

Traditional Ayurvedic Dietary Practices: Pertinence to Osteoarthritis

Suhasi Kumari^{1*}, Dr Navita Pareek², Dr Shilpi Sharma³

¹Research Scholar, Food Science and Nutrition (Department of Home Science),
Banasthali Vidyapith, Tonk, Rajasthan, India.
Email: suhasichoudhary80@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Food Science and Nutrition (Department of Home Science),
Banasthali Vidyapith, Tonk, Rajasthan, India.

³Associate Professor & Head, School of Allied Health Sciences,
Jaipur National University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a holistic system of health that emphasises diet and nutrition as key determinants of physiological balance and disease prevention. Traditional Indian dietary practices are deeply rooted in Ayurvedic principles and reflect an understanding of digestion, metabolism, and individual constitution (*Prakriti*). Several elements of the traditional Indian diet closely correspond to classical Ayurvedic dietary guidelines, making it a practical extension of Ayurvedic nutrition transmitted through generations. In Ayurveda, osteoarthritis is described as *Sandhigata Vata*, a degenerative joint disorder resulting from the aggravation of *Vata dosha* and the depletion of *Asthi dhatu* (bone tissue). Diet (*Ahara*) plays a pivotal role in both preventing and managing this condition. This review aims to highlight the relevance of Ayurvedic dietary principles in the prevention and management of osteoarthritis by integrating classical Ayurvedic concepts with contemporary scientific evidence. Primary Ayurvedic texts, including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, were critically reviewed. Additionally, scientific literature published between 2010 and 2024 was retrieved from PubMed, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect using keywords such as “osteoarthritis,” “diet,” “anti-inflammatory foods,” and “Ayurveda.” The review indicates that adherence to *Aaharavidhi*, the principles governing food selection, preparation, combinations, quantity, seasonal adaptation, and individual constitution, is essential for effective osteoarthritis management. Diets consisting of warm, unctuous, easily digestible, and nutrient-dense foods, including ghee, milk, sesame oil, wheat, red rice, green gram, and *Vata*-pacifying spices, may help slow disease progression, whereas dry, cold, processed, and heavy-to-digest foods may aggravate joint degeneration. A well-planned Ayurvedic dietary approach may serve as a sustainable and complementary strategy for long-term osteoarthritis prevention and management.

Keywords: *Sandhigata Vata*, Knee osteoarthritis, *Aaharavidhi*, Ayurvedic dietetics, *Pathya-Apathya*, *Vata dosha*

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INTRODUCTION OF OSTEOARTHRITIS (SANDHIGATA VATA)

Sandhigata Vata has been referred to in classical Ayurvedic texts as a degenerative joint disorder mainly caused by the aggravation of *Vata dosha*. The *Vata* aggravation leads to the progressive destruction of the joints with resultant loss of joint mobility and functions. The pathogenesis of *Sandhigata Vata* mainly involves the vitiation of *Vata* and the depletion of *Dhatu* or *Kshaya*, with reference to the depletion of *Asthi* (bone) and *Majja* (bone marrow) *dhatu*. The pathological process thus occurring leads to loss of joint integrity as well as decreased intra-articular pressure, thereby making the joints susceptible to pain and loss of function [1]. According to the classical Ayurvedic text, particularly *Charaka Samhita* (*Chikitsa Sthana* 28), the condition, when fully developed, is characterised by severe joint pain (*Sandhi Shoola*), swelling of the joint (*Sandhi Shotha*), pain on flexion and extension movements (*Akunchana*, *Prasarana Vedana*), and loss of joint functions or limitation of movement (*Sandhi Hani*) [2]. In Ayurveda,

irregular dietary habits, mental stress, lack of sleep, and heavy physical or occupational work are mentioned as the main factors that aggravate *Vata dosha* change and that impair *Agni* (digestive and metabolic function), thus preventing proper tissue nourishment (*Dhatu Poshana*) [3]. Fasting frequently, not eating enough, and regularly eating dry or light foods are ways of life that lead to the gradual exhaustion of *Rasa* (nutritive fluid), *Mamsa* (muscle tissue), *Meda* (adipose tissue), and finally *Asthi dhatu* (bone tissue) [4]. Improper dietary practices (*Apathya Ahara*), especially the consumption of dry, cold, light, incompatible, or nutritionally deficient foods, exacerbate *Vata* and facilitate tissue degeneration at a faster rate. However, *Pathya Ahara*, comprising warm, unctuous, nourishing, and *Vata*-pacifying foods, is deemed necessary to restore digestive power, supply nutrients to the bones and bone marrow, and normalise aggravated *Vata*. To assist joint nourishment and the maintenance of the structural integrity, the traditional Ayurvedic literature prescribes dietary ingredients like *Godhuma* (wheat), *Masha* (black gram), *Raktashali* (red

rice), Draksha (raisins), Ghrita (ghee), and Ushna Jala (warm water) [5].

DIETARY APPROACH FOR PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

Diet is a very important factor in the prevention and treatment of Vata-dominant joint disorders. Ancient Ayurvedic scriptures put considerable emphasis on the intake of pure, easily digestible, and nourishing foods, because such foods help to maintain the normal function of the digestive system (Agni), minimise inflammatory reactions, and conserve the structure of the joints. For instance, Godhuma (wheat), Masha (black gram), Raktashali (red rice), Ghrita (ghee), Draksha (raisins), and Ushna Jala (warm water) are some of the foods that are conventionally advised owing to their oily and nourishing nature, which makes the joints flexible and feeds the tissues [6].

In accordance with Ayurveda, a major causative factor in the worsening of joints and the development of arthritis is the regular intake of wrong diets (Apathya Ahara). Among other reasons, cold, dry, incompatible, wrongly cooked, or hard-to-digest foods contribute to the aggravation of the Vata dosha and the production of Ama (metabolic toxins), which together disrupt the flow of nutrients to the joints. Dry snacks, heavy pulses, and incompatible food combinations such as curd at night are Vata aggravating factors that can increase joint stiffness, swelling, and pain by damaging digestive function [7]. Some clinical and observational studies have also indicated that regularity in meal timings, stress management, and implementation of Vata, pacifying dietary, and lifestyle changes can help with the symptoms of osteoarthritis [8].

AAHARAVIDHI (RULES OF DIET) AND ITS PERTINENCE WITH OSTEOARTHRITIS

Ayurveda gives us an extensive and holistic system of diet rules (Aaharavidhi) covering aspects like the nature of food, the cooking procedures, suitable food combinations, quantity, time of eating, seasonal and environmental factors, eating habits, and one's digestive power. Contemporary research indicates that going away from these dietary codes can result in compromised digestion, increased production of toxic metabolic waste (Ama), and faster joint wear and tear [9]. The concept of Aaharavidhi, presented in the Charaka Samhita, prescribes methodical dietary instructions for balancing the three Doshas, mainly focusing on controlling the Vata dosha. Since Vata aggravation is the main cause of Sandhigata Vata, following Aaharavidhi is significantly effective in both preventing and treating, through diet, the degenerative joint disorders. Adhering strictly to Aaharavidhi helps in keeping Agni (digestive and metabolic capacity) at a good level; thus, the food is thoroughly digested, and the formation of Ama (toxins accumulated due to improper metabolism) is inhibited. Good digestion and the absence of Ama allow the proper nourishment of Dhatus, especially Asthi (bones) and Majja

(bone marrow), which are essential for joint lubrication and strength. Additionally, Aaharavidhi emphasises that people should not eat foods that are dry, cold, light, incompatible, or irregular, as these are the dietary factors that increase Vata dosha [10]. On the other hand, Ayurvedic diet principles recommend consumption of meals that are warm, thoroughly cooked, and eaten on time. These kinds of diets can not only lower Vata but also relieve the pain and stiffness, improve joint functions, and even lead to the slowing down of degenerative changes in osteoarthritis.

PRAKRITI (NATURE OF FOOD)

Prakriti refers to the natural characteristics of food substances such as guru (heavy), laghu (light), snigdha (unctuous), and ruksha (dry). Charaka Samhita (Sutra Sthana 26) states that black gram (Masha) is guru (heavy to digest), while green gram (Mudga) is laghu and thus, is easier to digest. Vata dosha gets aggravated by foods having dry and cold attributes. Such foods may lead to joint dryness, stiffness, and even gradual degeneration. When it comes to food treatments for osteoarthritis (Sandhigata Vata), there is a strong focus on snigdha (unctuous) and ushna (warm) foods, as these qualities help in joint lubrication, nourishing the tissues, and pacifying Vata [11]. These dietetic measures support the health of Asthi and Majja dhatu and diminish the occurrence of pain and stiffness. Some of the foods that are safe to eat include green gram (moong dal), rice that is cooked well, warm milk, ghee (clarified butter), and sesame seeds. These foods facilitate digestion and offer unctuous nourishment. In contrast, cold salads (like chilled cucumber, tomato, or leafy greens), dry snacks (such as popcorn, khakhra, and puffed rice), and heavy pulses like black gram, kidney beans (rajma), and chickpeas should be avoided, especially if the person has weak digestion [12].

KARANA (PROCESSING OF FOOD)

Karana means various food processing methods resulting in the qualitative and functional transformation of the food. Such processes are heating, soaking, churning (a traditional method of agitating substances such as milk or ghee to achieve unctuousness and make the food easier to digest), fermentation, and seasoning, which have been mentioned in the Charaka Samhita (Sutra Sthana 26). Processing appropriately changes the intrinsic characteristics of the food, making it less heavy and more easily digestible, increasing the nutrient availability, and facilitating the ideal function of digestion. Properly processed food helps in maintaining Agni and prevents Vata aggravation [13]. On the other hand, raw, poorly cooked, or unprocessed food can impair digestion, increase Vata dosha, and cause joint stiffness and pain, especially in people with degenerative joint disorders. From a therapeutic point of view (in osteoarthritis), the use of warm, very gently cooked, and freshly prepared foods such as soups, clarified butter (ghee), and properly seasoned or tempered lentil dishes is beneficial. On the other hand, raw salads, sprouts, cold smoothies, and refrigerated or leftover food should be avoided because they aggravate Vata, reduce the power of

digestion, and increase Ama formation, thus worsening joint problems [14].

SAMYOGA (COMBINATION OF FOOD)

Samyoga in Ayurveda primarily means the combination of certain food items and how they jointly affect the body. According to Charaka Samhita (Sutra Sthana 26), some combinations of food substances help digestion and nutrient assimilation, while others may cause incompatibility (Viruddha Ahara). The incompatible combinations of food hamper digestion and lead to the formation of Ama (toxins from improper metabolism) and weakening of Agni. Ama, being a sticky substance, can block the channels of the body (Srotorodha), stop proper nourishment of the tissues, and cause aggravation of Vata dosha. This mechanism of disease is considered one of the main factors for the occurrence of degenerative diseases like osteoarthritis, where digestive inefficiency and metabolic imbalance are two factors leading to the development of joint pain, stiffness, and degeneration. From the viewpoint of diet, it is acceptable to mix ghee with warm, well-cooked foods. Milk, when taken correctly, and the use of turmeric in the cooked dishes are also among the compatible food combinations that not only promote digestion but also help in reducing the tendency of inflammation. On the other hand, it is said that one should not eat curd at night or combine milk with fruits. These habits impair digestion, lead to Ama formation, and can, in turn, worsen Vata disorders [15].

RASHI (QUANTITY OF FOOD INTAKE)

Rashi means the amount of food eaten, which includes both the overall meal volume and the serving size of each food item, as stated in the Charaka Samhita (Sutra Sthana 26). Proper control of food quantity is a major factor in facilitating Agni digestive fire and overall digestive health. When food is consumed beyond the required quantity, it weighs down the Agni and, in turn, leads to incomplete digestion and the generation of Ama. When food is only partially digested, the resulting toxic metabolic byproducts are called Ama. On the other hand, insufficient food intake leads to a lack of nourishment of body tissues. Overeating as well as undereating negatively affect Vata dosha and can worsen the main complaints of osteoarthritis, namely pain, stiffness, and loss of movement. Hence, food intake should be in such proportions as to not only satisfy hunger but also be agreeable to one's digestive capacity (Agni Bala) [16]. The simplest and most down-to-earth changes in diet can be switching to lighter evening meals like moong dal khichdi or vegetable soup instead of heavy meals like rajma, chawal, or fried foods and keeping portions small to aid digestion and promote joint health.

DESHA (HABITAT AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS)

Desha refers to the geographical, climatic, and natural aspects of a place, such as aridity, humidity, temperature, and seasonal changes, which affect a person's dietary needs and physical reactions. The Charaka Samhita (Vimana Sthana) points out the necessity of changing one's diet and

lifestyle according to the regional and environmental conditions to keep the doshas in balance. People living in cold and dry areas are at a higher risk of Vata aggravation because of the ruksha (dry) and sheeta (cold) qualities of such places that are exterior to them. This susceptibility leads to Vata-related problems, especially in the joints, such as stiffness, pain, and degenerative changes, resulting in conditions like osteoarthritis. If the air pollution factors lead to the rise of Vata, then dietary interventions become indispensable for the lowering of the Vata level. By consuming warm, moist, and snigdha (unctuous) food, one can reverse the effect of the environment and benefit the joints with lubrication and nourishment of the tissues. For example, drinking hot soup, oatmeal, and freshly cooked dishes can be a good protection against the cold weather. On the other hand, one should not consume dry, cold, or chilled food items like raw vegetable salads, crackers, iced drinks, refrigerated leftovers, and cold desserts, as they will increase Vata, the state of which will be worsened further, and may also cause poor digestion [17].

KALA (SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS)

Kala is about how time influences our body's balance, which includes seasonal changes and the timing of food intake. According to Ayurveda, seasonal changes alter the relative dominance of the doshas, thus changing the dietary and lifestyle needs. Autumn and monsoon seasons are when Vata dosha is generally aggravated. Vata dosha is known to be the cause of many problems in the joints, such as osteoarthritis, stiffness, dryness, pain, and inflammation brought about by the aggravation. Functionally, during these seasons, diets that are warm, nourishing, and consist of easily digestible foods can effectively reduce the effects of Vata aggravation and promote musculoskeletal health. It is advisable to consume foods that are rich in lipids and have high energy content, such as clarified butter (ghee), nuts, and sesame seeds, during the cold seasons, as these will provide lubrication and support the integrity of the connective tissue. Warm whole grains like cracked wheat (daliya), oats, and millet preparations are particularly helpful because of their grounding and life-sustaining features [18]. Moreover, ginger and cinnamon may be used as flavoring of porridges, thereby enhancing digestive efficiency (Agni) and lessening stomach discomfort. Because during the monsoon season our digestive system tends to work less efficiently, we usually prefer to have lighter meals. Vegetable soups, split mung beans (moong dal), and very mildly spiced khichdi are examples of such easily digestible foods that not only maintain the metabolic balance but also prevent the buildup of Vata. Herbal teas made from ginger or *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi) are good for digestion and the immune system as well. In late autumn, it is a good idea to have a lot of well-cooked root vegetables such as sweet potatoes and carrots, which are good for your body tissues; they help you restore both moisture and stability. Drinking warm water with digestive herbs like *Trachyspermum ammi* (ajwain) or *Cuminum cyminum* (cumin) may be very helpful for getting the nutrients from your food and keeping your joints lubricated. On the other

hand, cold, dry, and heavy foods are thought to worsen Vata [19]. Foods like refrigerated leftovers, chilled drinks, ice cream, cold salads, and yogurt straight from the fridge, especially if they're eaten early in the morning or late at night, are most likely to weaken your digestion and worsen joint pain. Therefore, it is a good idea to try to eliminate those kinds of foods from your diet when the Vata phase is predominant in nature to keep both your body and joints in a good state.

UPAYOGA SAMSTHA (RULES AND MANNER OF EATING)

Upayoga Samstha addresses behavioural and procedural guidelines for food consumption, highlighting the importance of regularity, moderation, and awareness during eating. Classical Ayurvedic literature elucidates these principles as indispensable for the proper functioning of the digestive fire (Agni) and the maintenance of metabolic balance. According to both Ayurveda and contemporary physiology, meal timing consistency is one of the factors that influence the circadian rhythm of digestive enzymes, gastric motility, and hormonal secretions, thus ensuring the effectiveness of digestion and nutrient absorption. Maintaining a regular meal schedule supports your digestive system to function optimally and prevents the whole process of Ama. It can be understood as substances that are either incompletely digested or metabolised, and these, when released into the bloodstream, may cause inflammation in the body. Besides, the proper breakdown of food makes a considerable contribution to the regulation of Vata dosa, a factor that physically manifests in joints and through the neuromuscular system. Relating the role of Vata Dosa to osteoarthritis, it can be said that its balance is highly desirable since its aggravated condition results in pain, stiffness, and pathological changes of the joint tissues. On the other hand, an eating pattern that is inconsistent, frequent snacking, eating too much, and psychologically stressful meals can all negatively affect one's digestive system. Moreover, situations such as eating too fast or eating while one's attention is elsewhere may interfere with the mechanisms of satiety and digestive secretion, resulting in inefficient digestion and metabolic disorders. Such conditions may then lead to the increase of Vata Dosa and thus, the worsening of osteoarthritic symptoms [20].

UPAYOKTA (INDIVIDUAL FACTORS)

Upayokta is a term that includes one's age, digestive power (Agni), strength, and nature (prakriti), which are the individual, specific characteristics of the person consuming the food. These are the factors that help in deciding the metabolic processes, assimilation, and ultimately the use of the food in the body. Thus, they become very important factors for planning the diet, especially in cases of chronic degenerative diseases like osteoarthritis. Aging and Vata predominance are two modes of causation that stagnate the production of lubricant in the tissues, make the tissues very dry, and lead to degeneration. From the Ayurvedic view, these events are a manifestation of Vata imbalance and decreased digestion. Hence, to provide the tissues with

nourishment and to keep the joints healthy, dietary measures would require that only those foods be taken that are warm, nourishing, and easy to digest. One can provide the tissues with the nourishment that they need and keep the joints healthy with such dietary measures as addressing foods being warm, nourishing, and easy to digest. Besides light, properly cooked soups, it is the use of good-quality fats, especially sesame oil, that is recommended because of their properties in lubricating and pacifying Vata. However, foods that are dry, cold, or heavy by nature may not only reduce the digestive fire further but also increase the Vata disorder [21]. Excessive consumption of raw salads, sprouts, puffed rice, cold yoghurt, refrigerated leftovers, and iced drinks can weaken the digestive fire and thus lead to joint stiffness and pain. Hence, the consumption of these foods should be limited and, if possible, be changed by warming, cooking, or adding suitable spices to enhance digestibility. The overall idea of Upayokta emphasises the need for personalised dietary advice that considers factors like age, body type, and digestive power. Personalisation of this nature supports digestion at the best level, reduces the risk of inflammation, and retards the evolution of degenerative joint changes because of osteoarthritis.

DISCUSSION

The Ayurvedic concept of dietary management provides a holistic approach to musculoskeletal health. Many traditional dietary recommendations align with contemporary scientific understanding of anti-inflammatory nutrition and metabolic health. Warm, nutrient-dense foods rich in healthy fats and easily digestible proteins may support joint lubrication and tissue repair. Additionally, dietary practices that improve digestive efficiency may reduce systemic inflammation and metabolic stress associated with degenerative joint diseases. Integrating Ayurvedic dietary principles with modern nutritional research may provide a complementary strategy for long-term osteoarthritis management. Further clinical studies are required to evaluate the therapeutic potential of Ayurvedic dietary interventions in improving joint health and reducing disease progression.

CONCLUSION

The current review indicates that Ayurvedic dietetics can provide a comprehensive, preventive, and supportive solution for osteoarthritis management. Vata dosha aggravation combined with depletion of Asthi (bone) and Majja (marrow) tissues was identified as the cause of Sandhigata Vata in the classical Ayurvedic literature. The consequent symptoms are joint pain, stiffness, crepitus, and mobility restriction. The principles of Aaharavidhi, which cover the nature of food (prakriti), processing (Karana), combinations (Samyoga), quantity (Rashi), habitat (Desha), timing and seasonal suitability (kala), rules of consumption (Upayoga samstha), and individual factors (Upayokta), offer a well-organised and personalised dietary framework. This framework is designed to maximise digestive power (Agni), limit the production of metabolic waste (ama), decrease tissue dryness, and ultimately facilitate the

nourishment of the joints. Serving warm, unctuous, freshly made, and easily digestible meals, as extensively advised in the traditional literature, is the key to effectiveness in opposition to Vata aggravation and thereby preserving the joints' health.

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Author contributions

All the authors contributed to this study. Suhasi Kumari has the major contribution in preparing and drafting the manuscript. Along with the guidance and supervision of the whole research. Dr Navita Pareek and Dr Shilpi Sharma furnish with correction, comments and revising the manuscript. The author read and approved the final draft of the manuscript.

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This is a narrative review based on previously published studies; all data supporting the findings are available in the cited articles

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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