

VATARAKTA IN AYURVEDA: CLASSICAL CONCEPTS, CONTEMPORARY CORRELATION WITH GOUT AND EVIDENCE- BASED MANAGEMENT

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Article Received on 27 August 2026,
Article Revised on 17 Sept. 2026,
Article Published on 01 Oct. 2026,

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23032547>

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How to cite this Article: *Dr. Gouri Ashok Khot, Dr. Sanket Maruti Yadav (2026). Vatarakta In Ayurveda: Classical Concepts, Contemporary Correlation With Gout And Evidence-Based Management. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, 15(19), 117–131.

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ABSTRACT

Background Vatarakta is a distinctive disorder described in Ayurvedic classics, characterized by the simultaneous vitiation and interaction of Vata Dosha and Rakta Dhatu. The disease manifests predominantly with severe pain, swelling, tenderness, burning sensation, stiffness and restricted joint movements. Owing to similarities in clinical presentation, particularly acute inflammatory arthritis involving peripheral joints, Vatarakta is frequently correlated with gouty arthritis in contemporary medicine. **Aim** To critically review the classical Ayurvedic understanding of Vatarakta, its etiopathogenesis, clinical manifestations, types, diagnostic considerations and therapeutic principles, and to examine its contemporary correlation with gout and hyperuricemia. **Materials and Methods** A narrative literature review was undertaken using major Ayurvedic

classical texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with peer-reviewed literature indexed in PubMed and other scholarly databases. Contemporary studies concerning Ayurvedic management of gouty arthritis and Vatarakta were also reviewed. **Results** Ayurvedic literature describes Vatarakta as a disorder arising from the vitiation of Vata and Rakta, with obstruction and mutual aggravation playing a central role in its pathogenesis. The condition is broadly described as Uttana and Gambhira Vatarakta. Management is individualized according to Dosha, Dhatu, stage and severity of disease and includes Nidana Parivarjana, Shamana Chikitsa, Shodhana Chikitsa, external therapies, Raktamokshana where indicated, Basti, Virechana and Rasayana therapy.

Contemporary clinical studies have reported improvements in pain, inflammatory manifestations and serum uric acid following selected Ayurvedic interventions; however, the available evidence remains heterogeneous and requires confirmation through larger, well-designed controlled trials. **Conclusion** Vatarakta represents an important Ayurvedic model of inflammatory and metabolic musculoskeletal disease. Its classical emphasis on dietary regulation, individualized treatment, correction of Dosha-Dushya imbalance and long-term lifestyle modification offers a potentially valuable complementary framework in the management of gout. Rigorous clinical research integrating Ayurvedic diagnostic parameters with validated biomedical outcomes is required.

KEYWORDS: Vatarakta, Vatashonita, Gout, Hyperuricemia, Ayurveda, Rakta Dhatu, Vata Dosha, Basti, Shodhana, Shamana.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda considers health to be dependent upon equilibrium of Dosha, Agni, Dhatu and Mala, together with the normal functioning of the mind and sensory faculties. Disturbance in these physiological components produces disease. Among the disorders affecting the musculoskeletal system, Vatarakta occupies a unique position because both Vata Dosha and Rakta Dhatu play major roles in its pathogenesis.

Vatarakta is described in detail by Acharya Charaka in the context of Vata disorders and is also discussed by Sushruta and Vagbhata. The disease is characterized by an interaction between aggravated Vata and vitiated Rakta. Classical descriptions include severe pain, tenderness, burning sensation, pricking pain, swelling, discoloration and restricted movement.

In contemporary medicine, gout is a metabolic inflammatory arthritis caused by deposition of monosodium urate crystals in joints and tissues in the setting of hyperuricemia. Acute gout commonly presents with sudden severe joint pain, swelling, erythema and tenderness, often involving the first metatarsophalangeal joint.

Because of these overlapping clinical features, Vatarakta is frequently correlated with gouty arthritis. However, this correlation should be understood as a clinical and conceptual comparison rather than an assertion that both conditions are identical. Recent literature specifically emphasizes maintaining the distinct diagnostic frameworks of Ayurveda and modern biomedicine.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

AIM

To critically evaluate Vatarakta from classical Ayurvedic and contemporary biomedical perspectives and explore its potential correlation with gouty arthritis.

OBJECTIVES

1. To review the Nidana and Samprapti of Vatarakta according to Ayurvedic classics.
2. To describe its Purvarupa, Rupa, Upashaya and clinical varieties.
3. To examine the contemporary correlation between Vatarakta and gout.
4. To review Ayurvedic principles of Shamana and Shodhana management.
5. To assess the available clinical evidence regarding Ayurvedic interventions.
6. To identify areas requiring further scientific research.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A narrative review methodology was adopted.

Classical Ayurvedic references were obtained from major treatises including:

- Charaka Samhita
- Sushruta Samhita
- Ashtanga Hridaya
- Ashtanga Sangraha
- Madhava Nidana
- Chakradatta
- Bhaishajya Ratnavali
- Bhavaprakasha Nighantu

Contemporary scientific literature was identified through databases including PubMed, PubMed Central and scholarly Ayurvedic journals using combinations of the terms **“Vatarakta,” “Vatashonita,” “gout,” “gouty arthritis,” “hyperuricemia,” “Ayurveda,” “Basti,” “Raktamokshana,” “Punarnava Guggulu,” “Guduchi,” and “Ayurvedic management of gout.”**

Previous systematic and narrative reviews have also examined the Ayurvedic management of Vatarakta, including Shodhana, Shamana, Rasayana and external therapies.

4. CLASSICAL CONCEPT OF VATARAKTA

Vatarakta is formed from two components

Vata + Rakta = Vatarakta

The disease is primarily characterized by pathological involvement of Vata Dosha and Rakta Dhatu.

According to classical Ayurvedic understanding, Vata becomes aggravated by its own causative factors while Rakta is simultaneously vitiated by inappropriate dietary and lifestyle practices. The interaction between these two produces obstruction and further aggravation, ultimately resulting in manifestation of Vatarakta.

This pathogenesis is particularly important because Vata normally requires unobstructed movement through appropriate channels. When vitiated Rakta obstructs Vata, the resulting pathology is understood through the concept of **Margavarodha** and subsequent aggravation of Vata.

5. NIDANA

The causative factors described for Vatarakta can broadly be divided into dietary, behavioral and constitutional factors.

Dietary factors

- Excessive intake of Amla and Lavana Rasa
- Excessive Katu and Ushna substances
- Excessive Snigdha and Guru food
- Excessive consumption of meat
- Fermented food and beverages
- Overeating
- Irregular dietary habits
- Excessive consumption of incompatible foods

Lifestyle factors

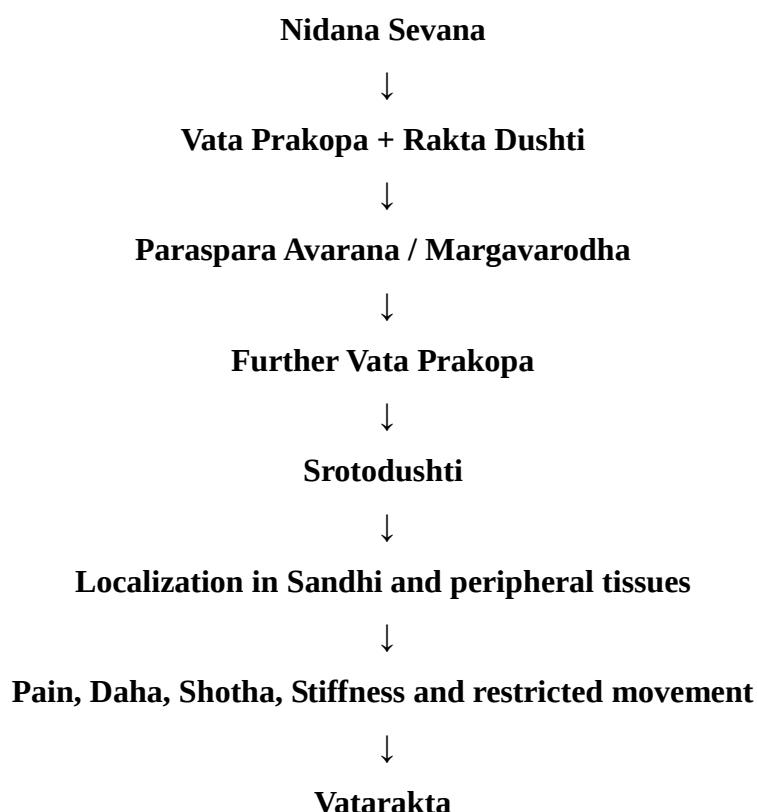
- Excessive sedentary behavior
- Excessive physical exertion
- Suppression of natural urges
- Irregular sleep

- Excessive stress
- Improper daily routine

The modern literature similarly recognizes dietary excess, alcohol consumption, obesity, sedentary lifestyle and metabolic abnormalities as important factors associated with hyperuricemia and gout. Recent Ayurvedic literature has emphasized the preventive importance of Pathya-Apathya and Nidana Parivarjana.

6. SAMPRAPTI

The fundamental pathological sequence may be summarized as follows



Thus, the interaction between Vata and Rakta forms the central pathological mechanism. Classical Ayurvedic descriptions and modern reviews identify this interaction as the key feature distinguishing Vatarakta from many other Vata disorders.

7. PURVARUPA

The prodromal manifestations may include

- Mild pain
- Tingling sensation
- Heaviness
- Burning sensation

- Pricking sensation
- Mild swelling
- Alteration in skin sensation
- Early joint discomfort

Recognition of these early manifestations may help in initiating preventive measures before the disease becomes chronic.

8. RUPA

Important clinical manifestations include

- Severe joint pain
- Swelling
- Burning sensation
- Tenderness
- Redness or discoloration
- Stiffness
- Pricking sensation
- Heaviness
- Restricted joint movements
- Recurrent episodes of inflammatory pain

Modern gout similarly presents with episodic inflammatory arthritis, severe pain, swelling, erythema and tenderness. The first metatarsophalangeal joint is a characteristic site in gout, although other peripheral joints may also be affected.

9. CLASSIFICATION

Vatarakta is broadly classified into:

9.1 Uttana Vatarakta

The pathology is predominantly superficial and involves the skin and superficial tissues.

Clinical manifestations may include

- Itching
- Burning
- Discoloration
- Mild swelling

- Pain
- Skin sensitivity

9.2 Gambhira Vatarakta

The pathology involves deeper tissues and structures.

Clinical manifestations may include

- Severe pain
- Deep swelling
- Stiffness
- Joint involvement
- Restricted movement
- Chronicity
- Structural changes

Classical literature therefore recommends treatment according to the depth, severity and stage of disease rather than applying one uniform therapeutic protocol. Contemporary Ayurvedic reviews have similarly emphasized stage-wise and individualized treatment.

10. VATARAKTA AND GOUT: CONTEMPORARY CORRELATION

Gout is a metabolic inflammatory arthritis associated with deposition of monosodium urate crystals within joints and surrounding tissues.

The major clinical similarities between gout and Vatarakta include:

Ayurvedic Vatarakta	Contemporary Gout
Vata-Rakta Dushti	Hyperuricemia with urate crystal deposition
Sandhi Shoola	Severe joint pain
Shotha	Joint swelling
Daha	Burning/inflammatory sensation
Sparsha Asahatva	Marked tenderness
Sandhi Vaikalyata	Chronic joint deformity
Recurrent inflammatory episodes	Acute gout flares

However, **Vatarakta should not be considered synonymous with hyperuricemia alone.** Hyperuricemia may remain asymptomatic, whereas Vatarakta is defined through an Ayurvedic clinical and pathophysiological framework.

Therefore, the most appropriate approach is to consider gout as an important contemporary clinical correlate of Vatarakta while preserving the individuality of Ayurvedic diagnosis.

11. DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH

Ayurvedic assessment

Assessment should include

- Prakriti
- Vikriti
- Dosha involvement
- Dushya
- Agni
- Ama
- Srotas
- Bala
- Satmya
- Koshtha
- Disease stage
- Chronicity
- Uttana/Gambhira status

Contemporary assessment

Where gout is suspected, relevant investigations may include

- Serum uric acid
- Complete blood count
- ESR/CRP where clinically indicated
- Renal function tests
- Liver function tests when required
- Urinalysis
- Joint imaging where indicated
- Synovial fluid analysis for monosodium urate crystals in diagnostically uncertain cases

Clinical assessment should also evaluate metabolic comorbidities such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and dyslipidemia.

12. MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Ayurvedic management should be individualized and may include four broad components:

12.1 Nidana Parivarjana

Removal of causative factors is the foundation of management.

Dietary correction, weight management, adequate physical activity, appropriate sleep and avoidance of known triggers should be emphasized.

12.2 Shamana Chikitsa

Depending on Dosha predominance and clinical stage, formulations traditionally used in Vatarakta may include

- Guduchi-based preparations
- Kaishora Guggulu
- Punarnava-based formulations
- Amritadi Guggulu
- Other classical formulations selected according to individual assessment

These medicines should be prescribed according to classical indications, patient suitability, drug quality and clinical monitoring.

12.3 Shodhana Chikitsa

Classical treatment emphasizes Shodhana in appropriately selected patients.

Potential procedures include

- Virechana
- Basti
- Raktamokshana/Siravyadha in selected cases
- Other procedures according to Dosha and disease stage

A classical treatment algorithm has emphasized that management should be individualized according to disease type and stage rather than following a single fixed protocol.

12.4 Bahya Chikitsa

External therapies may include

- Abhyanga
- Seka/Parisheka
- Lepa
- Upanaha
- Other localized therapies

Selection should depend upon the acute or chronic phase, Dosha predominance and inflammatory status.

13. ROLE OF BASTI

Basti occupies an important position in Ayurvedic management of Vata disorders.

In Vatarakta, Basti may be considered when Vata predominance, chronicity and deeper tissue involvement are present and when the patient is clinically suitable for the procedure.

A clinical study of gouty arthritis evaluated a protocol involving Guduchi Siddha Ksheera Basti, Guduchi Kashaya and Punarnava Guggulu. The investigators reported improvement in pain and serum uric acid after treatment; however, the study used a single-group pre-post design, limiting the strength of causal inference.

Therefore, these findings should be regarded as preliminary clinical evidence rather than definitive proof of efficacy.

14. ROLE OF RAKTAMOKSHANA

Raktamokshana is described among the classical therapeutic approaches for disorders involving Rakta Dushti.

In appropriately selected patients, especially when Rakta involvement is clinically prominent, classical texts describe blood-letting approaches such as Siravyadha.

Modern clinical research in this area remains limited. Consequently, Raktamokshana should be considered a specialized Ayurvedic procedure requiring proper patient selection, trained supervision, aseptic technique and appropriate clinical judgment.

15. RASAYANA AND LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

Vatarakta is often chronic and recurrent. Therefore, management should not be restricted to acute symptom relief.

Rasayana-oriented approaches may be considered after appropriate assessment and stabilization.

The long-term objectives include

- Prevention of recurrence
- Maintenance of Agni

- Improvement of Dhatu function
- Lifestyle correction
- Metabolic health
- Maintenance of joint function

This holistic approach represents one of the important differences between an acute symptom-oriented approach and long-term Ayurvedic disease management.

16. PATHYA AND APATHYA

Pathya

Recommended dietary and lifestyle measures may include

- Fresh and easily digestible food
- Adequate hydration
- Seasonal fruits and vegetables according to individual suitability
- Appropriate use of Mudga and other Laghu foods
- Regular physical activity
- Weight management
- Regular sleep
- Stress reduction
- Individualized dietary planning according to Prakriti and Agni

Apathya

Avoidance or restriction may be required for

- Excessive alcohol
- Frequent intake of heavy and highly processed foods
- Excessive meat consumption
- Excessive fried food
- Overeating
- Excessively salty, sour and spicy food
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Irregular sleep
- Repeated dietary triggers

Dietary management is particularly important because recent literature has highlighted Pathya-Apathya as a major component of Vatarakta prevention and management.

17. EVIDENCE FROM CLINICAL RESEARCH

Several studies have investigated Ayurvedic interventions for Vatarakta/gout.

A systematic review published in 2020 identified research involving interventions such as Guduchi Siddha Yoga Basti, Siravyadha and Punarnava-Amrita-Guggulu and reported improvements in various clinical and laboratory parameters.

A clinical study published in PubMed evaluated an Ayurvedic treatment protocol consisting of Guduchi Siddha Ksheera Basti, Guduchi Kashaya and Punarnava Guggulu in patients classified according to the ACR/EULAR 2015 gout criteria. The study reported significant improvements in pain scores and serum uric acid; nevertheless, its single-group pre-post methodology warrants cautious interpretation.

A recent 2026 review further emphasized the role of Shodhana, Shamana, Rasayana and lifestyle modification in Vatarakta management.

Overall, the available evidence is promising but insufficient to establish the effectiveness of any particular Ayurvedic treatment as a replacement for evidence-based gout care.

18. INTEGRATIVE CLINICAL APPROACH

An appropriate contemporary approach may integrate Ayurvedic and biomedical assessment.

Proposed clinical framework

Step 1 – Clinical assessment



Identify acute inflammatory arthritis and exclude septic arthritis or other urgent causes.

Step 2 – Biomedical assessment



Serum uric acid, renal function and other investigations as clinically indicated.

Step 3 – Ayurvedic assessment



Prakriti, Dosha, Agni, Ama, Dhatu, Srotas and disease stage.

Step 4 – Acute phase management



Appropriate evidence-based acute gout management when gout is diagnosed, alongside suitable supportive Ayurvedic measures.

Step 5 – Ayurvedic individualized management

Nidana Parivarjana + Shamana/Shodhana according to patient suitability.

Step 6 – Long-term prevention

Dietary correction + physical activity + weight management + metabolic risk reduction + recurrence monitoring.

This integrated approach avoids the misconception that Ayurvedic treatment and modern medical care must necessarily be mutually exclusive.

19. RESEARCH GAPS

Despite extensive classical descriptions and encouraging preliminary studies, several research gaps remain.

1. Large multicentric randomized controlled trials are required.
2. Standardized diagnostic criteria for Vatarakta should be developed.
3. Ayurvedic clinical parameters should be correlated with validated biomedical outcomes.
4. Long-term recurrence rates should be studied.
5. Changes in serum uric acid should be assessed alongside clinical outcomes rather than used as the sole endpoint.
6. Renal outcomes and safety should receive greater attention.
7. Pharmacological and pharmacokinetic studies of commonly used formulations are required.
8. Comparative studies between Ayurvedic treatment and standard gout management are needed.
9. Quality control and standardization of polyherbal formulations require strengthening.
10. Pragmatic trials reflecting real-world Ayurvedic clinical practice should be encouraged.

20. DISCUSSION

Vatarakta provides an important example of how classical Ayurvedic disease models can be examined in the context of contemporary biomedical disorders. The classical concept places emphasis on the interaction between Vata and Rakta, while modern gout research focuses on hyperuricemia, monosodium urate crystal deposition and inflammatory pathways.

The similarities in clinical presentation make gout an important contemporary correlate of Vatarakta. However, direct one-to-one equivalence should be avoided because Ayurvedic diagnosis incorporates Dosha, Dushya, Agni, Srotas and disease-stage assessment, which do not have direct equivalents in contemporary biomedical diagnosis.

The therapeutic framework of Ayurveda is multidimensional. Nidana Parivarjana addresses causative factors, Shamana targets Dosha imbalance, Shodhana is selected according to patient and disease status, while Rasayana and lifestyle modification aim at long-term health. The available clinical literature suggests potential benefits of selected Ayurvedic interventions in symptom reduction and biochemical parameters. However, methodological limitations—including small sample sizes, lack of controls, heterogeneous interventions and short follow-up—make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

Future research should therefore move from isolated case reports and small uncontrolled studies toward standardized, multicentric and adequately powered clinical trials.

21. CONCLUSION

Vatarakta is a clinically important Ayurvedic disorder involving the pathological interaction of Vata Dosha and Rakta Dhatu. Its characteristic manifestations of severe joint pain, swelling, burning, tenderness and restricted movement show substantial clinical overlap with gouty arthritis.

The Ayurvedic approach extends beyond symptomatic treatment and incorporates Nidana Parivarjana, dietary regulation, Shamana Chikitsa, appropriately selected Shodhana procedures, external therapies and Rasayana. Preliminary clinical evidence suggests that selected Ayurvedic interventions may improve symptoms and biochemical parameters in gout-like presentations.

Nevertheless, Vatarakta and gout should not be considered completely identical disorders. Future research should integrate classical Ayurvedic diagnostic parameters with contemporary clinical, biochemical and imaging outcomes.

A scientifically rigorous integrative research model may help establish the potential role of Ayurveda in the prevention and long-term management of gout and related metabolic inflammatory disorders.

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