

A STUDY OF SWASTHASYA SWASTHYA RAKSHANAM W.S.R. TO AHORATRIK ACHAR

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ABSTRACT

Background: Ayurveda gives the first place to the protection of health of a healthy person (Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam) and the second place to the cure of disease. In the present era, late waking, late sleeping, irregular meals, lack of exercise and long screen time have become a normal part of daily life. Because of this, lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, acidity and sleeplessness are increasing even in young people. Ayurveda offers a simple and natural answer in the form of Ahoratrik Achar, which means the right conduct for the whole day (Dinacharya) and the whole night (Ratricharya). These habits are planned according to the natural daily rise and fall of Vata, Pitta and Kapha.

Aim and Objectives: To study the concept of Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam and to review the role of Ahoratrik Achar in the maintenance of health and prevention of lifestyle disorders.

Materials and Methods: Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya with their commentaries were studied for references of Dinacharya and Ratricharya. Related modern literature was also searched. The collected matter was arranged, analysed and presented as a conceptual review.

Observation and Results: The classics give a complete 24-hour plan, from waking in Brahma Muhurta to sleeping at the proper time. Every step of this plan keeps a particular Dosha in balance, protects Agni, removes Mala and supports Ojas, and thus keeps both body and mind healthy.

Discussion: Ahoratrik Achar closely matches the modern concept of the body clock (circadian rhythm). Breaking this routine starts a chain of Dosha imbalance that ends in lifestyle disorders.

Conclusion: Regular practice of Dinacharya and Ratricharya is a cheap, safe and easy way to achieve Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam and should be taught to every person from childhood.

Keywords: Swasthavritta, Dinacharya, Ratricharya, Ahoratrik Achar, Swasthya Rakshana, Circadian rhythm.

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is not only a system of treatment; it is the complete science of life. It teaches what is good and what is bad for life, and how a person can live long with good health. Acharya Charaka has clearly written that the purpose of Ayurveda is to protect the health of a healthy person and to cure the disease of a sick person.¹ The order of these two aims is very important. Protection of health is placed first and cure of disease is placed second, which shows that Ayurveda believes more in prevention than in cure. A wise person should not wait for a disease to come; instead, he should follow such habits every day that a disease does not get a chance to start. The branch of Ayurveda that deals with this aim is known as Swasthavritta, which means the code of conduct of a healthy person.

In the present time, the daily routine of most people has changed a lot. Working till late at night, using mobile phones in bed, skipping breakfast, eating fast food, taking dinner very

late, sitting for long hours and living under constant mental stress have become common. These habits disturb digestion, sleep and the mind at the same time. According to the World Health Organization, noncommunicable diseases killed at least 43 million people in 2021, which is about three-fourth of all deaths not related to the pandemic; heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease and diabetes are the main types, and tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol are important risk factors that can be changed.² Such diseases are commonly called lifestyle disorders, because their root lies in the way a person lives every day. Medicines can control them to some extent, but a real and lasting solution needs correction of daily habits.

Ayurveda understood this truth thousands of years ago. Acharya Sushruta has written a separate chapter named Anagatabadha Pratishedha, which means prevention of diseases that have not yet come, and has described the daily regimen in it.³ The Sanskrit word Ahoratra is made of Aha

(day) and Ratri (night), and Achar means conduct or routine. Thus Ahoratrik Achar means the proper routine to be followed during the full 24 hours, and it includes Dinacharya (day regimen) and Ratricharya (night regimen). As this routine is repeated every day, even small correct habits give a big benefit over the years. The present article is an attempt to study the concept of Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam with special reference to Ahoratrik Achar and to understand its value in present-day life.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: To study the concept of Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam with special reference to Ahoratrik Achar.

Objectives:

1. To collect and review the references of Dinacharya and Ratricharya from classical Ayurvedic texts.
2. To understand how Ahoratrik Achar keeps Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, Mala and Manas in balance.
3. To explain the Samprapti of lifestyle disorders caused by neglect of Ahoratrik Achar.
4. To compare this concept with the modern science of the body clock (circadian rhythm).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a conceptual (literary) review study. The main materials were the classical texts of Ayurveda, namely Charaka Samhita with the Ayurveda Dipika commentary of Chakrapanidatta, Sushruta Samhita with the Nibandha Sangraha commentary of Dalhanacharya and Ashtanga Hridaya with the Sarvangasundara and Ayurveda Rasayana commentaries. Standard textbooks of Swasthavritta were also consulted. Modern literature related to lifestyle disorders and circadian rhythm was searched on PubMed, Google Scholar and the official website of the World Health Organization, using keywords such as Dinacharya, Ratricharya, daily routine, sleep and circadian rhythm. All the collected matter was arranged under suitable headings, studied critically and presented in the form of a conceptual review, tables, a flow chart and point-wise findings.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY – AYURVEDIC REVIEW

1. Concept of Swastha (Healthy Person)

Before protecting health, one must first understand who is a healthy person. Acharya Sushruta has given a complete definition of a healthy person.⁴ According to him, a person is called Swastha when his three Dosha are in balance, his digestive fire (Agni) is normal, his seven Dhatu (body tissues) are in their proper state, the formation and removal of waste products (Mala) is normal, and his soul, sense organs and mind are pleasant and happy. This shows that Ayurveda does not see health only as the absence of disease. Health means balance at the level of body, senses, mind and soul. Ahoratrik Achar works on all these levels together, and that is why it is the most practical way to keep a person Swastha.

2. Meaning of Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam

The phrase has three words. Swasthasya means 'of the healthy person', Swasthya means 'health' or 'the state of being well', and Rakshanam means 'protection' or 'maintenance'. So the whole phrase means 'protection of the health of a healthy

person'. For this purpose, Ayurveda describes many measures, such as Dinacharya, Ratricharya, Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), Sadvritta (good conduct), non-suppression of natural urges, proper food and sleep, and Rasayana (rejuvenation). Among all these, Ahoratrik Achar is the base, because it is practised every single day, while the others are followed only in a particular season or situation. If the daily routine is right, the other measures also give better results.

3. Concept of Kala and Ahoratra

Ayurveda considers time (Kala) as a very important factor for health. Just as nature has a daily cycle of sunrise, noon, sunset and midnight, the human body also has its own daily cycle. Acharya Vagbhata explains that Vata, Pitta and Kapha are dominant in the end, middle and beginning, respectively, of life span, day, night and digestion of food.⁵ In simple words, Kapha is dominant in the first part of the day and of the night, Pitta in the middle part, and Vata in the last part. The whole daily routine of Ayurveda is planned on this natural cycle. For example, waking up is advised in the Vata period, the main meal in the Pitta period and sleep in the Kapha period of the night (Table 1).

Table 1: Dominance of Dosha during Ahoratra (day and night)

Part	Day (approx.)	Night (approx.)	Dominant Dosha
First part (<i>Adi</i>)	6 am – 10 am	6 pm – 10 pm	<i>Kapha</i>
Middle part (<i>Madhya</i>)	10 am – 2 pm	10 pm – 2 am	<i>Pitta</i>
Last part (<i>Anta</i>)	2 pm – 6 pm	2 am – 6 am	<i>Vata</i>

4. Dinacharya (Daily Regimen)

Dinacharya is the set of activities to be done every day, from waking up in the early morning till the evening. The important steps are described below in the order in which they are followed.

4.1 Brahma Muhurta Jagarana (Waking up early)

Acharya Vagbhata starts the chapter on Dinacharya by advising that a healthy person should get up in Brahma Muhurta to protect his life span.⁶ Brahma Muhurta is the time of about one and a half hours before sunrise. At this time Vata is naturally dominant, so the body feels light, the mind is fresh and calm, and the natural urge to pass stool and urine comes easily. The air is pure and the surroundings are quiet, which makes this time the best for study, prayer and meditation. After waking, one should think about the state of his own body, for example whether the food taken last night has been properly digested or not, and then attend to the natural calls.

4.2 Shaucha, Dantadhavana and Jihva Nirlekhana

Acharya Charaka advises that one should practise daily those things which keep health in its normal state and which do not allow new diseases to arise.⁷ The day starts with Shaucha, that is, passing stool and urine naturally without any force. Then

Dantadhavana (cleaning of teeth) is done with a fresh twig of plants having bitter, astringent or pungent taste, such as Nimba, Khadira, Karanja, Arka and Arjuna. The tip of the twig is chewed to make a soft brush. It removes bad smell and dirt from the mouth, strengthens the gums and improves the taste. After this, the tongue is cleaned with a smooth, curved scraper made of metal (Jihva Nirlekhana). This removes the coating (Mala) on the tongue, bad breath and loss of taste.

4.3 Anjana, Nasya, Gandusha and Dhoomapana

Anjana means applying medicated collyrium in the eyes. The eye is made mainly of Tejas (fire element) and is easily harmed by Kapha; hence Sauviranjana is advised daily and the stronger Rasanjana once a week to clean the eyes and keep the vision clear. Nasya means putting drops of medicated oil, such as Anu Taila, into the nose. The nose is called the gateway of the head, so regular Nasya keeps the head, hair, sense organs, neck and shoulders strong and delays greying and falling of hair. Gandusha is holding medicated oil or liquid in the mouth for some time; it strengthens the jaws, voice and teeth and prevents dryness of lips. Dhoomapana is inhaling the smoke of medicinal herbs (not tobacco) to remove excess Kapha from the head and throat. These small procedures take very little time, but they keep the upper part of the body, where all the sense organs are present, clean and healthy.

4.4 Abhyanga (Oil massage)

Abhyanga means massage of the whole body with a suitable oil. Acharya Vagbhata advises it daily and explains its many benefits.⁸ It delays ageing, removes tiredness and controls Vata. It also improves eyesight, gives nourishment, increases life span, brings good sleep and makes the skin soft and firm. Oil should be applied especially on the head, ears and soles of the feet. Sesame oil (Tila Taila) is best in general, but the oil may be chosen according to the season and Prakriti. Abhyanga should be avoided in Kapha disorders, just after cleansing therapies like Vamana, and during indigestion (Ajirna).

4.5 Vyayama (Physical exercise)

Vyayama means physical activity that produces some tiredness in the body. According to Acharya Vagbhata, regular exercise brings lightness of the body, capacity to work, good digestive fire, reduction of extra fat and a well-shaped, firm body.⁹ Exercise should be done only up to half of one's strength (Ardha Shakti). The signs of this limit are sweating on the forehead, nose, armpits and joints, and dryness of the mouth. Strong persons who take unctuous food may exercise more in winter and spring, while others should do less. Too much exercise causes thirst, wasting, breathlessness, cough, fever and vomiting. Today, brisk walking, Yoga Asana, Surya Namaskara and Pranayama are simple and safe forms of Vyayama for all age groups.

4.6 Udvartana and Snana (Powder massage and Bath)

Udvartana is rubbing the body with herbal powder in the direction opposite to the hair growth. It reduces Kapha and extra fat (Meda), makes the limbs firm and improves the complexion of the skin. After this, Snana (bath) is taken. Bath increases appetite, gives energy and strength, improves life span, and removes itching, dirt, tiredness, sweat, drowsiness, thirst and burning sensation. Warm water may be poured on the body, but hot water on the head is harmful for the eyes and hair, so the head should be washed with water of normal

temperature. After the bath, clean clothes should be worn. Being neat and fresh also brings self-confidence and a happy mind.

4.7 Ahara (Food) in the daily routine

Food is the main support of life. The very first line of the chapter on daily regimen in Charaka Samhita says that one should eat in the proper quantity, and that the proper quantity depends on the strength of the digestive fire (Agni).¹⁰ Food should be taken only when the previous meal is digested, that is, when there is clear belching, lightness of the body, proper passage of urine and stool, and true hunger. The main meal is best taken around mid-day, when Pitta and Agni are strong. The stomach should be filled half with solid food, one-fourth with liquid, and one-fourth should be left empty for the free movement of Vata. Food should be warm, fresh and slightly unctuous, and it should be eaten with a calm mind, at a fixed time and in a clean place. Eating again and again without hunger (Adhyashana) and eating at irregular times (Vishamashana) are major causes of weak digestion.

4.8 Vega Adharana (Not suppressing natural urges)

Vega means the natural urges of the body. Acharya Charaka has clearly said that a wise person should not suppress the urges of urine, stool, semen, flatus, vomiting, sneezing, belching, yawning, hunger, thirst, tears, sleep and deep breathing after exertion.¹¹ In busy modern life, people often hold urine or stool during office or school hours, skip meals, avoid sleep for work, and hold back yawning or tears. Such suppression disturbs the normal movement of Vata and produces many diseases related to that urge. On the other hand, mental urges like greed, anger, jealousy, fear and grief should be controlled. Thus, the right handling of urges is an important daily habit for both physical and mental health.

4.9 Sadvritta and Achara Rasayana (Good conduct)

Sadvritta means good conduct in personal, social and moral life. It includes speaking the truth, not harming others, respecting teachers and elders, keeping the body and surroundings clean, controlling the senses, helping the needy and doing one's work with honesty. Acharya Charaka also describes Achara Rasayana, which says that a person who is truthful, free from anger, peaceful, kind and devoted to good deeds gets the benefits of Rasayana even without taking any medicine. In the daily routine, Sadvritta keeps the mind (Manas) pure and happy, which is an essential part of the Ayurvedic definition of health. Today, when stress, anxiety and depression are very common, Sadvritta is as important as diet and exercise.

5. Ratricharya (Night Regimen)

Ratricharya is the regimen to be followed from the evening till sleep. As the night is the time of rest and repair of the body, this part of the routine is equally important for the protection of health.

5.1 Sandhya Kala Charya (Conduct at sunset)

Sandhya is the time of sunset, when the day changes into night. The classics advise that at this time one should avoid taking food, sleeping, sexual intercourse and study. Instead, this time should be used for prayer, lighting a lamp, a short walk and spending peaceful time with the family. This calm change-over

prepares the mind for the night and slowly reduces physical and mental activity.

5.2 Ratri Bhojana (Dinner)

Dinner should be light, warm and easy to digest, and it is generally suggested that it be taken early, about two to three hours before going to bed, because the digestive fire is less active at night and the body is preparing for rest. Heavy, oily, cold and very sweet foods at night increase Kapha and cause indigestion, heaviness and disturbed sleep. Acharya Charaka specially says that curd should not be eaten at night; he also advises that curd, in general, should be taken along with ghee and sugar, green gram soup, honey or Amalaki, and never in heated form.¹² A short, slow walk after dinner helps digestion. Taking dinner late at night and going to bed immediately after eating are among the most common wrong habits of today.

5.3 Nidra (Sleep)

Nidra (sleep) is one of the main supports of life. Acharya Charaka says that happiness and sorrow, nourishment and thinness, strength and weakness, sexual power and its loss, knowledge and ignorance, and even life and death depend on sleep.¹³ He also explains that keeping awake at night (Ratri Jagarana) causes dryness (Rukshata) in the body and increases Vata, while sleeping in the daytime (Divaswapna) causes unctuousness and increases Kapha; however, day sleep is allowed in summer and for children, old persons, weak persons and those tired from work. Sleep should be taken early, in the Kapha period of the night, when the body naturally feels heavy and drowsy. Staying awake till late brings a person into the Pitta period, causing hunger, acidity and late-night eating. Washing the feet, Padabhyanga (foot massage with oil), avoiding mobile screens before bed, a calm mind and a fixed bedtime help to get sound and natural sleep.

5.4 Brahmacharya (Control of senses)

Brahmacharya means control over the senses, especially over sexual desire. For a married person, sexual life should be limited to the night, with one's own partner, in a healthy state of body and mind, and according to the season. It should be avoided when one is hungry, thirsty, ill, just after a heavy meal, and during menstruation. Excess sexual activity reduces Dhatu and Ojas and leads to weakness. For students, Brahmacharya also means a disciplined life with focus on study, control over distracting habits and respect for teachers.

SAMPRAPTI (PATHOGENESIS) DUE TO NEGLECT OF AHORATRIK ACHAR – FLOW CHART

When Ahoratrik Achar is not followed for a long time, disease develops step by step, as shown below.



Samprapti Vighatana (breaking the chain): Regular practice of Ahoratrik Achar removes the cause (Nidana Parivarjana) at the very first step, keeps Agni strong and prevents the formation of Ama; hence the chain of disease does not start.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. The first aim of Ayurveda is prevention, and Ahoratrik Achar is the most practical daily tool to achieve Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam.
2. The Ayurvedic definition of Swastha covers Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, Mala, senses, mind and soul; the daily routine takes care of all of them together.
3. Day and night are divided into Kapha, Pitta and Vata periods, and routine activities are placed to match them: waking in the Vata period, main meal in the Pitta period and sleep in the Kapha period.
4. Morning cleansing procedures (Dantadhavana, Jihva Nirlekhana, Anjana, Nasya, Gandusha, Dhoomapana) keep the sense organs and the head region free from Kapha and Mala.
5. Abhyanga, Vyayama, Udvartana and Snana give strength, firmness and good Agni, and keep Vata and Kapha under control.
6. Proper quantity and timing of food (Matrashahi, eating after digestion of the previous meal) protect Agni, which is the root of health.
7. Non-suppression of natural urges and good conduct (Sadvriddha) prevent Vata disorders as well as mental disorders.
8. Ratricharya – a light and early dinner, no curd at night and sound sleep at the proper time – gives rest, repair of Dhatu and good Ojas.
9. Neglect of the routine starts a clear Samprapti that ends in lifestyle disorders, while regular practice breaks this chain at the first step.

10. All the procedures are low-cost, safe and possible at home, so they can be adopted by people of every age and income group.

DISCUSSION

Ahoratrik Achar is based on a simple idea: the human body works best when it follows the rhythm of nature. The division of day and night into periods of Kapha, Pitta and Vata shows that the ancient Acharyas had carefully observed the daily changes in the body. Modern science now explains a similar idea called the circadian rhythm. Research shows that the body has molecular clocks with a cycle of about one day, which are kept in step with the solar day by a master pacemaker in the brain that responds to light; these clocks control sleep and waking as well as nervous, metabolic, hormonal, heart and immune functions.¹⁴ Thus the Ayurvedic advice of waking early, taking the main meal at mid-day and sleeping early at night can be understood as keeping the body clock in tune with the day-night cycle. In this way, an ancient principle and a modern discovery point towards the same truth.

When this natural rhythm is broken, health suffers. Night-shift work, bright screens late at night, irregular meals and jet lag disturb the body clock. A review of research has shown that such circadian disruption can bring on or worsen mood problems like depression in people who are prone to them, and the authors have suggested simple, low-cost behaviour and lifestyle changes to correct the rhythm.¹⁵ This matches the Ayurvedic view that Ratri Jagarana increases Vata and dryness, that Divaswapna increases Kapha, and that eating at wrong times weakens Agni. The Samprapti given in the flow chart explains how these small daily mistakes, when repeated, disturb all three Dosha, weaken Agni, produce Ama and finally lead to lifestyle disorders. Therefore, correction of the daily routine should be the first step in both the prevention and the management of such diseases.

Acharya Charaka has described Ahara (food), Swapna (sleep) and Brahmacharya (controlled conduct) as the three sub-pillars (Trayopastambha) of life.¹⁶ Ahoratrik Achar arranges all three in a daily timetable: the right quantity and time of food, the right time and length of sleep, and self-control in conduct. Along with this, the cleansing procedures, Abhyanga, Vyayama and Sadvritta take care of the sense organs, the body and the mind. The biggest strength of this routine is that it is cheap, safe and can be done at home without any special equipment. However, it should be adjusted according to Prakriti, age, season, place and occupation, and procedures like Nasya, Anjana and Dhoomapana should be learnt under proper guidance. Well-planned clinical studies on the effect of complete Dinacharya and Ratricharya on lifestyle disorders are needed to present this ancient wisdom in the language of modern evidence.

CONCLUSION

The first aim of Ayurveda, Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam, can be achieved in the simplest way through Ahoratrik Achar. Dinacharya and Ratricharya together form a complete 24-hour plan based on the natural rise and fall of Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Every step of this plan, from waking in Brahma Muhurta to sleeping at the proper time, helps to keep Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, Mala and Manas in balance. Neglect of this routine is a major cause of present-day lifestyle disorders, while its regular practice breaks the chain of disease at the very first step. The

concept also agrees well with the modern science of circadian rhythm. Therefore, Ahoratrik Achar should be taught in schools and colleges and adopted by every person as a daily habit for a healthy, happy and long life.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Nil

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