

SPORTS MEDICINE IN AYURVEDA: A PREVENTIVE, CURATIVE, AND REHABILITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Sports medicine focuses on the prevention, management, and rehabilitation of injuries related to physical activity. *Ayurveda*, the ancient system of Indian medicine, offers a comprehensive and holistic framework that aligns well with the modern requirements of sports medicine. *Ayurvedic* sports medicine emphasises not only the treatment of injuries but also the maintenance of physical fitness, enhancement of strength, and prevention of injury through lifestyle regulation and *Rasayana* therapy. The core principles are based on *Swasthavritta* (preventive healthcare), *Chikitsa* (curative management), and *Rasayana* (rehabilitation and rejuvenation). Common sports injuries such as acute trauma, overuse injuries, and chronic musculoskeletal disorders are addressed through external therapies like *Lepa*, *Bandhana*, *Swedana*, and *Marma Chikitsa*, along with internal medications including *Balya* and *Asthi-*

sandhana formulations. *Panchakarma* therapies such as *Basti*, *Nasya*, and *Raktamokshana* play a significant role in pain management, tissue healing, and functional recovery. Integration of *Yoga*, physiotherapy, diet, and lifestyle modification further enhances recovery and long-term physical resilience. This article reviews the scope, principles, and therapeutic modalities of Ayurveda in sports medicine and highlights its role as a safe, natural, and holistic approach for athletes and physically active individuals.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Sports Medicine, *Swasthavritta*, *Chikitsa*, *Rasayana*, *Panchakarma*, Sports Injuries.

INTRODUCTION

Sports medicine is all about helping people stay healthy, recover from injuries, and get back to doing what they love, whether that's playing sports, working out, or simply staying active in daily life. As more and more people embrace active lifestyles, we've seen a rise in issues like sore muscles, joint pain, and injuries that can get in the way of enjoying movement. While modern sports medicine often relies on treatments like surgery, painkillers, and physical therapy, many individuals are now seeking gentler, more holistic ways to heal and build lasting strength and well-being.^[1]

This is where *Ayurveda*, an ancient healing tradition, brings something special to the table. Ayurveda isn't just about treating illness it's about keeping people at their best, both physically and mentally. In the world of sports and fitness, *Ayurveda* goes beyond just patching up injuries. It aims to boost an athlete's strength, stamina, flexibility, and ability to bounce back after exertion. According to Ayurveda, true health comes from balance between our body's energies (*Dosha*), tissues (*Dhatu*), metabolism (*Agni*), and waste elimination (*Mala*).^[2] When these are in harmony, we're primed for peak performance. Ayurvedic sports medicine is fundamentally structured around three core principles: preventive care (*Swasthavritta*), curative treatment (*Chikitsa*), and rehabilitative rejuvenation (*Rasayana*).^[3] Preventive strategies aim to minimise injury risk through appropriate exercise regimens, diet, seasonal routines, and lifestyle discipline. Curative approaches involve both external and internal therapies to manage acute and chronic sports injuries, particularly those involving muscles, joints, ligaments, and bones. Rehabilitative measures focus on tissue regeneration, strengthening, and prevention of recurrence, enabling athletes to return safely to physical activity.^[4]

Furthermore, Ayurveda provides a wide range of therapeutic modalities such as *Lepa*, *Bandhana*, *Swedana*, *Marma Chikitsa*, and *Panchakarma* procedures, which are particularly effective in managing pain, inflammation, stiffness, and functional impairment. When integrated with *Yoga*, physiotherapy, and appropriate dietary measures, these interventions support faster recovery and sustained physical performance. Thus, *Ayurveda* presents a holistic, safe, and natural approach to sports medicine, making it highly relevant in contemporary sports healthcare systems.^[5]

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This narrative review takes a closer look at how *Ayurveda* can make a difference in the world of sports medicine. By drawing on a wide range of existing research, we explore how time-tested *Ayurvedic* principles support athletes not just in healing injuries, but also in preventing them and aiding their recovery. Our goal is to offer a practical perspective on how these ancient approaches can help keep athletes healthy and resilient, both on and off the field.

For this study, a diverse range of sources was explored to ensure a comprehensive understanding of *Ayurveda*'s role in sports medicine. Core classical texts such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya formed the foundation of the literature reviewed. These were supplemented with standard *Ayurvedic* textbooks and peer-reviewed articles focusing on musculoskeletal disorders and sports injuries.

Specialised academic materials, notably the seminar and reference work “Sports Medicine in *Ayurveda*,” served as the central thematic guide for the research. Additional resources and extensive literature on *Panchakarma* therapies, *Rasayana*, *Marma Chikitsa*, *Yoga*, physiotherapy, dietary practices, and lifestyle management were also considered.

Methods

Relevant literature was systematically gathered and critically reviewed to identify *Ayurvedic* principles and therapeutic strategies relevant to sports medicine. The data were thoughtfully organised into key categories to provide clarity and depth.

- Preventive strategies (*Swasthavritta*)
- Curative management (*Chikitsa*)
- Rehabilitative and rejuvenative approaches (*Rasayana*)
- *Panchakarma* interventions
- Integrative practices, including *Yoga*, physiotherapy, dietary guidance, and lifestyle modification.

A conceptual analysis was performed to bridge traditional *Ayurvedic* perspectives with the aims of modern sports medicine. This involved correlating ancient principles with contemporary objectives such as injury prevention, pain relief, tissue healing, functional recovery, and the enhancement of physical resilience, thereby offering a holistic and human-centred approach to sports healthcare.

RESULTS

Ayurveda brings a holistic and multifaceted perspective to sports medicine, as revealed in this narrative review. Its strength lies in addressing every stage of an athlete's journey, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation using time-tested strategies tailored to individual needs.^[6]

The literature consistently shows that the majority of sports-related injuries are closely linked to imbalances in *Vata*, often combined with *Pitta*, especially in cases of acute inflammation. *Ayurvedic* care, therefore, centres on restoring balance to these doshas, with *Vata–Pitta* pacifying therapies forming the cornerstone of injury management.

Preventative practices, grouped under *Swasthavritta*, emerged as particularly valuable. Regular attention to exercise routines (*Vyayama*), mindful dietary choices, and healthy lifestyle habits were shown to boost flexibility, strength, and endurance, while also reducing the risk of overuse injuries. These measures not only help athletes perform at their best but also promote quicker recovery from strenuous activity.

When injuries do occur, *Ayurveda* employs a range of external treatments such as herbal pastes (*Lepa*), therapeutic bandaging (*Bandhana*), fomentation (*Swedana*), and *Marma Chikitsa* (vital point therapy) to relieve pain, reduce swelling, and restore function. Internal remedies, including strengthening (*Balya*) and rejuvenating (*Rasayana*) formulations, as well as bone-healing medicines, play a vital role in supporting tissue repair and accelerating recovery.^[7]

Rehabilitation is approached just as thoughtfully, with therapies like *Rasayana*, *Panchakarma* procedures (including *Basti*, *Nasya*, and *Raktamokshana*), and the integration of Yoga and physiotherapy. These interventions help restore joint mobility, rebuild muscle strength, and enhance overall resilience, while tailored nutrition supports ongoing healing and prevents re-injury.^[8]

Ayurvedic sports medicine stands out for its comprehensive, integrative approach. Combining preventive care, targeted treatment, and robust rehabilitation enables faster recovery, enhances athletic performance, and supports long-term musculoskeletal health.

DISCUSSION

This review shines a light on how *Ayurveda*'s time-honoured wisdom can be meaningfully applied to sports medicine, especially in preventing, treating, and rehabilitating sports injuries. Unlike conventional methods that mostly focus on alleviating symptoms or repairing damaged structures, Ayurveda looks deeper, aiming to restore the body's overall balance by addressing the root causes of injury. This holistic perspective is particularly valuable in sports, where athletes often face recurring injuries or incomplete recovery.

A recurring theme in the literature is the central role of *Vata* imbalance in sports injuries. This observation is consistent with classical *Ayurvedic* concepts, where trauma, excessive physical activity, and tissue depletion are linked to *Vata* aggravation. Acute injuries typically involve *Pitta* as well, leading to inflammation, pain, and swelling. As a result, therapies that calm both *Vata* and *Pitta* have proven to be logical and effective for both sudden and long-standing injuries.

Ayurveda's preventative practices, known as *Swasthavritta*, stand out for their ability to boost endurance, flexibility, and neuromuscular coordination. By guiding athletes on exercise routines, seasonal adjustments, and dietary habits, these measures help preserve tissue health and ward off overuse injuries—mirroring many principles found in modern sports science.

When it comes to treatment, Ayurveda uses a blend of external therapies like herbal pastes (*Lepa*), bandaging (*Bandhana*), steam treatments (*Swedana*), and vital point therapy (*Marma Chikitsa*) to relieve pain and restore function. Internal remedies, especially strengthening and rejuvenating herbs, support deeper healing and tissue repair. Panchakarma therapies, particularly *Basti*, are highlighted for their systemic benefits in *Vata*-related injuries and for speeding up recovery.

Rehabilitation in *Ayurveda* goes beyond just physical therapy—it incorporates Yoga, physiotherapy, nutrition, and lifestyle changes to promote complete healing and prevent future injuries. While these insights are primarily based on classical texts and literature, they point to Ayurveda's strong potential as a complementary approach alongside modern sports medicine. Rigorous clinical research is needed to further validate and refine these strategies.

In summary, Ayurveda offers a natural, safe, and comprehensive approach to sports medicine, focusing not just on healing injuries but on building lasting resilience and overall well-being for athletes.

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