

“Lifestyle practices of *Ritucharya* to improve digestive health-a review study”

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ABSTRACT

Ritucharya is a classical Ayurvedic practice that provides seasonal nutrition and lifestyle guidelines to maintain health and prevent disease by aligning the body's rhythms with nature's changes. In *Ayurveda Ritu*, the season, classified by different features expresses different effects on the body as well as the environment. This approach towards in-to-today life helps in balancing the three *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*), which fluctuate with the seasons.

Lifestyle disorders are very common in the present era, basically originating from lack of following seasonal regimens due to lack of concentration in seasonal characteristics. The main principle of the dietary guidelines in *Ritucharya* is to consume food, adjust food intake according to your digestive strength that counteract the qualities of the current season and pacify the *dosha* that tends to aggravate or fluctuates with the seasons. Due to *Sharirik Doshas*,

Agni(catabolism) i.e. digestion is strongest in winter and weakest in summer and monsoon.

KEYPOINTS – *Ayurveda*, *Agni* (Digestive Fire), *Dosha*, *Ritucharya*

INTRODUCTION

In the changing day to day scenario of nature, Ayurveda provides valuable perception on how to align and integrate our health and lifestyle with the seasons. This practice in Ayurveda is known as *Ritucharya* which highlight the importance of adjusting our diets, daily routines and activities according to seasonal changes. By the support of *Ritucharya*, one can not only improve their physical and mental health-being but also strengthen their immunity.

Ritucharya means "seasonal regimen" in Sanskrit where each season has specific qualities that impact our physical and mental health. By recognizing these seasonal variations, one can make better choices regarding their diet, lifestyle,

and self-care. Seasonal regimens main aim was to prevent diseases due to seasonal derangement of *doshas*, with ever-changing nature and being healthy all at the same time. *Ritusandhi* is a unique concept of Ayurveda where it teaches us how to adapt the diet, lifestyle and self-care from one season to another season with smaller adjustments.

To maintain health, Ayurveda has described daily and seasonal routines in its *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi* known as *Dincharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen).

On Earth there are seasonal variations due to rotation of Earth around Sun forming six seasons which causes changes in environmental factors. Since human body having same equilibrium with surrounding environment and nature it has to accommodate with changes in the environment. For this there is change in state of *Doshas* with respect to seasons.

This can be cited as a **HRITU-DOSHA SAMBANDHA** mentioned as follows

Tridosha	Sancharya	Prakopa	Prashama
<i>Vata</i>	<i>Grishma</i>	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Sharad</i>
<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Sharad</i>	<i>Hemanat</i>
<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Shishira</i>	<i>Vasant</i>	<i>Grishma</i>

Ritucharya is an ancient Seasonal changes in agni –

Ritu (Season)	State of Agni	Reason
Hemant and Shishira (winter)	Teekshna (strong)	Cold climate, strengthen internal digestive fire
Vasant (Spring)	Agni start becoming weak	<i>Kapha</i> aggravation and melting of accumulated <i>kapha</i>
Grishma (Summer)	Kshina/manda (weak)	Excess heat and dehydration
Varsha (Monsoon)	Vishama (irregular)	<i>Vata</i> aggravation high humidity
Sharad (Autumn)	Moderate but Pitta-dominant	Residual heat increase <i>Pitta</i>

Ayurvedic practice of adapting one's diet and lifestyle to align with the changing seasons to maintain a balanced *Agni* (digestive fire) and promote overall health.

CLASSIFICATION OF SEASONS -

In *Ayurveda*, the year is divided into two parts called *Ayana* (solstices), based on the movement of sun.

Each *Ayana* has three seasons (Ritus) each, total in a year, there are six seasons which are mainly observed in the Indian subcontinent.

Uttarayana – when the sun moves north (northern solstice)

- 1) Shishira (late winter)
- 2) Vasanta (Spring)-
- 3) *Grishma* (Summer)

Dakshinayana – when the sun moves south (southern solstice)

- 1) *Varsha* (Monsoon)
- 2) *Sharad* (Autumn)
- 3) *Hemanta* (Early-Winter)

AGNI AND RITUCHARYA RELATION:-

In *Ayurveda* *Agni* (digestive and metabolic fire) is considered the foundation of health. *Ritucharya* means adopting diet and lifestyle according to the seasons. Due to changes in the external environment, the strength and nature of agni changes with every season.

Purpose of *ritucharya*:-

- To prevent seasonal aggravation of Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha).
- To support proper digestion and metabolism.
- To maintain balanced *Agni* for proper digestion.

Why relation is important between *Agni* and *Ritu*:-

- Each season causes aggravation or accumulation of specific *Doshas*. Proper *Ritucharya* prevents *Dosha prakopa* by protecting *Agni* from becoming weak or irregular.
- Seasonal changes naturally alter the strength of *Agni*. *Ritucharya* helps in adjusting diet and lifestyle so that *Agni* remains balance throughout the year.
- When *Agni* is balanced, digestion is complete and nutrients are properly assimilated preventing formation of *Ama*(toxins).
- *Ritucharya* enables the body to adapt smoothly to environmental changes without disturbing digestive and metabolic function.
- Many diseases occur due to seasonal changes affecting agony. Following *Ritucharya* helps to prevent seasonal illness such as infections, fever, skin disorders, and metabolic diseases.
- Since *Agni* governance life itself in Ayurveda protecting it through *Ritucharya* supports long-term health and longevity.

General dietary principles for digestion-

1. **Mindful Eating:** Eat in a peaceful

environment, chew food thoroughly about three-quarters full to avoid overwhelming your *Agni*.

2. **Warmth and Freshness:** Use of warm freshly prepared meals in proper manner, as they are easier to digest than cold, raw, or leftover foods.
3. **Hydration:** Sip of warm water or herbal teas (like ginger or green tea or lemon tea) throughout the day. Avoid ice-cold beverages, which can harm the digestive fire.
4. **Digestive Spices:** Use of digestive spices like ginger, turmeric, cumin, coriander, and black pepper into cooking to enhance *Agni* and prevent toxin accumulation i.e. *Ama*.
5. **Seasonal Eating:** maximum use of local, seasonal fruits and vegetables, as they are best suited to the body's needs in that climate.

General lifestyle practices for digestion-

1. **Regular Routine:** Maintain a consistent daily schedule for waking, eating, and sleeping to regulate the body's natural rhythms.
2. **Exercise:** Engage in regular physical activity, such as yoga, walking, or gentle exercise, to stimulate metabolism and circulation. Short walks after meals aid digestion.
3. **Massage (Abhyanga):** Regular self-massage with warm, medicated oils can help balance doshas, improve circulation, and loosen toxins for elimination.
4. **Adequate Sleep:** Ensure 7-9 hours of quality sleep to support the

body's natural detoxification and repair processes.

5. **Avoid Daytime**

Napping: Generally, daytime sleeping is discouraged (except in high summer heat), as it can slow down metabolism and aggravate Kapha dosha, impairing digestion.

6. **Stress Management:** Practices like meditation and deep breathing exercises can help manage stress, which significantly impacts digestive health.

AHARA AND VIHARA IN SIX RITUS

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RUTU	MONTH	RECOMMENDED DIET	RECOMMENDED LIFESTYLE	PATHYA-APATHYA
Shishira	Mid-November to Mid-January	Eating sour, salty, heavy, unctuous, thick meals, milk and its products, wines, rum and hot water	<i>Abhyanga</i> (application of oil to the whole body), oil massage to the scalp, staying in warm and less windy places	Too much of spice, bitter, astringent, consuming cold drinks and foods, avoid sleeping during daytime.
Vasanta	Mid-March to Mid-May	Food tasting predominantly <i>Tikta</i> (bitter), <i>Katu</i> (pungent) and <i>Kashava</i> (astringent) which are light for digestion, drink honey mixed with water	<i>Vamana</i> therapy, <i>Udvardana</i> <i>Dhumapana</i> , <i>Kavala</i> <i>Graha Anjana</i> sexual intercourse- once every three day	Eating sweet, sour, salty and oily food which is heavy for digestion and sleeping in the day time is to be avoided
Grishma	Mid-May to Mid-July	Sweet, cooling liquids and unctuous food and drinks, ghee, milk, rice can be consumed	During daytime stay in cold places, at night sleep under moonlight by applying chandan to the body wear pearls, corals made jewellery at night	Salty, sour foods like citrus fruits, Indian sorrel, bladder dock etc., pungent items like capsicum, food made of too much garam masala

RUTU	MONTH	RECOMMENDED DIET	RECOMMENDED LIFESTYLE	PATHYA-APATHYA
Varsha	Mid-July to September	A general regimen consisting of keeping all <i>doshas</i> in <i>Prakrutha Avastha</i>	<i>Pragharsa</i> <i>Udvardana</i> (the act of rubbing dry medicated powder	Drinking cold liquids, sleeping during day

		should be followed, use a bit of honey in drinks, eatables and also in processing food	during bath), <i>Snana</i> (bathing), <i>Gandhamalya</i> (applying medicated drugs a paśle over body after bath) is to be done daily during this seesun	time drinking river water, exposing to sunlight for longer time
Sharad	Mid-September to Mid-November	Food dominant in sweet taste, light to digest, cooling, bitter-taste properties bringing <i>prakrut avstha</i> in <i>Pitta dosha</i> to be consumed in proper quantity, <i>Kshashtikshali</i> (rice), <i>yava</i> (barley), <i>godhuma</i> (wheat)	Undergo <i>Virecana</i> (therapeutic purgation), <i>Raktamoksana</i> (bloodletting) and consume bitter medicated Ghee, exposure to moon rays during night time is helpful in the see	Exposure to sunrays during the sun is at its peak Consuming meat of animals from marshy land, alkaline substances, curd, daytime sleeping, exposure to winds
Hemant	Mid-November to Mid-January	Eating sour, salty, heavy, unctuous, thick meals, milk and its products, wines, rum and hot water	<i>Abhyanga</i> (application of oil to the whole body), oil massage to the scalp, staying in warm and less windy places	Too much of spice, bitter, astringent, consuming cold drinks and foods, avoid sleeping during daytime.

CONCLUSION -

- The practice of seasonal lifestyle is an age-old Ayurvedic tradition that supports greater vitality, immunity, gut health, and clarity of mind and heart.
- Strong digestion and elimination are crucial components of good

health, according to the ancient teachings of Ayurveda. When your digestion is strong, you're better able to assimilate nutrients and eliminate waste from everything you consume throughout the day. Your gut health and microbiome—the community of helpful and

harmful bacteria living in your intestines—play an important role as well.

- When your gut health is on track, your digestion and elimination generally run smoother. Gut health supports many other facets of health as well, including your immunity, emotions, and mental clarity, to name just a few. That's why gut health is one of the key aims of Ayurveda.
- *Rutusandhi* helps to transit of diet, lifestyle from one season to another season, as sudden changes in lifestyle can disturb *dosha* balance and cause seasonal illness.
- *Ritucharya* helps us to build good physical strength and mental stability throughout the year if practiced well in every *ritu*.

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