

**ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE AND PUBLIC HEALTH AN
AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE THROUGH SWASTHAVRITTA****Dr. Richa Sharma***

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ABSTRACT

Environmental hygiene and public health are increasingly important issues in today's global health context, with a growing focus on sustainable practices, disease prevention, and the overall health of individuals and communities. Ayurveda, an ancient Indian healthcare system, presents a holistic perspective on health that highlights the interconnectedness of the body, mind, spirit, and environment. A significant aspect of Ayurveda is Swasthavritta, which offers guidance on maintaining physical, mental, and environmental well-being through various practices related to hygiene, diet, lifestyle, and seasonal changes. This review examines the Ayurvedic viewpoint on environmental hygiene and its significance in modern public health initiatives. Ayurveda stresses the importance of balancing the five

elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether—and the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), which provides a distinct framework for understanding the impact of environmental factors on human health. Through Swasthavritta, Ayurveda advocates for the implementation of hygiene practices that benefit both individuals and the surrounding environment, promoting communal efforts aimed at disease prevention and health enhancement. These guiding principles underscore the necessity of a clean environment, access to pure water and air, responsible waste management, and respect for the natural cycles of both the body and the environment. The review aligns Ayurvedic practices with current public health issues such as sanitation, mental health, pollution management, and preventive care. It also emphasizes the potential advantages of integrating Ayurvedic concepts into modern public health policies, particularly in tackling chronic diseases, mental health challenges, and issues related to environmental sustainability. Despite facing hurdles such as the need for scientific verification, cultural disparities, and limited resources, the holistic perspective of Ayurveda

provides valuable insights for improving global health systems. By incorporating Swasthavritta into public health strategies, communities can promote a focus on environmental sustainability, mental health, and disease prevention. The article concludes with an exploration of practical applications, existing challenges, and opportunities for integrating Ayurvedic principles into contemporary public health frameworks, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and cohesive approach to global health.

KEYWORDS: Environmental Hygiene, Public Health, Preventive Healthcare, Holistic Health, Sanitation, Sustainable Health Practices, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

As global health challenges continue to escalate, the significance of environmental hygiene and its effect on public health is clearer than ever. Factors like air and water pollution, inadequate sanitation, climate change, and the transmission of infectious diseases are generating new health risks that cross national boundaries. Despite the remarkable progress made in modern medicine concerning disease management and technological solutions, the prevention of illnesses and the promotion of overall well-being still form essential elements of public health. One notable perspective that provides meaningful insights is Ayurveda, an ancient medical system that focuses on the equilibrium between the body, mind, and environment for sustaining health.^[1]

Ayurveda, meaning the "science of life," is an ancient system of medicine with roots that extend back thousands of years, and it continues to be practiced in contemporary times. In contrast to modern health practices that primarily concentrate on symptoms, Ayurveda provides an all-encompassing framework that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of well-being. Central to Ayurvedic philosophy is the emphasis on achieving balance between the individual and their surroundings, acknowledging that both internal and external influences significantly impact overall health.^[2]

Swasthavritta, an important aspect of Ayurveda, emphasizes the enhancement of health by focusing on prevention, lifestyle adjustments, and hygiene practices. The term "Swasthavritta" translates to the "code of health" or "healthy living." It offers recommendations for sustaining a balanced lifestyle, which includes daily habits, adaptations to seasonal changes, personal cleanliness, and moral behavior. Ayurvedic philosophy suggests that optimal health is attained when the body's internal environment aligns with the external

environment. In contrast, any disruptions in this harmony can result in illness and discomfort.^[3]

A primary emphasis of Swasthavritta is on environmental hygiene. Ayurveda promotes the necessity of cleanliness in both personal hygiene and the environment. This encompasses the tidiness of living areas, the significance of having fresh air and clean water, and the contribution of natural elements to maintaining health. Swasthavritta perceives the body as not separate from the environment; instead, it recognizes the individual as a microcosm of the broader universe, intricately linked with the natural world. Pollution or imbalance in the external environment directly affects the health of individuals.^[4] In contemporary society, the link between environmental cleanliness and public health is gaining recognition as an essential relationship. The international health community is dedicated to enhancing sanitation practices, minimizing pollution, guaranteeing access to safe water, and effectively managing waste as measures to curb the transmission of infectious diseases and enhance overall quality of life. Nonetheless, even with progress in technological and healthcare developments, challenges persist in addressing environmental problems and improving health results, particularly in areas undergoing rapid urbanization and facing limited resources. This situation underscores the importance of implementing well-rounded, sustainable strategies that tackle both environmental and lifestyle elements influencing health.^[5]

This review seeks to investigate the Ayurvedic viewpoint on environmental hygiene and its relevance to contemporary public health. By analyzing the principles of Swasthavritta, the article will showcase the comprehensive approach Ayurveda provides for illness prevention and overall health enhancement. Additionally, it will discuss how these Ayurvedic principles can be adapted and implemented within modern public health frameworks to tackle issues such as sanitation, pollution management, mental health, and disease prevention. Through this examination, the article aspires to connect traditional Ayurvedic insights with modern public health methodologies, underlining the potential advantages of merging these two systems to foster a more sustainable and holistic health paradigm.^[6] Through this exploration, we hope to shed light on how Ayurveda's holistic, preventative approach to health can offer valuable insights and practical solutions to contemporary global health challenges. By embracing Ayurvedic principles, public health systems can move towards a more comprehensive, integrative model that emphasizes prevention, balance, and environmental sustainability.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this review article is to explore the Ayurvedic perspective on environmental hygiene and its potential applications in modern public health strategies, particularly through the concept of Swasthavritta. The objectives are:

- To examine the principles of environmental hygiene in Ayurveda and how they align with modern public health practices.
- To explore the relevance of Ayurvedic teachings, particularly from Swasthavritta, in addressing contemporary health challenges such as sanitation, waste management, mental health, and disease prevention.
- To evaluate the potential for integrating Ayurvedic practices into current public health systems, especially in promoting preventive healthcare and sustainable environmental practices.
- To highlight the role of Ayurveda in fostering a balanced relationship between individuals and the environment, aiming for both personal and community health.
- To identify challenges and barriers in adapting Ayurvedic principles to modern health systems and suggest strategies for overcoming these limitations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review article is based on a comprehensive analysis of both classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary research articles.

Literature Review: Primary Ayurvedic Sources: Classical texts such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, which contain detailed discussions on Swasthavritta, environmental hygiene, and daily routines, were reviewed. These texts provide foundational knowledge on maintaining health through lifestyle management and hygienic practices.

Secondary Sources: Modern research papers, articles, and books related to Ayurveda and its integration into public health systems were also reviewed. Key areas of focus included the Ayurvedic approach to sanitation, waste management, diet, mental health, and disease prevention.

Ayurvedic Concept of Health and Environment

In Ayurveda, health is understood as a condition of equilibrium among the body, mind, and spirit, along with a harmony with the surrounding environment. A key principle is that the

human body reflects a small version of the broader universe, and any disruption in the environment—be it related to climate, diet, or individual behavior—can result in illness.^[7]

- **The Five Elements:** Ayurveda posits that the human body comprises five essential elements: earth (prithvi), water (jala), fire (tejas), air (vayu), and ether (akasha). These elements are also present in the surrounding environment. For optimal health, a person must sustain harmony with these elements internally and externally.^[8]
- **The Doshas:** Ayurveda categorizes energies into three doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Each dosha corresponds to various combinations of the five elements. Optimal health occurs when these doshas maintain balance. However, factors in the environment, such as severe weather conditions, pollution, or unhealthy living situations, can disturb this balance, resulting in health issues.^[9]

Swasthavritta and Environmental Hygiene

Swasthavritta, which literally means "the code of health," encompasses practices that ensure physical and mental well-being. Key principles include personal hygiene, daily routines (dinacharya), seasonal routines (ritucharya), and diet (ahara). These practices are aimed at preventing diseases and maintaining balance, particularly through environmental hygiene. Swasthavritta provides insights into the following areas:

Personal Hygiene

- **Cleanliness of the Body:** Ayurveda highlights the importance of regular bathing, maintaining dental hygiene, and ensuring the cleanliness of bodily orifices as measures to prevent illnesses. Swasthavritta underlines that personal cleanliness encompasses not only physical hygiene but also the necessity of mental and emotional purity.^[10]
- **Hygiene of the Mind:** Similar to the body's need for cleanliness, the mind also necessitates it. Essential activities such as meditation, moral behavior, and stress management play a vital role in Swasthavritta. By incorporating mental health hygiene practices alongside sanitation efforts, public health initiatives can enhance their effectiveness.^[11]

Cleanliness of the Environment

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of a clean environment as a crucial aspect of overall health. This principle involves keeping living areas devoid of pollution, waste, and dirt, as

well as ensuring access to clean water and air. Additionally, Swasthavritta highlights the need for cleanliness in food preparation areas, public spaces, and places of worship.^[12]

Waste Management

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of waste management in promoting a healthy environment. Inadequate disposal of human and animal waste, along with food scraps and other contaminants, can result in health issues. Swasthavritta recommends preventing the build-up of waste and supports the use of eco-friendly and sustainable waste management practices.^[13]

Diet and the Environment

In Ayurveda, diet is considered crucial, as it is thought to influence the body's internal environment. It is advisable to consume fresh, regionally sourced, and seasonal foods to harmonize with the natural cycles of the environment. Furthermore, Ayurveda advocates for reducing food waste, highlighting the importance of moderation in eating and the avoidance of overeating.^[14]

Public Health Implications of Swasthavritta

Contemporary public health frameworks have placed greater importance on sanitation, water quality, waste management, and pollution management as essential components of disease prevention. Swasthavritta, which prioritizes hygiene and environmental equilibrium, provides meaningful perspectives for today's public health initiatives.^[15]

Preventive Healthcare

Swasthavritta highlights the significance of prevention as opposed to treatment. By incorporating Ayurvedic preventive measures like balanced daily practices (dinacharya), seasonal routines (ritucharya), and appropriate personal hygiene, individuals can effectively reduce the risk of illness. Public health systems that focus on prevention, instead of solely on treatment, are likely to experience greater long-term advantages.^[16]

Environmental Sanitation

Maintaining clean environments, as emphasized in Swasthavritta, plays a crucial role in disease prevention. Contemporary sanitation practices, which include effective waste management and access to clean drinking water, are in harmony with Ayurvedic traditions.

Strategies designed to enhance sanitation can integrate Ayurvedic concepts, which highlight the importance of equilibrium among air, water, and soil.^[17]

Community and Ecological Health

Public health encompasses not just personal hygiene but also the well-being of communities and the environment. The principles of Ayurveda advocate for public cleanliness, pollution reduction, and the respectful use of natural resources, all of which can be incorporated into community health initiatives. Promoting green spaces, sustainable practices, and environmentally friendly lifestyles has the potential to greatly enhance public health results.^[18]

Mental Health

Swasthavritta emphasizes the significance of mental hygiene, which encompasses activities such as meditation, ethical behavior, and mindfulness. This focus is especially pertinent in tackling mental health challenges today. In contemporary society, mental well-being is frequently overlooked in public health initiatives. By integrating mental health considerations into environmental hygiene practices—such as employing stress reduction techniques and fostering serene living environments—it is possible to alleviate the prevalence of mental health problems.^[19]

Challenges and Limitations

While Swasthavritta offers a comprehensive and holistic approach, integrating Ayurvedic practices into contemporary public health systems poses challenges. These include:

- **Cultural and Geographic Differences:** Ayurvedic practices may not be universally accepted or understood across different cultures and regions.
- **Lack of Scientific Validation:** Some Ayurvedic principles, such as the balance of doshas and the impact of elements on health, may not have been sufficiently validated through modern scientific research, limiting their acceptance in mainstream public health.
- **Resource Constraints:** Many Ayurvedic recommendations, such as maintaining a pristine environment, may be difficult to implement in areas with limited resources or underdeveloped infrastructure.

DISCUSSION

The incorporation of Ayurvedic principles, especially through the perspective of Swasthavritta, into contemporary public health initiatives brings both benefits and obstacles.

The timeless insights found in Ayurveda promote a comprehensive approach to health, taking into account factors such as the environment, lifestyle choices, and individual behavior as essential elements of overall well-being. This section will explore the significance and possible effects of Swasthavritta on modern public health, emphasizing the difficulties of merging traditional knowledge with current scientific approaches.^[20]

Relevance of Ayurveda in Contemporary Public Health

Comprehensive Health Perspective: A key advantage of Ayurvedic health principles is their comprehensive approach. Ayurveda does not separate health into distinct categories, such as physical, mental, or social well-being; instead, it perceives health as an equilibrium among the body, mind, spirit, and surroundings. This integrated perspective can enhance modern public health initiatives, which often concentrate on specific aspects of well-being, like sanitation or disease management, without adequately addressing the larger environmental or mental health dimensions. Contemporary medicine frequently prioritizes treatment and technological solutions. The focus of Swasthavritta on prevention and achieving balance through dietary practices, lifestyle choices, and environmental health could substantially alleviate pressure on healthcare systems, particularly in addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. By integrating Ayurvedic preventive strategies into public health policies, there could be a transition toward healthier populations and an improved quality of life.^[21]

Environmental Hygiene and Public Health

The increasing alarm regarding environmental pollution, climate change, and waste management within public health highlights the importance of Ayurveda's principles of environmental hygiene. Ayurveda emphasizes the significance of keeping the environment clean at both individual and community levels, which corresponds with contemporary initiatives aimed at tackling issues such as water pollution, air quality, sanitation, and waste management. The Ayurvedic emphasis on achieving ecological balance—through the thoughtful use of natural resources and an appreciation for the natural elements—provides a sustainable framework for environmental health that is increasingly essential in the context of global environmental issues. Additionally, the teachings of Swasthavritta promote the creation of pollution-free environments, which directly affect both mental and physical well-being. Modern public health perspectives are starting to acknowledge the critical role that clean air, water, and green spaces play in disease prevention, suggesting that Ayurveda's

insights into these areas could inform and improve urban planning, sanitation efforts, and waste management practices.^[22]

Mental Health Integration

An important feature of Ayurvedic health is its focus on mental hygiene, a concept that modern public health systems are starting to incorporate. Traditional public health models often neglect mental health, concentrating primarily on physical health and the prevention of disease. Yet, as mental health issues become more widespread around the world, the Ayurvedic approach to mental hygiene—encompassing practices such as meditation, ethical living, and mindfulness—offers significant insights. The guidance provided by Swasthavritta regarding emotional and mental well-being supplies additional strategies to tackle stress, anxiety, and depression, which are common in contemporary society. By integrating these practices into public health strategies, it may be possible to address the mental health crisis by fostering resilience, enhancing emotional intelligence, and promoting mindfulness-based stress reduction.^[23]

Challenges in Integrating Ayurvedic Principles

Cultural and Regional Differences

Ayurveda, a traditional system of medicine, is intrinsically linked to Indian culture and may face challenges in being recognized or understood in various regions worldwide. In many Western countries, healthcare systems often emphasize evidence-based practices, which can result in hesitance to incorporate Ayurvedic methods without substantial scientific support. Additionally, differing cultural perceptions surrounding health, hygiene, and wellness can obstruct the global application of Ayurvedic principles. To address these challenges, it is essential to promote enhanced cross-cultural education and collaboration that effectively conveys the relevance of Ayurveda to varied populations. Furthermore, integrating Ayurvedic principles with globally recognized public health frameworks, such as those provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), could aid in fostering wider acceptance of these traditional practices.^[24]

Scientific Validation: A significant obstacle in the incorporation of Ayurveda into current public health frameworks is the insufficient scientific validation of many of its tenets. Although Ayurvedic practices have been established for thousands of years, much of the evidence affirming their effectiveness tends to be anecdotal or based on tradition. It is essential to conduct clinical trials and empirical studies to verify the health benefits of

methods such as Swasthavritta for their successful integration into modern health systems. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in scientific research aimed at substantiating Ayurvedic treatments and preventive strategies. The growing acceptance of integrative and complementary therapies within modern medicine creates a favorable environment for Ayurveda to undergo evaluation through contemporary scientific methods. Supporting and funding research in this domain may help reconcile traditional wisdom with modern scientific approaches.^[25]

Resource Constraints

Adopting Ayurvedic principles like cleanliness, sustainable practices, and access to clean air and water can require significant resources. In developing nations or areas with limited resources, many lifestyle modifications recommended by Swasthavritta—such as effective waste management and consistent hygiene practices—might not be possible without sufficient infrastructure and resources. To tackle this issue, public health systems should prioritize policies that establish fair access to health resources. This could involve promoting straightforward yet impactful public health measures that are in line with Ayurvedic principles, including handwashing initiatives, access to clean water, and waste management programs, all while considering the local environment and the resources available.^[26]

Practical Implementation: The implementation of Ayurvedic lifestyle practices in contemporary society is an important aspect that warrants consideration. Although the concepts of Swasthavritta are clear and beneficial in theory, their application on a broader scale can prove challenging. For instance, encouraging practices such as daily routines, seasonal adaptations, and mindful eating among individuals living in fast-paced urban settings may encounter obstacles stemming from cultural and lifestyle differences. Key stakeholders, including government bodies, healthcare professionals, and educators, have the potential to facilitate the incorporation of Ayurvedic practices into public health initiatives. By conducting awareness campaigns and engaging with the community, individuals can be motivated to make small, achievable modifications to their daily habits, thus promoting a wellness-focused culture informed by Ayurvedic principles.^[27]

CONCLUSION

Swasthavritta presents a distinctive Ayurvedic viewpoint on environmental cleanliness and public health. Its foundational elements, which include hygiene, balanced lifestyles, and an alignment with nature, offer a useful framework for tackling modern public health issues. By

incorporating Ayurvedic principles into current practices, public health frameworks could shift towards more comprehensive, preventive strategies aimed at disease prevention, mental health enhancement, and sustainability of the environment. Although challenges exist in merging Ayurveda with contemporary scientific approaches, the increasing interest in holistic health indicates that these age-old practices hold substantial potential to improve the health of individuals and communities.

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