



## Leech Therapy as a Complementary Approach in the Management of Chronic Venous Ulcers: Insights from Siddha Medicine

\*Dr. Jenifer Lancy A<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Hariharan P<sup>2</sup>, Bhavadarani R<sup>3</sup>, Jaisree R<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Varmam, Pura maruthuvam and sirappu maruthuvam, Santhigiri Siddha Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Aruvai maruthuvam, Santhigiri Siddha Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala.

<sup>3</sup>Under graduate students, Santhigiri Siddha Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.13695418](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13695418)

Submission Date: 30 July 2024 | Published Date: 05 Sept. 2024

\*Corresponding author: [Dr. Jenifer Lancy A](#)

Department of Varmam, Pura maruthuvam and sirappu maruthuvam, Santhigiri Siddha Medical College, Trivandrum, Kerala.

### Abstract

**Background:** Chronic venous ulcers (CVUs) represent a significant clinical challenge, characterized by persistent leg ulcers resulting from impaired venous circulation. Traditional treatments include medications and compression therapy; however, alternative approaches such as leech therapy, used in Siddha medicine, offer promising adjunctive benefits.

**Objective:** To evaluate the effectiveness of leech therapy combined with Siddha medicine in managing CVUs and improving patient outcomes.

**Methods:** A 48-year-old female patient with a six-year history of bilateral lower limb venous dilation, pain, ulcer formation, and hyperpigmentation was treated with leech therapy and Siddha internal and external treatments. Treatment included leech application, wound dressing, and specific Siddha medications. Clinical outcomes were assessed based on changes in ulcer appearance, symptom relief, and venous clinical severity score (VCSS).

**Results:** The patient exhibited significant improvements, with the ulcer on the right lower limb healing, reduced discoloration, and a decrease in VCSS from severe to mild. Symptomatic relief was noted, including reduced pain, swelling, and itching.

**Conclusion:** Leech therapy, as an adjunct to Siddha medicine, demonstrated effective wound healing and symptom management for chronic venous ulcers. The combination of leech therapy with traditional Siddha treatments offers a valuable alternative to conventional methods.

**Keywords:** Chronic Venous Ulcers, Leech Therapy, Siddha Medicine, Wound Healing, Venous Clinical Severity Score, Alternative Medicine.

### Introduction

Chronic Venous Ulcer (CVU) is a prevalent and challenging condition characterized by persistent leg ulcers resulting from compromised venous blood flow. These ulcers commonly arise due to underlying venous insufficiency, where blood pools in the veins, causing pressure and damage to the skin and surrounding tissues. The pathophysiology of CVUs often involves venous hypertension, which can stem from various factors including varicose veins, deep vein thrombosis, prolonged periods of standing or sitting, obesity, and other conditions that impede proper venous return [1].

The clinical presentation of CVU includes symptoms such as itching, hyperpigmentation of the skin, swelling (edema), and a dull, aching pain in the affected leg. These ulcers are typically located on the lower legs, especially around the medial malleolus. The chronic nature of CVUs makes them resistant to conventional treatments, leading to a prolonged healing process and significant impact on the patient's quality of life [2].

Modern medical approaches for managing CVUs often involve a combination of medications, compression therapy, and surgical interventions. Compression therapy aims to reduce venous pressure and improve blood flow in the affected legs, while medications may include topical agents and systemic drugs to address inflammation and infection. Surgical options may be considered for more severe cases, including vein stripping or laser treatments. Despite these efforts, complete resolution of CVUs can be elusive, and patients may experience recurring issues [2].

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in integrating traditional therapies with conventional medical treatments to improve outcomes for patients with CVUs. Siddha medicine, an ancient system of traditional medicine from India, offers several therapeutic modalities that are believed to aid in the management of chronic wounds. Among these, leech therapy (Attai Vidal) has gained attention for its potential benefits in promoting wound healing and alleviating symptoms associated with CVUs [3].

Leech therapy involves the application of medicinal leeches to the affected area. The leeches secrete bioactive substances such as hirudin, calin, and acetylcholine, which have anticoagulant, anti-inflammatory, and vasodilatory effects. These properties can potentially enhance blood circulation, reduce swelling, and promote healing of chronic ulcers. The therapeutic use of leeches has a long history, and modern studies have begun to explore their effectiveness in treating various skin disorders and inflammatory conditions [3].

The integration of Siddha therapies like leech therapy with contemporary treatment approaches offers a holistic perspective on managing CVUs. By combining traditional and modern methods, there is potential for improved patient outcomes and a more comprehensive approach to wound care. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of leech therapy in the management of CVUs, highlighting its role alongside conventional treatments in addressing this challenging condition [3].

### Case study:

Mrs. XXX, a 48-year-old housewife, was admitted to our facility on 5th August 2022 and discharged on 9th August 2022, presenting with a long-standing condition of bilateral lower limb venous dilation. Over the past six years, she experienced progressive symptoms, including severe pain, ulcer formation, hyperpigmentation, and swelling predominantly affecting the right lower limb. Despite multiple sclerotherapy sessions, her condition showed only partial improvement. Her medical history included thyroid dysfunction and hypercholesterolemia, alongside previous sclerotherapy treatments.

A thorough Siddha examination revealed that Mrs. XXX exhibited characteristics of Pitha dehi with Kurinji Thinai and Koothir Kalam. The affected areas included the right lower limb, with specific issues such as venous ulcers and pain during walking. Evaluations of Kanmendriyam and Janenthiriyam indicated involvement of the legs (Kal) and skin (Thol). The diagnosis was aligned with Azhal factors, particularly Vanna Pitham affecting the ulcer.

The treatment approach combined traditional Siddha medicine with leech therapy. Initially, purgation was performed to reduce Vatham, followed by internal and external medicines to address the lesions and provide symptomatic relief. The external therapy included leech application aimed at improving blood circulation and wound healing. The leeches were applied in conjunction with external therapies involving Notchi and Nuna leaves, and wound dressings with Padikara Neer and Mathan Thyalam.

Throughout the treatment, Mrs. XXX showed substantial improvement. On the first day, leeches were applied along with external therapies. By the second day, Agasthyar Kuzhambu with Notchi leaf juice was administered, and external therapies continued. After a rest day, the fourth day involved the administration of internal medicines including C.RGM, Parangipattai Chooranam, Sangu Parpam, and Silasathu Parpam, with additional leech therapy.

Observations noted a significant transformation from hyperpigmented lesions with an open ulcer and severe Venous Clinical Severity Score (VCSS) to healed skin, reduced discoloration, and an improved VCSS score to mild. The integration of leech therapy with Siddha medicinal treatments proved effective, offering a complementary approach to conventional methods for managing chronic venous ulcers. The patient experienced notable relief from symptoms and overall improvement, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating traditional therapies into modern medical practice.

### Siddha Examination Summary

The Siddha examination for Mrs. XXX, a 48-year-old female patient with a chronic venous ulcer, was meticulously conducted to determine the underlying imbalances according to traditional Siddha medicine principles.

**Yakkai Ilakkanam:** The patient was classified as Pitha dehi, indicating a predominance of Pitha (heat) dosha, which aligns with the presentation of inflammation and ulceration in her condition.

**Thinai:** The examination identified the Kurinji type, which is associated with mountainous and elevated terrain, often reflecting a specific localized imbalance.

**Paruva Kalam:** The patient was in the Koothir Kalam phase, a time when cooling treatments are often emphasized to counterbalance excess heat in the body.

#### **Pori Pulankal:**

- **Mei:** Affected, with the presence of a venous ulcer in the right lower limb.
- **Vaai, Kann, Mooku, Sevi:** Not affected, indicating no involvement of the oral cavity, vision, nose, or hearing in the current condition.

#### **Kanmendriyam and Janenthiriyam:**

- **Kai, Vai, Eruvai, Karuvai:** Not affected, suggesting that the hands, throat, and other sensory organs were not implicated.
- **Kal:** Affected, corresponding to the ulcer in the right lower limb.

#### **Pir/Anga Kurippukal:**

- **Thol:** Affected, reflecting the involvement of the skin, specifically where the ulcer is located.
- **Mayir, Nagam, Sthanagal:** Not affected, showing no involvement of hair, veins, or specific body parts.

#### **Vali:**

- **Uyirkkal, Keel nokku kal, Melnokokkal, Vizhi katru, Kottavi katru, Thummal katru, Imai katru, Veengal katru:** Not affected, indicating that these specific bodily functions and elements were not compromised.
- **Paravukal:** Affected, with pain experienced in the ulcer area during walking.
- **Nadukkal:** Affected, reflecting a disturbance in the body's movement and balance due to the ulcer.

#### **Azhal:**

- **Pasaka pitham, Aatral pitham, Ulloli pitham, Nokku pitham:** Not affected, except for **Vanna pitham**, which was affected, correlating with the presence of the ulcer and associated discoloration.

#### **Iyyam:**

- **Ali iyyam, Neer pilayan, Suvaikaan iyyam, Niraivu iyyam, Onri iyyam:** All affected, indicating systemic involvement and imbalance in bodily functions associated with the ulcer.

#### **Udal Thathukkal:**

- **Saaram, Senner, Kozhupu, Enbu, Moolai, Sukkilam:** All normal, indicating that these fundamental body fluids and tissues were not significantly disturbed, except for **Oon**, which was affected due to the ulcer's presence.

#### **Envaagai Thervu:**

- **Aadi:** Identified as Vatha Kapham, reflecting a dosha imbalance with cooling and drying characteristics.
- **Parisam:** Mithaveppam, indicating a mild heat presence.
- **Naa:** Pinkish in color, **Niram:** Blackish complexion, **Mozhi:** Low pitched voice, **Vizhi:** Muddy conjunctiva, **Malam:** Normal, **Moothiram:** Normal.

This comprehensive Siddha examination highlighted various imbalances contributing to Mrs. XXX's chronic venous ulcer and guided the tailored treatment approach integrating both traditional Siddha therapies and modern interventions.

**Table – 1.0 Siddha examination**

Category	Details
<b>Yakkai Ilakkanam</b>	Pitha dehi
<b>Thinai</b>	Kurinji
<b>Paruva Kalam</b>	Koothir Kalam
<b>Pori Pulankal</b>	
- Mei	Affected (venous ulcer present in right LL)

- Vaai	Not affected
- Kann	Not affected
- Mooku	Not affected
- Sevi	Not affected
<b>Kanmendriyam and Janenthiriyam</b>	
- Kai	Not affected
- Kal	Affected (ulcer present in right LL)
- Vai	Not affected
- Eruvai	Not affected
- Karuvai	Not affected
<b>Pir/Anga Kurippukal</b>	
- Thol	Affected (ulcer present in right LL)
- Mayir	Not affected
- Nagam	Not affected
- Sthanagal	Not affected
<b>Vali</b>	
- Uyirkkal	Not affected
- Keel nokku kal	Not affected
- Paravukal	Affected (pain present on ulcer while walking)
- Melnokkukal	Not affected
- Nadukkal	Affected (since other vayus are affected)
- Vizhi katru	Not affected
- Kottavi katru	Not affected
- Thummal katru	Not affected
- Imai katru	Not affected
- Veengal katru	Not affected
<b>Azhal</b>	
- Pasaka pitham	Not affected
- Vanna pitham	Affected (ulcer present in right LL)
- Aatral pitham	Not affected
- Ulloli pitham	Not affected
- Nokku pitham	Not affected
<b>Iyyam</b>	
- Ali iyyam	Affected (ulcer present in right LL)
- Neer pilayan	Affected
- Suvaikaan iyyam	Affected
- Niraivu iyyam	Affected
- Onri iyyam	Affected
<b>Udal Thathukkal</b>	
- Saaram	Normal
- Senner	Normal
- Oon	Affected (ulcer present in the lower limb)
- Kozhupu	Normal
- Enbu	Normal
- Moolai	Normal
- Sukkilam	Normal
<b>Envaagai Thervu</b>	
- Aadi	Vatha Kapham
- Parisam	Mithaveppam
- Naa	Pinkish in color
- Niram	Blackish complexion
- Mozhi	Low pitched voice
- Vizhi	Muddy conjunctiva
- Malam	Normal 2 times/day
- Moothiram	Normal 6 times/day

Leech Therapy and Outcomes

## Line of Treatment

The patient was treated with a comprehensive approach combining purgation, internal medicines, and external therapies, including leech therapy. The treatment plan aimed to reduce Vatham (imbalance in bodily humors) and manage symptoms associated with CVU.

The application of leech therapy involves several steps:

1. **Selection of Leeches:** For therapeutic use, leeches are selected based on their size, activity level, and cleanliness. Typically, leeches are chosen for their moderate size and active behavior [9].
2. **Preparation:** The leeches are prepared by placing them on the affected area. A small drop of blood is sometimes induced to encourage the leech to attach if it does not do so naturally [10].
3. **Attachment:** The leech's anterior part is allowed to attach to the skin, where it begins to draw blood. This process usually lasts between 20 to 40 minutes [11].
4. **Post-Treatment Care:** After the leech has detached, the wound is cleaned and dressed. The area is monitored for any adverse reactions, and appropriate wound care measures are taken to promote healing [12].

## Treatment Procedure

- **Day 1:** Leeches were applied to the affected area, with external therapies involving Notchi and Nuna leaves. The wound was dressed with Padikara Neer and Mathan Thyalam.
- **Day 2:** The internal medicine Agasthyar Kuzhambu with Notchi leaf juice was administered. External therapies continued, with additional application of Notchi and Nuna leaves.
- **Day 3:** A rest day was observed to allow the wound to stabilize.
- **Day 4:** Internal medicines, including C.RGM, Parangipattai Chooranam, Sangu Parpam, and Silasathu Parpam, were given. External therapy included another session of leech application.

## Observations

- **Before Treatment:** The patient presented with hyperpigmented lesions and an open ulcer. The Venous Clinical Severity Score (VCSS) indicated severe symptoms.
- **After Treatment:** Significant healing was observed, with the ulcer showing complete closure and reduced discoloration. The VCSS improved to a mild score, reflecting notable symptom relief.

## Discussion

Leech therapy, or *Attai Vidal* in Siddha medicine, has been explored as a complementary approach to managing chronic venous ulcers (CVUs). This therapy utilizes the therapeutic potential of leech saliva, which contains a range of bioactive substances. Key components such as hirudin, calin, acetylcholine, and histamine-like substances provide significant benefits in treating chronic wounds. Hirudin acts as a potent anticoagulant, preventing blood clot formation, while calin and acetylcholine contribute to vasodilation and improved blood flow [5]. Additionally, histamine-like substances play a role in modulating the inflammatory response [6].

In the case study of Mrs. XXX, leech therapy was integrated with traditional Siddha treatments to address her chronic venous ulcer. The patient exhibited notable improvement, with enhanced blood circulation and symptom relief. Specifically, the leech application was effective in reducing ulcer-related symptoms such as hyperpigmentation, pain, and swelling. These observations are consistent with previous studies that highlight the efficacy of leech therapy in chronic wound management [7, 8].

The positive outcomes observed in Mrs. XXX align with the growing body of evidence supporting leech therapy. Research has demonstrated that leech therapy can facilitate wound healing by improving local blood flow and reducing inflammation [9]. For example, a study by Dautel et al. (2020) found that leech therapy significantly improved healing rates in patients with chronic ulcers [6]. Similarly, another study highlighted the role of leech therapy in enhancing tissue repair and reducing pain associated with chronic wounds [10].

In the context of Siddha medicine, leech therapy is often used alongside other traditional treatments to address imbalances identified through comprehensive assessments. The integration of internal and external Siddha medicines with leech therapy provides a holistic approach to managing CVUs, addressing both the symptomatic and underlying causes of the condition.

Overall, the successful outcome in this case study underscores the potential of leech therapy as a valuable adjunct in the treatment of chronic venous ulcers. Future studies with larger sample sizes and controlled designs are needed to further validate these findings and explore the mechanisms underlying the observed benefits.

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### CITATION

Jenifer Lancy A, Hariharan P, Bhavadarani R, & Jaisree R. (2024). Leech Therapy as a Complementary Approach in the Management of Chronic Venous Ulcers: Insights from Siddha Medicine. In *Global Journal of Research in Medical Sciences* (Vol. 4, Number 5, pp. 15–20). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13695418>