

Ushapan in Ayurveda: A Classical Preventive Health Practice and Its Contemporary Relevance

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda emphasizes preventive healthcare through daily regimens (Dinacharya) aimed at maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Among these practices, Ushapan (Ushah Pana), the consumption of water early in the morning before sunrise or immediately after waking, occupies a significant position. Classical Ayurvedic literature describes Ushapan as a simple yet effective Rasayana practice that promotes longevity, digestive health, detoxification, and disease prevention. The practice involves drinking a specified quantity of water, often stored overnight in a copper vessel, on an empty stomach. Ancient texts including Bhavaprakasha, Yogaratnakara, and Anandakanda describe the procedure, indications, benefits, and contraindications of Ushapan. Modern scientific understanding supports several of these claims through evidence relating to hydration, gastrointestinal motility, renal function, and metabolic regulation. This review explores the concept of Ushapan from classical Ayurvedic texts, discusses its physiological and therapeutic significance, and examines its relevance in contemporary health promotion. The article highlights Ushapan as an inexpensive, safe, and easily adoptable lifestyle intervention capable of contributing to preventive medicine and holistic health.

Keywords: Ushapan, Ayurveda, Dinacharya, Rasayana, Jalapana, Preventive Medicine, Morning Water Intake, Lifestyle Medicine

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, places strong emphasis on preventive healthcare. The maintenance of health (*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*)¹ is considered equally important as the treatment of disease. To achieve this objective, Ayurveda prescribes daily and seasonal regimens that harmonize bodily functions with natural biological rhythms. In the daily regimen, the first activity is

‘*Brahme Muhurt Uttishthet*’² or waking up early in the morning before sunrise. 1 Muhurta refers to a timespan of 48 minutes. A day consists of 30 Muhurtas, i.e. 15 Muhurtas in the day and 15 Muhurtas in the night. The 14th Muhurta of the night is called “Brahmi Muhurta”. This period is approximately one and a half hours before sunrise, or to be exact, one hour and 36 minutes before sunrise. This time may vary from region to region based on the time of

sunrise. According to Ayurveda, this is the ideal time for a person to wake up in the morning. This is the time in which *Ushapana* is to be done.

One such daily practice is Ushapan, the consumption of water early in the morning before food intake. This practice is traditionally performed during *Brahma Muhurta*, approximately 45–90 minutes before sunrise. *Ushapan* is included within *Dinacharya* and is regarded as a simple intervention capable of promoting digestive efficiency, facilitating detoxification, and supporting longevity.

Water (*Jala*) occupies a central role in Ayurvedic physiology. It is considered one of the *Panchamahabhutas* and is essential for nourishment, transportation, lubrication, and elimination processes. Ushapan utilizes the therapeutic properties of water at a time when the body is physiologically receptive, thereby enhancing its beneficial effects.

Definition of Ushapan

Bhava Mishra explained a procedure called ‘Ushapana’ at the time of sunrise, can live for a period of hundred years without any disease and fear of old age.³

‘Usha’ means dawn or the time just before sunrise.

‘Pana’ means to drink. Therefore, ‘Ushapana’ means to drink water early in the morning before sunrise or during Brahmi Muhurta.

Ushapana: Drinking Water Early in the Morning

Ayurveda explains Ushapana as part of the healthy daily regimen. Here, water is advised for drinking early in the morning.

Ushapan refers to drinking water immediately after waking up, preferably during *Brahma Muhurta*, before brushing the teeth and before consuming any food. The water is generally stored overnight, traditionally in copper, earthen, silver, or gold vessels depending on individual constitution and therapeutic indications. The quantity and temperature may vary according to the individual's digestive strength (*Agni*), age, season, and constitution (*Prakriti*).

Quantity of water for Ushapana

The dose of Ushapana is 8 Prasriti or approximately 770 ml. A person who drinks water in this quantity just before sunrise remains free from diseases and aging and lives for more than a hundred years.⁴

The ideal time for Ushapana begins from the 14th Prahara (part) of the night or 14th Muhurta of the night. Acharya Bhoja opines that ‘Paryushita jala’ or water which is stored overnight should be used for the purpose of Ushapana. Ushapana should be done just before sunrise.

Method of Practicing Ushapan

The traditional procedure for Ushapan includes the following steps:

1. Wake up during *Brahma Muhurta*.
2. Sit comfortably in a calm environment.
3. Drink water slowly on an empty stomach.
4. Traditionally, 1–4 glasses (approximately 770ml) of water are consumed according to individual capacity.
5. After drinking water, light walking may be performed.
6. Natural urges such as defecation and urination should not be suppressed.
7. Other *Dinacharya* procedures may then be undertaken.

Ayurvedic practitioners often recommend lukewarm water for individuals with Kapha predominance and room-temperature water for those with Pitta constitution. Adjustments are made according to climatic conditions and digestive capacity.

Ayurvedic Perspective on Ushapan

Influence on Agni

Agni, the digestive and metabolic fire, is regarded as the foundation of health in Ayurveda. Disturbance of Agni leads to the formation of Ama (metabolic toxins), which is considered the root cause of many diseases.

Morning water intake is believed to stimulate digestive activity, improve gastrointestinal motility, and prepare the digestive system for food intake. By supporting Agni, Ushapan helps prevent the accumulation of Ama and promotes efficient metabolism.

Effect on Doshas

Ushapan influences all three Doshas:

- **Vata:** Promotes proper bowel movement and prevents constipation.
- **Pitta:** Provides cooling and hydration, reducing excessive heat.
- **Kapha:** Facilitates mobilization of accumulated mucus and sluggishness.

Thus, the practice contributes to maintaining Dosha equilibrium.

Role in Srotoshodhana

Ayurveda describes channels known as Srotas through which nutrients, wastes, and biological substances

circulate. Obstruction of these channels leads to disease.

Water consumed during Ushapan supports cleansing and unobstructed functioning of these channels. This process is referred to as Srotoshodhana (purification of channels).

Therapeutic Benefits of Ushapan

Digestive Health

One of the most frequently cited benefits of Ushapan is improvement in digestive function. Early morning water intake stimulates peristalsis and facilitates bowel evacuation. Individuals suffering from constipation often experience symptomatic relief through regular practice.

Adequate hydration improves stool consistency and promotes efficient gastrointestinal transit, thereby supporting digestive health. Traditional Ayurvedic texts also associate Ushapan with the prevention of hemorrhoids and other anorectal disorders.

Detoxification and Elimination

Ayurveda emphasizes the elimination of metabolic waste products as an essential component of health maintenance. Ushapan promotes urinary and fecal excretion, thereby facilitating removal of accumulated waste materials.

Although the concept of Ama differs from modern biomedical definitions of toxins, improved hydration supports renal filtration and gastrointestinal clearance, which may contribute to overall physiological homeostasis.

Metabolic Regulation

Proper hydration plays a critical role in metabolic activities. Morning water intake may enhance circulation, improve nutrient transport, and support enzymatic reactions. Some studies suggest that water consumption may temporarily increase metabolic rate and contribute to weight management.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, Ushapan promotes balanced Agni and supports efficient tissue nourishment (*Dhatu Poshana*).

Skin Health

Classical Ayurvedic texts describe benefits of Ushapan in maintaining healthy skin and preventing skin disorders. Improved hydration enhances skin elasticity and may support normal physiological processes involved in tissue repair and maintenance.

The Ayurvedic explanation attributes these effects to improved elimination of impurities and proper nourishment of bodily tissues.

Urinary System Support

Adequate water intake assists urinary flow and may reduce the concentration of urinary solutes. Ayurveda recognizes Ushapan as beneficial for urinary disorders and maintenance of urinary tract health. Regular hydration supports normal kidney function and urinary elimination.

Neurological and Psychological Benefits

The early morning period is considered a time of mental clarity and tranquility. Performing Ushapan during Brahma Muhurta may contribute to psychological well-being by promoting relaxation and supporting healthy daily routines.

Hydration status has been associated with cognitive performance, mood regulation, and alertness. Thus, Ushapan may indirectly contribute to mental health and productivity.

Scientific Correlation

Although direct scientific studies specifically evaluating Ushapan are limited, several physiological mechanisms support the traditional claims associated with the practice.

Hydration Status

During sleep, the body undergoes several hours without fluid intake. Morning water consumption restores hydration and compensates for overnight fluid loss through respiration and perspiration.

Gastrointestinal Motility

Water intake upon waking stimulates the gastrocolic reflex and may enhance bowel movements. This provides a plausible explanation for the beneficial effects of Ushapan in constipation and digestive sluggishness.

Renal Function

Adequate hydration supports glomerular filtration, urinary output, and maintenance of electrolyte balance. These mechanisms align with Ayurvedic descriptions of improved elimination and cleansing.

Metabolic Activation

Research suggests that water intake may transiently increase energy expenditure and metabolic activity. Improved hydration also supports cellular metabolism and physiological functions.

Circadian Biology

The concept of Brahma Muhurta corresponds with modern understanding of circadian rhythms. Early morning physiological changes involve hormonal fluctuations, increased cortisol secretion, and

activation of digestive processes. Ushapan may complement these natural biological rhythms.

Rasayana Perspective

As per Bhairavokta Anandakandah, Ushapaana acts as Rasayana, one of the unique concepts to be known and understood. A new earthen pot filled early in the morning with water from any sources like Rain water (Gangmbu), River (Nadi), Lake (Tadaka/saras), Well (kupi), Well with steps (Vapi) is kept on a platform so that it receives abundant sunlight by which it becomes devoid of all Doshas during day time and cooled by cool rays of moonlight during night. After that, add small amounts of Ela (Elettaria cardamom), Ushira(Vetiveria zizanoides Linn), Karpura(Cinnamomum camphora Linn.), Chandana(santanum alba), then with patali(Stereospermum suaveolens Roxb), Ketaki(Pandanus odoratissimus), mallika(Jasminum sambac), utpala(Nymphaea nouchali). After that sprinkle water on a palm leaf fan and blow air again and again. This is known as Hemodaka. First, one should drink the water kept in a pot . only after that should bowel and bladder evacuation be performed.⁵

As per Agni bala(digestion capacity), the person can start with a dose of 1Prasruta(96 ml /gm measurement)for 3/5/7 days and gradually increasing the dose in the unit of 1 Prasruta/ 1 Kudava till it reaches upto 16 Prasruta. If one drink water like this, there will be no disease and even if one gets disease, get cured easily and person lives happily for 100 years and all the senses work properly⁶.

Maximum duration of therapy: 6months-1year⁷.

Rasayana therapy in Ayurveda focuses on rejuvenation, longevity, immunity enhancement, and maintenance of health. Ushapan is sometimes described as a simple Rasayana because of its potential role in preserving vitality and preventing disease. Regular practice supports healthy digestion, proper elimination, and tissue nourishment, which are fundamental objectives of Rasayana therapy.

Benefits of ushapan⁸

Person who habitually drinks water early in the morning is protected from the following diseases:

Arśas (haemorrhoids/piles)

Śōtha (oedema)

Grahanī (malabsorption syndrome)

Jvara (fever)

Udara (abdominal enlargement)

Jarā (premature ageing)

Kuṣṭha (skin diseases)

Medo Vikāra (obesity and disorders of fat metabolism)

Mūtraghāta (urinary obstruction)

Rakta Pitta (bleeding disorders)

Śrotra, Gala, Śira Roga (diseases of the ears, throat, and head)

Śroṇi Śūla (pelvic pain)

Akṣi Roga (eye diseases)

Other diseases caused by Vāta, Pitta, Kapha, and injuries.

Precautions and Contraindications

Although Ushapan is generally considered safe, certain precautions should be observed:

1. Excessive water intake should be avoided.
2. Individuals with severe renal impairment or fluid-restricted conditions should seek medical advice.
3. Water temperature should be selected according to individual constitution and season.
4. Drinking water rapidly may cause discomfort in some individuals.
5. Personalized recommendations should be obtained from qualified Ayurvedic practitioners when required.

Nasajalpan and Its Benefits⁹

Man who inhales water through his nose in the early hours of the day will have perfect vision like a kite and will be free from all diseases, including skin folds and greying of hair.

After the darkness has faded away, i.e., in the early morning, three handfuls/ Prasruta (290ml)of water can be inhaled in this way to prevent pigmentation disorders, skin folds, grey hair, sinusitis, cough, and edema. It acts as a Rasāyana (rejuvenating therapy) and improves the sharpness of vision.

Contraindications of nasajalpan¹⁰

One should not inhale water in this way if he has:

1. Taken oil or ghee,
2. Sustained an injury,
3. Taken medicines for purgation or emesis,
4. Abdominal distension,
5. Hiccough,

6. Diseases caused by Kapha or Vāta.

Future Research Directions

Despite widespread traditional acceptance, high-quality clinical studies evaluating Ushapan remain limited. Future investigations may focus on:

- ❑ Effects on constipation and bowel habits.
- ❑ Influence on metabolic parameters.
- ❑ Impact on hydration biomarkers.
- ❑ Role in weight management.
- ❑ Relationship with gastrointestinal motility.
- ❑ Long-term health outcomes.

Randomized controlled trials would help establish evidence-based recommendations and facilitate integration into preventive healthcare programs.

CONCLUSION

Ushapan is a simple, inexpensive, and accessible Ayurvedic practice that exemplifies the preventive philosophy of Ayurveda. By consuming water during the early morning hours on an empty stomach, individuals may support digestive health, elimination, hydration, metabolic efficiency, and overall well-being. Classical Ayurvedic texts regard Ushapan as an important component of Dinacharya and a preventive measure against various disorders. Contemporary physiological understanding provides plausible mechanisms that support many of its traditional claims. While additional scientific research is needed, Ushapan remains a valuable lifestyle intervention with potential applications in modern preventive and integrative healthcare.

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