

PATHYA-APATHYA IN KUSHTHA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF CLASSICAL EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Kushtha represents a broad spectrum of dermatological disorders described extensively in Ayurvedic literature and is considered among the *Ashta Mahagada* due to its chronic, recurrent, and socially distressing nature. Ayurveda emphasizes *Nidana Parivarjana* as the first line of management, wherein regulation of diet (*Pathya–Apathya Ahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*) plays a pivotal role. The present literature review aims to critically analyze classical Ayurvedic texts—from the Vedic period to post-Samhita compendia—regarding the concept of *Pathya* and *Apathya* in the prevention and management of *Kushtha*, and to correlate these principles with contemporary scientific understanding of skin diseases. References from the Atharvaveda, Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, Madhava Nidana, Bhavaprakasha, Bhaishajya Ratnavali, Chakradatta, and Yoga Ratnakara were

systematically reviewed. Additionally, relevant modern Ayurvedic review articles and dermatological studies were analyzed. Classical texts unanimously advocate the consumption of light, bitter, and detoxifying food substances such as *Tikta Shaka*, *Purana Dhanya*, *Mudga*, *Triphala*, and *Nimba*, while discouraging heavy, sour, fermented, incompatible, and *Abhishyandi* foods like curd, milk, fish, jaggery, and excessive salt. Contemporary research supports these dietary principles, highlighting the role of inflammation, immune modulation, gut health, and lifestyle factors in chronic skin diseases. **Discussion:** Classical Ayurvedic texts consistently identify improper diet and lifestyle as key etiological factors in *Kushtha*,

emphasizing *Pathya–Apathya* as an essential component of *Nidana Parivarjana*. The predominance of *Tikta*, *Laghu*, and *Agni-deepana* foods and the avoidance of *Abhishyandi*, *Amla*, and incompatible diets are aimed at reducing *Ama*, pacifying *Doshas*, and purifying *Rakta*. Contemporary studies support these principles by demonstrating the role of diet, inflammation, immunity, and lifestyle in chronic dermatological conditions. **Conclusion:** The review concludes that strict adherence to *Pathya–Apathya* serves as both a preventive and therapeutic modality in *Kushtha*, reinforcing Ayurveda’s holistic and sustainable approach to dermatological health.

KEYWORDS: *Kushtha*, *Pathya-Apathya*, *Aahar* and *Vihara*, Ayurvedic Dermatology.

INTRODUCTION

Background: The word *Kushtha* is derived from the word ‘*Kus Nishkarshane*’ by adding the suffix ‘*tka*’^[1] The meaning of *kus* is to tear, extract, pull or draw out. Thus, the word *Kushtha* means that which destroys with certainty and also which comes out from the inner part to the outer part.^[2] Skin diseases have shown a significant rise globally, contributing to a substantial burden on healthcare systems. In India, skin and subcutaneous conditions accounted for 4.02% of total years lived with disability (YLDs) in 2017, with dermatitis, urticaria, and acne being major contributors. Ayurveda classifies skin disorders under the broad category of *Kushtha*, emphasizing dietary and lifestyle modifications (*Pathya* and *Apathya*) as essential components of management.^[1] Ayurveda regards skin diseases as *Kushtha*, a complex group of disorders involving all three *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and four *Dushyas* (*Tvaka*, *Mamsa*, *Rakta*, *Lasika*). Management emphasizes *Nidana Parivarjana* (elimination of causative factors), supported by dietary and lifestyle interventions.

Historical Review

a. Vedic Period

The earliest references to skin diseases resembling *Kuṣṭha* are found in the Ṛigveda and Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda mentions *kilasa* and *palita*, conditions suggestive of depigmentary and dermatological disorders. These diseases were often considered afflictions caused by divine displeasure or sins, and treatment involved rituals, mantras, and herbal remedies.

“*Apakṣāmāṇam kuṣṭham...*” – indicates awareness of chronic skin ailments (Atharvaveda, 1/23/1)^[1]

b. Samhita Period

Charaka Samhita: described *Kushtha* in Chikitsa Sthana chapter 7 and defined it as a Tridoshaja disease involving *Tvak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa* and *Lasika* and classified *Kushtha* into 7 *Mahakushthas* and 11 *Kshudrakushthas*. Sushruta Samhita: described *Kushtha* in Nidanasthana chapter 5 and Chikitsasthana chapter 9, giving greater emphasis to *Rakta Dushti* and surgical measures like Post- Samhita and Medieval Period:

Madhav Nidana: focused on differential diagnosis.^[1]

Bhav Prakash: described newer formulations and dietary guidelines.^[2]

Classification of *Kushtha*

a. *Maha kushtha*

S.N.	Types of <i>Kushtha</i>	CH. ^[3]	SU. ^[4]	AH. ^[5]	MN. ^[6]
1	<i>Kapala</i>	+	+	+	+
2	<i>Audumbara</i>	+	+	+	+
3	<i>Mandala</i>	+	-	+	+
4	<i>Rishyajivha</i>	+	+	+	+
5	<i>Pundarika</i>	+	+	+	+
6	<i>Sidhma</i>	+	-	-	+
7	<i>Kakanaka</i>	+	+	+	+
8	<i>Dadru</i>	-	+	+	-
9	<i>Aruna</i>	-	+	-	-

b. *Kshudra Kushtha*

S.N.	Types of <i>Kushtha</i>	CH. ^[7]	SU. ^[8]	AH. ^[9]	MN. ^[10]
1	<i>Ekakushtha</i>	+	+	+	+
2	<i>Kitibha</i>	+	+	+	+
3	<i>Charmadala</i>	+	+	+	-
4	<i>Pama</i>	+	+	+	+
5	<i>Vicharchika</i>	+	+	+	+
6	<i>Charmakhya</i>	+	-	+	+
7	<i>Vipadika</i>	+	-	+	+
8	<i>Alasaka</i>	+	-	+	+
9	<i>Dadru</i>	+	-	-	+
10	<i>Visphotaka</i>	+	-	+	+
11	<i>Shataru</i>	+	-	+	+
12	<i>Sidhma</i>	-	+	+	-
13	<i>Sthularushka</i>	-	+	-	-
14	<i>Mahakushtha</i>	-	+	-	-
15	<i>Visarpa</i>	-	+	-	-
16	<i>Parisarpa</i>	-	+	-	-
17	<i>Raksha</i>	-	+	-	-

Pathya-Apathya in Kushtha

Pathya is derived from the root word "*Patha*", which means "a way or channel."

पथं पथोऽनपेतं यद्यच्चोक्तं मनसः प्रियम्। यच्चाप्रियमपथं च नियतं तन्न लक्षयेत्॥ (Ch.Su. 25/45)

The dietary articles and activities that do not adversely affect the body systems and are liked by the mind are regarded as *pathya* (wholesome). Likewise, dietary articles and activities that adversely affect the body system and are disliked by the mind are regarded as (*apathya*) unwholesome.^[11]

A. ACCORDING TO BRIHAT TRAYEE**Pathya in Kushtha**

<i>Pathya</i>	C.S. ^[11]	S.S. ^[12]	A.H. ^[13]
<i>Laghu anna</i>	+	-	-
<i>Purana dhanya</i>	+	+	-
<i>Tikta shaka</i>	+	-	+
<i>Jangala mansa</i>	+	+	+
<i>Shastic shali, Godhuma, Yava, Uddalak</i>	-	+	+
<i>Mudga</i>	+	-	+
<i>Masura</i>	-	-	+
<i>Ghrita</i>	+	-	-
<i>Triphala</i>	+	-	+
<i>Nimba</i>	+	+	+
<i>Patola</i>	+	-	+
<i>Bhallatak</i>	+	+	+
<i>Adhaka</i>	-	-	+
<i>Parisheka avagaha of khadir</i>	+	+	

Apathya in Kushtha

<i>Apathya</i>	C.S. ^[14]	S.S. ^[15]	A.H.
<i>Guru anna</i>	+	-	-
<i>Amla rasa</i>	+	+	+
<i>Dugdha</i>	+	+	+
<i>Dadhi</i>	+	+	+
<i>Guda</i>	+	+	+
<i>Tila</i>	+	-	+
<i>Kulatha</i>	-	+	-
<i>Anupa mansa</i>	+	-	+
<i>Matsya</i>	+	-	-
<i>Mansa and vasa</i>	-	+	-
<i>Masha</i>	-	+	+
<i>Taila</i>	-	+	-
<i>Ikshu vikara</i>	-	+	-
<i>Lavana</i>	-	-	+
<i>Vidahi anna</i>	-	+	-

<i>Abhishyandi anna</i>	-	+	-
<i>Maithuna</i>	-	+	-

B. ACCORDING TO OTHER CLASSICAL TEXTS

1. Yoga Ratnakar

In the dietary management of *kuṣṭha roga*, simple *anna-paana* (food and drink) is beneficial. However, one should never consume *amla-rasa*, *lavana*, *marica* or other *tauḷṣaṇa* substances, *dadhi*, *dugdha*, *guḍa*, *anupa mamssa*, *tila*, and *uḍida*.^[16]

2. Bhaisajya Ratnavali

Pathya: *Ghrita Pana*, *Ghrita lepa*, *purana yava*, *godhuma*, *shalidhanya*, *mudga*, *arhara*, *masura*, *madhu*, *jangala mamsa*, fruits produced in months of *Ashadh*, *Trapusha*, *amruda*, *patola*, *vetra*, *brihati*, *kakamachi*, *nimba patra*, *lasuna*, *Punarnava*, *bhallataka*, *tada fala*, *Khadira* (*kashtha*, *churna*, *kwath*), *chitraka mula*, *triphala*, *jayaphala*, *nagakeshara*, *gomutra* and other *tikta* substances.^[16]

Apathya: *Paap karma*, *kritaghna bhava*, criticizing *Guru*, causing distress to *Guru*, *Viruddha-paana*, *viruddha aahar*, sleeping during the day, walking under intense sunlight, *mithya aahar*, *svedana-karma*, *maithuna-karma*, *vegadharana*, consumption of *Ikshu vikara*, excessive exercise, *amla-padartha*, *tila*, *udida*, liquid foods, heavy grains, *vidahi* and *vistambha*, *muli*, *Sahyadri* and *Vidhyachala*, *aanupa mamsa*, *dadhi*, *dugdha*, *madya* and *guda*.^[16]

3. Chakradatta

Pathya: *Purana shali*, *yava*, *mudga*, *tikta shaka*, *jangala mamsa*

Apathya: *Stri sampark* (*Maithun*), *Mamsa* and *Madya*^[16]

4. Bhela Samhita: *Shyamaka*, *Makustha*, *Chanaka* are mentioned as beneficial.^[16]

C. Contemporary Relevance

Modern dermatology recognizes the role of diet and lifestyle in skin health. Conditions like psoriasis, eczema, and acne are influenced by nutrition, stress, and immunity. Ayurveda's *Pathya-Apathya* aligns with modern preventive dermatology by emphasizing

- Anti-inflammatory foods (bitter vegetables, neem, *Triphala*).
- Avoidance of allergenic and heavy foods (milk, curd, fish combinations).

Detoxification and immune modulation.

Dermatological Aspect of Do's and Don'ts in Skin Diseases^[17,18]

Proper dermatological care in skin diseases involves adherence to specific do's and don'ts to promote healing, prevent exacerbation, and maintain skin integrity:

Do's

- Maintain good hygiene by regular gentle cleansing to remove dirt and prevent infections.
- Use prescribed topical medications and follow dermatologist's instructions strictly.
- Keep the skin moisturized to prevent dryness and cracking.
- Protect skin from excessive sun exposure using appropriate clothing and sunscreen.
- Follow a balanced diet rich in antioxidants, vitamins (A, C, E), and minerals to support skin repair.
- Manage stress through relaxation techniques as stress can worsen many skin conditions.
- Avoid scratching or picking lesions to prevent secondary infections and scarring.
- Stay hydrated to maintain skin elasticity and function.

Don'ts

- Avoid harsh soaps, detergents, and irritants that can worsen skin inflammation.
- Do not self-medicate or use unprescribed topical steroids or creams.
- Avoid excessive sun exposure without protection to prevent pigmentation and damage.
- Refrain from using allergenic or comedogenic cosmetics that may trigger flare-ups.
- Do not ignore early signs of infection such as increased redness, swelling, or pus.
- Avoid tight clothing that can cause friction and worsen lesions.
- Do not consume foods known to aggravate specific skin conditions (e.g., spicy, oily, or junk foods).

DISCUSSION

Ayurvedic literature consistently identifies improper diet and lifestyle as fundamental etiological factors in the pathogenesis of *Kushtha*. From the earliest Vedic references in the Atharvaveda, where skin disorders such as *Kilasa* and *Palita* are mentioned, to detailed pathological descriptions in the *Brihat Trayee*, *Kushtha* is understood as a systemic disorder involving *Tridosha* imbalance and vitiation of *Tvak*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, and *Lasika*. This systemic perspective inherently necessitates dietary and behavioral regulation rather than symptomatic suppression alone. The concept of *Pathya* is not merely nutritional but encompasses psychological acceptability and physiological compatibility, as described by Acharya Charaka. Foods that support digestive fire (*Agni*), reduce *Ama*, and pacify vitiated

Doshas are considered therapeutic. The repeated endorsement of *Tikta Rasa*, *Laghu Guna*, and *Sheeta Virya* substances across classical texts highlights their role in reducing inflammation and purifying *Rakta*, a key *Dushya* in *Kushtha*. Conversely, *Apathya* foods such as *Dadhi*, *Dugdha*, *Matsya*, *Guda*, and *Viruddha Ahara* are consistently contraindicated due to their *Abhishyandi* and *Ama*-producing properties.

Modern Ayurvedic review articles corroborate these classical observations. Recent analyses demonstrate a strong association between dietary indiscretions—particularly excessive intake of sour, salty, fermented, and incompatible foods—and chronic inflammatory skin diseases such as psoriasis and eczema. Studies published emphasize that dietary modulation alone can significantly influence disease severity and recurrence by improving gut-skin axis function and immune regulation.^[17]

Furthermore, contemporary dermatological literature increasingly recognizes lifestyle factors such as stress, sleep disturbances, and poor dietary habits as triggers for inflammatory dermatoses. Ayurveda's emphasis on *Vihara*—including stress management, avoidance of day sleep, moderation in physical activity, and ethical conduct (*Sadvritta*)—aligns closely with modern preventive dermatology principles. Thus, *Pathya–Apathya* serves as a bridge between classical wisdom and evidence-based holistic care, offering a sustainable, low-risk, and cost-effective approach to managing chronic skin disorders.^[17]

CONCLUSION

The present review establishes that *Pathya–Apathya Ahara* and *Vihara* form the cornerstone of *Kushtha* management in Ayurveda, transcending mere dietary advice to encompass a comprehensive lifestyle-based therapeutic strategy. Classical Ayurvedic texts unanimously advocate dietary moderation, avoidance of incompatible and inflammatory foods, and adoption of wholesome lifestyle practices as essential measures for both prevention and treatment of skin diseases. Contemporary scientific literature further substantiates these principles by elucidating the role of diet, immunity, inflammation, and stress in the pathogenesis of chronic dermatological conditions. In an era marked by rising prevalence of lifestyle-induced skin disorders and limitations of long-term pharmacological therapies, the Ayurvedic framework of *Pathya–Apathya* offers a rational, preventive, and patient-centered approach. Strict adherence to these principles can reduce disease chronicity, prevent recurrence, enhance treatment outcomes, and improve overall quality of life. Future clinical and translational research integrating classical dietary guidelines with modern nutritional

science may further validate and expand the role of *Pathya–Apathya* as a foundational modality in integrative dermatology.

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