

AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF SWASTHA AND WHO DEFINITION OF HEALTH: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Health is a fundamental concept in both Ayurveda and modern medicine. Ayurveda describes health as Swastha, a state of equilibrium of Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, Mala, and a balanced state of mind, senses, and soul, whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being. This review aims to compare these two concepts from a preventive health perspective. **Material and Method:** References regarding the Ayurvedic concept of Swastha were collected from classical Ayurvedic texts, while the WHO definition of health was reviewed from the WHO Constitution (1948) and standard preventive medicine literature. Relevant published articles were also analyzed. **Result:** Both Ayurveda and WHO describe health as a positive state beyond the absence of disease. Ayurveda emphasizes internal physiological balance and

psycho-spiritual harmony through Swasthavritta, whereas WHO focuses on physical, mental, and social well-being. The comparison highlights the complementary role of both concepts in promoting preventive healthcare.

KEYWORDS: Swastha, Ayurveda, WHO, Health, Preventive Health, Swasthavritta.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a fundamental concept in both classical Ayurveda and modern public health, yet each tradition explains it through a different conceptual framework. In contemporary medicine, the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.^[1] This definition marked an important shift from a disease-centered view of health to a positive and multidimensional understanding of human well-being. In Ayurveda, a similar holisvisiontic is expressed through the concept of Swastha, which denotes a person established in their own natural state of balance. The concept of Swasthya is fundamental to the understanding of any disease or abnormality. Health is order and disease is disorder. Within the body there constantly exists interaction between order and disorder.

A state of health exists when these factors are in balance – digestive fire (agni), bodily humors or doshas (vata, pitta, kapha), three waste products or malas (urine, faeces and sweat) are produced at normal levels and five senses (vision, hearing, touch, taste & smell) and their corresponding organs are functioning normally the body, mind and consciousness are harmoniously working as one. Together, this balance can bring the Sharir (body), Manas (mind) and Atma (soul) in harmony with each other.^[2]

The Ayurvedic description of Swastha describes an individual in a state of health according to Ayurveda, meaning one who has balanced Doshas, proper digestion, well-functioning senses, and a tranquil mind. This shows that Ayurveda does not define health merely as the absence of visible symptoms but as a dynamic state of internal harmony involving body, mind, and spirit.^[2] From a preventive health perspective, this concept is especially significant because Ayurveda places great emphasis on maintaining health before disease arises. The principles of Swasthavritta focus on daily regimen, seasonal regimen, diet, hygiene, ethical conduct, and lifestyle discipline as measures for preserving balance and preventing disease.

The WHO definition and the Ayurvedic concept of Swastha therefore share an important common ground: both regard health as a positive state of well-being rather than a narrow absence of pathology. However, they differ in emphasis. WHO highlights physical, mental, and social well-being at a global and public health level, whereas Ayurveda gives a more individualized and functional explanation centered on internal physiological balance and psycho-spiritual harmony.

In the present article, the comparison of Swastha and the WHO definition of health is explored to show how classical Ayurvedic thought can enrich modern preventive health discourse. Such a comparison is relevant not only for theoretical understanding but also for practical health promotion, lifestyle modification, and holistic preventive care.

AIM

To compare the Ayurvedic concept of Swastha with the WHO definition of health from a preventive health perspective.

OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the Ayurvedic concept of Swastha.
2. To explain the WHO definition of health.
3. To identify similarities and differences between the two frameworks.
4. To evaluate their relevance in preventive health.

METHODOLOGY

Authentic Ayurvedic classical texts, including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Kashyapa Samhita, Vachaspathyam, and the Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary, along with the WHO Constitution (1948) and standard preventive medicine textbooks, were reviewed. Relevant published literature on Swastha, preventive health, and the WHO definition of health was also collected and analyzed for comparison.

Ayurvedic Concept of Swastha

स्व अव इति उपसर्गद्वयपूर्वकात् स्था "गतिनिव तौ इति धातोः निष्पद्यते स्वस्थ शब्द

Swa- means -Innate, natural, inherent, peculiar, one's own, belonging to one self Av- means – To protect, defined, do good to

Stha-means-To stand, do well, live in total it means “one's own stand to protect life”.

स्वः परलोके तिष्ठति स्वेन स्वभावेन सुखेन वा तिष्ठति स्था- क वा विसर्गलोपः ॥ वाचस्पत्यम् Vol. VI^[3]

It is the state in which one's own self stands by its inherent nature and stands happily.

स्वास्थ्यमिति स्वः स्वीयो विकृतो धर्मस्तिस्मिन्तिष्ठति इति स्वस्थः तस्य भावः स्वास्थ्य स्वाभाविकत्वादिक धातुसाम्यामिति यावत्। (गंगाधर च.सू. 5/13)

One who stands in a balanced status of one's own self is called Swastha. Being in this state is Swasthya, which is the state of equilibrium of Dhatus.

सुष्ठु निर्विकारत्वेनावतिष्ठत इति स्वस्थः, तस्य भावः स्वास्थ्यम्; उद्वेजकधातुवैषम्य विरहितधातुसाम्यमित्यर्थः। (चक्रपाणि च.सू. 5/13)^[4]

Sushthu means well, excellently, beautifully, exceeding, truly, rightly. Therefore, one who stands excellently without any Vikaras and where there is no stimulatory factor for disequilibrium of Dhatus.

In Sanskrit English dictionary of Monier Williams Swastha means Self abiding, self dependent. Relying on one's own exertion. Confident, firm, resolute, well in health, at ease, conformable, contended, happy. Being in one's natural state. Uninjured, unmolested.^[5]

Definition of Swastha

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातु मलक्रियः । प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रिय मनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ॥ (सु.सू. १५/४१)^[6]

Acharya Susrutha says that the Sama Svasthas of Doshas 3 Sharirika Vata, Pitta, Kapha and 2 Mansika Raja and Tama, Agni 13 types: Jathara: 4 Types, Dhatavaagani: 7 Types, Bhutaagani: 5Types, 7 Dhatus: Rasa, Rakta. Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, Shukra at normal karma sthana and 3malas mutra purisha and sweda, pleasant state of athma, indriya (11 indriya 5 karama indriya and 5 gyana intriya) and mana is considered as swastha. Here they used word Sama the meaning is balance state of all these in each day and in every age.

Swastasya Lakshana

Theses all are the subjective parameters of a person which shows health of a person and theses physical and mental laksans of health changes continuously according to dincharya and rituchraya and mental condition of a person and a physician can easily asses health of person by asking these parameters as these all laksansa are dynamic process these are as follow:

अन्नाभिलाषो भुक्तस्य परिपाकः सुखेन च । सृष्टविष्मूत्रवातत्वं शरीरस्य च लाघवम् ॥ सुप्रसन्नेन्द्रियत्वं च सुखस्वप्न प्रबोधनम् । बलवर्णायुषां लाभः सौमनस्यं समाग्निता ॥ विद्यात् आरोग्यलिङ्गानि विपरीते विपर्ययम् ॥ (का.सं. खिलस्थान् ५/६, ७, ८)^[7]

Ayurvedacharya Kashyapa has explained the following important points:

1. Proper digestion of food followed by good appetite
2. Smooth, normal evacuation of urine, stool, abdominal gases
3. Proper sound sleep. Easy and natural awakening early in the morning with a sensation of Freshness

4. Normal growth and development of body
5. Nice Complexion, texture and luster of the body
6. Good immunity or resistance power to any disease
7. Absence of lethargy, heaviness and laziness of the body
8. Light and energetic body
9. Steady, active but balanced calm and quiet mind.

सममांसप्रमाणस्तु समसंहननो नरः।

दृढेन्द्रियो विकाराणां न बलेनाभिभूयते॥

क्षुत्पिपासातपसहः शीतव्यायामसंसहः।

समपक्ता समजरः सममांसचयो मतः॥(च.सू. 21/18)^[8]

Person should have proportionate musculature and compactness of the body. Person can withstand Hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and work Strong sensory and motor organs Person can digest and assimilate properly.

Definitions of Health^[9]

WHO definition: The widely accepted definitions of health are given by WHO (1948)-Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity”

Acc to “Webster”: “The condition of being sound in body, mind, especially freedom from physical diseases or pain.”

Acc to oxford dictionary: “Soundness of body or mind; that condition in which its functions are duly and efficiently discharged.”

Acc to Perkins: “A state of relative equilibrium of body form and function which results from its successful dynamic adjustment to forces tending to disturb it. It is not passive interplay between body substance and forces impinging upon it but an active response of body forces working toward readjustment.”

Holistic Health: It is actually an approach to life rather than focusing on illness or specific parts of the body, this ancient approach to health considers the whole person and he or she interacts with his or her environment. It emphasizes the connection of mind, body, and spirit.

Table: Comparison between Ayurvedic Concept of Swastha and WHO Definition of Health.

Parameter	Ayurvedic Concept of Swastha	WHO Definition of Health
Source/Origin	Classical texts — Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Kashyapa Samhita	WHO Constitution, 1948
Basic Definition	State of equilibrium of Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, Mala, with a pleasant state of Atma, Indriya, and Manas	Complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely absence of disease
Level of Approach	Micro-level — individualized, person-specific	Macro-level — population/public health-oriented
Core Components	Dosha (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), Agni, Dhatu, Mala, Indriya, Manas, Atma	Physical, Mental, Social dimensions (with Spiritual, Emotional, Vocational as extended/non-medical dimensions)
Nature of Balance	Dynamic physiological and psycho-spiritual harmony (Dhatu Samya)	Multidimensional well-being without a fixed physiological marker
Assessment Basis	Subjective and dynamic lakshanas (desire for food, proper digestion, sound sleep, sensory clarity, mental pleasantness)	Broader indicators — clinical, questionnaire-based, biochemical, and social/environmental assessments
Preventive Orientation	Swasthavritta — dincharya, ritucharya, ahara, achara, personal hygiene, ethical conduct	Health promotion through policy, equity, education, and access to health services
Scope	Individual self-regulation and internal balance	Social responsibility, community, and environmental context
Operational Applicability	Practically operational through daily and seasonal regimen guidance	Considered non-operational due to difficulty in direct measurement
Underlying Philosophy	Integration of Sharira (body), Manas (mind), and Atma (soul)	Integration of physical, mental, and social spheres of life
Complementary Value	Offers detailed individualized preventive framework	Offers broad and socially relevant public health framework

Dimensions of Health^[9]

As per the definitions, health dimensional divided into 2 parts:

1. Medical these are Physical, Mental and Social dimensions.
2. Non-medical dimensions are Spiritual, Emotional, Vocational and Political dimensions.

Physical dimensions: It implies the perfect functioning of the body -it is state of perfect

harmony between functions of each cell and organ with rest of body.

Techniques & Tools:- Self assessment of overall health, Inquiry into sumptuous of ill health and risk factors, Inquiry into medications, Inquiry into levels of activity, Inquiry into use of medical services in the past, Standardized questionnaires for Cardiovascular diseases, Standardized questionnaire for Respiratory diseases, Clinical Examination, Nutrition and dietary assessment and, Biochemical and laboratory investigation.

Mental Dimension: A state of balance between the individuals and the surrounding world, a state of harmony between one's self and others a coexistence between the realities of the self and that of other people and that of the environment.

Characteristics as attributes of a mentally healthy person: A mentally healthy person is free from interact, conflicts, is well adjusted, accepts criticism and is not easily upset, searches for identity, has a strong sense of self esteem, knows their needs, problems and goals, Copes well with stress and anxiety and possesses good self control.

Social Dimension: Quality and quantity of an individual's interpersonal ties and the extent of involvement with the community involvement. Social well-being entails a sense of balance and integration. The social component is about The ability to connect and relate to other people in Healthy relationships with family, friends, and coworkers.

Spiritual Dimension: Promotes purpose, values, ethics, integrity, and inner peace. It is not religion but the development of a sound mind, sound body, and higher consciousness.

Emotional Dimension: -Refers to recognizing, expressing, and managing emotions effectively. It includes self-control, resilience, empathy, and the ability to cope with stress and maintain healthy relationships.

Vocational Dimension: Involves choosing meaningful work that matches one's skills, interests, and values, leading to personal satisfaction and growth.

DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that both Ayurveda and WHO define health positively rather than negatively. In both systems, health means more than freedom from diagnosable disease. However, the Ayurvedic model is more detailed in its physiological and psycho-spiritual

explanation, whereas the WHO model is more general and socially inclusive. From the preventive point of view, Ayurveda provides a particularly strong framework because it links health preservation with practical daily measures. Review literature on Swasthavritta emphasizes disciplined lifestyle, dietary regulation, seasonal adaptation, cleanliness, proper sleep, and ethical conduct as measures for maintaining health before disease appears. This makes the Ayurvedic model especially valuable for prevention of lifestyle-related and chronic disorders.

The WHO model contributes preventive value at the public health level. Its explicit inclusion of social well-being allows health to be understood in relation to living conditions, education, social support, and access to health services. This broadens prevention beyond the individual and makes it relevant to policy, equity, and health promotion programs. The two models may therefore be seen as complementary. Ayurveda offers a micro-level approach based on internal balance and self-regulation, while WHO offers a macro-level approach based on multidimensional well-being and social responsibility. Their integration could support a more comprehensive preventive health framework for modern healthcare systems.

CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic concept of Swastha and the WHO definition of health both affirm that health is a positive and multidimensional state. Ayurveda defines health through balance of doṣa, agni, dhātu, mala, and the pleasant state of mind, senses, and self, whereas WHO defines it through complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

From a preventive health perspective, Ayurveda offers a detailed individualized approach to health preservation, while WHO offers a broad and socially relevant public health model. Considered together, these frameworks provide a richer understanding of preventive health that integrates self-care, internal balance, and community well-being.

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