WORLD JOURNAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH
Coden USA: WJPRAP Impact Factor 8.63
Volume 15, Issue 21, 415-450. Review Article ISSN 2277–7105

EFFECT OF JUNK FOOD ON RASA DHATU

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Article Received on 28 Sept. 2026
Article Revised on 18 October 2026
Article Published on 01 Nov. 2026

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.237598

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How to cite this Article: [*1]Dr. Pallavi Alias Priyanka Raosaheb Patil, [2]Om Jadhav, [3]Dhiraj Jain, [4]Mihir Jakhi. (2026). Effect of Junk Food on Rasa Dhatu. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, 15(21), 415–450.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda explains health (Swasthya) in terms of the balance of Doshas, proper functioning of Agni, appropriate formation of Dhatus and Malas, and a settled state of the Atma, Indriya, and Manas. Among the seven Dhatus described in classical texts — Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra — Rasa Dhatu is especially important because it is the first Dhatu formed after digestion. It is responsible for sustaining life by providing nutrition, vitality (Bala), mental clarity, emotional balance, complexion (Varna), and overall well-being (Prinana).

A disturbance in the formation or quality of Rasa Dhatu can affect the subsequent Dhatus formed from it in sequence — Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra — and may eventually contribute to disturbances in other body functions. Because Rasa Dhatu develops from digested food (Ahara Rasa), its quality depends greatly on the food taken and the strength of Agni.

With changes in lifestyle, junk food has become a common part of daily eating habits, especially among adolescents, students, and working individuals. Junk foods — characterized by high amounts of refined carbohydrates, unhealthy fats, excess salt, preservatives, artificial additives, and low nutritional density — are often chosen because they are convenient, tasty, easily available, and fit into busy academic or work schedules. In Ayurvedic terms, such foods largely fall into the categories of Asatmya Ahara (habitually incompatible

diet),Viruddha Ahara (mutually contradictory or improperly combined/processed food), and Guru-Vidahi-Ama-janaka Ahara (heavy, acid-forming, toxin-generating food).

Frequent intake of such foods may disturb Jatharagni (the central digestive fire), can interfere with normal Ahara Paka, and may result in Ama, described in Ayurveda as incompletely processed material. According to the Ayurvedic framework used in this study, Ama can interfere with the proper formation and quality of Rasa Dhatu, which may present as Rasa Dushti. Impaired Rasa Dhatu manifests clinically through symptoms such as decreased vitality, fatigue, dullness or roughness of skin, reduced immunity (Vyadhikshamatva), mood instability, disturbed appetite, and generalized physiological dysfunction.

Over time, defective Rasa Dhatu can negatively influence subsequent Dhatus, thereby contributing to a range of lifestyle disorders including obesity, diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease — conditions that are increasingly prevalent in contemporary society and are frequently first seeded by dietary indiscretion in adolescence and young adulthood.

With fast food becoming more common, it is useful to examine its possible effects through the classical lens of Ayurveda and relate the observations to findings from modern nutrition. Studying the effect of junk food on Rasa Dhatu can help establish preventive perspectives, highlight the importance of healthy dietary habits, and support Ayurvedic recommendations for promoting balanced nutrition and Dhatu Poshana (nourishment of tissues) among the general population, and especially among the youth who form the future workforce of the nation.

1.1 Background and Rationale

Modern dietary habits have undergone a significant shift over the past few decades, with an increasing reliance on processed and ready-to-eat foods. This lifestyle transition has led to widespread consumption of junk food, which is characterized by high levels of sugar, unhealthy fats, refined flour, salt, artificial preservatives, and low nutritional value. Such foods are consumed frequently due to convenience, taste appeal, busy academic and professional schedules, and the influence of advertising, particularly among adolescents, young adults, and urban populations.

In Ayurveda, diet (Ahara) plays a central role in the formation of Rasa Dhatu, the first and primary Dhatu responsible for nourishing the entire body. The quality of Rasa Dhatu is closely related to Ahara and the strength of Agni. Junk food, being Guru (heavy), Vidahi (acid-producing), and Ama-janaka (toxin-forming), is considered incompatible for regular consumption. These properties can weaken Jatharagni, leading to improper digestion and the formation of Ama, which disrupts the proper formation of Rasa Dhatu.

Impaired Rasa Dhatu manifests through symptoms such as decreased vitality, fatigue, dullness of skin, reduced immunity, mood instability, and disturbed physiological functioning. Over time, defective Rasa Dhatu can negatively influence subsequent Dhatus — including Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, and others — thereby contributing to lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease.

Understanding this relationship is relevant mainly from a preventive point of view. With lifestyle disorders on the rise and dietary patterns shifting rapidly, an Ayurvedic analysis of how junk food impacts foundational bodily tissues can guide the development of effective health education strategies, promote healthy dietary choices, and support better Dhatu-level nourishment. The study therefore attempts to view a current dietary habit through Ayurvedic concepts and identify practical preventive measures.

1.2 Need of the Study

- Junk food consumption is rising sharply among adolescents and young adults, yet its impact is rarely studied through the lens of classical Ayurvedic Dhatu physiology.
- Rasa Dhatu, being the first Dhatu, reflects the earliest signs of nutritional and digestive disturbance; identifying these early markers can help in timely preventive intervention before disease manifests at a grosser (Sthula) level.
- There is a scarcity of structured clinical or observational data correlating dietary habits with Rasa Dushti Lakshanas in the Indian population, especially among students and young working adults.
- Findings from this study may help formulate Pathya–Apathya guidelines relevant to contemporary eating patterns and support health education initiatives in colleges and communities.
- An integrative understanding bridging Samhita-based concepts with modern survey-based observation can strengthen the evidence base for preventive Ayurveda (Swasthavritta).

1.3 Relevance to Ayurvedic Practice

Ayurveda gives strong importance to prevention (Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam) over cure (Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam). Since Rasa Dhatu Dushti is often the earliest and most reversible stage of dietary-lifestyle disorders, timely identification of its clinical markers — through simple, non-invasive, questionnaire-based assessment as used in this study — may provide a simple tool that can be used in health education and preliminary assessment. The findings may therefore have practical relevance for Ayurvedic clinical practice, nutrition counselling, and community health education.

CHAPTER 2

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aim

To evaluate the effect of regular junk food consumption on the quality and functional status of Rasa Dhatu according to Ayurvedic principles.

2.2 Objectives

- To study the Ayurvedic concept and physiological role of Rasa Dhatu.
- To analyze junk food based on Ayurvedic parameters such as Guna, Rasa, Virya, and Vipaka.
- To assess the impact of frequent junk food intake on the formation and function of Rasa Dhatu.
- To identify early clinical features of Rasavaha Srotodushti in junk food consumers.
- To emphasize the importance of Pathya–Apathya Ahara in maintaining healthy Rasa Dhatu.
- To correlate the observed clinical findings with classical descriptions of Rasa Dushti and Rasapradoshaja Vikara.

2.3 Research Gap

Classical Ayurvedic texts clearly describe the importance of Ahara and Agni in the formation and nourishment of Rasa Dhatu. However, despite increasing consumption of junk food in modern life, there is a lack of structured clinical studies evaluating its direct impact on Rasa Dhatu. Modern nutritional research documents metabolic and lifestyle disorders caused by junk food, but correlation with Ayurvedic concepts such as Rasa Dushti, Agni Mandya, Ama formation, and Rasavaha Srotodushti is insufficient. Hence, there is a need for an observational study to bridge classical Ayurvedic principles with current dietary practices.

2.4 Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no significant association between regular junk food consumption and features of Rasa Dhatu Dushti (fatigue, poor skin quality, low vitality, digestive disturbance).

Alternate Hypothesis (H1)

Regular junk food consumption is significantly associated with clinical features suggestive of Rasa Dhatu Dushti.

2.5 Operational Definitions Used in the Study

- Junk Food: Commercially prepared food items that are calorie-dense but nutrient-poor, including fried food, packaged snacks, bakery items, and soft drinks, consumed for convenience rather than nutritional value.
- Rasa Dhatu Dushti (operational, questionnaire-based): A composite of self-reported markers — skin quality, fatigue level, digestive strength, thirst pattern, sense of post-prandial nourishment, and overall vitality — used as clinical proxies for classical Rasa Dushti Lakshanas.
- Regular Consumption: Intake of junk food three or more times per week, as per the inclusion criterion of the study.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF RASA DHATU

3.1 Etymology and Definition

The word ‘Rasa’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘Rasa’ meaning ‘that which is tasted’ or ‘essence’. In the context of Dhatu Sharira (tissue physiology), Rasa Dhatu refers to the first of the seven Dhatus (Sapta Dhatu) formed from digested food. It represents the essential, liquid, nutrient-rich fraction of Ahara that circulates throughout the body to provide nourishment (Prinana) to all tissues.

3.2 Formation of Rasa Dhatu (Ahara Paka Krama)

According to Ayurvedic physiology, ingested food undergoes a sequential process of digestion under the influence of Jatharagni. The food, after being acted upon by Prakupita and Prasadana processes in the Amashaya (stomach) and Grahani (duodenum), is separated into a nutrient portion (Prasada Bhaga) and a waste portion (Kitta Bhaga). The Prasada Bhaga, in its Avyakta Rasa (unmanifest, initial nutrient) form, is termed Ahara Rasa or Anna

Rasa. Under the influence of Ranjaka Pitta and the Bhutagnis (elemental fires), this Ahara Rasa is transformed and matures into Rasa Dhatu, the first of the seven bodily tissues.

Strength of Agni is thus the single most important determinant of whether ingested food is transformed into healthy (Prasanna, Paripakva) Rasa Dhatu or into Ama — an improperly processed, sticky, toxic byproduct that disturbs subsequent physiological processes.

3.3 Rasa Dhatu Poshana Krama (Nourishment Mechanism)

Two classical theories describe how Rasa Dhatu nourishes the subsequent Dhatus:

- Kedari Kulya Nyaya (Irrigation Channel Theory): Just as water flows sequentially from one field to the next through interconnected channels, Rasa Dhatu nourishes Rakta Dhatu, which in turn nourishes Mamsa Dhatu, and so on, in a sequential manner up to Shukra Dhatu.
- Khale Kapota Nyaya (Threshing-floor Pigeon Theory): Alternatively, it is proposed that Rasa Dhatu simultaneously supplies nourishment to all seven Dhatus, much as pigeons descend together on a threshing floor to feed, rather than in a strict sequence.

  Both theories agree on one central point relevant to this study: any compromise in the quality of Rasa Dhatu — whether due to Agni Mandya or Ama formation from improper diet — has downstream consequences for every subsequently formed Dhatu.

3.4 Sthana (Location) and Rasavaha Srotas

The Hridaya (heart, in the broader physiological sense including the cardiovascular centre) is described as the Moola Sthana (root site) of the Rasavaha Srotas — the channel system responsible for the transport and circulation of Rasa Dhatu throughout the body. The Dasha Dhamanis (ten major vessels) originating from the Hridaya are also considered part of this Moola Sthana, facilitating the distribution of Rasa to all parts of the body.

3.5 Karma (Functions) of Rasa Dhatu

Acharya Sushruta describes the principal function of Rasa Dhatu as Prinana — the act of nourishing, satisfying, and sustaining the body and mind. Healthy Rasa Dhatu is associated with:

- Twak Prasada — clarity, glow, and healthy texture of the skin.
- Utsaha — enthusiasm, motivation, and mental vigour.
- Trupti — a sense of satisfaction and contentment after food intake.
- Bala — physical strength and stamina.

- Proper functioning of the special sense organs and clarity of cognition.

3.6 Rasa Dhatu Pramana (Quantity)

Classical texts allot a defined proportion to Rasa Dhatu among the total Dhatus of the body, indicating its foundational bulk contribution besides its qualitative role; more clinically relevant to this study, however, is not the absolute quantity but the qualitative integrity (Shuddhi) of the Rasa Dhatu formed.

3.7 Rasavaha Srotodushti (Vitiation of the Channels of Rasa)

The Rasavaha Srotas can become vitiated (Dushta) due to several Nidana (causative factors), prominently including Guru, Sheeta, and Abhishyandi Ahara (heavy, cold, and channel-blocking foods) — qualities closely paralleling those found in modern junk food — as well as excessive worry (Chinta) and irregular routine. Four types of Srotodushti relevant to Rasavaha Srotas are described:

- Atipravritti — excessive functioning/flow, e.g. excessive salivation or profuse sweating.
- Sanga — obstruction, e.g. Agni Mandya, heaviness, anorexia.
- Sira Granthi — nodular obstruction within the channels.
- Vimarga Gamana — abnormal or misdirected flow of Rasa, e.g. skin eruptions, oedema.

3.8 Rasa Dhatu Dushti – Vridhi and Kshaya Lakshana

Charaka Samhita (Sutrasthana, Dhatu Vridhi Kshaya Adhyaya) describes the clinical features of increase (Vridhi) and decrease (Kshaya) of Rasa Dhatu:

Condition	Classical Lakshana (Signs)
Rasa Vridhi (increase)	Excess salivation (Praseka), nausea (Hrullasa), heaviness of body (Gaurava), lethargy, loss of appetite (Aruchi), cough with mucus
Rasa Kshaya (decrease/depletion)	Exhaustion (Klama), reduced tolerance to sound/exertion, cardiac discomfort (Hridrava), roughness of body (Rukshata), giddiness (Bhrama), general debility

Notably, features of both Vridhi (heaviness, lethargy, loss of appetite) and Kshaya (dryness, exhaustion, low vitality) are represented among the symptoms reported by respondents in the present study, suggesting a mixed or fluctuating pattern of Rasa Dushti rather than a uniform picture — consistent with the varied and inconsistent nature of junk food intake reported.

3.9 Rasapradoshaja Vikara (Disorders arising from Vitiated Rasa)

Charaka Samhita enumerates a list of disorders arising specifically from vitiation of Rasa Dhatu (Rasapradoshaja Vikara), including Jwara (fever), Arochaka (anorexia), Avipaka (indigestion), Vairasya (loss of taste perception), Kandu (itching), Angamarda (body ache), Sadana (exhaustion), Gaurava (heaviness), Hridyata Abhava (cardiac discomfort), Praseka (excess salivation), and Panduta (pallor). Several of these — particularly Arochaka, Avipaka, Gaurava, and Sadana — find close parallels with the fatigue, appetite disturbance, and post-prandial heaviness reported in the survey results of this study.

3.10 Upadhatu and Mala of Rasa Dhatu

Stanya (breast milk) and Artava (menstrual fluid/reproductive tissue) are described as the Upadhatus (sub-tissues) of Rasa Dhatu in female physiology. This classical linkage provides a rationale for examining menstrual regularity as one of the assessed parameters in this study, since disturbance of Rasa Dhatu may manifest secondarily as Artava Dushti (menstrual irregularity). Kapha is considered the Mala (waste product) of Rasa Dhatu.

3.11 Interrelationship of Ahara, Agni, and Rasa Dhatu

The relationship between Ahara, Agni, and Rasa Dhatu is central to the present study. Wholesome food acted upon by a balanced Agni produces Prasanna (clear) Rasa Dhatu, which in turn maintains Bala, Varna, and Utsaha. Conversely, unwholesome or incompatible food (such as junk food), even when Agni is initially adequate, can progressively weaken Agni through repeated overload, resulting in Ama formation and Dushta (vitiated) Rasa Dhatu. This cyclical relationship — in which poor diet weakens Agni, and weakened Agni further compromises the processing of subsequent meals — is central to understanding the cumulative, progressive nature of Rasa Dushti observed in regular junk food consumers.

3.12 Clinical Assessment of Rasa Dhatu (Pariksha)

Classical texts do not describe a single isolated test for Rasa Dhatu status; rather, its condition is inferred through a composite clinical assessment drawing on several of the traditional examination methods (Pariksha). The parameters most relevant to Rasa Dhatu, and adopted in modified, questionnaire-based form in this study, include:

- Twak Pariksha (examination of skin) — glow, texture, moisture, and presence of blemishes, corresponding to Question 11 of the study questionnaire.
- Jihva and Mukha Pariksha (examination of tongue and mouth) — dryness, salivation, and taste perception, corresponding to Questions 15 and 20.

- Agni Pariksha (assessment of digestive strength) — appetite, digestion pattern, and post-prandial sensation, corresponding to Questions 10, 14, and 19.
- Bala Pariksha (assessment of physical strength/stamina) and Utsaha (assessment of mental enthusiasm) — corresponding to Questions 12, 16, and 21.
- Artava Pariksha (menstrual assessment, in females) — corresponding to Question 19 (numbered 19 in the questionnaire) of the survey.

Using several parameters together to assess Rasa Dhatu — rather than relying on a single symptom — is consistent with the classical principle that Dhatu Dushti manifests through a constellation of related signs rather than any single pathognomonic feature, and formed the basis for the questionnaire used in Chapter 6.

3.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the classical Ayurvedic understanding of Rasa Dhatu — its formation, function, quantity, channels of circulation, patterns of vitiation, and associated disorders — establishing the theoretical framework against which the effect of junk food, reviewed in the following chapter, and the empirical survey findings, presented in Chapter 7, are subsequently interpreted.

CHAPTER 4

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF AHARA AND JUNK FOOD

4.1 Importance of Ahara in Ayurveda

Ahara (food) is regarded in Ayurveda as one of the three sub-pillars of life (Trayopastambha), alongside Nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya (regulated conduct/sexual discipline). Charaka Samhita goes so far as to describe appropriately consumed food as Mahabhaishajya — the greatest medicine — emphasizing that the majority of disease can be prevented or managed through appropriate dietary discipline alone.

4.2 Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana (Eight Factors Governing Wholesome Food Intake)

Ashtanga Hridaya and Charaka Samhita describe eight factors that determine whether a given food, even if individually wholesome, will nourish the body appropriately:

Factor	Meaning	Relevance to Junk Food
Prakriti	Inherent nature/quality of food	Fried, processed foods are inherently Guru and Vidahi
Karana	Method of processing/cooking	Deep frying, artificial preservation alter natural Guna unfavourably
Samyoga	Combination with other foods	Junk food often combined incompatibly (e.g., cold drinks with fried food)
Rashi	Quantity consumed	Large packaged portions encourage overconsumption
Desha	Habitat/regional suitability	Many junk foods are non-native, mass-manufactured items
Kala	Time and season of intake	73% of respondents consume junk food in the evening, when Agni is comparatively weaker
Upayoga Samstha	Rules of dietary intake	Junk food often eaten hurriedly, while distracted (e.g., using phone/TV)
Upayokta	Constitution of the consumer	Effects vary with individual Prakriti and Agni Bala

4.3 Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (Rules of Wholesome Eating)

Ashtanga Hridaya (Sutrasthana, Ahara Vidhi Vidhana Adhyaya) lays down ten rules for healthy food consumption, including eating warm (Ushna), unctuous (Snigdha) food in proper quantity (Matravat), after the previous meal is digested (Jeerne), in a suitable place and with suitable accessories, without haste (Na Ati Drutam) and without excessive delay (Na Ati Vilambitam), with full attention (Ananyamanaso Bhutva), and food that is suitable to oneself (Atmanam Abhisamikshya). Regular junk food consumption, as reported by the study population — frequently in the evening, largely as packaged snacks eaten out of convenience — tends to violate several of these principles simultaneously, particularly Kala (timing), Upayoga Samstha (manner of eating), and Prakriti (inherent quality).

4.4 Concept of Pathya and Apathya

Pathya refers to that which is wholesome and favourable to the maintenance of Dhatu Samya (tissue equilibrium), while Apathya refers to that which is unfavourable and disease-promoting. Junk food, by virtue of its Guru, Vidahi, and Ama-janaka properties, is broadly classified as Apathya for regular use, though it may be tolerated occasionally by individuals with strong Agni without immediate harm. The chronic, repetitive nature of modern junk food consumption — as opposed to occasional indulgence — is what elevates it from a minor dietary indiscretion to a significant causative factor (Nidana) for Rasa Dushti.

4.5 Viruddha Ahara and Junk Food

Viruddha Ahara refers to food combinations or processing methods that are mutually contradictory in their properties, leading to disturbed Dosha function and Ama formation even when individual components may be wholesome. Several patterns common to junk food consumption — such as combining very hot fried food with ice-cold beverages (Sheeta-Ushna Viruddha), or reheating/refrying oils multiple times (Samskara Viruddha) — fall under this classical category and are believed to be particularly Ama-janaka.

4.6 Asatmya Ahara

Asatmya Ahara refers to food that is not habitually suited to an individual or population, even if nutritionally adequate on paper. The rapid, recent proliferation of highly processed, imported dietary patterns (packaged snacks, carbonated beverages, deep-fried fast food) represents, in many respects, a population-level shift toward Asatmya Ahara, particularly for a population whose Agni and Prakriti evolved around traditional, freshly-prepared, regionally appropriate diets.

4.7 Modern Classification and Composition of Junk Food

From a modern nutritional standpoint, junk food is defined as food that is high in calories from sugar and/or fat, with minimal protein, vitamins, minerals, or dietary fibre. Common categories, consistent with those assessed in this study's questionnaire, include:

- Fried foods — samosas, chips, pakoras, fried chicken, French fries: high in trans and saturated fats, Guru and Vidahi in nature.
- Packaged snacks — chips, namkeen, instant noodles, biscuits: high in refined carbohydrates, sodium, and preservatives; Ruksha (dry) with a dominant Katu-Lavana (pungent-salty) Rasa.
- Bakery items — cakes, pastries, white bread: high in refined sugar and maida (refined flour); Guru and Madhura (heavy, sweet) in Rasa.
- Soft drinks/carbonated beverages — high in refined sugar and carbonic acid; Amla Vipaka (sour post-digestive transformation), Pitta-Kapha aggravating.

4.8 Ayurvedic Guna–Rasa–Virya–Vipaka Analysis of Junk Food.

Junk Food Category	Predominant Guna	Predominant Rasa	Probable Vipaka/Effect
Fried food	Guru, Snigdha, Ushna, Vidahi	Katu, Lavana	Pitta-Kapha vitiating; Ama-janaka

Packaged snacks	Ruksha, Laghu (initially), Vidahi	Katu, Lavana	Vata-Pitta vitiating; dehydrating
Bakery items	Guru, Snigdha, Madhura	Madhura	Kapha vitiating; Srotorodha (channel blockage)
Soft drinks	Drava, Sheeta (superficially), Vidahi	Amla, Madhura	Amla Vipaka; Pitta-Kapha vitiating

This analysis demonstrates that, despite superficial differences in taste and preparation, all major categories of junk food converge on properties — Guru, Vidahi, and Ama-janaka — that are classically described as detrimental to Agni and, by extension, to the formation of healthy Rasa Dhatu.

4.9 Mechanism: From Junk Food to Rasa Dushti

The study proposes the following possible sequence linking regular junk food intake with Rasa Dushti: repeated intake of Guru, Vidahi, Ama-janaka food → progressive weakening of Jatharagni (Agni Mandya) → incomplete digestion of subsequent meals → formation and accumulation of Ama → obstruction and disturbance of Rasavaha Srotas (Srotodushti) → formation of Dushta (impure/impaired) rather than Prasanna Rasa Dhatu → clinical manifestation as fatigue, dull/oily/dry skin, poor post-prandial satisfaction, low vitality, and — if uncorrected — downstream involvement of Rakta, Mamsa, and Meda Dhatu. This mechanistic pathway forms the conceptual basis against which the survey findings of this study (Chapter 7) are interpreted in the Discussion (Chapter 8).

4.10 Comparative Overview: Traditional Diet versus Modern Junk-Food-Dominant Diet

Parameter	Traditional Ahara	Modern Junk Food
Preparation	Freshly cooked, minimally processed	Industrially processed, long shelf-life
Guna (qualities)	Predominantly Laghu, Ushna (freshly cooked)	Predominantly Guru, Vidahi
Rasa (taste)	Balanced Shad Rasa (six tastes)	Dominant Katu-Lavana or Madhura-Amla, imbalanced
Timing of intake	Regulated, aligned with Agni Bala (Kala)	Irregular, often evening/late-night
Fibre and micronutrient content	Generally higher	Generally low

Preservatives/additives	Minimal to absent	Frequently present
Ama-janaka potential	Low, when consumed as per Ahara Vidhi	High, due to Guru-Vidahi-Ruksha qualities
Effect on Agni (per this review)	Supportive/Deepana in appropriate quantity	Progressively Agni Mandya-karaka with regular use

The comparison suggests that the main concern in this study is not occasional consumption of any single food item, but with the systematic replacement of Kala-Matra-Samskara-appropriate traditional eating patterns with a diet structurally weighted toward Guru, Vidahi, and Ama-janaka qualities — a shift that the survey data presented in Chapter 7 suggests is already well underway in the studied population.

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined junk food using the classical Ayurvedic framework of Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana, Pathya-Apathya, Viruddha Ahara, and Asatmya Ahara, and analyzed its Guna-Rasa-Virya-Vipaka properties in comparison with traditional dietary patterns. The proposed mechanistic pathway from junk food intake to Rasa Dushti, together with the conceptual foundation of Rasa Dhatu physiology established in Chapter 3, provides the theoretical framework for interpreting the survey-based observations presented in Chapter 7 and discussed in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature was reviewed under three broad areas: (a) classical Ayurvedic texts, (b) modern nutritional and biomedical research, and (c) integrative studies attempting to correlate the two systems of knowledge.

5.1 Literature from Ayurvedic Classical Texts

5.1.1 Charaka Samhita

Charaka Samhita describes Ahara as the primary source for Rasa Dhatu formation. Improper, incompatible, or unwholesome foods cause Rasa Dushti, impaired immunity, fatigue, and Ama formation due to weak Agni. The Sutrasthana and Chikitsasthana sections elaborate extensively on Nidana Parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors) as the foremost principle of treatment, placing dietary discipline above all other therapeutic measures for disorders of Agni and Dhatu.

5.1.2 Sushruta Samhita

Sushruta Samhita highlights the role of Rasa Dhatu in vitality (Bala) and complexion (Varna). Guru, Ati-Snigdha, Vidahi, and Viruddha Ahara — qualities that closely parallel those of modern junk food — disturb Kapha-Pitta and impair Rasa Dhatu formation. Sushruta further correlates dietary quality with Ojas, describing a direct chain from Ahara to Rasa to Ojas, the latter being the subtlest essence responsible for immunity and overall vigour.

5.1.3 Ashtanga Hridaya

Ashtanga Hridaya states that improperly processed, nutrition-deficient foods cause faulty Rasa formation and early Rasaja Vikara such as dull complexion and low energy. The text's detailed Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (rules of eating) chapter, reviewed in Section 4.3, provides the practical framework against which modern eating patterns — including those captured in this study's survey — can be evaluated.

5.1.4 Other Classical Texts

Madhava Nidana, in its description of Agni Mandya and Ama-related disorders, links irregular and heavy diet to progressive weakening of digestive capacity. Bhavaprakasha Nighantu, in its food-material (Ahara Varga) section, classifies numerous food substances by Guna, Rasa, Virya, and Vipaka, providing a reference framework used in Chapter 4 to analyse modern junk food categories. Sharangdhara Samhita and Yogaratnakara further reinforce the principle that Matra (quantity), Kala (timing), and Samskara (processing) of food critically determine its wholesomeness, independent of the raw ingredient's inherent quality.

5.2 Literature from Modern Research and Nutrition

5.2.1 Impact on Digestion

Refined carbohydrates, trans fats, and additives in junk food are widely documented in nutritional literature to impair digestion and metabolism, correlating with the Ayurvedic concept of Agni Mandya and Ama formation. High glycaemic-index, low-fibre foods slow gastric emptying variably and alter gut motility, producing sensations of heaviness and sluggishness comparable to the classical description of Gaurava.

5.2.2 Fatigue and Low Immunity

Nutrition literature consistently shows that diets dominated by processed food reduce the intake of essential micronutrients such as iron, zinc, and vitamins A and B-complex, leading

to symptoms of fatigue and lowered immunity — findings that mirror the classical description of Apakva (immaturely formed) Rasa Dhatu, in which nutrient assimilation is incomplete despite adequate caloric intake.

5.2.3 Metabolic Disorders

Regular fast food and processed food consumption is well established in the biomedical literature as a contributor to obesity, dyslipidemia, and insulin resistance — conditions that run parallel to disturbed Rasa and Meda Dhatu in Ayurvedic physiology, and which frequently have their earliest, subclinical origins in the very symptoms (fatigue, heaviness, irregular appetite) assessed in this study.

5.2.4 Psychological Impact

A growing body of research on the gut–brain axis associates high intake of processed/junk food with increased stress reactivity, mood fluctuation, and reduced cognitive performance — comparable to the Rasaja Manasika Vikara (mind-related disorders arising from vitiated Rasa) described in Ayurveda, and consistent with the mental fatigue reported by over two-thirds of respondents in this study's survey (Table 7.20).

5.2.5 Public Health Perspective

Reports from bodies such as the World Health Organization and national nutrition institutes have repeatedly flagged the rising consumption of ultra-processed food among adolescents and young adults as a public health concern, linking it to the early onset of non-communicable, lifestyle-related disease. This global trend is broadly reflected in the present study's finding that over 71% of the sampled population consumes junk food three or more times per week.

5.3 Integrative Ayurvedic–Modern Insights

Rasa Dhatu is comparable, in a broad physiological sense, to the initial nutrient absorption and plasma formation described in modern biology — the earliest, most fundamental pool of assimilated nutrition from which all subsequent tissue building occurs. Junk food, by displacing nutrient-dense food and burdening digestive capacity, reduces this foundational nourishment at its very source. Ama, in this integrative view, resembles the free radicals and metabolic toxins/inflammatory mediators recognized by modern medicine as by-products of poor dietary quality and impaired metabolism. Dhatu Poshana Krama mirrors the sequential (or simultaneous, per the two classical theories reviewed in Section 3.3) nutrient assimilation

process recognized in modern tissue physiology, illustrating how disturbed Rasa Dhatu formation affects all subsequently formed tissues.

5.4 Gaps Identified in Existing Literature

- Limited direct studies linking the classical concept of Rasa Dhatu with quantifiable biomedical markers of nutrition or inflammation.
- Few studies examine junk food specifically, and systematically, as a major causative factor (Nidana) for Rasa Dushti using Ayurvedic clinical parameters.
- A need exists for integrative, community-level research connecting classical Ayurvedic Dhatu theory with modern nutritional science, using structured, reproducible assessment tools.
- Existing survey-based Ayurvedic research on dietary habits is largely urban, hospital-based, or limited to small clinical cohorts; population-level, questionnaire-based studies among students and young adults — as undertaken here — remain relatively uncommon.

5.5 Summary Table of Literature Reviewed.

Table 5.1 above consolidates the principal sources reviewed in this chapter and the specific contribution of each to the conceptual and interpretive framework of the present study.

Source	Key Contribution to This Study
Charaka Samhita	Ahara as primary source of Rasa Dhatu; Rasa Vridhi-Kshaya Lakshana; Rasapradoshaja Vikara
Sushruta Samhita	Rasa Dhatu's role in Bala and Varna; effect of Guru/Vidahi/Viruddha Ahara
Ashtanga Hridaya	Ahara Vidhi Vidhana; faulty Rasa formation from nutrition-deficient food
Madhava Nidana	Agni Mandya and Grahani Roga as consequences of irregular, heavy diet
Bhavaprakasha Nighantu	Guna-Rasa-Virya-Vipaka classification framework for food substances
Modern nutrition literature	Micronutrient deficiency, metabolic disorder, and psychological impact of processed food
WHO / ICMR-NIN reports	Population-level trends in processed food consumption and public health impact

5.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review examined the classical Ayurvedic understanding of Ahara-Agni-Rasa Dhatu interrelationship across Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and allied texts, and has correlated these descriptions with modern nutritional and biomedical findings on processed food consumption. The identified gaps in existing literature — particularly the scarcity of integrative, questionnaire-based studies correlating dietary habits with Rasa Dhatu status — directly motivate the observational design adopted in this study, described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

MATERIALS AND METHODS

6.1 Study Design

An observational, questionnaire-based, cross-sectional study.

6.2 Study Setting

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed electronically (Google Forms) to individuals meeting the inclusion criteria, in and around the catchment area of SMBT Ayurveda College & Hospital, Dhamangaon, Nashik, and its associated student and community network.

6.3 Study Population

Individuals aged 18–30 years from the general population, drawn primarily from student and young working groups, were invited to participate voluntarily.

6.4 Sampling Technique

Convenience (purposive) sampling was used because this was an exploratory, student-led observational study. While this approach does not permit strict random-sample generalization, it is appropriate for an initial, hypothesis-generating observational study of this kind.

6.5 Sample Size

50 participants were targeted as per the original study protocol; a total of 63 valid responses were ultimately received and analyzed through the structured online questionnaire, which was slightly higher than the planned sample size.

6.6 Study Duration

3 months, encompassing questionnaire design and validation, data collection, and data analysis/compilation.

6.7 Inclusion Criteria

- Age group 18–30 years.
- Individuals with regular junk food intake (≥ 3 times/week).
- Willingness to give informed consent and participate voluntarily.

6.8 Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with chronic systemic illness.
- Pregnant women.
- Individuals on long-term medication that could independently alter Agni, appetite, or Dhatu status.

6.9 Variables Studied

6.9.1 Independent Variable

Frequency, type, and timing of junk food consumption.

6.9.2 Dependent Variables

Clinical parameters used as proxies for Rasa Dhatu status: skin condition, appetite, digestive strength (Agni), thirst pattern, dryness of lips/tongue/skin, dry mouth, fatigue level, overall vitality/enthusiasm, post-junk-food heaviness/lethargy, sense of post-prandial nourishment, mental fatigue, and (in female respondents) menstrual regularity.

6.9.3 Confounding/Background Variables

Age, gender, occupation, daily physical activity level, average sleep duration, and frequency of freshly cooked homemade meals were additionally recorded to contextualize the primary findings.

6.10 Assessment Tool

A structured dietary and symptom-recall questionnaire (Google Forms based), consisting of 21 items, was developed covering demographic details, dietary habits, and Ayurvedic parameters indicative of Rasa Dhatu status. The complete questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix II.

6.10.1 Questionnaire Development and Content Validation

The questionnaire items were framed by correlating classical Rasa Dushti Lakshanas and Rasapradoshaja Vikara (reviewed in Sections 3.8–3.9) with commonly used, lay-comprehensible descriptions of the corresponding clinical experience — for example, Twak Prasada/Vaivarnya was operationalized as a four-option question on skin condition (Question 11), and Bala Hani/Sadana was operationalized as a four-option question on fatigue (Question 12). The draft questionnaire was reviewed by the guide for content relevance and clarity before circulation, and minor wording revisions were made to improve comprehensibility for a non-clinical, lay respondent population.

6.10.2 Mode of Administration

The questionnaire was shared through Google Forms, allowing participants to respond anonymously at their convenience. by respondents across the target age group. Each question, except for the free-text age field, was designed as a single-select multiple-choice item to minimize respondent burden and facilitate straightforward tabulation.

6.11 Data Collection Procedure

- Primary data collected through self-administered questionnaires, supplemented by informal interviews for clarification where required.
- Assessment of Rasa Dhatu quality using Ayurvedic parameters such as: skin glow and moisture, digestive strength (Agni), level of fatigue and immunity, and emotional balance (Manasika Bala).
- Responses were collected anonymously and compiled into a master data sheet for analysis.

6.12 Statistical/Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the collected data. Responses to each questionnaire item were tabulated and expressed as frequencies and percentages. Patterns and apparent associations were identified between junk food consumption habits and Rasa Dhatu-related clinical parameters through cross-comparison of response distributions. No inferential statistical testing (e.g., chi-square, correlation coefficients) was performed, given the observational, single-arm, non-comparative design of the study; this is discussed further as a limitation in Chapter 9.

6.13 Ethical Considerations

- Approval obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee.
- Informed written/electronic consent taken from all participants prior to participation (Appendix I).
- Confidentiality of personal data maintained throughout the study; no personally identifying information was used in analysis or reporting.
- Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

6.14 Flow of the Study

- Step 1: Review of classical and modern literature; formulation of aim, objectives, and hypothesis.
- Step 2: Design and validation of the structured questionnaire (Appendix II).
- Step 3: Ethics committee approval and preparation of informed consent documentation.
- Step 4: Distribution of the questionnaire to eligible participants and collection of responses.
- Step 5: Compilation, tabulation, and descriptive analysis of data.
- Step 6: Interpretation of findings in light of classical Ayurvedic concepts and modern literature; drafting of discussion and conclusions.

CHAPTER 7

OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

A total of 63 responses were received through the structured questionnaire. The observations are presented under demographic, lifestyle and dietary factors, Agni-related findings, and Rasa Dhatu-related clinical parameters, followed by a summary of key observations.

7.1 Demographic Profile

Table 7.1: Age Distribution (n = 63).

Age Group	Approx. Respondents	Percentage
18–19 years	9	≈ 14%
20–21 years	24	≈ 38%
22–23 years	19	≈ 30%
24 years and above	11	≈ 18%

Majority of respondents (≈ 68%) belonged to the 20–23-year age group, reflecting a predominantly young-adult study population, consistent with the college-going and early-career demographic typically associated with high junk food exposure.

Table 7.2: Gender Distribution (n = 63).

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	32	50.8%
Female	30	47.6%
Transgender	1	1.6%

The sample included almost equal numbers of male and female respondents, allowing comparison of general findings and female-specific parameters across genders, including the female-specific parameter of menstrual regularity (Table 7.21).

Table 7.3: Occupation (n = 63).

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Student	48	76.2%
Other (govt./private job, medical student, transport, etc.)	15	23.8%

The predominance of students (76.2%) in the sample is notable, as this group is widely recognized — both in Ayurvedic and modern literature — as being at particularly high risk of irregular, convenience-driven dietary patterns due to academic schedules, hostel/mess food limitations, and peer influence.

7.2 Lifestyle Parameters

Table 7.4: Daily Physical Activity Level (n = 63).

Activity Level	Percentage
Sedentary	14.3%
Moderate	50.8%
Active	28.6%
Very active	6.3%

Table 7.5: Average Sleep Duration per Day (n = 63).

Sleep Duration	Percentage
< 5 hrs	1.6%
5–7 hrs	65.1%
7–8 hrs	27.0%
> 8 hrs	6.3%

A majority (65.1%) of respondents reported sleeping only 5–7 hours per day, indicating a generally sleep-deficient lifestyle among the study group — a factor that may independently aggravate Vata Dosha and compound Agni disturbance alongside dietary indiscretion.

7.3 Junk Food Consumption Pattern

Table 7.6: Frequency of Junk Food Consumption (n = 63).

Frequency	Percentage
Daily	7.9%
3–4 times/week	63.5%
Rarely/Never	28.6%

Combining the 'daily' and '3–4 times/week' categories, 71.4% of respondents met or exceeded the study's inclusion threshold of regular junk food consumption, confirming that the sample was appropriately representative of the target population for this study.

Table 7.7: Type of Junk Food Consumed Most Frequently (n = 63).

Type	Percentage
Fried food	36.5%
Packaged snacks	55.6%
Bakery items	6.3%
Soft drinks	1.6%

Packaged snacks and fried food together account for over 92% of the preferred junk food type, both of which — as reviewed in Section 4.8 — share Guru, Vidahi, and Ama-janaka properties considered particularly detrimental to Agni.

Table 7.8: Time of Day Junk Food is Usually Consumed (n = 63)

Time of Day	Percentage
Morning	≈ 1.6%
Afternoon	14.3%
Evening	73.0%
Late night / other	≈ 11.1%

Nearly three-fourths of respondents (73%) reported consuming junk food predominantly in the evening, a pattern that may compound digestive load (Agni Mandya) at a time when Agni is naturally less robust, and close to bedtime, allowing less time for complete digestion before rest — a violation of the Kala (timing) principle discussed in Section 4.2.

Table 7.9: Frequency of Freshly Cooked Homemade Meals (n = 63).

Frequency	Percentage
Always	46.0%
Often	33.3%
Sometimes	12.7%
Rarely	7.9%

Encouragingly, nearly 80% of respondents reported ‘always’ or ‘often’ consuming freshly cooked homemade meals, suggesting that junk food, for most respondents, is an addition to — rather than a wholesale replacement of — a home-cooked diet. This point is important when interpreting the clinical findings, as it suggests the observed Rasa Dushti features may reflect a cumulative burden of frequent junk food snacking superimposed on an otherwise reasonable diet, rather than a diet composed exclusively of processed food.

7.4 Agni (Digestive) Parameters

Table 7.10: General Appetite (n = 63)

Appetite	Respondents	Percentage
Good appetite	47	74.6%
Irregular	11	17.5%
Poor appetite	7	11.1%

Table 7.11: Status of Digestion / Agni (n = 63).

Agni Status	Percentage
Strong	52.4%
Irregular	38.1%
Weak	9.5%

Nearly half (47.6%) of respondents reported irregular or weak Agni, which in Ayurvedic terms directly compromises the formation of healthy Rasa Dhatu regardless of the nutritional quality of the diet otherwise consumed.

Table 7.12: Frequent Thirst or Dehydration (n = 62).

Response	Percentage
Never	33.9%
Occasionally	53.2%
Frequently	6.5%
Always	6.5%

Table 7.13: Dry Mouth / Lack of Salivation (n = 62).

Response	Percentage
No	71.0%
Occasionally	27.4%
Frequently	1.6%

7.5 Rasa Dhatu Dushti Lakshanas (Clinical Indicators)

Table 7.14: Skin Condition (n = 63).

Skin Condition	Percentage
Clear and glowing	30.2%
Dry or rough	25.4%
Oily and acne-prone	36.5%
Dull or pale	7.9%

Only 30.2% of respondents reported clear, glowing skin (a classical marker of healthy Rasa Dhatu – Twak Prasada), while the remaining ≈ 70% reported some form of vitiated skin quality (oily/acne-prone, dry/rough, or dull/pale).

Table 7.15: Dryness or Roughness of Lips, Tongue or Skin (n = 63).

Response	Percentage
No	25.4%
Occasionally	58.7%
Frequently	15.9%

Table 7.16: Fatigue or Low Energy (n = 63).

Response	Percentage
Never	11.1%
Occasionally	47.6%
Frequently	27.0%
Always	14.3%

Fatigue or low energy was reported at least occasionally by 88.9% of respondents, consistent with the classical description of Rasa Kshaya/Dushti manifesting as diminished vitality (Bala Hani).

Table 7.17: Overall Vitality and Enthusiasm for Daily Activity (n = 63).

Rating	Percentage
Excellent	28.6%
Good	46.0%
Fair	11.1%
Poor	14.3%

Table 7.18: Heaviness, Lethargy or Sluggishness after Junk Food (n = 63).

Response	Percentage
Never	23.8%
Occasionally	54.0%
Frequently	19.0%
Always	3.2%

Post-meal heaviness or lethargy after junk food was reported by 76.2% of respondents at least occasionally, indicative of Agni Mandya and Ama formation as described in classical texts.

Table 7.19: Sense of Nourishment and Satisfaction after Eating (n = 62).

Response	Percentage
Feel light and energetic	33.9%
Feel full but sluggish	53.2%
Feel unsatisfied / craving more food	12.9%

Only about one-third of respondents reported feeling light and energetic after meals; the majority report a sluggish fullness, suggesting that Rasa Dhatu formed after such meals is Aparipakva (immaturely formed) rather than Prasanna (clear and nourishing).

Table 7.20: Mental Fatigue (n = 61).

Response	Percentage
Rarely	32.8%
Sometimes	52.5%
Often	14.8%

Table 7.21: Menstrual Irregularities – Female Respondents Only (n = 44).

Response	Percentage
No	50.0%
Sometimes	36.4%
Frequently	13.6%

Among female respondents, nearly half reported some degree of menstrual irregularity, which in Ayurveda may be linked to disturbed Rasa and Artava Dhatu Poshana secondary to poor dietary quality, given the Upadhatu relationship between Rasa and Artava described in Section 3.10.

7.6 Summary of Key Observations

- 71.4% of respondents consume junk food at least 3–4 times a week.
- Packaged snacks (55.6%) and fried food (36.5%) are the most commonly consumed types.
- 73% consume junk food predominantly in the evening.
- 47.6% report irregular or weak Agni (digestive strength).
- Only 30.2% report clear, glowing skin; the rest show signs suggestive of Rasa Dushti.

- 88.9% experience fatigue at some frequency; 76.2% experience post-meal heaviness/lethargy after junk food.
- Only 33.9% feel light and energetic after eating; the majority feel full but sluggish.
- Nearly half of female respondents report at least occasional menstrual irregularity.
- Despite frequent junk food intake, nearly 80% of respondents also regularly eat freshly cooked homemade meals, suggesting a pattern of superimposed rather than exclusive junk food dependency.

CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

This observational study assessed 63 individuals, predominantly young adults and students, to evaluate the effect of regular junk food consumption on parameters indicative of Rasa Dhatu status as described in Ayurveda. The findings are discussed objective-wise, followed by an overall interpretation and a probable Samprapti (pathogenesis) linking the observations to classical concepts.

8.1 Discussion on Demographic and Lifestyle Findings

Most respondents were students (76.2%) in the 20–23-year age group aligns with existing literature identifying this demographic as particularly susceptible to convenience-driven, irregular eating patterns due to academic pressure, hostel or mess-based food availability, peer influence, and the ready accessibility of packaged and fried food near educational institutions. The near-equal gender distribution allowed reasonably balanced observation of both general and female-specific (menstrual) parameters.

The finding that 65.1% of respondents sleep only 5–7 hours daily is noteworthy, since inadequate sleep is itself capable of aggravating Vata Dosha and secondarily disturbing Agni, independent of dietary factors. This raises the possibility that sleep deprivation and junk food consumption act as co-existing, potentially synergistic Nidanas for Rasa Dushti in this population — a hypothesis meriting more targeted future study (see Section 9.4).

8.2 Discussion on Junk Food Consumption Pattern

The data reveal that a substantial majority of the study population (71.4%) consumes junk food — chiefly packaged snacks and fried foods — at least 3–4 times a week, largely in the evening hours. Ayurvedically, foods of this nature possess Guru (heavy), Snigdha (unctuous), Vidahi (acid/heat-producing), and Ama-janaka (toxin-forming) qualities, as detailed in the

Guna-Rasa-Virya-Vipaka analysis in Section 4.8. Regular ingestion of such Asatmya Ahara, particularly when Agni is naturally on the decline in the evening (as per Kala, Section 4.2), appears to place a cumulative burden on Jatharagni that a single instance of indulgence would not.

It is also worth noting that nearly 80% of respondents also regularly consume freshly cooked homemade meals. This suggests that, for the majority of this population, junk food functions as a frequent superimposed addition rather than a wholesale dietary replacement — a pattern that may partly explain why the observed Rasa Dushti features, discussed below, are largely mild-to-moderate and 'occasional' in frequency rather than severe or constant.

8.3 Discussion on Agni-Related Findings

Nearly half of respondents (47.6%) report irregular or weak digestion, a finding consistent with the theoretical mechanism outlined in Section 4.9, wherein repeated Guru-Vidahi Ahara progressively weakens Jatharagni. A majority (76.2%) experience heaviness or lethargy after consuming junk food specifically, reinforcing the direct, food-linked (rather than purely constitutional) nature of this Agni disturbance. Such post-prandial sluggishness is a classical sign of Agni Mandya and incomplete Ahara Paka, resulting in the formation of Ama rather than well-formed Rasa Dhatu, as described in Section 3.2.

8.4 Discussion on Rasa Dhatu Dushti Lakshanas

The clinical indicators most directly linked to Rasa Dhatu quality — skin condition, sense of nourishment, and vitality — support the interpretation of an underlying Rasa Dushti in this population. Only 30.2% of respondents described their skin as clear and glowing (Twak Prasada, a classical sign of healthy Rasa Dhatu per Section 3.5), while the remainder reported oiliness/acne, dryness, or dullness — features that align with Kapha–Pitta vitiation and Rasa Dushti described in the classics (Section 3.8–3.9).

Similarly, only about one-third of respondents feel light and energetic after eating, with the majority reporting a full-but-sluggish sensation, suggesting that the Rasa Dhatu being formed is Aparipakva rather than Prasanna (clear, light, and nourishing). Fatigue emerged as one of the most consistently reported symptoms, with 88.9% of respondents experiencing it at some frequency, and over half rating their overall vitality as only 'good' or lower rather than 'excellent'. Since Rasa Dhatu is directly responsible for Prana, Varna, and Utsaha (energy,

complexion, and enthusiasm, per Section 3.5), these findings are consistent with an early or subclinical Rasa Dhatu Dushti in a population with high junk food intake.

Mental fatigue, reported by 67.3% of respondents at least 'sometimes', and menstrual irregularity, reported by 50% of female respondents at least 'sometimes', extend this picture to the Manasika (mental) and Upadhatu (Artava) domains respectively, consistent with the classical linkages reviewed in Sections 3.9 and 3.10.

8.5 Probable Samprapti (Pathogenesis) Based on Study Findings

Integrating the findings of this study with the classical mechanism outlined in Section 4.9, a probable Samprapti (pathogenesis) for the observed pattern of Rasa Dushti in this population can be proposed as follows: frequent, evening-predominant intake of Guru-Vidahi-Ama-janaka junk food (packaged snacks and fried food in particular) → cumulative overburdening of Jatharagni, especially when consumed at a time of naturally reduced digestive strength → resultant Agni Mandya, evidenced in this study by irregular/weak Agni in 47.6% of respondents → incomplete digestion (Avipaka) and Ama formation, evidenced by heaviness/lethargy after junk food in 76.2% of respondents → disturbance of Rasavaha Srotas and formation of Dushta rather than Prasanna Rasa Dhatu, evidenced by compromised skin quality in ≈ 70% and reduced sense of post-prandial nourishment in ≈ 66% of respondents → systemic Rasapradoshaja features — fatigue, low vitality, mental fatigue, and (in females) menstrual irregularity.

8.6 Correlation Between Parameters

While this study did not employ formal inferential statistics (Section 6.12), a descriptive cross-comparison of response patterns reveals several internally consistent associations that lend coherence to the proposed Samprapti: respondents reporting frequent junk food intake (Table 7.6) and evening-predominant timing (Table 7.8) also form the majority reporting irregular/weak Agni (Table 7.11), post-junk-food heaviness (Table 7.18), and compromised skin quality (Table 7.14). This internal consistency across independently-worded questionnaire items — rather than any single isolated finding — is what lends strength to the overall inference of diet-linked Rasa Dushti in this population.

8.7 Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings of this study are broadly in agreement with modern nutritional literature correlating processed food intake with micronutrient deficiency, low-grade metabolic

disturbance, and reduced subjective well-being (Section 5.2), as well as with classical Ayurvedic descriptions of Asatmya and Viruddha Ahara as causative factors for Rasa Dushti (Sections 4.4–4.6). The similarity between observations from Ayurveda and modern nutrition — one derived from centuries-old clinical observation and the other from modern biomedical research — on a similar causative narrative supports the study's main interpretation, although biochemical confirmation was not part of this study.

8.9 Public Health Implications

The findings — with over 70% of a predominantly student sample reporting regular junk food intake and a comparable proportion showing at least one marker suggestive of Rasa Dushti — also have relevance for health education. If a similar pattern is seen in larger student and young-adult groups, these findings suggest a public-health-scale, largely subclinical burden of Agni and Rasa Dhatu disturbance that predates the overt lifestyle disorders (obesity, diabetes, dyslipidemia) typically targeted by public health screening in later adulthood. This supports the case for early, school- and college-level dietary health education grounded in both modern nutrition science and accessible Ayurvedic principles of Pathya-Apathya and Ahara Vidhi Vidhana.

8.10 Ayurvedic Preventive Recommendations Arising from This Study

Based on the classical framework reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4 and the findings of this study, the following broad preventive recommendations may be proposed, without constituting individualized clinical prescription:

- Limiting junk food intake to occasional rather than routine use, particularly reducing evening-time consumption given the natural decline in Agni at that time of day.
- Prioritizing freshly prepared, warm, Laghu (light) food for the majority of daily meals, consistent with Ahara Vidhi Vidhana.
- Avoiding classically Viruddha combinations, such as very hot fried food with ice-cold beverages.
- Ensuring adequate sleep duration, given its independent role in supporting Agni and Dosha equilibrium.
- Incorporating simple Agni-Deepana (digestive-stimulating) measures — such as the customary use of ginger, cumin, and other mild digestive spices with meals — as a low-risk adjunct to dietary moderation.

- Regular, moderate physical activity to support digestive and metabolic function, consistent with the moderate-to-active activity levels already reported by a majority of the study population (Table 7.4).

These are general preventive suggestions based on the study findings and classical principles; they should not be considered a substitute for individual assessment by a qualified Ayurvedic physician, particularly for individuals with pre-existing Agni or Dhatu-related disorders.

8.11 Limitations of Interpretation

Since this was an observational, questionnaire-based study without direct biochemical or classical Ayurvedic diagnostic (Nadi Pariksha, Prakriti-based Ashtavidha Pariksha) correlation, the findings indicate associations and should not be taken as proof of cause and effect. Because the responses were self-reported, recall and response bias are possible, and the cross-sectional design does not allow assessment of change over time within the same individuals. Even so, similar patterns appeared across several parameters, and their coherence with both classical and modern literature, strengthens the overall inference drawn in this chapter.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Summary

This cross-sectional observational study was conducted to assess the effect of regular junk food consumption on Rasa Dhatu, the first Dhatu described in Ayurvedic physiology. A structured questionnaire was administered to 63 respondents, predominantly students aged 18–30 years, covering demographic details, lifestyle habits, junk food consumption patterns, and clinical parameters indicative of Agni and Rasa Dhatu status.

The conceptual review in Chapters 3 and 4 showed that Rasa Dhatu, as the first-formed tissue responsible for Prinana, Bala, Varna, and Utsaha, is directly and sensitively dependent on the quality of Ahara and the strength of Agni, and that junk food — by virtue of its Guru, Vidahi, and Ama-janaka properties — is classically positioned as a significant Nidana for Rasa Dushti. The results (Chapter 7) show that the majority of respondents consume junk food frequently (≥ 3–4 times/week), mainly in the evening, and report at least occasional signs of Agni Mandya, fatigue, compromised skin quality, and post-prandial heaviness — all of which are classical indicators of disturbed Rasa Dhatu (Rasa Dushti). The discussion in Chapter 8

linked these findings with the classical Samprapti and compared them with relevant modern nutritional observations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We sincerely thank our guide, Dr. Pallavi Patil, Associate Professor, Department of Samhita Adhyayan, for her guidance, encouragement, and support throughout this research work.

We are grateful to the Principal and the Department of Samhita Adhyayan, SMBT Ayurveda College & Hospital, Dhamangaon, Nashik, for providing the facilities and support required for this study.

We also thank all the participants who took part in the survey and shared their responses. Their participation made this study possible.

Finally, we are thankful to our family and friends for their constant support and encouragement during this work.

9.2 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, regular consumption of junk food is associated with clinical features suggestive of impaired Rasa Dhatu formation and function, including reduced vitality, compromised skin quality, digestive irregularities, mental fatigue, and diminished post-prandial satisfaction. These observations are in line with the Ayurvedic view that Asatmya and Viruddha Ahara, through weakening of Agni and formation of Ama, disturb the foundational Rasa Dhatu and may, over time, affect the nourishment of other Dhatus and overall health.

The findings highlight the importance of Pathya–Apathya Ahara guidance, dietary moderation, adherence to Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (particularly regarding timing and manner of eating), and Agni-strengthening measures, especially among adolescents and young adults, as a preventive approach against early, subclinical Rasa Dhatu Dushti and its downstream consequences. The objectives listed in Chapter 2 were addressed as follows: the Ayurvedic concept of Rasa Dhatu was studied (Chapter 3), junk food was analyzed on Ayurvedic parameters (Chapter 4), its impact on Rasa Dhatu was assessed through survey data (Chapters 7–8), early clinical features of Rasavaha Srotodushti were identified (Section 7.5, Section 8.4), and the importance of Pathya-Apathya Ahara was emphasized throughout (Sections 4.4, 8.5, 9.2).

9.3 Limitations

- Sample size limited to 63 self-reported responses; larger, more diverse samples would strengthen generalizability.
- Data collected through self-reported questionnaire without objective Ayurvedic (Nadi, Darshana, Sparshana) or biochemical parameters.
- Cross-sectional design precludes establishing a definitive cause-effect relationship.
- Convenience sampling technique limits statistical generalization to the wider population.
- No inferential statistical testing was performed; associations described are descriptive/observational in nature.

9.4 Scope for Future Study

- Clinical studies incorporating direct Ayurvedic Pariksha (Ashtavidha/Dashavidha Pariksha) and biochemical markers of Rasa Dhatu status (e.g., micronutrient panels, inflammatory markers).
- Interventional studies evaluating the effect of Pathya Ahara and Agni-Deepana measures on reversing Rasa Dushti Lakshanas identified in this study.
- Larger, multi-centric, randomly sampled studies across diverse age groups and geographic regions.
- Longitudinal studies tracking the same cohort over time to assess causal progression from junk food intake to Rasa Dushti and beyond.
- Focused sub-studies examining the interaction between sleep deprivation and junk food intake as co-Nidanas for Agni and Rasa Dhatu disturbance.

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APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Effect of Junk Food on Rasa Dhatu – A Clinical Observational Study

I have been informed about the purpose, procedure, and nature of this study, which involves answering a structured questionnaire regarding my dietary habits and general health-related observations. I understand that:

- My participation is entirely voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the study at any point without giving any reason and without any consequence.
- My responses will be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of this academic research.
- No personally identifying information will be published or shared with third parties.
- This study does not involve any medication, procedure, or intervention that could cause harm; it is limited to a questionnaire-based survey.

I hereby give my informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE PROFORMA

(Structured questionnaire administered to study participants; 63 valid responses received)

No.	Question	Response Options
1	Age	Numeric entry
2	Gender	Male / Female / Transgender

3	Occupation	Student / Government job / Private sector / Medical student / Transport / Other
4	Daily physical activity level	Sedentary / Moderate / Active / Very active
5	Average sleep duration per day	<5 hrs / 5–7 hrs / 7–8 hrs / >8 hrs
6	How often do you consume junk food?	Daily / 3–4 times per week / Rarely or never
7	What type of junk food do you consume most frequently?	Fried food / Packaged snacks / Bakery items / Soft drinks
8	At what time of day do you usually consume junk food?	Morning / Afternoon / Evening / Late night / Other
9	How often do you consume freshly cooked homemade meals?	Always / Often / Sometimes / Rarely
10	How is your appetite generally?	Good appetite / Irregular / Poor appetite
11	How would you describe your skin condition?	Clear and glowing / Dry or rough / Oily and acne-prone / Dull or pale
12	Do you often experience fatigue or low energy?	Never / Occasionally / Frequently / Always
13	Do you experience frequent thirst or dehydration?	Never / Occasionally / Frequently / Always
14	How is your digestion (Agni)?	Strong / Irregular / Weak
15	Do you notice dryness or roughness in your lips, tongue, or skin?	No / Occasionally / Frequently
16	How would you rate your overall vitality and enthusiasm for daily activity?	Excellent / Good / Fair / Poor
17	Do you observe heaviness, lethargy, or sluggishness after consuming junk food?	Never / Occasionally / Frequently / Always
18	How would you describe your general sense of nourishment and satisfaction after eating?	Feel light and energetic / Feel full but sluggish / Feel unsatisfied or craving more food
19	Do you experience any menstrual irregularities? (for women only)	No / Sometimes / Frequently
20	Do you have dry mouth or lack of salivation?	No / Occasionally / Frequently
21	Do you feel mental fatigue?	Rarely / Sometimes / Often

APPENDIX III

MASTER CHART (SUMMARY)

The complete individual-level master chart of all 63 respondent entries has been maintained separately by the investigators as raw survey data (Google Forms response sheet) and is available for reference/verification. Chapter 7 (Observations and Results) presents this data in aggregated, tabulated form as frequencies and percentages for each questionnaire item, consistent with the descriptive statistical analysis described in Section 6.12.

APPENDIX IV

PATHYA–APATHYA AHARA CHART FOR RASA DHATU SAMRAKSHANA

(General preventive dietary guidance derived from classical principles reviewed in this thesis; not a substitute for individualized clinical advice.)

Category	Pathya (Recommended)	Apathya (To be Minimized)
Cooking method	Freshly cooked, steamed, light sautéing	Deep frying, repeated reheating/refrying of oil
Grains/snacks	Whole grains, freshly prepared light snacks	Packaged/processed snacks, refined-flour bakery items
Beverages	Warm water, herbal decoctions (Kashaya), fresh buttermilk	Carbonated soft drinks, iced beverages with heavy food
Combinations	Satmya (habitual, compatible) combinations as per regional custom	Viruddha combinations (e.g., very hot + very cold together)
Timing	Regular mealtimes, aligned with hunger (Kshudha) cues	Irregular, late-night, or hurried eating
Quantity	Matra Ahara – quantity proportionate to Agni Bala	Overeating or eating before the previous meal is digested
Mental state while eating	Calm, attentive (Ananyamanaso Bhutva)	Eating while distracted, stressed, or in a hurry

This chart is intended as a general, educational summary consolidating the Pathya-Apathya principles discussed in Sections 4.3–4.4 and 8.10, for the benefit of readers seeking a quick preventive reference alongside the detailed discussion presented in this thesis.