

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF AYURVEDIC INTERVENTIONS IN LIFESTYLE DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, a vital branch of Vedic knowledge, reflects its depth and adaptability to modern life. It offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to traditional healthcare, emphasizing both the maintenance of health and the prevention of diseases. Lifestyle disorders are conditions that emerge as a result of one's daily habits and way of living. Factors such as a sedentary routine, unhealthy eating patterns, increased workload, stress, physical inactivity, improper posture, and disruption of natural biological rhythms contribute to the rise of disorders like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, arthritis, insomnia, stress, cancer, metabolic syndrome, thyroid imbalances, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, and stroke. These conditions are collectively termed lifestyle disorders due to their strong link with lifestyle choices. Ayurveda proposes effective strategies to manage these disorders through daily and seasonal regimens (*Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*),

rejuvenation therapies (*Rasayana*), and ethical conduct (*Sadvritta*). The primary goal of these interventions is to restore and maintain internal balance (*Homeostasis*) rather than merely suppress symptoms.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Lifestyle Disorders, *Ahara*, *Vyayama*, *Ritucharya*, *Rasayana*, *Sadvritta*, *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*, *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*.

INTRODUCTION

Various illnesses are influenced by an individual's daily routines and work-related behaviors. These health conditions are largely avoidable and can be mitigated by adopting healthier diets, improving lifestyle choices, and creating better environmental conditions. Lifestyle diseases refer to ailments that result primarily from habitual actions and a poor interaction with one's environment. These conditions usually develop slowly and are challenging to cure once established. Major contributing factors include unhealthy eating patterns, physical inactivity, incorrect posture, and disruption of the body's natural biological rhythms.^[1-3]

Common lifestyle-related disorders

- High blood pressure (Hypertension)
- Diabetes mellitus
- Joint inflammation (Arthritis)
- Excessive body weight (Obesity)
- Sleep disturbances (Insomnia)
- Psychological stress
- Malignant growths (Cancer)
- Thyroid gland dysfunction
- Cerebrovascular accident (Stroke)

Causes of lifestyle disorders

- Disruption of the body's natural biological rhythms
- Unhealthy dietary patterns
- Sedentary lifestyle or incorrect forms of exercise
- Harmful habits such as smoking and alcohol consumption
- Social isolation or lack of community engagement
- Poor ergonomic practices
- Mental health imbalances, including conditions like depression

In recent times, the term "lifestyle disorders" has gained widespread recognition in the healthcare sector. These disorders, often referred to as LSDs, are largely the result of significant changes in human living patterns, frequently linked to societal and technological advancements. Conventional medicine primarily addresses these conditions with extensive steroid usage. However, prolonged steroid use combined with unhealthy lifestyles often leads to chronic illnesses and a weakened immune system.^[4]

From an Ayurvedic perspective, disease stems from three primary causes, which are closely related to personal decisions and environmental influences. These are Prajnaparadha (Intellectual error), Asatmendriyarth Samyoga (Improper use of senses), and Parinama (effects of time or transformation). Ayurveda aims not just to alleviate symptoms, but to restore an individual's natural state, allowing the body to heal itself. As stated in the *Charaka Samhita*, "The inappropriate interaction of senses with their objects, intellectual error, and transformation – these are the threefold root of disease. Appropriate use of sense objects, actions, and time contributes to maintaining good health".^[5]

Ayurveda also classifies the causes of all diseases into three categories based on how time (kala), objects (artha), and actions (karma) are used — namely Heena yoga (deficient use), Mithya yoga (incorrect use), and Ati yoga (excessive use).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Classical Ayurvedic texts
2. Contemporary textbooks and online resources
3. Research studies and scholarly journal articles

Role of ayurveda

Ayurveda promotes straightforward daily routines aimed at achieving a healthy, disease-free life. The Ayurvedic approach to lifestyle disorders is rooted in the concept of *Swasthavritta*, which emphasizes living in harmony with one's natural constitution. Simply put, it advocates for maintaining health through a balanced routine and appropriate lifestyle choices. *Swasthavritta* not only addresses personal hygiene but also considers public health as essential components of wellness.^[6]

According to this Ayurvedic principle, the two fundamental objectives are: preserving the health of the healthy and treating the illness of the sick—described as "*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*", meaning the protection of health. In preventing lifestyle disorders, Ayurveda adopts both an individualized and holistic perspective.

The most effective way to control or slow the advancement of these conditions is by implementing simple lifestyle modifications through Ayurvedic routines and practices.

Preventive measures

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Sadvritta* refers to the code of good conduct. It outlines specific behavioral guidelines that help individuals maintain health and discipline over their senses. These ethical principles are documented in classical Ayurvedic texts and encompass various dimensions of human life, including social, emotional, psychological, and moral aspects. *Sadvritta* can be broadly categorized into personal, social, emotional, psychological, religious, and occupational conduct.^[7]

Promotive measures

For managing lifestyle-related diseases, Ayurveda provides a comprehensive approach through various lifestyle regimens. These include *Ahara* and *Vihara* (diet and daily habits), *Dinacharya* (Daily routine), *Ritucharya* (Seasonal regimen), *Vyayama* (Exercise), *Panchakarma* (Fivefold detoxification therapies), and *Rasayana* (Rejuvenation therapy). Practices like *Sadvritta* (Ideal behavioral code) and *Aachara Rasayana* (Ethical conduct as a rejuvenative measure) are considered essential for maintaining psychological well-being and a balanced life.^[8]

Ahara (Diet)

In Ayurveda, both *Ahara* (Diet) and *Vihara* (Lifestyle) are considered vital elements of a healthy life. Among these, *Ahara* is given special significance, often regarded as *Prana*—the very essence of life. Unlike many other medical systems, Ayurveda not only emphasizes the physical and biological roles of food but also explores its emotional and spiritual effects on overall health and wellness.^[9]

Ahara (Diet) is recognized in Ayurveda as one of the *Trayopastambha*—the three fundamental supports of life, alongside *Nidra* (Sleep) and *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy or regulated lifestyle).^[10] Diet plays a crucial role in sustaining the body by providing essential nutrients and supporting longevity. Ayurveda consistently emphasizes the importance of consuming a balanced and nourishing diet to maintain overall health. According to Ayurvedic philosophy, both the well-being of the human body and the development of diseases are directly influenced by diet. The intake of *Hita-Ahara* (Wholesome food) is believed to promote health and extend life, while *Ahita-Ahara* (Unwholesome food) is associated with the onset of various ailments.

In contemporary times, the concept of *Hita-Ahara* is often overlooked, contributing significantly to the rise in lifestyle-related diseases.^[11] Ayurveda also outlines eighteen forms of dietary incompatibilities known as *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food combinations) that should be avoided to preserve health and longevity.^[12] Furthermore, the system offers comprehensive guidelines on *Pathya-Apathya Ahara and Vihara*—the dos and don'ts concerning diet and daily habits—which play a vital role in preventing and managing lifestyle disorders, as well as correcting improper eating behaviors.

Dinacharya (Daily regimen)

Maintaining regular circadian rhythms is essential for regulating the body's internal clock. Ayurveda recommends beginning the day mindfully, rising early, avoiding suppression of natural urges, and ensuring proper elimination. Daily practices include oral hygiene, skin care, regular oil massage (*Abhyanga*), and bathing, which is believed to enhance appetite and support longevity. Eating food that aligns with one's hunger and metabolic needs is considered fundamental for daily health promotion.

Ayurveda also advises against staying up late and consuming stale or improperly prepared foods, as such habits can disturb the body's natural rhythms. Prolonged disruption of these rhythms may lead to imbalances that contribute to lifestyle-related disorders. Therefore, adhering to a structured daily routine is crucial for enhancing immunity, promoting health, and preventing disease.^[13]

Panchakarma (Bio-Purification therapy)

Panchakarma refers to a set of five core Ayurvedic detoxification techniques designed to cleanse the body's internal systems, eliminate accumulated toxins, and restore the balance of the three fundamental bodily humors (*Tridosha*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*). These five therapeutic procedures include:

- *Vaman* (Therapeutic emesis)
- *Virechan* (Therapeutic purgation)
- *Asthapan Basti* (Medicated decoction enema)
- *Anuvasana Basti* (Medicated oil enema)
- *Nasya Karma* (Nasal administration of medication)

Ayurveda places great emphasis on the preventive applications of Panchakarma. In addition to detoxifying the body, it helps in restoring mental clarity, reducing stress, and plays a significant role in the prevention and management of various lifestyle-related disorders.

Rasayana (Rejuvenation therapy)

Beyond regular nutrition, Ayurveda introduces the concept of *Rasayana*, a category of rejuvenative therapies and medicinal supplements aimed at enhancing overall vitality. Rasayanas can function both as dietary supplements and as therapeutic agents, depending on their composition and intended use. They promote the body's strength (*Bala*), stimulate digestive fire (*Agni*), and purify bodily channels (*Srotoprasadan*), ultimately improving tissue nourishment and the quality of *Dhatus* (body tissues).

Rasayanas are known for their revitalizing and restorative effects. Some are specifically formulated to support particular organs or systems—such as *Medhya Rasayana* for cognitive health, *Hridya Rasayana* for heart function, and *Twachya Rasayana* for skin health.^[14]

Sadvritta and Achara rasayana (Code of good conduct)

Ayurveda outlines ethical and lifestyle guidelines under the concepts of *Sadvritta* (ideal conduct) and *Achara Rasayana* (behavioral rejuvenation). These practices are categorized into various domains:

- **Personal conduct:** Includes maintaining a regular sleep-wake cycle, avoiding excessive physical exertion, refraining from suppressing natural urges, regular bathing, and maintaining personal hygiene. Avoiding harmful habits such as smoking also falls under this category.
- **Social conduct:** Encourages kindness, truthfulness, abstinence from alcohol, compassion, and wearing clean, well-maintained clothes.
- **Psychological and Emotional conduct:** Promotes emotional stability, practicing patience, avoiding intense emotional reactions, and not dwelling on past insults.

Following these behavioral practices supports not only personal well-being but also contributes significantly to the prevention and management of various lifestyle-related disorders.^[15]

Daivavyapashraya chikitsa (Spiritual therapy)

Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa refers to the spiritual aspect of Ayurvedic healing. It includes practices such as chanting mantras, using herbs and gemstones for spiritual benefits (*Aushadhi* and *Mani Dharana*), performing rituals like *Mangal Karma* (Auspicious acts), *Bali* (offerings), *Homa* (Sacrificial fire rituals), *Prayashchitta* (Penance), *Upavasa* (Fasting), and *Swastyayana* (Prayers for social and personal welfare).

A significant portion of the global population—estimated at around 90%—engages in some form of religious or spiritual activity. These practices play a key role in managing stress and depression, and serve as supportive tools in the prevention and treatment of lifestyle-related conditions.^[16]

Satvavajaya chikitsa (Mind control therapy)

In *Charaka Samhita*, one of the foundational texts of Ayurvedic internal medicine, *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* is defined as the technique of restraining the mind from indulgence in unwholesome desires. This form of therapy focuses on gaining control over the *Manas* (mind), which is naturally prone to instability and distraction. These methods aim to strengthen mental discipline and emotional regulation.^[17-19]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

"Lifestyle disorders," commonly referred to as *non-communicable diseases (NCDs)* or *chronic diseases of lifestyle (CDLs)*, are primarily the result of imbalanced interactions between individuals and their environment. These diseases are often linked by common risk factors such as poor dietary habits, smoking, lack of physical activity, prolonged stress, and exposure to these conditions over extended periods. Major contributing risks include hypertension, elevated cholesterol, diabetes, and obesity. These conditions can eventually lead to serious health outcomes such as stroke, heart attacks, cancer, chronic respiratory issues, kidney failure, and others.

Ayurveda has long played a significant role in both the treatment and prevention of lifestyle-related disorders. Its emphasis on nutritious food (*Ahara*) and physical exercise (*Vyayama*) is central to maintaining health. *Rasayana* therapies, by enhancing digestive fire (*Agni*), promoting strength (*Bala*), and purifying the bodily channels (*Srotoprasadan*), support better nutrition and improve the quality of *Dhatus* (body tissues).

In addition, Ayurveda promotes ethical and holistic lifestyle practices under *Sadvritta* and *Acharya Rasayana*, addressing various aspects of personal, social, psychological, and emotional behavior. Furthermore, *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*, which includes spiritual practices like chanting mantras, offers powerful coping mechanisms for managing stress and depression, thereby aiding in the prevention and management of lifestyle diseases.

Adopting such integrative and preventive measures as recommended in Ayurveda proves to be highly beneficial in reducing the risk and aiding in the management of lifestyle disorders.

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