

## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NIDRA-AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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Article Received on  
10 August 2025,

Revised on 30 August 2025,  
Accepted on 19 Sept. 2025

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17221641>



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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** In *Ayurveda*, the principle of '*Trayopstambha*' (three pillars of life) includes '*Nidra*', establishing its significance, crucial for maintaining physical and mental well-being. A number of vital physiological functions happen during sleep. Cut-throat competition nowadays leads to numerous lifestyle disorders, of which sleep disturbance is most common cause. **Material & Methods:** Classical *Ayurvedic* texts like *Brihat-trayi* and other existing literature or published articles on database were reviewed to gather insights into the nature, type and functions of *Nidra*. *Ayurvedic* perspective on inter-connection of sleep quality and *Doshik* balance is also being reviewed. **Discussion & Conclusion:** *Nidra* (sleep) is more than, just a physiological quiescence. It is complicated, regular, repeated and easily reversible by minute changes in physical, psychological or social background. It comes into light after analysis, that *Nidra*, not only

rejuvenates the body but also provide *Bala*, *Pushti* and *Tushti*. Where '*Bala*' means, physical strength or immunity (*Ojas*) to combat any physical and mental ailments; '*Pushti*' means nourishment to the body in the form *Agni-Sandhushan* (increase in digestive fire) as *Agni-Mandya* leads to number of lifestyle disorders and finally '*Tushti*', which means providing satisfaction to the brain in the form of balance in *Sadhaka Pitta* as it provides emotional strength to the individual.

**KEYWORDS:** *Tryopstambha, Brihatrayee, Doshik, Bala, Pushti, Tushti, Ojas, Agni-sandhushan, Agni-mandya, Sadhaka Pitta.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Nidra* (sleep) is considered as chief nourisher at life's feast. It is a valuable gift to be protected and it has been proved as a protector itself as well. *Ayurveda* recognizes the significance of *Nidra* which is considered as an important dimension of good health related with happiness and is a result of relax mental state. As per *Acharya Charaka*, it is believed that *Nidra* rejuvenates the body, replenishes energy, restores physical strength and provide mental clarity with essential emotional stability.

Sound sleep at night is a natural and nourishing phenomenon, which is described as *Bhutadhatrī*,<sup>[1]</sup> that which nourishes every living form. One can exercise some control over it, can prepare, postpone and even avoid it temporarily for short period of time. However, absence or inadequacy of sleep may lead to many disorders and hampers number of physiological functions of the body including digestion, excretion, reproduction etc. As per *Acharya Sushruta*, "*Nidra* provides nutrition to the living body and maintains the health like 'Lord Vishnu', who himself nourishes and protects the world." He termed *Nidra* as "*Vaishnavi*".<sup>[2]</sup>

**AIM:** To provide a comprehensive understanding of *Nidra* from *Ayurvedic* perspective.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To elucidate concept of *Nidra* in *Ayurveda*.
2. To investigate the role of *Nidra* on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.
3. To have a keen eye on interconnectedness of *Doshik* balance and quality of sleep.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The classics of *Brihat-trayi* designated as *Charak Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Sangraha* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* and their available commentaries with other existing literature are reviewed to gather insights of ayurvedic perspective of *Nidra*. Also, published articles regarding *Nidra* from PubMed, Medline like databases have been reviewed.

### *Nidra*

As per *Acharya Charak*, *Nidra* is nothing more than the state of having a mind and body that are both exhausted. It simply indicates that when an individual's intellect becomes exhausted

and when their *Indriyas* get so overworked that they retreat from their objects, then the individual sleep.<sup>[3]</sup>

When *Tamas Guna*, one of the *Trigunas* that creates ignorance, predominates with *Kapha*, the seat of *Chetana* is covered and sleep occurs. *Nidra* is another form of *Tamas* i.e. mental darkness. When *Tamas* naturally predominates at night and the mind and intellect are thoroughly relaxed, sleep occurs<sup>[4]</sup> explained by *Acharya Sushruta*.

Also, the commentator of *Ashtanga Sangraha*, states that when an individual fall asleep, *Manovaha Srotas* become accumulated with *Sleshma*, and the mind is devoid of sense organs because of fatigue.<sup>[5]</sup>

As per *Yoga Sutra*, *Nidra* is a mental state where individual is devoid of all experiences “*Abhavpratyayavalambana vrittirNidra*”.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Types of *Nidra*-** *Nidra* can be classified into type's viz. *Svabhavika* (natural) and *Asvabhavika*<sup>[7]</sup> (abnormal). The former *Svabhavika Nidra* is regular every night, which offers beneficial effects for the living beings, whereas the later *Asvabhavika* is one that can be due to different pathologies. There are, difference in opinion with respect to types of *Nidra* which is as follows.

**Table 1: Type of *Nidra*.**

According to <i>Acharya Charaka</i> <sup>[8]</sup>	<i>Tamobhava</i> - due to <i>Tamas</i> <i>Sleshmasamudbhava</i> - due to vitiated <i>Kapha Dosha</i> . <i>Manah-sharir shram sambhava</i> – due to tired mind and body. <i>Agantuki</i> - due to external factors <i>Vyadhi</i> - due to disease condition <i>Ratriswabhavaprabhva</i> - due to nature of night
According to <i>Acharya Sushruta</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	<i>Vaishnavi Nidra</i> - this kind of <i>nidra</i> is typical and is believed to be the divine energy providing nourishment and support life. <i>Vaikariki Nidra</i> - this occurs because of vitiating doshas and disorders affecting body of an individual. <i>Tamasi Nidra</i> - appears because of aggravation of <i>Tamas Guna</i> and results in unconsciousness at the time of death.
According to <i>Laghu Vagbhatta</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	<i>Mithya-yoga-roopa</i> - untimely sleep <i>Ati-yoga-roopa</i> - excessive duration of sleep <i>Heen-yoga-roopa</i> - improper sleep <i>Samyak-yoga-roopa</i> - timely and with appropriate hours of sleep.
According to <i>Acharya Dalhana</i> <sup>[7]</sup>	<i>Tamasi- Sangyavaha Srotas</i> getting clogged with increase <i>Sleshma</i> dominated by <i>Tamoguna</i> , <i>Tamasi Nidra</i> occurs.

	<i>Swabhaviki</i> - occurring daily <i>Vaikariki</i> - occurs due to any kind of vitiation in either body or mind.
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**Effects of Doshas on Nidra**- Understanding of *Doshik* influence on *Nidra* offers a holistic view, emphasizing the interconnection of body, mind and consciousness. Different *Doshas* effect *Nidra* on different note which could be further understood by having an overlook on their individual *Prakriti*. *Prakriti* in *Ayurveda* provides fair indication of person's physiological strength and weaknesses, mental tendencies and susceptibility to illnesses of various types. Thus, it determines the *Doshik* influence on not only quality but the quantity of *Nidra* as well. Brief description is as follows.

*Vata* -*Vata* prakriti people tend to have inconsistent and brief sleep cycles, and easily wake up in the middle of the night and have trouble falling back to sleep. They require utmost of 5-6 hrs. of sleep for a fresh start.

*Pitta*-They typically have restful and moderate quantity of sleep. It is not difficult to go back to sleep after awakening during the night. However, they may have hyperactive and agitated mind so, it would be challenging to fall back asleep. They are good having 6-7 hours of sleep.

*Kapha*- Person will have most restful and sound sleep. But may feel heavy and lazy, meaning that if they are not disturbed or awakened, they have a tendency to oversleep. Short duration may not provide satisfactory rest to them. *Kapha Prakriti* individuals mostly require 8 to 9 hours of sleep.

**Significance of Good Night Sleep (Nidra)**- *Nidra* plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including happiness, unhappiness, physical health, sexual strength, impotence, knowledge, ignorance, longevity, and mortality.<sup>[10]</sup> It can be further elaborated as.

- Samyak Nidra* (proper *Nidra*), is associated with happiness (*Sukha*), while insufficient sleep, or *Asamyak Nidra*, can result in misery (*Dukha*). A calm and happy mind, fostered by sound sleep, is favourable to inner happiness and emotional equilibrium.
- Nidra* supports physical health and spiritual growth, fostering vitality and enabling deeper engagement to the subjects around.
- Adequate *Nidra* enhances cognitive abilities (*Gyan*) and mental clarity.
- Inadequate sleep fosters ignorance, by clouding the mind and hindering awareness of reality, highlighting the need to prioritize rest for clarity.

- v. Proper sleep promotes longevity (*Jivita*), while insufficient sleep may shorten lifespan (*Ajivita*); a balanced lifestyle, including adequate rest, preserves vital energy (*Prana*).

**Table 2: Merits of proper *Nidra* as per different classics of *Ayurveda*.**

<i>Charak Samhita</i>	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i>
<i>Bala</i> (strength)	<i>Arogya</i> (free from diseases)
<i>Jnana</i> (knowledge)	<i>Sumanasya</i> (pleasant mind)
<i>Pushti</i> (growth)	<i>Varna</i> (bright complexion)
<i>Sukha</i> (happiness)	<i>Bala</i> (strength)
<i>Vrushata</i> (virility)	<i>Na-ati-sthoolkari</i> (well-built body)
<i>Jeevatam</i> (long life span)	<i>Shatayu</i> (100 years of life)

**Effect on Hridaya-** *Hridaya* which in *Ayurveda* has been mentioned as like the lotus in downward direction, is said to bloom in wakeful state & closes while asleep.<sup>[11]</sup>

**Relation with Management of Weight-** Awakening at the night increase dryness in the body. Day sleep increase unctuousness in the body & sleeping in sitting posture during day time does not increase unctuousness or dryness.<sup>[12]</sup> Like the proper diet, proper sleep is essential for maintenance of the body. Proper sleep increase weight, induces obesity whereas less sleep produce emaciation.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Relation with Health-** Untimely sleep & excessive sleep take both happiness & longevity like *Kala Ratri* i.e. fierce night. At the same time if properly enjoyed, they bring about happiness, longevity to human being as real knowledge i.e. *Satya Buddhi* brings about *Siddhi* to *Yogi*.<sup>[14]</sup>

**Spiritual Enrichment through *Nidra*-** In the *Mandukya Upanishad*<sup>[15]</sup>, *Nidra* is intricately linked with various levels of consciousness. It outlines four primary states.

1. *Jagrat* (Waking State): People are completely conscious of and involved in their everyday environment.
2. *Swapna* (Dreaming State): People are asleep and dreaming in this state (a reflection of their subconscious).
3. *Sushupti* (Deep Sleep State): The absence of dreams is the defining feature of this state. It is essential for the body's and mind's healing processes and is frequently linked to profound serenity.

4. *Turiya* (The Fourth State): This transcendent state is characterized by an awareness that exists outside of inward or outward emphasis, signifying pure existence and unity with the divine.

These stages can be correlated with stages of NREM and REM sleep respectively, of modern medical physiology.

**Nidra as Adharniya Vega-** *Acharyas* have clearly mentioned that one must never suppress the natural urge of sleep. Doing so causes symptoms as below.

**Table 3: Symptoms of Suppression of Nidra.**

<i>Charak Samhita</i>	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i>	<i>Ashtanga Samgraha</i>
<i>Jrumbha</i>	<i>Jrumbha</i>	<i>Jrumbha</i>
<i>Angamarda</i>	<i>Angamarda/ angajadya</i>	<i>Angamarda</i>
<i>Shirojadya</i>	<i>Shirojadya</i>	<i>Murdhagaurav</i>
<i>Akshigaurav</i>	<i>Akshijadya</i>	<i>Akshigaurav</i>
<i>Tandra</i>	-	-
-	-	<i>Moha</i>
-	-	<i>Alasya</i>

**Health Risks of Inadequate Sleep (Nidra)-** *Acharya Charaka* also stated that inadequate sleep leads to *Dukha*, *Karshya*, weakness, sterility and even death. It causes *Haleemaka* (severe form of jaundice), *Shiro-roga* (disorders of head), stiffness and heaviness as that in *Jwara*, *Klama* etc. Sleep deprivation also causes diseases due to vitiation of *Vata Dosha*, which includes disorders like *Ardita*, *Ekanga-roga*, *Sarvanga roga*, *Pakshavadha*, *Akshepaka*, *Dandaka*, *Bhrama*, *Vepathu*, *Vishada*, *Atipralapa*, *Atatvabhinivesha* etc. *Sushrutacharya* has described the untimely sleep pattern as an important cause of *Ajirna*.

**Methods to induce Nidra-** In *Ayurveda* there are ways to manage a proper sleep by oil massage, bath, soup of domestic, marshy & aquatic animals, sali rice with curds, unctuous substance, milk, alcohol & psychic pleasure, smell of scents & hearing of sounds of one's own taste, comfortable touch, application of an ointments to body, *tarpana* for eyes, comfortable bed, home & sleeping at proper time.<sup>[16]</sup>

**Indication for Divaswapna-** *Divaswapna* is prescribed for those who are emaciated by singing, study, alcoholic drinks, sexual act, elimination therapy, carrying heavy weight, walking long distance, wasting, thirst, diarrhoea, colic pain, dyspnoea, hiccough, insanity, those who are too young, weak, injured by fall, assault, exhausted by journey, vigil, anger,

grief, fear & those accustomed to sleep at day. In summer when nights are shorter, *Vata* gets aggravated in the body due to absorption of fluid, so day sleep is prescribed for all.<sup>[17]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

It is a period of rest for fatigued and worn-out tissues and is considered as a time when body and mind disengage from external stimuli allowing restoration of vital energy (*Ojas*) and body tissues (*Dhatus*). Some studies also suggest that any disturbance to quality of sleep affects our immune system in a detrimental way. Poor sleep drains vitality, weakens the immune system, and disrupts body-mind connection. Weakened immunity not only affects the lustre of skin but speeds up the aging process too. By adhering to proper sleep timings, ensuring high-quality sleep and getting adequate rest, supports overall vitality and well-being.

Not only it is important to get the correct amount or the correct quality of sleep, but it is equally important to sleep at the right time. For example, sleeping right after a meal is not recommended, because it could lead to indigestion as it increases the *Kapha* and decreases the *Vata* and *Pitta*. If one stays awake for too late at night, it leads to an increase in *Vata Dosha*. This should be made up by sleeping during day on empty stomach for half of the usual time. As per *Ayurveda*, the best time to sleep is to match it with sun i.e. sleep after sunset and rise with the sun. Sleeping too much is considered *Tamasik* and increases and imbalances the *Kapha* in the body. Which derails all the metabolic processes of the body by leading to *Ajeerna*<sup>[16]</sup> and *Agni-Mandya* resulting in the formation of *Ama* i.e. toxins. This eventually causes *Shiro-Guruta* which further complicates with *Nidra*, and this vicious cycle continues. Metabolic disturbances lead to numerous diseases of which obesity, HTN, DM etc. are common one.

Cortisol, a stress hormone that follows diurnal rhythm, with levels peaking in the early morning and gradually declining throughout the day. High cortisol at night because of the exposure to increasing stress in day-to-day life can prevent deep sleep, leading to poor quality sleep. So, sleep also acts as a buffer system for depression, anxiety like mental ailments which are results of chronic stress, by balancing *Sadhak Pitta* as it governs the brain and heart and is associated with digestion of emotions, life experiences and stress as well. Which could be understood by increase in secretions of mood stabilizer neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine etc.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of *Nidra* from *Ayurvedic* perspective highlights its profound significance in promoting holistic well-being. *Acharya Charak* specifically defines '*Ratriswabhavaprabhava Nidra*' as "*Bhutdhatu*" and *Acharya Sushruta* coined it as "*Vaishnavi*". Thus, making it influential among '*Tryopstambha*' that which support the body just like pillars.

Sleeping qualitatively and quantitatively is as much important as sleeping at the right time. Understanding *Nidra* in relation to *Doshas*, *Gunas* and *Prakriti* allows for tailored lifestyle choices. Meanwhile, spiritual texts like *Upanishads* emphasize role of *Nidra* in self-awareness and inner peace, showcasing its transformative power. Embracing the significance of *Nidra* enables individuals to cultivate vitality, growth, mental clarity and eventually happiness or inner peace in their lives.

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