One of the fundamental concepts of Ayurvedic management of diseases is to eliminate toxic materials (vitiated dosas) from the body in order to cure a disease. Panchakarma therapy (PKT) is designed to eliminate the toxic materials. It is postulated that the toxic materials of the body need to be eliminated radically before a palliative therapy is given. The palliative therapy in the form of drugs and diets may not be effective unless the body channels are properly cleansed and toxic materials are eliminated.

PKT is believed to purify or cleanse all the body tissues and to bring about the harmony of neurohumours (tridosas) (i.e., vata, pitta, kapha, and manasa dosas[i.e., satva, raja, and tama]) and to obtain long-lasting beneficial effects. PKT is not merely a therapeutic regi-men, but it may be considered a management tool when used at certain tissue and body parts. It promotes and preserves the individual’s normal health.

PKT is an important component of Ayurvedic management of diseases. It is the comprehensive method of internal purification of the body through emesis (vaman karma), purgation (virechana karma), enema (vasti karma), errhines (nasya karma), and bloodletting (raktamokshana). This chapter will review the ancient classical concepts, traditional practices, and recent advances made in this important field with proper evaluation and rational assessment. Evidence obtained at our hospitals and at other research institutes in treating a variety of diseases with PKT is discussed along with its possible use as an adjunct to allopathic therapies.

PKT is indicated in arthritis, paralysis, neuromuscular diseases and in respiratory, gastrointestinal, ENT, and several blood-related disorders with great benefits. PKT is contraindicated in certain conditions like acute fevers, in various debilitating diseases, and in certain tumors and cancers of different organs; it is also contraindicated in children, the elderly, and pregnant women. PKT is indicated for both the healthy and diseased. The five elimination procedures are usually advised in the sequence of emesis, purgation, enema, errhines, and bloodletting, although it is not mandatory. Either one or all five procedures are advised as per the need and condition of the person undergoing PKT. Based on the health of the individual and stage and type of the disease, only one of the five procedures may be done without following a sequence. However, proper preparation and follow-up treatment are implemented for even one cleansing procedure. The classical PKT is done in three stages:

1. Preparatory procedures (PREP) (purva karma) — These procedures are done to prepare the body to undergo a proper and thorough cleansing. They involve applying as well as ingesting oils and fats, sweating, and also advising which herbs to use to improve the digestion and metabolism in tissues.
2. Main cleansing procedures (MCP) (pradhana karma) — These procedures consist of five purification procedures especially designed to eliminate toxic materials from the imbalanced dosas of the body. They are emesis, purgation, enema, errhines, and bloodletting.
3. Postprocedures (pashchata karma) — These procedures consist mainly of recuperative measures in the form of diet, lifestyle changes, and rejuvenating herbs.