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Ayurvedic Approach to Lifestyle Disorders: A Preventive and Holistic Model of Healthcare

Taksande T.¹, Patil A.², Patil P.³, Patil S.⁴

1. PG scholar Department of Kayachikitsa, Lokanete Rajarambapu Patil Ayurvedic Medical Collage, Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Center, Urun, Islampur.
2. Professor and H.O.D. of Kayachikitsa, Lokanete Rajarambapu Patil Ayurvedic Medical Collage, Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Center, Urun, Islampur.
3. Associate Professor Department of Kayachikitsa, Lokanete Rajarambapu Patil Ayurvedic Medical Collage, Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Center, Urun, Islampur.
4. Associate Professor Department of Kayachikitsa, Lokanete Rajarambapu Patil Ayurvedic Medical Collage, Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Center, Urun, Islampur.

ABSTRACT: Lifestyle disorders (LSDs), such as diabetes, hypertension, etc., are a primary cause of death globally, posing a significant challenge to modern healthcare ^{[1][2]}. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a preventive and holistic model for these conditions. This paper presents the Ayurvedic framework for managing LSDs, highlighting its root-cause-focused principles as a solution to this contemporary health crisis. This study comprehensively reviews classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary research. Core concepts such as Prakriti (constitution), Dinacharya (daily regimen), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), and Trayopastambha (three pillars of life) were analyzed and cross-referenced with modern science. The review finds that Ayurveda attributes LSDs primarily to an imbalance of Doshas and compromised Agni (digestive fire), caused by Prajnaparadha (intellectual error)^[8]. Personalized regimens, including Dinacharya and Ritucharya, and adherence to the three pillars of life - Ahar (diet), Nidra (sleep), and Brahmacharya (self-control) - are the foundational strategy to correct these imbalances. Ayurveda provides a comprehensive roadmap for a disease-free life by shifting the focus from treatment to prevention and personalized care. It presents a sustainable, cost-effective, and holistic healthcare model. Integrating this ancient wisdom into modern public health is an essential strategy for building a healthier society.

KEYWORDS: Prakriti, Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Trayopastambha, Prajnaparadha, Agni, Ama, Dosha, Panchakarma and Rasayana.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Dr. Tejaswini S. Taksande

PG scholar Department of Kayachikitsa, Lokanete Rajarambapu Patil Ayurvedic Medical Collage, Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Center, Urun, Islampur.

Email: dr.tejaswini4@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION:

The 21st century is witnessing a silent pandemic of lifestyle disorders (LSDs), also known as non-communicable diseases (NCDs)^[5]. These conditions, including Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases, once considered ailments of the affluent West, are now rampant globally, imposing an enormous burden on healthcare systems. For instance, a study conducted by the India Health Level Description based on the India National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16) indicates that hypertension has risen from 3.7% in 1990 to 8.8% in 2016^[3]. Furthermore, data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Economic Forum estimate that India will face an accumulated loss of \$236.6 billion by 2030 due to unhealthy lifestyles and poor dietary choices.^[4] These diseases are primarily a consequence of prolonged exposure to unhealthy lifestyle choices, including poor dietary habits, physical inactivity, chronic stress, and disturbed sleep patterns. Lifestyle disorders can be defined as conditions that are largely preventable and treatable through lifestyle modifications, but if left unaddressed, can lead to serious health complications and increased mortality. These disorders are intrinsically linked to modern living conditions, which often involve sedentary routines, increased consumption of processed foods, and irregular sleep patterns.^[6] Modern medicine has made significant strides in managing the symptoms of these disorders, primarily through pharmacotherapy. However, this approach often requires lifelong medication, which can have side effects and does not always address the underlying cause of the disease. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian "science of life," offers a profound and time-tested framework for understanding, preventing, and managing these very conditions. In Ayurveda, the

concept of health is described holistically. The definition of a "Swastha Purusha" (healthy individual) is given in Sushruta Samhita. A healthy person in Ayurveda is not just free from disease, but one whose: Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are in physiological balance, metabolism (Agni) and digestion are strong, excretory functions (Mala Kriya) are normal, and whose senses, mind, and soul (Atma, Indriya, Manas) are peaceful and content.^{[7][9]} This holistic perspective views health not merely as the absence of disease, but as a dynamic state of balance between body, mind, and consciousness. Ayurveda places immense importance on prevention (Svasthasya Svasthya Rakshanam) and provides detailed guidelines on diet (Ahar), lifestyle (Vihar), and daily (Dinacharya) and seasonal (Ritucharya) routines to maintain health and prevent disease. This paper aims to explore the Ayurvedic approach to lifestyle disorders, juxtaposing its core concepts of etiology (Nidan), pathophysiology (Samprapti), and management (Chikitsa) with modern scientific understanding to present a holistic and integrated model of healthcare.

Aims and Objectives

Aim: To comprehensively explore and present the Ayurvedic approach to lifestyle disorders as a preventive and holistic model of healthcare.

Objectives:

- To review classical Ayurvedic texts and contemporary research to understand the etiology (Nidan) and pathophysiology (Samprapti) of lifestyle disorders from an Ayurvedic perspective.
- To analyze core Ayurvedic concepts such as Prakriti, Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Trayopastambha, Dosha, and Agni in relation to the development and management of lifestyle disorders.

- To cross-reference Ayurvedic principles of causation (e.g., Prajnaparadha, Aharaj Nidan, Viharaj Nidan, Manasika Nidan) with modern scientific understanding of lifestyle disorder risk factors.
- To describe the multi-pronged Ayurvedic management (Chikitsa) strategies for lifestyle disorders, including Nidana Parivarjana, Ahara, Vihara, Shamana Chikitsa, Shodhana Chikitsa (Panchakarma), and Rasayana Therapy.

Methodology

This paper is based on a comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic literature and relevant contemporary research. The foundational Ayurvedic Samhita were studied to extract the core principles related to lifestyle disorders.

The key concepts analyzed include:^{[7][8][9]}

- Prakriti (individual constitution)
- Dosha theory (Vata, Pitta, Kapha)
- Agni (digestive/metabolic fire)
- Ama (metabolic toxins)
- Dinacharya (daily regimen)
- Ritucharya (seasonal regimen)
- The Trayopastambha (three pillars of life: diet, sleep, and self-control).

These classical concepts were then cross-referenced with contemporary scientific research papers and review articles from databases like PubMed and Google Scholar to validate their relevance and draw parallels with modern pathophysiology and treatment strategies for lifestyle disorders.

Nidan (Etiology)

Causative Factors of Lifestyle Disorders: An Ayurvedic and Modern Perspective

Ayurvedic Perspective (Nidan):

Ayurveda identifies the root cause of all diseases as the triad of Asatmya Indriyarthasamyoga (unwholesome contact of senses with their objects), Prajnaparadha (intellectual error or failure of the intellect),

and Parinama (effects of time/season).^[10] For lifestyle disorders, Prajnaparadha is the foremost cause - knowingly engaging in unhealthy habits despite being aware of their harmful consequences. This intellectual blasphemy involves going against what one knows is good, such as knowingly eating the wrong food or ignoring health advice.

This leads to specific causative factors:

• **Aharaj Nidan (Dietary Causes):**

This includes excessive consumption (Ati Sevana) of foods that are heavy (Guru), sweet (Madhura), fatty/oily (Snigdha), and processed. It also encompasses unwholesome diets (Asatmya Ahara) are Abhishyandi (channel-blocking) or Rooksha (dry), and the consumption of incompatible foods (Viruddha Ahara). Irregular eating habits (Vishamashana), including skipping meals or irregular timing and quantity, disrupt Agni. Eating again before digestion (Adhyashana) also leads to Agnimandya (impaired digestive fire) and subsequently, Ama formation.

• **Viharaj Nidan (Lifestyle Causes):**

A sedentary lifestyle (Avyayama), characterized by a lack of physical activity, desk jobs, and excessive screen time, it causes Kapha and Meda vitiation. Divaswapna and Ratri Jagrana are also crucial, with late-night wakefulness disturbing Vata and Pitta balance, leading to insomnia, stress, and metabolic imbalances. Suppression of natural urges (Vega Dharana) leads to the accumulation of Doshas and disease production.

• **Manasika Nidan (Psychological Causes):**

Chronic mental stress (Chinta – worry, Krodha – anger, Shoka – grief), lack of relaxation, and emotional suppression disturb the neuro-hormonal balance, directly impacting the Doshas and overall physiology. These mental factors can cause – Manovaha

srotas dushti, leading to conditions like hypertension, depression, and insomnia.

Modern Perspective:

Modern science largely corroborates the Ayurvedic view, albeit with different terminology. The primary etiological factors identified are:

- **Unhealthy Diet:**

Diets high in saturated fats, trans fats, simple sugars, and sodium, combined with low intake of fiber, fruits, and vegetables, are major contributors to obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. High intake of processed foods, sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, along with low fiber and micronutrient intake, are significant. Skipping meals or irregular eating patterns also contribute.^[6]

- **Physical Inactivity:**

A sedentary lifestyle reduces energy expenditure, promotes weight gain, impairs glucose metabolism, and weakens the cardiovascular system. This includes lack of exercise, desk jobs, and excessive screen time.^[6]

- **Chronic Stress & Mental Strain:**

Prolonged psychological stress leads to elevated levels of hormones like cortisol, which can cause insulin resistance, increased abdominal fat, and hypertension. Lack of relaxation, emotional suppression, anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances are key contributors.^[6]

- **Substance Abuse:**

Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and drug abuse are significant risk factors.^[6]

- **Lack of Sleep / Disturbed Sleep:**

Insomnia, irregular sleep schedules, night shifts, and late-night screen use impair glucose metabolism and overall health.^[6]

- **Urbanization & Environmental Factors:**

Pollution, noise, overcrowding, and lack of green/open spaces are recognized environmental factors.^[6]

Samprapti (Ayurvedic Perspective)

The disease pathway begins with Nidan Sevana (exposure to causative factors). This leads to:

- **Agnimandya (Impaired Digestive Fire):**

Unhealthy diet and lifestyle weaken the digestive and metabolic fire (Jatharagni and Dhatu Agni). This impaired metabolism is a crucial initial step in the pathogenesis of lifestyle disorders.

- **Ama Utpatti (Formation of Metabolic Toxins):**

Impaired Agni leads to improper digestion and the formation of a sticky, toxic substance called Ama. Ama is considered the root of most diseases.

- **Vitiation of Tridosha, primarily Kapha and Meda:**

The causative factors aggravate the Doshas. A sedentary lifestyle and high-calorie diet primarily vitiate Kapha dosha and obstruct Vata dosha. Mental factors such as Chinta (worry), Bhaya (fear), and Krodha (anger) cause Vata vitiation.

- **Srotorodha (Blockage of Channels):**

The sticky Ama, along with vitiated Doshas, travels through the body and blocks the micro-channels (Srotas), particularly those responsible for nourishing fat tissue (Medovaha Srotas) and other tissues. This srotorodha is a critical step in disease progression.

- **Dhatu Poshana Vikriti (Improper Tissue Nutrition):**

Due to the blockage, subsequent tissues are not nourished properly. This leads to an excessive accumulation of fat tissue (Meda Dhatu) and depletion of other vital tissues, manifesting as diseases like obesity (Sthaulya) and diabetes (Madhumeha). Improper lifestyle

ultimately leads to dosha-dushya sammurchana, the interaction between vitiated Doshas and susceptible tissues (dushyas), producing the disease.

Ayurvedic Management in LSDs

The Ayurvedic management is holistic and multi-pronged, aiming to restore balance by addressing the root cause. It encompasses Ahara (diet), Vihara (lifestyle), and Aushadha (medicinal therapies).

• Nidana Parivarjana (Elimination of Causative Factors):

The first and most crucial step is the elimination of the causative factors—correcting diet and lifestyle. This involves avoiding a sedentary lifestyle, junk food, irregular sleep, and managing stress.

• Ahara (Dietary Recommendations):

A personalized diet plan is created based on the individual's constitution (Prakriti) to support digestion and restore balance. Emphasis is on whole, unprocessed foods. Recommended dietary changes include consuming Laghu (light) and Pachan - enhancing (digestion-promoting) foods. It is crucial to avoid Guru (heavy), Snigdha (oily/unctuous), and Abhishyandi (channel-blocking) foods.

• Vihara (Lifestyle Practices):

Regular practice of Yoga and Pranayama (breathing exercises) is prescribed to improve metabolism, reduce stress, and enhance physical and mental well-being. This includes adhering to Dinacharya (daily regimen) and Ritucharya (seasonal regimen). Regular Vyayama (exercise), adequate sleep, and stress management are key components.

• Shamana Chikitsa (Palliative Therapy/Herbal Treatment):

This involves the use of specific herbs and formulations to pacify the Doshas, kindle Agni, and aid in the digestion of Ama.

- Madhumeha (Diabetes): Key herbs include Nishamalaki (Turmeric + Amla), Chandraprabha Vati.
- Sthaulya (Obesity): Herbs like Triphala, Guggulu, and Musta are beneficial.
- Hypertension: Sarpagandha, Arjuna, and Jatamansi are commonly used.

• Shodhana Chikitsa (Purification/Detoxification Therapies):

This involves cleansing the body of accumulated Ama and excess Doshas through detoxification procedures known as Panchakarma.

- Vamana (therapeutic emesis) is indicated for Kapha disorders (e.g., Obesity).
- Virechana (therapeutic purgation) is effective for Pitta-related conditions (e.g., Prameha).
- Basti (medicated enemas) is primarily used for Vata-based conditions (e.g., Insomnia, Hypertension).
- Nasya (nasal administration of medicines) is beneficial for mental disorders.

• Rasayana Therapy (Rejuvenation Therapy):

After the cleansing process, rejuvenation therapies are administered to nourish the tissues (Dhatu), boost immunity, and promote longevity.^[8] This includes Medhya Rasayana (brain tonics) like Brahmi and Mandukaparni, and Achar Rasayana (ethical living and positive thinking).

Table: Key Ayurvedic Therapies for Common Lifestyle Disorders

Lifestyle Disorder (Ayurvedic Modern Terminology)	Shamana Chikitsa &(Palliative/Herbal Therapies)	Shodhana Chikitsa (Purification/ Detoxification Therapies)	Key Ahara & Vihara Principles
Madhumeha (Diabetes)	Nishamalaki (Turmeric + Amla) Chandraprabha Vati	Virechana (for Pitta-related Prameha) Basti(for Vata imbalances)	Personalized diet (Laghu, Pachan – enhancing foods), Avoid Guru/ Snigdha/ Abhishyandi foods, regular Vyayama, stress management.
Sthaulya (Obesity)	Triphala Guggulu Musta	Vamana (for Kapha disorders)	Personalized diet (Laghu, Pachan – enhancing foods), avoid Guru/ Snigdha/ Abhishyandi foods, regular Vyayama, avoid Divaswapna
Hypertension	Sarpagandha Arjuna Jatamansi	Basti (for Vata-based conditions) Nasya (for mental factors)	Personalized diet, stress management (Yoga, Pranayama), adequate sleep, avoid Vega Dharana.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of Ayurvedic and modern perspectives on lifestyle disorders (LSDs) reveals a striking alignment in their etiological understanding. Ayurveda emphasizes the role of *Prajnaparadha* (intellectual errors) and faulty lifestyle habits such as improper diet, lack of exercise, disturbed sleep, and psychological strain, while modern science attributes similar disorders to poor dietary patterns, sedentary lifestyle, stress, and environmental factors. Both approaches acknowledge the interplay of diet, behavior, and environment in disease development. The Ayurvedic model of pathogenesis—*Agnimandya*, *Ama* formation, *Dosha vitiation*, and *Srotorodha*—offers a holistic explanatory framework that parallels

modern concepts of impaired metabolism, toxin accumulation, and vascular obstruction. Importantly, Ayurvedic management emphasizes *Nidana Parivarjana* (removal of causative factors), along with a personalized approach involving diet, lifestyle modifications, yoga, stress management, herbal remedies, and Panchakarma therapies. These interventions resonate with contemporary preventive medicine and integrative healthcare approaches, particularly in addressing metabolic syndrome, obesity, diabetes, and stress-related disorders. Thus, Ayurveda provides not only preventive and curative strategies but also a sustainable lifestyle model through *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, and *Rasayana* therapies. Modern validation of

these concepts highlights Ayurveda's continuing relevance in tackling non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are a global health challenge.

CONCLUSION

Lifestyle disorders are a product of unhealthy habits, stress, and environmental factors. Ayurveda identifies the root causes in faulty diet, lifestyle, and intellectual errors, while modern medicine recognizes similar contributors under different terminologies. Ayurvedic management—centered on dietary discipline, lifestyle correction, Panchakarma, and Rasayana—provides a holistic, preventive, and therapeutic model that aligns well with modern integrative medicine. In conclusion, Ayurveda offers timeless wisdom that complements contemporary biomedical insights, making it a valuable resource in addressing the rising epidemic of lifestyle disorders. An integrative approach combining Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific validation can pave the way for effective prevention, management, and long-term wellness.

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