



Review Article

HEALTH DETERMINANTS IN AYURVEDA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Pradeepkumar Tiwari^{1*}, Santosh T. Kadam²

¹PhD (Scholar), Associate Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, ²Assistant Professor, Department of Dravyaguna, R. A. Podar Medical College (Ayu.), Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

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ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic philosophies are the concepts of "*Swasthavritta*," which encompass key determinants of health- diet, lifestyle, sleep, and mental well-being that maintain balance and prevent disease. In Ayurveda, health is defined as the harmonious integration of these factors, rather than simply the absence of illness. This review explores the foundational principles of Ayurvedic health determinants, examining their theoretical basis, clinical applications, and their potential contribution to modern healthcare systems. By addressing factors such as individual constitution (*Prakriti*), digestion (*Agni*), and emotional well-being, Ayurveda provides a personalized framework for preventing and managing chronic diseases. Incorporating Ayurvedic practices, including diet regulation, lifestyle modifications, and stress management, into contemporary medical paradigms could offer a more integrative and preventative approach to health. This paper highlights the potential of Ayurveda to complement modern healthcare practices by promoting patient-centered, holistic care that focuses on long-term wellness and disease prevention.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, a holistic and preventive system of medicine with roots in ancient India, emphasizes the importance of "*Swasthavritta*" (health determinants), which are vital for maintaining balance and health. This review explores Ayurvedic concepts regarding health determinants and their implications for individual well-being. In Ayurvedic thought, health extends beyond the mere absence of disease and encompasses optimal functioning across physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.

Prakriti (Body Constitution)- According to Ayurveda, each individual has a unique constitution, or *Prakriti*, influenced by the interplay of the three *Doshas*- *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. These *Doshas* govern an individual's physiological, psychological, and metabolic characteristics and predispose them to specific health conditions. The *Prakriti* determines how a person responds to environmental factors, treatments, and

dietary practices (Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 25: 40-41). Understanding *Prakriti* is essential for personalized healthcare and management of disease susceptibility. (Mishra & Singh, 2004).

Ahara (Diet): In Ayurveda, *Ahara* (diet) is considered one of the most crucial determinants of health. The quality, quantity, and timing of food intake significantly impact *Agni* (digestive fire), metabolism, and overall health. Ayurvedic texts provide comprehensive guidelines on food selection tailored to an individual's *Prakriti* and seasonal changes. By aligning diet with one's constitution and environmental conditions, Ayurveda aims to optimize digestion, prevent disease, and maintain vitality (Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 5:14-16) (Tiwari, 2015).

Nidra (Sleep): Adequate sleep, or *Nidra*, is fundamental in Ayurveda for the restoration of physical and mental health. It is considered essential for maintaining *Dosha* balance, supporting immunity, and promoting cognitive function. Ayurvedic texts outline the ideal duration, timing, and quality of sleep based on one's constitution and life stage, emphasizing the restorative effects of a disciplined sleep routine (Charaka Samhita Vimana Sthana 8:86-87) (Gupta & Kumar, 2018).

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Brahmacharya (Celibacy): The concept of *Brahmacharya* refers to moderation in sexual activity, aiming to conserve *Ojas*, the vital energy responsible for health and longevity. Excessive indulgence in sensory pleasures is believed to deplete *Ojas* and impair physical and mental well-being. Ayurveda emphasizes celibacy or controlled sexual activity as a means to preserve energy and promote overall health (Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 2:16-17).

Dinacharya (Daily Routine): A Path to Balance: *Dinacharya*, or daily routine, is a foundational Ayurvedic principle that advocates a structured daily schedule for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Practices such as early rising, self-care rituals, physical activity, and meditation align the body's rhythms with natural cycles, promoting optimal digestion, detoxification, and vitality (Charaka Samhita Vimana Sthana 2:3-4).

Ritucharya (Seasonal Routine): Adapting to Nature's Rhythms: Ayurveda acknowledges the influence of seasonal changes on health and recommends *Ritucharya*, or seasonal routines, to adjust lifestyle, diet, and self-care practices in response to environmental shifts. By adopting seasonal practices, individuals can prevent disease and maintain balance in the face of changing weather and climate (Charaka Samhita Vimana Sthana 1:8-9).

Vihara (Lifestyle Practices): A balanced lifestyle, or *Vihara*, encompasses physical activity, relaxation, and mental well-being. Ayurveda advocates regular physical exercise, yoga, and meditation to harmonize body and mind, improve digestion, and enhance overall vitality. The integration of these practices fosters resilience to stress, promotes longevity, and improves quality of life. (Patwardhan & Bodeker, 2008; Sharma, 2017).

Acharya (Behavior): Ethical and Moral Conduct: *Acharya*, or ethical conduct, involves adherence to principles of non-violence (*Ahimsa*), truthfulness (*Satya*), and compassion (*Karuna*). In Ayurveda, virtuous behavior is essential not only for moral well-being but also for maintaining health, as ethical conduct influences mental states and helps preserve inner peace and harmony (Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 4:4).

Vyayama (Physical Activity): Movement for Vitality: *Vyayama*, or physical exercise, is vital for improving circulation, digestion, and metabolic function in Ayurveda. Regular moderate exercise is believed to stimulate the flow of *Prana* (vital energy), strengthen the body, and enhance longevity. Ayurvedic recommendations emphasize personalized exercise regimens based on one's constitution and physical capacity, highlighting the importance of balance to avoid overexertion (Charaka Samhita Sutrasthana 6:1-5).

Etiology of Disease in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, the etiology (or causes) of disease is multi-factorial. Disease is seen as the result of an imbalance between the internal environment (the *Doshas*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*) and external factors (seasonal changes, diet, stress, etc). While this concept is aligned with some modern understandings of disease, Ayurveda also integrates deeper metaphysical and psychological components into its explanation (Srikanth & Sharma, 2015).

Imbalance of the Doshas - According to Ayurvedic principles, diseases arise when the three *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) become imbalanced, either due to internal factors such as genetic predisposition or external factors like climate, diet, and lifestyle (Mishra & Singh, 2004). For example, excess *Vata* is linked to dryness, anxiety, and degenerative diseases, while excess *Pitta* is associated with inflammation and fevers (Vagbhata, 2018).

Jvara (Fever) and Infection- Fever (*Jvara*) in Ayurveda is often considered a manifestation of a deeper imbalance, often linked to infections. The causative factors in Ayurveda for infections include poor digestion, exposure to pathogens, and seasonal transitions, all of which lead to an internal imbalance that can facilitate the development of infectious diseases (Vagbhata, 2018; Sharma, 2016).

Environmental and Psychological Factors- According to Ayurveda, environmental factors like pollution, seasonal changes, and emotional disturbances such as stress or grief can disturb the *Doshas* and contribute to disease. Modern research supports this view, as stress and environmental factors are known to influence immune function and susceptibility to various illnesses (Patwardhan & Bodeker, 2008; Sharma, 2017).

Janapadodhwamsa (Epidemic Diseases) in Ayurveda: The concept of *Janapadodhwamsa* refers to epidemic diseases, which are often caused by the collective imbalances in society, including environmental, social, and behavioral factors. According to the Charaka Samhita, epidemics are the result of disturbances in the balance between individuals and the environment, and their control requires comprehensive strategies that include maintaining hygiene, balanced nutrition, and seasonal adaptation (Mishra, 2011).

Epidemic diseases such as cholera and plague, as well as viral infections like influenza and COVID-19, can be understood through this lens. Ayurveda's approach to managing epidemics emphasizes purification therapies (*Shodhana*), enhancing immunity (*Ojas*), and addressing environmental and lifestyle factors that predispose individuals to disease (Gautam & Rao, 2015).

Ayurvedic Approaches to Disease Prevention and Treatment:

The Ayurvedic treatment paradigm is based on restoring balance through diet, lifestyle modification, herbal remedies, detoxification, and mind-body practices. It offers personalized treatment plans based on an individual's unique constitution (*Prakriti*), current imbalance (*Vikriti*), and the environmental factors affecting health.

Herbal Remedies: Ayurvedic herbs, such as turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), and Triphala (a combination of three fruits), are used for their anti-inflammatory, immunomodulatory, and rejuvenating properties. These herbs help balance the *Doshas* and are used both preventively and therapeutically in the treatment of a wide range of diseases (Tiwari, 2015).

Detoxification and Panchakarma: Panchakarma is a set of therapeutic treatments designed to purify the body and restore its natural balance. These treatments include detoxification through methods like *Virechana* (purgation), *Basti* (enema), and *Nasya* (nasal therapy), which are intended to remove toxins and enhance bodily functions (Patwardhan & Bodeker, 2008).

Yoga and Meditation: Yoga and meditation are integral parts of Ayurvedic treatments, helping to reduce stress and promote mental clarity. These practices support the mind-body connection, which is central to preventing and treating disease (Balasubramanian, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to understanding and managing health and disease through principles of balance, personalized care, and the interconnectedness of body, mind, and environment. Its focus on individualized dietary guidelines, structured daily routines, physical activity, ethical conduct, and seasonal adaptations offers valuable strategies for both prevention and treatment. Integrating Ayurvedic principles with modern medical practices, particularly in chronic disease management and holistic care, holds significant potential to enhance patient outcomes, promote preventive care, and enrich contemporary healthcare systems with a more holistic, patient-centered model.

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***Address for correspondence**

Dr. Pradeepkumar Tiwari

Associate Professor,
Department of Kriya sharer,
R.A. Podar Medical College (Ayu.)
Mumbai.

Email:

Tiwari.pradeep1988@gmail.com