



AYURVEDA: A TIME-HONORED PATH TO SUSTAINABLE WELL-BEING AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Dr Mythri H S¹, Dr Nithin Krishna R², Dr Raja Ram Mahto³

¹PhD Scholar, Dept of Kayachikitsa, All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, India
Email:- drmythri.achar@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Faculty of Indian Medical System, SGT university, Gurugram, India
Email:-drnithinkrishnan@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, Dept of Kayachikitsa, All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi, India
Email:- mahtorajaram@yahoo.com

***Corresponding author - Dr Mythri H S,**

*PhD Scholar, Dept of Kayachikitsa, All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi,
Email:-drmythri.achar@gmail.com

Abstract:

The manuscript explores Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old traditional Indian medicinal system that addresses holistic well-being. Rooted in the Atharva Veda, Ayurveda emphasizes longevity, material well-being, and spiritual fulfillment, offering remedies and guidance for disease prevention. Key concepts like 'Agni,' 'Dosha,' 'Dhatu,' and 'Prakriti' guide both treatment and prevention strategies. Ayurveda links intellectual transgressions ('Prajnaparadha') to diseases, highlighting the connection between mental and physical health. Ayurveda recommends various practices to promote preventive, personalized, and participatory medicine. Ayurveda defines health as a harmonious state with balanced digestion, proper elimination, and emotional well-being. It offers recommendations for daily foods, seasonal practices, body purification, and seasonal vulnerability to maintain well-being. The manuscript also aligns Ayurveda with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the role of Ayurveda in promoting healthy eating, hygiene, and well-being, as well as reducing the carbon footprint and promoting equality, peace, and justice. It discusses the progress made by the Indian government, recognizing Ayurveda's relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives like a National Clinical Management Protocol and guidelines for long COVID demonstrate Ayurveda's potential in modern healthcare. Future directions include research, standardization, regulation, public awareness, education, international collaboration, and integration into healthcare systems. In conclusion, Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to health, aligning with the principles of sustainable growth. Integrating Ayurveda into healthcare systems can yield numerous benefits for societies seeking sustainable development.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Sustainable health, Health and Wellness, Preventive health, Traditional medicine

India is renowned for its rich diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of culinary delights, cultural practices, and age-old traditions. Among the treasures of ancient Indian wisdom is Ayurveda, a traditional medicinal system that boasts a legacy spanning 5,000 years. Rooted in the Atharva Veda, Ayurveda's name bears profound significance, with 'Ayur' signifying life and 'Veda' representing science. Thus, it is rightly termed the 'Science of Life,' addressing the holistic spectrum of human existence, including the desires for Longevity (*Praneshana*), material Well-being (*Dhaneshana*), and Spiritual fulfilment (*Pralokeshana*).

This time-honored science not only offers remedies for existing ailments but also provides guidance for the prevention of future diseases. Central to Ayurvedic principles are foundational concepts such as '*Agni*' (~The Digestive fire), '*Dosha*' (~Body Humors), '*Dhatu*' (~Functional Tissues), and '*Prakriti*' (~Constitution). These concepts play pivotal roles in determining both treatment strategies and preventative measures.

Ayurveda introduces the notion of '*Prajnaparadha*,' - intellectual transgressions as the primary instigator of diseases. It delineates a profound connection between psychological well-being and physical health, emphasizing the delicate balance between mental control and sensory harmony. Any disruption in this balance may lead to diseases. Ayurveda's wisdom extends to the advocacy of regimens like '*Dinacharya*' (~daily regime), '*Ritucharya*' (~seasonal routines), '*Panchakarma*' (~five detoxification and bio-purification therapies), '*Rasayana*' (~rejuvenation and revitalization therapy), '*Sadvritta*' (~good conduct and behaviour), and '*Aachara Rasayana*' (~customary law, codes, conducts, and behaviour which prevents the psychosomatic ailments) with an aim for Preventive, Personalized, and Participatory medicine.

Ayurveda defines health as a harmonious state wherein one experiences a natural desire for nourishment, efficient digestion, proper elimination, body lightness, well-timed sleep and wakefulness, and a delightful state of the soul, mind, and sense organs. This definition lays the foundation for sustainable health, enabling the perception of subtle deviations in these parameters. Such vigilance facilitates the early detection and management of diseases, promoting a holistic approach to well-being.

Ayurveda principles and recommendations for overall well-being

1. "*Nitya sevaniya Dravya*" refers to foods that are suitable for daily consumption. Ayurvedic texts suggest including items like red rice, green moong dal, rock salt, gooseberry, barley, rainwater, milk, ghee, land-dwelling meat, and honey in daily regular diet. These recommendations are aimed at maintaining a balanced digestive system and preserving the equilibrium of bodily tissues.

Ayurveda places significant emphasis on certain factors when it comes to food consumption, such as considering the nature of the food, the method of food processing, compatible and incompatible food combinations, the location and time of food production and consumption. Additionally, specific guidelines are provided for eating, such as consuming warm, oily (unctuous) food in appropriate quantities to support digestive fire without overburdening it, and only when genuinely hungry and at a moderate pace. Ayurvedic texts suggest following these principles can lead to benefits like improved complexion, a pleasant voice, increased longevity, nourishment, and enhanced strength.

2. *Dinacharya* – (Daily regimen procedures) aims at promoting health, hygiene, and mental well-being. The foremost among all daily regimens is the practice of arising during the '*brahma muhurta*,' which occurs approximately 1.5 hours before sunrise. This is followed by various therapeutic activities, including *Gandusha* (cleansing of the mouth and throat), *Anjana* (application of healing collyrium to the eyes), *Dhumapana* (medicated smoke inhalation), *Nasya* (nasal instillation with lipid-based preparations), *Vyayama* (regular physical exercise), *Abhyanga* (massage with oil), *Udvartana* (powder massage), *Padaprakshalana* (cleansing of the feet), and *Kavacha dharana* (wearing personal protective coverings).

The daily regimen procedures outlined in *Dinacharya* can hold specific significance in the context of the communicable diseases like COVID-19 pandemic. This can provide support to immune system, improve oral and respiratory health, reduce stress and improve hygiene and personal protection.

3. Ritucharya is the guided practices for the six distinct seasons. The Indian calendar is organized into six seasons, determined by lunar positions and climate shifts. Ayurveda provides specific dietary and lifestyle guidelines for each of these seasons, collectively referred to as *Ritucharya*. Broadly, the first three seasons—*Sishira* (Winter), *Vasant* (Spring), and *Grishma* (Summer)—are associated with bodily dryness and decreased physical strength. During these seasons, Ayurvedic recommendations aim to sustain digestive fire by incorporating foods like barley and honey, promoting gentle physical activity. In the scorching summer season, advice includes the consumption of Ghee, Milk, and a liquid diet, while avoiding alcohol and strenuous physical exertion. Conversely, the remaining three seasons—*Varsha* (Rainy season), *Sharad* (Autumn), and *Hemant* (Late autumn)—witness a gradual increase in body strength. During these periods, it is advisable to maintain one's health by consuming '*Hamsodaka*' (water kept overnight on the day of *Agastya* star), and progressively incorporate sweet, unctuous, and easily digestible foods such as dairy products.

4. Ritu shodhana, or seasonal body purification, is an essential aspect of *Panchakarma*, a bio purification process that offers numerous advantages. It promotes mental clarity, enhances the functioning of sensory organs, provides stability to bodily tissues, slows down the aging process, and maintains robust digestive fire. Bio purification is recommended not only for individuals with specific health concerns but also for those who are seeking to maintain their healthy state. It is particularly beneficial during the three seasons: *Varsha*, *Sharat*, and *Vasant*, as it helps restore the equilibrium that may be disrupted by physiological changes associated with doshas. This approach is not only cost-effective but also holistic, contributing to the prevention of future illnesses.

5. Ritu sandhi and Yamadamshtra kala (Seasonal Vulnerability) represent distinct periods during which individuals are more susceptible to illness due to the body's increased fragility and vulnerability. These critical times typically occur between October and November, during which it is recommended to consume easily digestible foods to maintain good health. Seasonal changes can affect the human body's immune response and overall health. Understanding these vulnerable periods is crucial for anticipating and preparing for potential health challenges and take preventive measures. Knowing these vulnerable periods can encourage individuals to take additional preventive health measures, such as getting vaccinated, practicing good hygiene, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This awareness can empower individuals to protect themselves and their communities from the spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19. This knowledge could be used by health authorities and policymakers to enhance public health preparedness, to allocate resources, increase healthcare infrastructure capacity, and implement targeted public health campaigns.

6. Sadvritta encompasses a set of ethical and behavioural guidelines outlined in Ayurvedic texts to promote a longer and healthier life with a focus on both mental and physical well-being. Ayurveda imparts specific principles for nurturing mental health, such as avoiding intellectual errors, practicing acts of generosity, emphasizing the importance of one's dedication to work rather than the outcomes, cultivating fearlessness, and embracing forgiveness. Furthermore, it prescribes a variety of additional practices, including walking while attentively observing the immediate six feet, regular nail trimming every five days, daily application of oil to the head, ears, and feet, maintaining a balanced and truthful manner of speaking, refraining from pointing out the mistakes of others, treating all individuals with equality, and extending care to those who are suffering. In this comprehensive manner, *Sadvritta* addresses the full spectrum of a healthy life, encompassing the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of individual well-being. It underscores the interconnectedness of individual health and happiness with broader societal and global goals

7. Rasayana is a comprehensive discipline within Ayurveda, encompassing the specialized use of herbs, herbomineral formulations, dietary choices, and lifestyle practices. These are combined with a commitment to self-discipline and adherence to social etiquette. The ultimate goal of *Rasayana* is to achieve an optimal state of bodily tissues and systems, minimizing the impact of causative factors on

the body. Essentially, it can be seen as a pathway to establish and maintain homeostasis, thereby slowing down the aging process and preventing diseases.

In the context of well-being, it serves as a dynamic approach for rejuvenating both the body and the mind. In Ayurveda, aging is perceived as a natural degenerative process and is considered a condition akin to a disease. Therefore, *Rasayana* encompasses strategies not only to prevent premature aging but also to enable individuals to age gracefully and healthily. This multifaceted approach underscores that Ayurveda's primary focus has always been a comprehensive analysis of health parameters, and the means to maintain them. Consequently, Ayurvedic treatment involves a holistic approach, addressing aspects such as diet, lifestyle, and medicines, all aimed at achieving *Dhatu Samya*, which signifies the attainment of a state of balance and homeostasis, rather than just treating the symptoms of a disease.

Sustainable Development Goals:

Ayurveda aligns well even with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) laid down by United Nations, where both Ayurveda and SDGs aims at a more sustainable and equitable changes with respect to social, economic, and environmental challenges. SDG 2 and SDG 12 benefit from Ayurveda's promotion of nutritious, locally available foods and responsible consumption. SDG 3 is directly addressed as Ayurveda emphasizes overall health, well-being, and preventive care. *Sadvritta* and *Rasayana* practices contribute to SDG 3 by supporting physical and mental well-being and longevity. SDG 6 is supported through Ayurvedic practices that maintain hygiene, aligning with clean water and sanitation goals. SDG 13 benefits from Ayurveda's emphasis on locally available, seasonal foods, reducing the carbon footprint and supporting climate action. *Sadvritta* promotes equality, addressing SDG 10 by emphasizing care and forgiveness for all. SDG 16 is addressed through daily routines involving meditation and stress management, contributing to individual well-being and indirectly promoting peace and justice. This highlights the potential for Ayurveda to become an integral part of healthcare and sustainability programs, fostering alliances and cooperative efforts to realize the objectives of SDG 17 by exchanging traditional wisdom and practices to advance a comprehensive approach to well-being and sustainable progress.

Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to healthcare that can significantly contribute to economic, environmental, and social factors of sustainable growth. Promotion of Traditional Knowledge enhances the use of indigenous resources and traditional healing methods, which can stimulate local economies and cottage industries along with creating employment opportunities in agriculture, processing, and marketing sectors. It can significantly reduce the burden of chronic diseases, ultimately leading to healthcare cost savings for both individuals and governments (**Fig 1**). Plant-Based Medicine reduces the need for synthetic drugs and their associated environmental impacts. The practices like eating seasonal, locally sourced foods, can reduce the carbon footprint associated with food production and transportation as. Community-Based Healthcare strategies enhances the community participation thereby empowers local communities to take charge of their health, fostering social cohesion and identity.

Progress Made:

Recognising the approach of Ayurveda towards enhancing the host's immune system and restoring balance in the individual have been recognised well by Govt of India. Various initiative and Projects have been undertaken by Ministry of Ayush (MoA), GOI. An Interdisciplinary Ayush Research Task Force with a group of senior experts was formed to formulate strategies for COVID-19 mitigation. A "National Clinical Management Protocol based on Ayurveda and Yoga for management of COVID-19" [1] was released by MoA including the therapeutic modalities of Indian medical systems. Efforts have been made to apply Ayurvedic practices in the management of Long-Covid, including the release of guidelines such as "Ayush recommendations for holistic health and well-being preventive measures and care during COVID-19 and long COVID-19" [2] by the MoA. Additionally, the Ministry has published a comprehensive document called "Ayush Dietary Advisory for Kuposhan Mukh Bharat,"

which encompasses general dietary guidance, dietary recommendations for pregnant women, dietary suggestions for lactating mothers, meal plans for children, and dietary advice for pregnant women with anemia and malnourished children. [3] Furthermore, by harnessing technology for the effective dissemination of AYUSH guidelines, the MoA introduced the AYUSH Sanjeevni mobile application. This app was designed to collect data on the utilization of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa, and Homoeopathy) recommendations and interventions by the public, assessing their role in preventing COVID-19. [4] For centuries, traditional medicine has played a vital role in healthcare within communities worldwide. Acknowledging its significance, the World Health Organization has set up the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar, India. This pioneering centre represents the first and only global outpost dedicated to traditional medicine globally.[5] Presently, the MoA is also administering a Central Sector Scheme known as AYURSWASTHYA, which offers financial support to eligible individual organizations and institutions. This assistance is aimed at facilitating the establishment and enhancement of their operations and facilities and supporting research and development initiatives in the field of AYUSH [6]. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has notified the creation of a new category of Ayush (AY) visa for foreign nationals for treatment under Ayush systems/Indian systems of medicine. The introduction of Ayush Visa fulfills the proposal for introduction of a special visa scheme for foreigners visiting India for treatment under Ayush systems/Indian systems of medicine like therapeutic care, wellness and Yoga. [7].

Future directions:

To globalize Ayurveda for sustainable health, a comprehensive approach is vital. This involves robust research and standardization to validate the efficacy and safety. Clear regulation and quality control standards to ensure the quality of Ayurvedic products and practices. Concurrently, public awareness campaigns are essential to dispel misconceptions and promote Ayurveda's holistic benefits. Moreover, education and training programs are needed to produce qualified practitioners. International collaboration can foster global acceptance, while intellectual property protection safeguards traditional knowledge. Integration into healthcare systems is critical for Ayurveda's worldwide recognition, enhancing its role in modern healthcare.

In conclusion, Ayurveda's holistic approach to health aligns well with the principles of sustainable growth (**Fig 2**). Its emphasis on natural remedies, community involvement, and the preservation of cultural and environmental resources makes it a valuable contributor to economic, environmental, and social factors of sustainable development. Integrating Ayurveda into healthcare systems and promoting its practices can yield numerous benefits for societies seeking sustainable growth.

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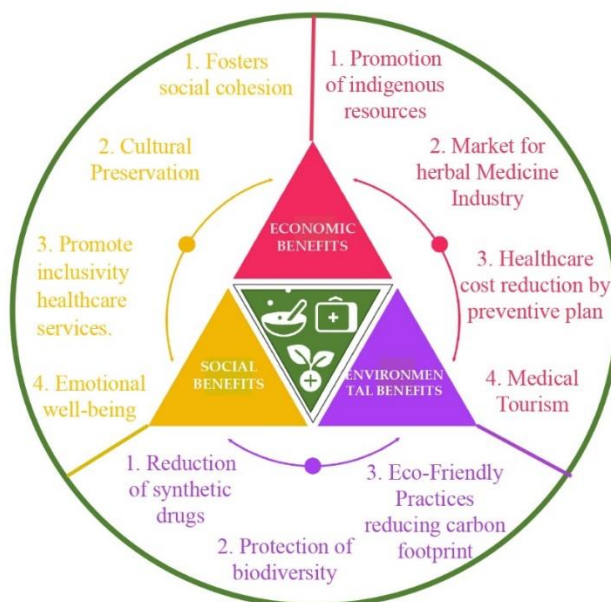


FIGURE 1 – Contribution of Ayurveda for SDGs

Figure 2 - Ayurveda's Role in Promoting Long-Term Health

