

Special Procedures

Unit 4. Special Procedures (Visheshā Upakrama): Definitions, Types, Procedures, Benefits

This chapter consolidates seven high-yield fomentation/oleation-based procedures frequently used in Panchakarma. For each, you get: definition, types/variants, step-wise procedure (pūrva-pradhāna-pāścāt karma), classical logic, and benefits/indications with cautions.

Core Classical Anchors (for the whole unit)

- **Piṇḍa-sweda (Saṅkara-sweda) media:**
“तिलमाषकुलत्थाम्लघृततैलामिशोदनैः । पायसैः कृशरैर्मांसैः पिण्डस्वेदं प्रयोजयेत् ॥”
— *Caraka Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 14/25*
(Use boluses prepared from sesame, black gram, horse gram, sour media, ghee, oil, meat, rice gruel, milk preparations, kṛśāra, meat etc.)
- **Rūkṣa vs. Snigdha selection:**
“... श्लेष्मिकान् स्वेदयेत् पूर्वं वातिकान् समुपाचरेत् ॥”
— *Caraka Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 14/27*
(Dry media for Kapha states; unctuous/wet for Vāta states.)
- **Ten Nirāgni (non-fire) sweda principles** (useful where dhāra/steam are avoided/contraindicated):
“व्यायाम उष्णसदनं गुरुप्रावरणं क्षुधा ।
बहुपानं भयक्रोधावुपनाहाह्वातपाः ॥ स्वेदयन्ति दशैतानि नरमग्निगुणादृते ॥”
— *Caraka Saṃhitā, Sūtrasthāna 14/64–65*

1) Saṅkara-Sweda (Piṇḍa-Sweda; Bolus Fomentation)

Definition

A **sāgni-sweda** where heat and selected drugs are delivered through **boluses (piṇḍa)** wrapped in cloth and applied rhythmically over the body/region. “Saṅkara” signifies mixing of media (leaf/powder/rice/meat/milk etc.).

Common Types (by media)

- **Snigdha Piṇḍa-Sweda** (for Vāta-rūkṣa states):
 - **Patra-piṇḍa** (herbal leaves with taila/ghṛta)
 - **Cūrṇa-piṇḍa** (herb powders roasted in taila)
 - **Śāṣṭika-śālī piṇḍa** (navara rice cooked in milk-decoction)
- **Rūkṣa Piṇḍa-Sweda** (for Kapha-āma-meda):
 - **Vāluka-piṇḍa** (hot sand)
 - **Yava-Kulatta-Triphalā** powder boluses (dry)

Indications (illustrative)

Sandhigata-Vāta, Gridhrasī (sciatica), Pakṣāghāta (stiff phase), muscular spasm, osteoarthritis phenotype, chronic back pain, āma-resolved phases of Āmavāta (then shift to snigdha).

Contraindications

Pitta-prakope (burning tendency), acute inflammation/fever, pregnancy (abdomen/lumbosacral), open wounds, severe debility.

Procedure (step-wise)

- **Pūrva-karma:** assessment (doṣa/āma, agni, bala), **abhyanga** with suitable taila; protect eyes/genitals/heart.
- **Pradhāna-karma:** heat 2–4 boluses; alternate in rotation to maintain uniform warmth. Stroke pattern—long strokes on muscles, circular over joints; pressure mild-moderate; session **30–45 min**. Watch for **samyak-sveda** signs (relief of śīta–stambha–gaurava; mārḍava).
- **Paścāt-karma:** gentle **nāḍī-sveda** (if needed), warm bath, light **laghu-āhāra**, rest.

Benefits

- Relieves pain–stiffness, improves range of motion, softens tissues, mobilises doṣa for later śodhana, nourishes when **Śāṣṭika-śālī** is used (br̥ḥhaṇa).

2) Kṣīrādhūma (Medicated Milk Vapour/Fume)

Definition

Directed application of **warm vapour/fume generated from milk (kṣīra)** processed with suitable drugs (e.g., Daśamūla, Vāta-hara leaves), channelled to the **orofacial/aural** or regional site. It blends **snehana + mṛdu swedana** with soothing action.

Indications

Ardita (facial palsy) – mṛdu local sweda; Hanustambha (trismus), Mukhapāka (stomatitis—mild), Dantashūla (tooth pain), dry rhinitis, post-nasal dryness, certain voice disorders; also for delicate constitutions needing gentle heat.

Contraindications

Pitta-rakta vitiation locally (burning/bleeding), acute purulent infections, uncontrolled hypertension (face-steam caution).

Procedure

- **Pūrva:** mild **abhyanga** on target area; patient seated comfortably; eye protection.
- **Pradhāna:** boil medicated milk; conduct vapour through a nozzle/tube; expose **15–20 minutes, comfortable warmth only**; keep head supported.
- **Paścāt:** wipe moisture; avoid cold exposure, gargle with lukewarm decoction if oral route used.

Benefits

Soothes mucosa, reduces stiffness/spasm, relieves pain, improves salivary/secretory lubrication; excellent where **mṛdu, snigdha sweda** is preferred.

3) Pizhichil (Kāyaseka / Taila-Dhāra; “Oil Bath”)

Definition

A **continuous warm stream of medicated oil** poured systematically over the whole body or a large region while gentle **abhyanga** is performed. It is a Kerala classic combining **snehana with snigdha-swedana** (akin to *parīśeka* in classics).

Variants

- **Sarvāṅga Pizhichil** (whole body)
- **Ekaṅga Pizhichil** (regional—back/hip/limb)



- Oil choice: **Tila taila** base with Vāta-hara formulations (e.g., Kṣīrabala, Dhanvantara, Mahānārāyaṇa), or **ghṛta** in Pitta-skin.

Indications

Sandhigata-Vāta, Pakṣāghāta (chronic), cervical/lumbar spondylosis, neuromuscular stiffness, insomnia/stress with Vāta predominance, dry skin/eczema in nirāma stage.

Contraindications

Āma-jvara, Kapha-sañcaya with heaviness, open/wet skin lesions, uncontrolled diabetes/obesity (prolonged oil bath cautioned), pregnancy (abdomen).

Procedure

- **Pūrva:** assessment; bowel/bladder empty; baseline vitals; light food prior; select oil, **lukewarm**.
- **Pradhāna:** 2–4 therapists synchronised strokes; **head protection** with cotton/ghee pad; **40–60 min**; maintain oil warmth.
- **Paścāt:** **sveda chamber (jēntāka/kuṭi)** short sitting if planned; wipe; warm bath; **pathya-āhāra**.

Benefits

Deep Vāta-śamana, analgesia, relaxation, improved sleep, skin softness, better joint glide; primes for **Basti** in Vāta disorders.

4) Dhanyāmla-Dhāra (Fermented Cereal Sour Pour)

Definition

A **rūkṣa-uṣṇa dhāra** using **Dhanyāmla**—a sour, fermented liquid prepared from cereals/pulses (e.g., rice, barley) with spices and herbs—poured in streams over the body/region.

Indications

Āmavāta (āma-dominant), Kapha-Meda sañcaya with heaviness, myofascial pain with edema, cellulitic congestion, post-traumatic stiffness without acute inflammation.

Contraindications

Dry Vāta states without āma (can aggravate), active Pitta disorders (burning), pregnancy abdomen, very delicate/sensitive skin.

Procedure

- **Pūrva:** no heavy abhyanga (keeps it rūkṣa); protect eyes/genitals.
- **Pradhāna:** warm Dhanyāmla to comfortable heat; **continuous pouring** with gentle rubbing **30–45 min**; keep patient warm.
- **Paścāt:** wipe; **valuka-sweda** if indicated; light, warm diet.

Benefits

Reduces **āma-kapha**, edema, heaviness; improves circulation and mobility; transitions patients toward **snigdha** modalities once āma declines.



5) Takra-Dhāra (Buttermilk Stream)

Definition

Medicated buttermilk (takra)—often processed with **Dhānyaka, Mustā, Amlī, Amalaki** etc.—is poured lukewarm over the **forehead (śiro-dhāra)** or the **body** in a steady stream.

Indications

Pitta-dominant **śīroroga** (burning scalp, headache with heat), insomnia/anxiety with heat signs, psoriasis/seborrhea of scalp (non-oozing), menopausal heat intolerance with anxiety, stress-headaches.

Contraindications

Strong Vāta-cold states (prefer oil dhāra), sinusitis with acute kapha (risk of chill if fluid too cool), head cold.

Procedure

- **Pūrva:** light head **abhyanga** with pitta-pacifying oil (optional/individualised).
- **Pradhāna:** position dhāra pot **4–6 inches** above; oscillate stream **forehead-temple-forehead; 30–45 min;** maintain uniform **lukewarm** temperature.
- **Paścāt:** wipe; head kept warm; avoid wind/cold; mild steam for body if needed.

Benefits

Calms mind, reduces burning/heat, improves sleep, soothes scalp/skin (pitta); many patients report deep relaxation.

6) Thālam and Thalapothichil (Head Applications)

6A. Thālam (Topical Head Patching)

Definition: Application of a **small quantity** of medicated paste/oil on the **vertex or fontanel area** (often with a protective leaf and bandage) for a prescribed time.

Indications: Headache (vāta-pitta), insomnia, anxiety, early hair/scalp disorders, mental agitation.

Procedure:

- **Pūrva:** mild head massage; part hair; place a small pad/leaf.
- **Pradhāna:** apply paste (e.g., **Kottamchukkādi** paste + oil/ghṛta); secure; **30–60 min.**
- **Paścāt:** remove; wipe; keep head warm; avoid wind.

Benefits: Focused vāta-pitta śamana at **śiras**, tranquilising effect, relief in tension-type headaches.

6B. Thalapothichil (Full Head Pack)

Definition: **Whole-scalp coating** with a **thick medicated paste** (often amla, yashtimadhu, bringaraja, chandana in pitta states; bala, ashwagandha for vāta), covered with leaves/cloth.

Indications: Pitta-predominant scalp disorders, bald patches (supportive), headache with heat, stress-insomnia, pediatric hyperirritability (gentle, short duration).

Procedure:



- **Pūrva:** baseline check; protect ears/eyes; apply a thin trail of oil around hairline.
- **Pradhāna:** thick paste **0.5-1 cm** layer over scalp; cover; **45-60 min**.
- **Paścāt:** remove; warm rinse; keep head warm.

Benefits: Cools scalp, calms mind, reduces pitta-heat, nourishes follicles (supportive), improves sleep quality.

7) Annalepa (Topical Rice Poultice/Plaster)

Definition

Topical **application of cooked rice**—classically **Śaṣṭika-śālī** cooked in **kṣīra + kvātha**—as a **paste/plaster** over a region, delivering **snigdha-mṛdu swedana** and **br̥mhaṇa**. (Local cousin of **Śaṣṭika-śālī Piṇḍa-sweda**.)

Indications

Vāta-kṣaya with muscle wasting (after āma resolution), post-fracture stiffness (late), osteoarthritis with dryness, pediatric/geriatric weakness needing gentle nourishment.

Contraindications

Āma, active edema/oozing, Pitta-heat state, acute infection.

Procedure

- **Pūrva:** local abhyanga with ghr̥ta/taila as indicated.
- **Pradhāna:** apply warm rice paste **0.5-1 cm** thick; keep **20-30 min**; replenish warmth by gentle fomentation over pad.
- **Paścāt:** remove; wipe; warm bath; light diet.

Benefits

Nourishes and softens tissues, reduces pain-stiffness, supports **br̥mhaṇa** in rehabilitation phases.

Quick Comparison Table

Procedure	Nature	Best for	Avoid/caution
Saṅkara (Piṇḍa)-Sweda	Snigdha or Rūkṣa (by media)	Vāta pain-stiffness; OA; spasm	Pitta heat, acute inflammation
Kṣīrādhūma	Mṛdu, snigdha-sweda vapour	Ardita, orofacial dryness, trismus	Pitta-rakta states, acute infection
Pizhichil	Snigdha-sweda (oil bath)	Chronic Vāta neuromuscular issues	Āma-kapha heaviness, open lesions
Dhanyāmla-Dhāra	Rūkṣa-uṣṇa dhāra	Āmavāta, Kapha-Meda	Dry Vāta, Pitta heat
Takra-Dhāra	Cooling-soothing (pitta śamana)	Pitta head-heat, insomnia	Vāta-cold head, sinus flares
Thālam	Local head application	Tension headache, insomnia	Uncontrolled pitta scalp
Thalapothishil	Full scalp pack	Pitta scalp, stress, heat	Cold exposure post-therapy
Annalepa	Snigdha-mṛdu local pack	Vāta-kṣaya, rehab stiffness	Āma/ooze, acute heat



Safety & Stop-Criteria (applies to all)

- **Stop at Samyak-Sveda signs:** relief of **śīta-stambha-gaurava**, appearance of **mārdava**.
- **Watch for Ati-sveda:** excessive heat, dizziness, thirst, burning, weakness—**stop immediately**, cool/unctuous measures, oral warm water in sips.
- **General care:** protect eyes/heart/testes; avoid wind/cold, heavy exercise, loud speech, anger, day sleep, and cold bath post-procedure; use light, warm **pathya-āhāra**.

Assessment

Long Answer (10 marks — answer any 1)

1. Define **Saṅkara-Sveda**. Classify its variants with media. Describe full procedure (pūrva-pradhāna-pāścāt), indications/contraindications, and benefits. Quote **Caraka Sū. 14/25**.
2. Compare **Pizhichil**, **Dhanyāmla-Dhāra**, and **Takra-Dhāra** with respect to doṣa targeting, āma status, and tissue goals. Give a protocol for switching from rūkṣa to snigdha phases in Āmavāta.
3. Write short essays on **Kṣīrādhūma**, **Thālam/Thalapoṭhichil**, and **Annalepa**—definitions, indications, step-wise procedures, and cautions.

Short Answer (5 × 5 = 25 marks — answer any 5)

1. Enumerate **Snigdha vs Rūkṣa** piṇḍa-sveda media with two examples each.
2. Write the **samyak-sveda** stop-criteria and two steps of pāścāt-karma common to all seven procedures.
3. Indications and step-points for **Takra-Dhāra (śīro-dhāra)** in pitta head-heat.
4. Procedure highlights of **Dhanyāmla-Dhāra**, including temperature control and duration.
5. Thālam vs Thalapoṭhichil—two differences in indication and application.
6. Write a note on **Annalepa**: when to choose it over Śāṣṭika-śālī Piṇḍa-sveda.
7. Kṣīrādhūma—apparatus, exposure time, and after-care.
8. List three **contraindications** common to Pizhichil and Annalepa.

MCQs (10 × 1 = 10 marks)

1. The verse listing media for Piṇḍa-Sveda occurs in:
a) Ca. Sū. 13 b) Ca. Sū. 14 c) Su. Sū. 12 d) A.H. Sū. 20
2. Dhanyāmla-Dhāra primarily provides:
a) Snigdha-sveda b) Rūkṣa-sveda c) Śīta-upakrama d) Nirāgni-sveda
3. For Vāta-neuromuscular stiffness without āma, the **best first choice** is:
a) Pizhichil b) Dhanyāmla-Dhāra c) Takra-Dhāra d) Nirāgni vyayāma
4. Kṣīrādhūma is **least appropriate** in:
a) Trismus b) Facial palsy (mr̥du heat) c) Acute purulent sinusitis d) Dry rhinitis
5. Thalapoṭhichil primarily targets:
a) Kapha cold b) Pitta head-heat c) Vāta dryness only d) Rakta bleeding disorders
6. Annalepa is **contraindicated** in:
a) Vāta-kṣaya b) Late rehab stiffness c) Active ooze/āma d) Dry skin
7. Pizhichil maps closest to which classical mode?
a) Upanāha b) Parīśeka c) Nāḍī-sveda d) Ātapa
8. In Piṇḍa-Sveda, pressure should be:
a) Strong and focal b) Mild-moderate and rhythmic c) Negligible d) Variable lightning strokes
9. A **pitta-pacifying** dhāra commonly used over scalp is:
a) Taila-dhāra b) Takra-Dhāra c) Dhanyāmla-Dhāra d) Jambīra-piṇḍa
10. The ten **nirāgni** sweda principles include all **except**:
a) Vyayāma b) Uṣṇa-sadana c) Nāḍī-sveda d) Ātapa

Answer key: 1-b, 2-b, 3-a, 4-c, 5-b, 6-c, 7-b, 8-b, 9-b, 10-c.



Viva-Voce Hooks (rapid recall)

- **One-liners:**

- *Sañkara-sweda* = bolus fomentation; choose **snigdha** for Vāta, **rūkṣa** for Kapha/āma.
- *Pizhichil* = oil-dhāra + abhyanga (snigdha-sweda).
- *Dhanyāmla-Dhāra* = rūkṣa-uṣṇa sour pour; āma-Kapha reducer.
- *Takra-Dhāra* = pitta-calming head/body stream.
- *Thālam/Thalapothishil* = focal vs full-scalp head applications.
- *Annalepa* = local rice plaster for **br̥mhaṇa** and mṛdu sweda.

- **Quote at least once in exam:**

- **Piṇḍa-sweda media** (Ca. Sū. 14/25) and
- **Nirāgni ten** (Ca. Sū. 14/64-65) to establish classical command.

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