leaf decoction 10-15ml twice daily is used as a tonic and blood purifier.

*Rubiaceae*

*Adina cordifolia* Roxb. (COP/PGSY/208)

LN : Kadambabai

The leaf decoction (10-15ml) is taken twice daily as an anthelmintic.
**Hymenodictyon excelsum** Wall.  
(COP / PGSY / 251)  
LN : **Viralli**  
The leaf juice is used to prevent fungal infections.

**Randia dumetorum** Poir.  
(COP / PGSY / 274)  
E : **Common Emetic Nut**; LN : **Kadudam**  
The leaves are mixed with oil and applied externally on wounds and tumours.

**Rubia cordifolia** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 275)  
E : **Indian Madder**; LN : **Manjithi**, **Shevuk Kodi**  
The decoction of roots, 10-20ml once daily, is used in dysentery and as a vermifuge.

**Rutaceae**

**Aegle marmelos** Corr. ex Koen.  
(COP / PGSY / 212)  
E : **Bael Tree**; LN : **Villuvam**  
The fruit juice (one teaspoon) is taken early in the morning, acts as a laxative cooling and stomachic. Decoction of root is used in fever.

**Glycosmis cochinchinensis** Pierre  
(COP / PGSY / 242)  
LN : **Anam**  
The root decoction is taken orally to decrease anxiety. It is also used as a digestive and carminative.

**Ruta graveolens** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 276)  
E : **Garden Rue**; LN : **Aruvadam**  
The whole plant juice (5-10ml once daily) is used as an anthelmintic in epilepsy and as an antispasmodic.

**Toddalia asiatica** Lam.  
(COP / PGSY / 290)  
E : **Wild Orange Tree**; LN : **Milagaranai**  
The root and bark infusions, around 5ml, 2-3 times daily, are used as an antimalarial and antipyretic.

**Salvadoraceae**

**Azima tetracantha** Lam.  
(COP / PGSY / 216)  
LN : **Ichankai**, **Sanganjedi**  
The leaf juice one teaspoon twice daily is used for cough and rheumatism.

**Santalaceae**

**Santalum album** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 277)  
E : **Sandal Wood Tree**; LN : **Chandanam**  
The wood is powdered and used externally as an antiseptic.

**Scrophulariaceae**

**Bacopa monnieri** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 218)  
LN : **Nirbrahmi**  
Decoction of leaves about 5ml, 3-4 times daily is used as a diuretic.

**Solanaceae**

**Datura metel** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 234)  
LN : **Ummatham**  
The leaves are powdered and mixed with coconut oil and applied externally for sore skin.

**Solanum surattense** Burm.f. syn. S. xanthocarpum Schrad. & Wendl.  
(COP / PGSY / 282)  
E : **Yellow Berried Nightshade**; LN : **Kandangkathri**  
The leaves are powdered and applied to open wound and also as an anthelmintic.

**S. verbascifolium** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 283)  
E : **Potato tree**; LN : **Anaichundai**  
The fruits when taken uncooked, found to destroy tooth infections.

**Withania somnifera** Dunal.  
(COP / PGSY / 297)  
LN : **Amukkuram**  
The root and leaf decoctions are used in ulcers, coughs, dropsy and also as aphrodisiac.

**Sterculiaceae**

**Helicteres isora** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 248)  
E : **East Indian Screw Tree**; LN : **Valampiri**  
The entire fruit is crushed and given to patients suffering from diarrhoea. It is also used as a baby bath powder.

**Tiliaceae**

**Grewia microcos** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 246)  
LN : **Kadambu**  
The decoction (1-2 teaspoon, 2 times daily) of the entire plant is used in indigestion, fever and dysentery.

**G. villosa** Willd.  
(COP / PGSY / 245)  
LN : **Kullai**  
The decoction (10-15ml, once daily) of root and bark is used to treat diarrhoea.

**Urticaceae**

**Laportea crenulata** Gaud.  
(COP / PGSY / 257)  
E : **Devil Nettle**; LN : **Ottapilavu**  
Around 4g of seed powder is taken with water to treat fever and body pain.

**Verbenaceae**

**Clerodendrum inerme** (Linn.) Gaertn.  
(COP / PGSY / 229)  
LN : **Anjali**, **Pinari**  
The flower and leaf is dried and powdered and mixed with coconut oil and applied externally to treat skin rashes and psoriasis.

**Gmelina arborea** Linn.  
(COP / PGSY / 244)  
LN : **Kattanam**, **Kumiz**  
The fruit and leaf juice 10ml once a day for three days is used as a laxative.
Vitex negundo Linn. (COP / PGSY / 301)
E : Monk’s pepper; LN : Vennochi
The decoction (10-20ml once at bed time) of the leaves and fruits is used for worm infection.

Violaceae
Ionidium suffruticosum Ging. (COP / PGSY / 252)
LN : Orilathamai
Leaf juice is used for scorpion sting and as a tonic.

Zingiberaceae
Alpinia galangal Willd. (COP / PGSY / 211)
LN : Peravattai
Decoction of rhizomes is used 3-4 times daily to treat rheumatism and diarrhoea.

Curcuma aromatica Salisb. (COP / PGSY / 232)
LN : Kasturi manjal
Decoction of rhizomes one teaspoon full 2 times a day is used to reduce blood pressure.

Zingiber zerumbet Rosc. ex Smith (COP / PGSY / 299)
LN : Katuinji
The rhizomes are use as a flavouring agent and carminative.

Zygophyllaceae
Fagonia cretica Linn. (COP / PGSY / 241)
LN : Chittigra
The stems, leaves and flowers are put together and prepared a decoction and used as bitter tonic (5-10ml of decoction taken internally at bed time) against stomach problem.

Discussion
The present study records 102 folk medicinal plants used by Maduga tribes of Siruvani forest. The data obtained by interviewing these tribal healers indicate that there is considerable knowledge about the use of herbal remedies among Maduga tribes. Literature survey (Kirtikar & Basu, 1935; Chopra et al, 1956; Agarwal, 1986) showed that the chemical constituents and pharmacological actions of most of the species are already known to some extent.

Most of the preparations are used internally or applied externally in the form of infusion, decoction, paste or powder. Investigations on ethnomedicinal plants bring out clues for the phytochemical research people to better evaluate the efficiency of plant medicines from various species.

During this survey, we have identified 42 families and 40 different species. Around thirteen plants, viz. Abrus precatorius, Aristolochia indica, Celosia cristata, Emblica officinalis, Euphorbia hirta, Ocimum sanctum, Piper longum, Terminalia bellirica, Tylophora indica, Wedelia calendulacea, Withania somnifera, Azima tetracantha and Calotropis gigantea have been found useful in cough, bronchitis and asthma.

The plant like Abrus precatorius, Acacia concinna, Achyranthes aspera, Bridelia retusa, Cassia tora, Clerodendrum inerme, Datura metel, Euphorbia hirta, Helianthus debils, Mappia foetida, Mentha piperita, Randia dumerorum, Santalum album, Wedelia calendulacea, Wrightia tinctoria and Sida cordifolia are useful for various kinds of skin infections. We have also observed that the plant Mappia foetida which is now-a-days explored for its anti-tumour properties, occurs abundently in Siruvani forest and the tribals use its leaves for increasing lactation in cattles and the leaf paste is used in healing wounds. The Maduga tribes use Dolichos lablab, Drosera peltata, Smithia germiniflora and Strychnos nux-vomica as anti-fatigue and anti-ageing drugs. The plants like Mucuna prurita, Pterocarpus marsupium and Withania somnifera are used as aphrodisiac.

This paper provides a report on ethnomedicinal uses of some important plants locally available for curing various diseases. In Siruvani, the medicinal plants present are still not fully explored. A thorough investigation may provide remedy for different ailments and also raw materials for undertaking further scientific research to confirm the findings.

References
Ayurvedic Tips

In this column for the benefit of our patrons we are trying to include simple tips from medical experts of various systems of medicine.

Long beautiful, silky, bouncing and dark black hairs are considered to be one of the important features of beauty. But reverse condition is not accepted easily by anybody. If there are patches on the scalp with baldness, with absolutely no hair, it is called Alopecia rather more specific Alopecia areata. Alopecia is a highly unpredictable, autoimmune skin disease resulting in the loss of hair on the scalp and elsewhere on the body. This common but very challenging and capricious disease affects approximately 1.7 per cent of the population overall. Due to the fact that much of the public is still not familiar with Alopecia areata, the disease can have a profound impact on one's life and functional status, both at work and at living place.

In Alopecia areata, the affected hair follicles are mistakenly attacked by a person’s own immune system (white blood cells), resulting in the arrest of the hair growth stage. Alopecia areata usually starts with one or more small, round, smooth bald patches on the scalp and can progress to total scalp hair loss (Alopecia totalis) or complete body hair loss (Alopecia universalis). It occurs in males and females of all ages and races; however, onset most often begins in childhood and can be psychologically devastating. Although not life-threatening; most certainly life-altering, and its sudden onset, recurrent episodes and unpredictable course have a profound psychological impact on the lives of those disrupted by this disease. It does not cause any physical pain and people with the condition are generally healthy otherwise. In Alopecia universalis, however, loss of eyelashes and eyebrows and hair in the nose and ears can make the person more vulnerable to dust, germs, and foreign particles entering in them.

Causes

In Alopecia areata, immune system cells called white blood cells attack the rapidly growing cells in the hair follicles that make the hair. The affected hair follicles become small and drastically slow down hair production. Fortunately, the stem cells that continually supply the follicle with new cells do not seem to be targeted. So the follicle always has the potential to regrow hair. Scientists do not know exactly, why the hair follicles undergo these changes, but they suspect that a combination of genes may predispose some people to the disease. In those who are genetically predisposed, some type of trigger, perhaps a virus or something in the person’s environment brings on the attack against the hair follicles.
Alopecia areata often occurs in people whose family members have other autoimmune diseases, such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid disease, systemic lupus erythematosus, pernicious anemia or Addison’s disease. People who have Alopecia areata do not usually have other autoimmune diseases, but they do have a higher occurrence of thyroid disease, atopic eczema, nasal allergies and asthma.

Ayurvedic aspect about Alopecia areata

In Ayurveda this disease has been discussed in a greater length as Indraloopa. It has been considered by Sushrutacharya as a type of skin disorder. Ayurveda believes that if there are problems in the functioning of the bhrajak pitta, vata and metabolism of ashthi, there is a pathogenesis taking place by virtue of which there are possibility of epilation of hair follicles along with the roots from the region of scalp. There exists a patchy baldness. That is known as Indraloopa.

Prognosis

There is every chance that patient’s hair will regrow, but it may also fallout again. No one can predict when it might regrow or fallout. The course of the disease varies from person to person. Some people lose just a few patches of hair, then the hair regrows and the condition never recurs. Other people continue to lose and regrow hair for many years. A few lose all the hair on their head; some lose all the hair on their head along with face and body. Even in those who lose all their hair, the possibility for full regrowth remains. In some, the initial hair regrowth is white, with a gradual return of the original hair colour. In most, the regrown hair is ultimately of the same colour and texture as the original hair.

Ayurvedic management of Alopecia areata

In Ayurveda the diet of patients is streamlined. Drugs like Kukutandatwak Bhasma, Ajasthibhasma, Pravalpishti, Muktapishti, Sahukt pishti, etc. are recommended under the supervision of a doctor. Since, alopecia is a skin disease some herbs like Manjistha, Sariva, Kadeera, Karanja beeja, Neem, etc, which improve blood circulation, reduce the itching and act against microbes are given.

There are certain pastes, which are specially advocated for these conditions. They are to be applied on that part of scalp with patchy baldness as a local therapy. Some of them are as follows:

1. Romasanjanana Lepa to be applied on the scalp.
2. Jaipal beej may be rubbed with either water or cow’s urine and to be applied on that patch
3. Hastidanti mashi along with Daruharidra kalka to be applied on the patch.

Do’s and Don’t

In addition to the treatments to help hair grow, there are measures that can be taken to minimize the physical dangers or discomforts of lost hair.

- Sunscreens are important for the scalp, face and all exposed areas.
- Eyeglasses (or sunglasses) protect the eyes from excessive sun, dust and debris when eyebrows or eyelashes are missing.
- Wigs, caps or scarves protect the scalp from the sun and keep the head warm.
- In diet, Ayurveda advocates that these patients should not take salty, sour, spicy and pungent food.

Ayurvedic Tips

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