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THE AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF NIDRA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This review article examines the concept of Nidra (sleep) as a fundamental aspect of health in the Ayurveda system, exploring its physiological, psychological, and social dimensions. Recognized as one of the three pillars of health alongside Ahara (diet) and Brahmacharya (self- control), sleep is essential for maintaining overall well-being. The review highlights the critical functions of sleep in regulating metabolic processes, enhancing cognitive function, and promoting emotional stability. It discusses the consequences of sleep deprivation, which include increased risk of chronic diseases, impaired immune function, and psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. By integrating ancient wisdom with contemporary research findings, this review underscores the importance of Nidra as a vital component of holistic health and offers insights into effective strategies for enhancing sleep quality, ultimately contributing to improved health outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Nidra, sleep, Ayurveda, health, chronic disease, psychological well-being, Metabolic disorders, sleep quality.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, considers sleep as one of the three fundamental pillars of health which are Ahara (diet), Nidra (sleep), and Brahmacharya (celibacy or self-control). Sleep is acknowledged as an essential and universal requirement for human beings. The critical function of adequate sleep in preserving the balance of physical, mental, and emotional stability cannot be overstated. Poor sleep quality adversely affects

various aspects of physical health, contributing to conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, chronic pain, and elevated body mass index, among other negative outcomes. Beyond the physical ramifications, inadequate sleep is linked to detrimental psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, aggression, impaired cognitive function, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, among additional concerns. According to Ayurveda, Normal sleep plays a vital role in fostering happiness, nourishment, strength, fertility, knowledge, longevity, and overall well-being.[1] Conversely, inadequate sleep can lead to significant distress,malnutrition, weakness, infertility, lack of knowledge, and even mortality. This paper aims to explore the multifaceted benefits of sleep, the consequences of improper sleep, and strategies for enhancing sleep quality, ultimately underscoring sleep's role as a cornerstone of a healthy life.

Nidra (Sleep) and its associated theory in Ayurveda

Nidra is a fundamental physiological phenomenon experienced by all living organisms, typically during the night.[2] It is defined as a condition in which the mind, along with the sensory and motor faculties, becomes fatigued and detaches from its associated objects.[3] Sleep, often regarded as an enhancement of Tamas, primarily occurs during the night and is influenced by elements such as blocked srotas and the fatigue linked to Kapha. Acharya Sushruta posits that Hrudaya serves as the center of consciousness (Chetana), explaining that sleep manifests when Tamas prevails. Tamas is recognized as the driving force behind sleep. Similarly, Acharya Vagbhata says that Tama guna is the main attributing factor in causing sleep.

Thus, it can be stated that the Ayurvedic concepts of Nidra encompass the Tamo guna theory, the Kapha dosha theory, and the Swabhava theory.

Recent theories of Sleep

The views regarding the phenomenon of sleep throw light upon the phenomenon occurring during the rest and refreshing effect.

Table No. 1: Various theories about Sleep according to recent Concepts.[4,5,6]

Vascular Theory	Sleep is induced by a reduction in the blood supply to the brain or at least to the conscious centers. This is the so-called ischemic theory.
Pavlov's Theory	Cortical inhibition by the repeated elicitation of a conditioned response without reinforcement causes sleep.

Chemical Theory	Chemicals like lactic acid, acetylcholine, bromide, etc. accumulate during waking hours and irritates the nerve cells of the brain leads to sleep.
Kleiman's Theory	Sleep is caused by the reduction of the muscle tone and discharge of less afferent impulses causing inactive cerebralcortex.
Hypothalamus Theory	Stimulation of the sleep center in the hypothalamus is responsible for sleep.
Serotonin Theory	Serotonin is a major neuro transmitter substance associated with the production of sleep.
Neuronal Centers	Stimulation of the nucleus of tractus solitarius promotes sleep by exciting the raphe nuclei and serotonin system.

Types of Nidra according to Ayurveda[7,8,9]

In Ayurvedic classics sleep has been explained very deeply. Acharya Charak described six types of Nidra and Acharya Sushruta mentioned three types of Nidra. Acharya Vagbhata explained seven types of Nidra.

Table no. 2: Types of Nidra according to Various Acharya.

Sr. No.	Acharya Charaka[7]	Acharya Sushruta[8]	Acharya Vagbhata[9]
1	Tamobhava (Originatedfrom inertia)	Vaishnavi	Tamobhava
2	Shleshmasamdbhava (Originated from Kapha)	Vaikariki	Aamayakhedaprabhavaja
3	Manasharira Shrama(Due to mental and physical exertion)	Tamsi	akhedaprabhavajaSambhava
4	Agantuki (Due to exogenous factors)		Agantuki
5.	Vyadhyanuvartini(Associated with diseases)		Kaphaprabhavaja
6.	Ratriswabhavaprabhava		Dehakhedaprabhavaja
7.			Kalasvabhavaja

A brief description of these different types of Nidra may be produced as under-

- **Tamobhava** -Generally, the sleep is due to the effect of Tamas, but the Tamobhava Nidra as particularly due to the excessive Tamas causing sleep. When Satva and Rajasa are diminished in excess and the seat of Atma and Mana i.e. Hridaya is covered by thevitiated Tamas, then the organization becomes inert or inactive.
- **Sleshmasambhava** - This type of sleep occurs due to vitiated Kaphadosha.
- **Mana Sharir Shrama Sambhava** - It occurs due to mental and physical exertion. Dueto excessive mental stress and strain, the mind gets tired and unable to perform its activities; as a result, the individual gets sleep.
- **Aagantuki** -This occurs due to external causes like the use of medicines, odors, or any physical or mental trauma.

- **Vyadhianuvartini -** This type occurs as a result of complications in various diseases.
- **Ratrisvabhava Prabha** – This is physiological sleep that occurs due to the nature of the night.

Nidra as an important health tool

Nidra is the second important pillar of life. In the Ayurvedic literature, these factors i.e. Ahara, Nidra, and Brahmacharya have been compared with the three legs of sub-support and have been termed as the three Upastambhas. It is a physiological state of rest for the body, mind, senses, and motor organs. Due to proper and adequate sleep body tissue and Doshas remain inequilibrium and maintain health physically as well as mentally. Happiness-sorrow, obesity-emaciation, strength-weakness, virility-impotence, knowledge-ignorance, and a life-death are all depend on adequate and inadequate sleep. The timing, duration, and quality of sleep play a vital role in maintaining a balanced life, as irregular, excessive, or insufficient sleep can disturb one's fortunes. Adequate sleep is highlighted as a key contributor to happiness, with individuals who practice healthy sleep habits enjoying better health, a pleasant disposition, and improved vitality, complexion, and strength. Such individuals are likely to maintain a healthy body weight and experience a longer lifespan, along with overall well-being. Additionally, Acharya Charaka and Acharya Vagbhata described the close relationship between diet, sleep, and body composition. Both dietary habits and sleep patterns have a significant impact on conditions such as obesity and undernourishment. Staying awake at night can lead to dehydration, while sleeping during the day may increase moisture in the body, potentially exacerbating the Vata and Kapha doshas, respectively. Conversely, sleeping in a seated position is viewed as neutral regarding dosha balance, neither excessively drying nor overly moistening. The significance of sleep is on par with that of regular and nutritious food consumption for the body. Acharya Kashyapa asserts that obtaining quality sleep at appropriate times is a hallmark of a healthy individual.[10]

Role of Nidra in clinical assessment[11]

The equilibrium of Dhatus represents the "action itself". It is invariably associated with the alleviation or absence of the disease. This state of health can be ascertained from

1. Getting sleep at the appropriate time.
2. Absence of dreams indicating morbidity.
3. Happy awakening – along with other points.

In Yogaratnakara, it is mentioned that, the patient who gets sound sleep, who feels lightness in the body, and whose sense organs work properly will not deteriorate from the present health condition.[12]

Improper Sleep is a cause of many disorders

If Nidra is performed wisely, according to Acharya Vagbhata, it would provide bliss and long life, just as the yogic mind becomes clear from soul knowledge. Atinidra (Excessive sleep) and Anidra (Lack of sleep) both the conditions are harmful to the body. Atinidra causes obesity and disorders like diabetes since it increases Kaphadosha while Anidra leads to a increase in Vata Dosha, tissue wasting, emaciation, and insomnia. Poor sleep quality has been linked with a higher BMI where it seems that poor sleep quality leads to an increase in BMI.[13] Sleepquality may affect BMI through hormonal and biochemical changes such as variations in leptin, ghrelin and cortisol levels or increased resistance to insulin. Some mechanisms underlie the relationship between poor sleep quality and depression and anxiety. For example, the corticolimbic circuitry seems to be affected by poor sleep quality which is related to difficultiesin affective reactivity and regulation.

A review of several hundred epidemiological studies[14] concluded that nearly one-third of the general population experience symptoms of insomnia (defined as difficulties falling asleep and/or staying asleep), between 4% and 26% experience excessive sleepiness, and between 2% and 4% experience obstructive sleep apnoea. Additionally, a recent study of over 2000 participants reported that the prevalence of ‘general sleep disturbances’ was 32%.

The association between sleep and mental health is well documented.[15,16] For example, people with insomnia are 10 and 17 times more likely than those without insomnia to experience clinically significant levels of depression and anxiety, respectively.

Chronic insufficient sleep is associated with an increased risk of mortality. It contributes to both the individual risk and societal burden associated with several medical epidemics, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and cancer.

CONCLUSION

By the previous descriptions regarding sleep, it is very clear that sleep has having important role in the maintenance of the equilibrium of the body. As Nidra is said to be Sleshma dominant process, it also maintains the equilibrium between the three Dosha. The equilibrium of the

Dhatus also depends upon sleep. Acharya Charaka and Sushruta have stated that by utilizing proper sleep the Dhatusamya, the nourishment of the body, the increase of strength and the stability of Ayushya are achieved. By prioritizing quality sleep, individuals can help prevent the onset of diseases and maintain overall wellness. Ayurvedic practices often emphasize the importance of establishing a regular sleep routine, creating a conducive sleep environment, and incorporating relaxation techniques to enhance the quality of sleep.

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