



Ayurvedic Management of Non Healing Ulcers: A Clinical Review

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Abstract

Vrana, or wound, refers to the disruption or discontinuity of body tissues due to trauma or disease. The depth, extent, and involvement of structures such as skin, muscles, bones, fat, ligaments, and vital organs play a crucial role in determining the prognosis of an ulcer. This study presents an overview of non-healing ulcers by integrating perspectives from classical Ayurvedic texts and modern medical literature. Management of ulcers involves both systemic and local approaches. Systemic therapy includes internal medications that support healing and detoxification, while local applications aim at cleansing and tissue regeneration. Herbs and formulations with Shodhana (cleansing) and Ropana (healing) properties are commonly utilized. There is significant potential for further scientific investigation into Ayurvedic formulations and single drugs used for ulcer management. Systematic clinical and pharmacological validation of these traditional therapies could greatly contribute to the effective treatment of chronic and non-healing wounds.

Key Words : Non Healing ulcers, Shalya,

INTRODUCTION

The term *Vrana* refers to the destruction, rupture, or discontinuity of body tissues. The prognosis of an ulcer largely depends on its anatomical location—such as the skin (*Tvaka*), blood vessels (*Shira*), muscle tissue (*Mamsa Dhatu*), adipose tissue (*Meda Dhatu*), bone (*Asthi Dhatu*), ligaments (*Snayu*), vital organs (*Marma*), and internal viscera of the thoracic and abdominal cavities (*Antaradi*). Complications associated with ulcers include conditions like *Visarpa* (erysipelas), *Pakshaghata* (hemiplegia), *Shirastambha* (vascular constriction), and *Jwara* (fever). Factors that hinder the healing process include sloughing of ligaments and blood vessels, the presence of deep-seated maggots, bone fractures near the ulcer, and foreign bodies lodged within the wound.

The management of *Nija Vrana* (endogenous ulcers) differs from that of *Agantuja Vrana* (exogenous ulcers). Endogenous ulcers arise from the vitiation of *Vata* and other *Doshas*, whereas exogenous ulcers are primarily caused by external trauma such as *Vadha* (stab wounds), *Bandha* (tight bindings), *Prapatana* (falls), and injuries from nails or teeth. However, over time, even exogenous ulcers may involve *Dosha* imbalance, requiring treatment similar to that of endogenous ulcers.

Therapeutic management of endogenous ulcers includes *Shodhana* therapies such as *Vamana* (emesis), *Virechana* (purgation), *Basti* (medicated enema), and *Raktamokshana* (bloodletting) to eliminate *Doshaja* toxins. Additionally, *Agnikarma* (therapeutic cauterization) is beneficial due to its *Ushna Guna* (heat property), which counteracts *Vata* and *Kapha*. The generated heat promotes vasodilation, relieving *Srotorodha* (channel obstruction) and enhancing blood flow to the affected area.

For exogenous ulcers, localized treatments such as the application of *Kshara* (alkaline preparations), surgical procedures, and cauterization are advocated for effective wound management.

Review of literature

Vrana (ulcers) are broadly classified into two types based on their etiology and mode of treatment: *Nija Vrana* (endogenous ulcers) ¹ and *Agantuka Vrana* (exogenous ulcers). *Nija Vrana* arises from the vitiation of *Doshas*—primarily *Vata*—from the very onset, while *Agantuka Vrana* is initially caused by external trauma, such as blows, bindings, falls, bites, or injuries from nails, teeth, weapons, or poisonous substances. In *Agantuka Vrana*, *Dosha* involvement typically occurs at a later stage.

Complications associated with ulcers, including *Visarpa* (erysipelas), *Sirastambha* (vascular constriction), and *Jwara* (fever), are well-documented in Ayurvedic texts. During the inflammatory phase of ulceration (*Vrana Shotha*), *Raktamokshana* (bloodletting) is considered significant as it helps eliminate impure blood, thereby reducing toxic substances and pacifying aggravated *Doshas*.

Management approaches differ based on ulcer type. In the case of fractures related to ulcers, their complications and treatment modalities are elaborately described. *Dahana Karma* (cauterization) is employed to constrict blood vessels and control bleeding, while *Kshara* (alkaline applications), surgical procedures, and cauterization are also recommended as part of localized treatment.

The prognosis of an ulcer depends on its type and anatomical location. Notably, exogenous ulcers are treated with interventions such as *Mantra* (incantations) and anti-toxic herbal pastes, which differ significantly from the internal purification and *Dosha*-specific treatments used in endogenous ulcers. Each type presents with distinct etiologies, clinical features, and therapeutic strategies.

Importance of Dosha Dominance in Treatment

When exogenous ulcers do not heal and begin to exhibit internal pathological features, they should be managed as *Nija Vrana* (endogenous ulcers). The treatment approach must be guided by the predominance of the vitiated *Dosha*. Understanding the dominant *Dosha* is crucial in planning an effective line of

treatment, as it directs the selection of appropriate *Shodhana* (purificatory), *Shamana* (palliative), and local therapies in accordance with Ayurvedic principles.²

Nija Vrana (Endogenous ulcers)

Vata, **Pitta**, and **Kapha**, when vitiated by their respective causative factors, localize in the external channels of the body, leading to the formation of *Nija Vrana* (endogenous ulcers).

Dosha dominant Vrana and their treatment

Vata dominant Vrana and treatment

Ulcers caused by vitiated Vata are typically characterized by stiffness, hardness on palpation, minimal discharge, intense pricking pain, throbbing sensation, and a blackish discoloration. The management of *Vatika Vrana* involves therapies that counteract Vata's dryness and roughness, such as **Sampoorna** (filling of the ulcer cavity), **internal oleation** (consumption of unctuous substances), **Snigdha Swedana** (unctuous fomentation), **lepana** (application of medicinal poultices), **ointments**, and **sprinkling of medicated liquids** to promote healing and pacify Vata.

Pitta dominant Vrana and treatment

Pittaja ulcers are identified by symptoms such as **excessive thirst**, **fever**, **sweating**, **burning sensation**, **foul-smelling purulent discharge**, **impurity of the ulcer site**, a **tearing type of pain**, and sometimes even **loss of consciousness**. Management of such ulcers involves **cooling and soothing therapies**, including **cold anointing (Sita Abhyanga)** and **sprinkling (Sita Sheka)**, internal use of **sweet and bitter-tasting drugs**, **ghee (Ghrita) intake**, and **purgation therapy (Virechana)** to expel the aggravated Pitta and promote healing.

Kapha dominant Vrana and treatment

Kaphaja ulcers are characterized by symptoms such as **excessive sliminess**, **heaviness**, **unctuousness**, **numbness**, **mild pain**, **pale coloration**, **minimal sloughing**, and a **prolonged healing process**. Treatment of Kaphaja ulcers involves the application and sprinkling of **astringent, pungent, dry, and heating substances**, alongside **fasting** and **digestive therapies** to balance the aggravated Kapha. Additionally, the two types of ulcers—Pittaja and Kaphaja—are further classified into **twenty subtypes** based on their distinct clinical features.

Twenty types of ulcers³

Curable (can be treated with surgical intervention), incurable; infected, non-infected; situated in vital parts, not situated in vital parts; closed, open; hard, soft; discharging, non-discharging; poisonous, non-poisonous; unevenly located, evenly located; pouched, un-pouched; elevated, depressed – these are the twenty types of ulcers according to various distinguishing features

Three fold examination ⁴

Examination of ulcer can be performed by three methods e.g. by inspection, interrogation and palpation. Age, complexion and colour, body parts and sense organs are examined by inspection. Etiology, nature of pain, suitability and power of digestion should be known by patient's statement. By palpation softness and coldness are known with their contraries

Twelve types of ulcers ⁵

White, with depressed margins, very thick margins, much greyish (pinjara), blue, blackish, surrounded with numerous boils, red, black, very fetid odour, non-healing nature and bottle-necked (narrow opening) these are twelve types of defective (Dushta) ulcers.

Sites of vitiation

In the treatise, eight locations of wounds have been mentioned such as skin, blood vessels, flesh, fat, bone, ligament, vital parts and viscera

Specific odours of Vrana ⁷

Eight types of wound odours have been defined by the experts like ghee, oil, muscle-fat, pus, blood, and cadaver, sour and fetid.

Fourteen types of discharges and sixteen complications⁸

Discharges from ulcers are of fourteen types in appearance such as Laseeka (like lymph), water, pus, blood, colour of exudation as yellow, reddish, brownish, ochre-coloured, blue, green, unctuous, rough, white and black. The experts have mentioned sixteen complications of wounds such as erysipelas, paralysis, occlusion in blood vessels, tetanus, and mental confusion, and insanity, pain in wound, fever, thirst, lockjaw, cough, vomiting, diarrhoea, hiccups, dyspnoea and trembling

Causes of non-healing ulcers ⁹

Defects are known to be twenty four according to etiological factors which are as follows: moistening of ligaments, excess of fluid in blood vessels, deepness, eaten by maggots, cracking of bones, presence of foreign body, presence of toxins, spreading, excessive tearing with nails or wooden piece, friction of skin, friction of body hair, faulty bandage, over-application of unctuous substance, excessive emaciation due to over dose, indigestion, over-eating, intake of incompatible food items, unsuitable food, grief, anger, day sleep, physical exercise, sexual intercourse and inactivity. These factors lead to delay in the healing process. Ulcers having much impurity become difficult to be cured due to presence of excessive discharges, odours, defects and complications.

Factors affecting prognosis ¹⁰

Wound is easily curable if it is located in skin and muscles, easy places, youthful age, without complication, in a wise patient and of recent origin. If it is devoid of some of these qualities it is curable with difficulty and when it is devoid of all the qualities it is incurable and thus not to be treated.

Principles of management ¹¹

In cases of wound, first of all, purification with therapeutic emesis, purgation, Shashtra karma (surgical intervention) and Basti (medicated enema) should be done after assessment of condition because the wounds get healed quickly in those with cleansed body.

Procedures for management of ulcers ¹²

The measures of treatment in order such as – measures for pacification of swelling, six types of surgical operations, pressing, cooling, uniting, fomentation, pacification, probing, cleansing, healing, cleaning paste, healing paste, cleaning oil, healing oil, two types of covering with leaf, two types of bandaging, diet, elevation, two types of cauterization, depression, hardening fumigation, softening fumigation, hardening paste, softening paste, powdering, colorization, healing, repilatory- these are the thirty six measures of treatment of wounds.

Guidelines for management of ulcers ¹³

The physician observing Shopha (swelling) as prodromal sign in the beginning should apply blood-letting to prevent the manifestation of wound. One should evacuate the persons with plenty of impurity and lighten those with little impurity. He should overcome the wound predominant in Vata first with decoctions and Ghritas. Paste of Nyogrodha bark (*Ficus bengalensis* Linn.), Udumbara (*Ficus glomerata* Roxb.), Ashwattha (*Ficus religiosa* Linn.), Pplaksha (*Ficus lacor* Buch.Ham.) and Vetasa (*Salix caprea* Linn.) are mixed with ghee is an excellent cooling for inflammation, other local applications prescribed are (1) Vijaya (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), Madhuka (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.), Veera, Bisagranthi, Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus* Willd.), Neeilotpala (*Nymphaea stellata* Willd.), Nagapushpa (*Mesua ferrea* Linn.) and Chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.). Parched grain flour, Madhuka, Sharkara and ghee. Avidahi (nonburning) food is the best remedy for inflammation.

Patana (incision) and Upanaha (poultice)

If swelling of ulcers treated in this way does not subside, poultice should be applied and when ripened should be incised. Warm poultice of the bolus of parched grain flour mixed with oil or ghee or both is useful for ripening of inflammation. The bolus of parched grain flour mixed with Tila (*Sesamum indicum* Linn.), linseeds (*Linum usitatissimum* Linn.), sour curd, yeast, Kustha (*Saussurea lappa* C. B. Clarke) and salt is recommended as poultice. Swelling is known as Vidagdha (under ripening) by the symptoms such as pain, burning sensation, redness and piercing pain. The same should be known as ripened when it is like water-bag on palpation and rises on pressure. Linseed, Guggulu (*Commiphora mukul*), latex of Snuhi

(*Euphorbia neriifolia* Linn.), faeces of chicken and pigeon, alkali of Palasha (*Butea monosperma* Linn.), Svarnksheeri (*Argemone mexicana* Linn.) and Mukoolaka (*Pistacia vera* Linn.). This is the group of drugs which helps in the tearing of ripened inflammation in delicate patients otherwise it should be operated upon surgically.

Six types of surgical procedures ¹⁵

Surgical treatment is of six types such as – incision, puncturing, excision, scrapping, scarification and suturing.

Indications of various surgical procedures ¹⁶

Sinuses, ripened inflammations (i.e. suppurated ulcer or abscess), intestinal perforation, intestinal obstruction, having foreign body within and other similar conditions can perform incision. Ascites, suppurated tumour and Raktaj gulma (uterine tumour), blood disorders such as erysipelas, boils etc, are treated by puncturing. Wounds protruded with thick margins, elevated, hard, piles etc and other growths should be excised. The wise physician should scrape leucoderma, skin diseases and other such disorders which need scraping. The physician should perform scarification over Vatarakta (nodular swelling), Granthi (cysts) pimples, urticarial rashes, red patches, skin diseases, injured parts and swellings. Suturing should be done in pelvic, abdominal surgeries (i.e., laparotomy) etc. Thus the scholars have mentioned six types of surgical treatments.

Vrana peedana (pressing of wound) ¹⁷

Wounds with narrow opening and multiple loculi should be pressed on. Kalaya (*Pisum sativum* Linn.), Masoor (Lens culinaris Medic.), wheat (*Triticum sativum* Lam.) and peas pounded and applied as paste without mixing any fat are useful for pressing the wound.

Various treatment modalities for pacification of ulcer ¹⁸

Bark of Shalmali (*Salmalia malabarica* Schott), Bala (*Sida cordifolia*) root, tender leaves of Nyagrodha – this group (of drugs) known as Nyagrodhadi or Baladi acts as cooling agent applied as paste and sprinkling. Wounds predominant in Raktapitta should be cooled by applying very cold ghee washed hundred times, milk or decoction of Madhuka (*Madhuka indica*). Chronic wound should be pasted with honey and ghee there after bandaged leads to evenly union. When they are evenly set, powder of Priyangu (*Callicarpa macrophylla* Vahl.), Lodhra (*Symplocos racemosa* Roxb.), Katphala (*Myrica esculenta* Buch-Ham.), Lajjalu (*Mimosa pudica* Linn.) and Dhataki (*Woodfordia fruticosa* Kurz.) should be applied thereon or the powder of Panchavalkala mixed with that of Shukti bhasma (pearl ash) or the powder of Dhataki and Lodhra should be applied. Application of above measures leads to proper wounds healing

Management of various conditions of Vrana ¹⁹

Wounds which are dry, intensely painful, stiffened and predominant in Vata should be fomented by bolus fomentation with Krishara and Payasa (a type of dietary preparation). Similarly, they should be fomented with seasoned Veshavara made of the meat of domestic, burrowdwellers, aquatic or marshy animals or hot

Utkarika. Thus the patient gets relief. If the wounds predominant in Vata have burning sensation and pain, they should be pasted upon with linseed and sesamum seeds roasted, then dipped in milk and again pounded with the same milk. Bala (*Sida cordifolia* Linn.), Gudoochi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Madhuka (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.), Prishnaparni (*Uraria picta* Desv), Sshatavari (*Asparagus racemosus* Willd), Jeevanti (*Leptadenia reticulata* W. & A.), sugar, milk, oil, fish fat, ghee cooked with beeswax is known as Sneha sharkara, it relieves pain. The wound should be sprinkled with warm decoction of two Panchamoola (ie. Dashamula), milk and ghee with oil. Barley powder (*Hordeum vulgare* Linn.), Madhuka (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.) and Tila mixed with ghee should be applied as warm paste for alleviating burning sensation and pain. Payasa prepared of Mudga (*Phaseolus radiates* Linn.) mixed with Tila should be applied as poultice to pacify pain and burning sensation. These management principles are beneficial in wounds.

Eshana (Probing)²⁰

In case of wounds with narrow opening, profuse discharge and pouch and not situated in vital parts, probing is beneficial. Probe is of two types – soft and hard, the former is made of soft stalks of plants and the latter of iron (metallic) rods. In deep and muscular parts iron rods preferred while in other parts plant stalks should be used for probing.

Vrana Shodhana (local purification of ulcers)²¹ Wounds with foul odour, abnormal colour, profuse discharge and intense pain should be known as Dushta vrana (unclean) and as such wounds should be treated with cleansing agents.

Decoctions of Triphala, Khadira (*Acacia catechu* Willd), Daruharidra (*Berberis aristata* DC), Nyagrodhadi group, Bala (*Sida cordifolia* Linn.), Kusa (*Desmostachya bipinnata* Stapf.), leaves of Nimba (*Azadirachta indica* A. Juss) and Badara (*Zizyphus jujube* Lam.) are regarded as cleansing drugs. Tila paste, salt, Haridra (*Curcuma longa* Linn.), Daruharidra (*Berberis aristata* DC), Trivrit (*Operculina turpethum* Linn.) Ghrita, Madhuka, Nimba leaves – this formulation is said as wound cleanse. [22] Ropana (healing) of ulcer Those ulcers, are not very red, pale, blackish, painful, elevated and protruded should be known as clean and appeals healing process. Decoction of Nyagrodha, Udumbara, Asvattha, Kadamba, Plaksha, Vetasa, Karaveera (*Nerium indicum* Mill.), Arka (*Calotropis procera* R. Br.) and Kutaja (*Holarrhena antidysentrica* Linn.) are wound healing. Chandana (*Santalum album* Linn.), lotus stamens, Daruharidra bark, blue water lily, Meda (*Polygonatum airrhifolium* Royle), Mahameda (*Polygonatum airrhifolium* Royle), Moorva (*Marsdenia tenacissima* W. & A.), Lajjalu (*Mimosa pudica* Linn.) and Madhuyasti- this formulation is wound healer. Prapaundarika, Jeevanti, Gojihva (*Onosma bracteatum* Wall.), Dhataki, Bala and sesamum should be applied as paste with ghee for wound healing. Kampillaka (*Mallotus philippinensis* Muell Arg), Vidanga (*Embelia ribes* Burm), Kutaja, Triphala, Bala, Patola (*Trichosanthes dioica* Roxb.), Nimba, Musta (*Cyperus rotundus* Linn.), Priyangu, Khadira, Dhataki, Sarja, ela (*Elleteria cardamomum* Maton.), Aaguru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb.) and Chandana are pounded together and oil is extracted. This oil is used as ulcer healing agent. Similarly, oil prepared with equal quantity of prapaundarika, Mahuka, Kakoli (*Roscoca procera* Wall.), Ksheerakakoli (*Roscoca procera*

Wall.), Chandana and Rakta chandana (*Pterocarpus santalinus* Linn.) is an excellent ulcer healing agent. Oil cooked with Durva juice or Kampillaka or paste of Daruharidra bark is an important ulcer healer. By the above method Ghrita should be prepared and used for healing, ulcers predominant in Rakta and Piitta

Patta bandhana (bandage) For covering the wound, leaves of Kadamba, Arjuna, Nimba, Patala (*Stereospermum suaveolens* DC.), Pippala (*Ficus religiosa* Linn.) and Arka should be used. Bandage made of plant bark, deer hide or flaxen cloth is used in wounds. Bandaging of wounds are of two types i.e., It can be started either from left or right side.

Contraindications Patients ²⁴ of ulcer should abstain from salt, sour, pungent, hot, burning and heavy food and drinks and also sexual intercourse. Food and drinks that are not too cold, heavy and fatty, non-burning, according to the nature of ulcer are beneficial, while day-sleep is not suitable in these patient. Suitable food and medicines For raising the depressed wounds galactogogues (*Stanyajanana*), vitalizers (*Jeevaneeya*) and bulk promotives (*Brunhaneeya*) drugs should be applied. Similarly, Bhoorjagranthi (nodes in the tree of *Butea utilis*), Ashmakasisa (copper sulphate), purgatives, Guggulu and excrement of sparrow and pigeon should be used for depressing the wounds.

Indications and contraindications of Agni karma ²⁵ (cauterization) Excessive haemorrhage after excision, excisable growths, Kaphaja nodules, glands, stiffness and disorders due to Vata, wounds with hidden pus and lymph, deep and form; and after amputation of body part, cauterization is prescribed. The expert in cauterization should cauterize the spot with beeswax, oil, marrow, honey, muscle-fat, Ghrita or various heated metallic sticks. Wounds deep and predominant in Vata and in patients rough and delicate should be cauterized with fat or beeswax otherwise with iron stick or honey. Cauterization should not be applied in children, debilitated, old persons, pregnant women, those suffering from internal haemorrhage, thirst, fever, weak and poisoned persons and in wounds situated at ligaments and vital parts, poisoned, foreign body, ophthalmic and leprosy wounds.

Kshara karma (application of alkali) and dhupana (fumigation) ²⁶

The physician conversant with dose, time and Agni (heat) may apply alkali in cases amenable to surgical treatment and cauterization according to severity of disease and morbidity. Wounds attain hardness by being fumigated with aromatic substances and heartwood. The wounds get softened if fumigated with Ghrita, marrow or muscle-fat. Through fumigation pain, discharges, odours, maggots, hardness and softness of wounds are removed. Lodhra, leaf-buds of *Nyagrodha*, *Khadira*, *Triphala* and Ghrita - this combination used as paste provides looseness and softness in wounds. The wounds which are painful, hard, stiff and without discharge should be pasted frequently with barley powder mixed with Ghrita. Wounds may be saturated by applying frequently the paste of Payasa (cereals cooked with milk) made of *Mudga*, *Shashtika* and *Shali* rice or *Jeevaneeya* drugs mixed with Ghrita.

External applications

By dusting the wounds with the powders of barks of *Kakubha* (*Termalia arjuna*), *Udumbara*, *Asvattha*, *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa* Roxb), *Jambu* (*Eugenia jambolana* Lam) and *Katphala* (*Myrica esculenta*

Buch-Ham) they heals the skin quickly. Manashila (Realgar), Manjishtha, Lkshac, Haridra and Daruharidra used as paste with ghee and honey is an excellent cleanser of skin. The paste prepared by Bhasmas of iron, Kaseesa and Triphala flowers provide blackness in the newly formed skin quickly. Kaleeyaka (Jateorhiza palmata Miers), Nata /Tagara (Valeriana wallichii DC), mango seeds, Nagakeshara, iron and Triphala powder mixed with cow-dung juice make an excellent paste for reviving normal colour in skin. Roots of Dhyamaka, Ashvattha and Nichula (Barringtonia acutangula Linn), lac, Gairika (red-ochre), Nagakeshara and Kaseesa – These restore the natural colour of the skin. The hairless spots are smeared with oil and dusting with the ash of skin, hair, hoof, horns and bone of quadrupeds, reproduces hairs. The treatment of sixteen complications of wounds has been mentioned in their respective contexts.

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