

A REVIEW ARTICLE ON *RITUCHARYA* AND ITS ROLE IN PREVENTION OF
LIFESTYLE DISEASESDr. Simran Chauhan^{*1}, Dr. Manohar Ram² and Dr. Ramnihor Tapsi Jaiswal³¹Pg Scholar, Department of Samhita Evam Siddhant, Government Pg Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Varanasi (U.P).²Reader and HOD, Department of Samhita Evam Siddhant, Government Pg Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Varanasi (U.P).³Reader, Department of Samhita Evam Siddhant, Government Pg Ayurvedic College and Hospital, Varanasi (U.P).

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient science of life that focuses more on preventing lifestyle diseases rather than just treating them. For prevention, it offers various rules and routines related to *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (daily habits), *Achara* (conduct), and *Vichara* (thoughts), as described in different classical texts (*Samhitas*). One important routine in *Ayurveda* is "*Ritucharya*", which helps the body adjust smoothly to seasonal changes without disturbing its natural balance. Each *Ritu* (season) causes changes in the levels of *Doshas* in the environment. These seasonal changes can affect the body and disturb its natural equilibrium, as explained in the concept of *Prakruti-Purusha Samyata Siddhanta* (the balance between body and environment). If a person fails to follow the seasonal guidelines properly, it can lead to *Dosha* imbalance in the body, which may result in lifestyle diseases. Therefore, it is important to understand and follow *Ritucharya* according to the changes in each season.

KEYWORDS: *Ritu*, *Ritucharya*, lifestyle disorders, seasonal regimens, seasonal variations.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, mainly focuses on maintaining good health and preventing diseases by following a proper diet and lifestyle, rather than just treating illnesses. The main principle of *Ayurveda* is "*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*", which means protecting the health of a healthy person, instead of only "*Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam*", which means treating the diseases of a sick person. To maintain health, *Ayurveda* has described daily and seasonal routines in its classical texts, known as *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen).

Seasonal changes are clearly seen in our environment. We observe many changes in nature like plants blooming in spring and shedding leaves in autumn, or animals hibernating during winter. Since humans are also a part of nature, our bodies are deeply affected by these environmental changes. There are many natural rhythms inside and outside our body that are connected and work in harmony with each other. But when the body cannot adjust to the seasonal changes and related stress, it leads to *Dosha* imbalance (*Dosha Vaishamyam*), which can eventually cause disease.

Adapting to seasonal changes is important for staying healthy, which is why knowing about *Ritucharya*

(seasonal routine and diet) is essential. Many people either don't know or ignore the right types of food, clothing, and lifestyle habits that should be followed in each season. This causes an imbalance in the body's natural state (homeostasis), leading to various diseases like obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and more. When people live out of sync with their environment, it results in lifestyle diseases. These diseases usually develop slowly, without obvious symptoms at first, and are hard to treat once they appear.

In recent years, there has been a rapid rise in such diseases in India, which is now a serious concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) has predicted that India will soon have one of the highest numbers of lifestyle-related diseases. These illnesses are not just increasing in general but are now affecting younger age groups too. The risk, which used to be higher in people over 40, is now seen in those aged 30 or even younger. India, already called the "diabetes capital of the world," is now at risk of becoming the leading country in other lifestyle diseases too. A study by AIIMS and Max Hospital found that high blood pressure, obesity, and heart disease are rising fast, especially among the young urban population.

Doctors believe that lack of physical activity, combined with eating fatty foods and drinking alcohol, are the main causes of diseases like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. *Ayurveda* places great importance on *Ritucharya*, and it is described in the very first chapters of most *Ayurvedic* texts (*Samhitas*). The main aim of *Ayurveda* is to prevent disease and maintain health. As said in *Charaka Samhita*: “*Tasya Shitadiya Ahaarbalam Varnascha Vardhate*” and “*Tasyartusatmayam Vadam Chestaharvyapasrayam*” - which means that a person who follows the right diet and lifestyle according to the seasons will have good strength and a healthy complexion. The goal of this teaching is to help people live in balance with nature.

This article discusses *Ritucharya* as explained in *Ayurvedic* classics, with a focus on how following seasonal routines may help prevent or manage lifestyle disorders.

Classification of season

In *Ayurveda*, the year is divided into two parts called *Ayana* (solstices), based on the movement of the sun:

- *Uttarayana* – when the sun moves north (northern solstice)
- *Dakshinayana* – when the sun moves south (southern solstice)

Each *Ayana* has three seasons (*Ritus*). The word *Ritu* means “to go” or “to move,” showing how nature changes in a regular and specific pattern, which we experience as seasons.

In one year, there are six seasons

- *Uttarayana* (northern solstice)
 1. *Shishira* (winter)
 2. *Vasanta* (spring)
 3. *Grishma* (summer)
- *Dakshinayana* (southern solstice).
 4. *Varsha* (monsoon)
 5. *Sharad* (autumn)
 6. *Hemanta* (late autumn)

These seasonal changes are mainly observed in the Indian subcontinent.

Uttarayana and its effect

Uttarayana is the time when the sun moves towards the northern hemisphere. During this period, the sun becomes stronger and shines directly overhead, which increases heat and reduces the cooling effect of the earth. This affects the human body by weakening strength (*Bala*) and increasing dryness. It also increases the bitter (*Tikta*), astringent (*Kashaya*), and pungent (*Katu*) tastes in the environment, which further dries out the body. This time is also known as *Adana Kala*, meaning the period when energy or strength is taken away from the body.

According to modern science, this is similar to the earth's movement around the sun, where on June 21st,

the sun's rays fall directly at a 30-degree angle on the North Pole, known as the summer solstice. In India, during the sun's northward movement from the Tropic of Capricorn to the Tropic of Cancer, seasonal changes occur - moving from *Shishira* (winter) to *Vasanta* (spring) and then to *Grishma* (summer). This period lasts from mid-January to mid-July, during which the weather becomes hotter and drier, affecting both human health and the environment.

Dakshinayana and its effect

Dakshinayana is the time when the sun moves from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. During this period, the wind becomes cooler, and the moon becomes more powerful than the sun, creating a cooling effect on the Indian subcontinent. The atmosphere becomes more moist and unctuous (oily), and the sour (*Amla*), salty (*Lavana*), and sweet (*Madhura*) tastes become dominant. This helps in restoring the body's strength. This time is known as *Visarga Kala*, meaning the period when energy or strength is given back to the body.

According to modern science, this period is related to the earth's movement around the sun. On December 21st, the sun's rays fall directly at a 30-degree angle on the South Pole, known as the winter solstice. During the sun's southward journey from the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn, India experiences seasonal changes - from *Varsha* (monsoon) to *Sharad* (autumn) and then to *Hemanta* (late autumn). This phase lasts from mid-July to mid-January, ending around 14th January, when the Hindu festival Makar Sankranti is celebrated.

State of strength

At the start of *Visarga Kala* and the end of *Adana Kala* that is, during the monsoon (*Varsha*) and summer (*Grishma*) the body feels weak. During autumn (*Sharad*) and spring (*Vasanta*), the body's strength is moderate. At the end of *Visarga Kala* and the start of *Adana Kala* that is, during late autumn (*Hemanta*) and winter (*Shishira*) the body has its maximum strength.

Regimen of different seasons

Shishira (winter)

Mid-January to mid-March is considered *Shishira Ritu* (winter season) in *Ayurveda*.

During this time, the weather is cold. The main taste (*Rasa*) during this season is bitter (*Tikta*), and the dominant element (*Mahabhuta*) is *Akasha* (space/ether). In this season, a person's strength becomes low, *Kapha dosha* increases, and the digestive fire (*Agni*) remains strong.

Diet regimen

During *Shishira Ritu* (winter), sour fruits like amla and foods with a sour taste are recommended. You should include cereals and pulses, foods made from wheat and gram flour, new rice, corn, and similar items in your diet. Also include ginger, garlic, *Haritaki* (*Terminalia*

chebula), *Pippali* (long pepper), sugarcane products, and milk and milk products. You should avoid foods with a pungent (*Katu*), bitter (*Tikta*), or astringent (*Kashaya*) taste.

Light (*Laghu*) and cold (*Shita*) foods should also be avoided.

Lifestyle

A person should avoid activities that increase *Vata*, such as excessive walking, staying up late at night, or exposure to cold wind, as these can negatively affect health.

Instead, one should bathe with warm water, do regular body massage, get some sunlight, and wear warm clothes to stay healthy during this season.

Spring (*Vasanta*)

This is a mid-season when flowers start blooming and trees grow fresh new leaves. The weather becomes calm and slightly cold. The main taste (*Rasa*) during this time is astringent (*Kashaya*), and the dominant elements (*Mahabhutas*) are Earth (*Prithvi*) and Air (*Vayu*).

A person's strength is moderate, *Kapha dosha* increases, and the digestive fire (*Agni*) stays at a medium level.

Diet

One should follow an easily digestible diet during this season. It is good to include honey in the daily diet. Non-vegetarians can eat rabbit meat (*Shasha*), as it is light and easy to digest. Foods that are cold (*Sheeta*), oily or heavy (*Snigdha*), sour (*Amla*), and sweet (*Madhura*) should be avoided.

Lifestyle

During *Vasanta Ritu* (spring season), people should bathe with warm water and can also do regular exercise. *Udvardhana* (massage) using herbal powders like *Chandana* (sandalwood), *Kesara* (saffron), *Agaru*, and others is recommended. Practices like *Kavala* (gargling), *Dhooma* (medicated herbal smoke), *Anjana* (herbal eye application) are also advised.

Cleansing therapies such as *Vamana* (therapeutic vomiting) and *Nasya* (nasal cleansing) should be done during this season for better health.

Grishma (summer)

Summer (*Grishma Ritu*) is considered to be from mid-May to July. During this time, the weather is very hot, and dry winds are common. The main taste (*Rasa*) of this season is pungent (*Katu*), and the dominant elements (*Mahabhutas*) are Fire (*Agni*) and Air (*Vayu*).

A person's strength becomes low, and *Vata dosha* starts to increase, while *Kapha dosha* gets balanced. The digestive fire (*Agni*) remains weak or mild during this season.

Diet regimen

During summer, one should eat light and easy-to-digest food. The diet should include qualities like sweet

(*Madhura*), oily or moist (*Snigdha*), cool (*Sheeta*), and liquid (*Drava*).

Foods like rice, lentils, etc., are good choices. It is important to drink plenty of fluids, such as cool water, buttermilk, fruit juices, meat soups, mango juice, and curd churned with a little pepper. At bedtime, drinking milk with sugar candy is beneficial. Foods that are salty (*Lavana*), pungent (*Katu*), sour (*Amla*), or hot (*Ushna*) in nature should be avoided.

Lifestyle

During summer, one should stay in cool places and use pleasant fragrances or natural aromas on the body. Wearing flowers and taking afternoon naps can also be helpful for staying refreshed. Exercise, heavy physical work, and too much sexual activity should be avoided.

Drinking alcohol is also not recommended during this season.

Varsha (Monsoon Season)

The months from July to September are considered *Varsha Ritu* (rainy season).

During this season, the main taste (*Rasa*) is sour (*Amla*), and the dominant elements (*Mahabhutas*) are Earth (*Prithvi*) and Fire (*Agni*). A person's strength becomes weak, *Vata dosha* gets disturbed, *Pitta dosha* starts to accumulate, and the digestive fire (*Agni*) also becomes weak or imbalanced.

Diet regimen

During *Varsha Ritu* (rainy season), one should eat sour fruits like *Amla*, and include foods with a salty (*Lavana*) taste and unctuous (oily or moist) qualities (*Sneha*). Among cereals, old barley, rice, and wheat are recommended. Meat soup, *Yusha* (lentil or vegetable soup), and similar light, nourishing foods should be part of the diet. It is also advised to drink medicated or boiled water to stay healthy.

Lifestyle

During *Varsha Ritu* (rainy season), it is good to do body massage after bathing.

Medicated *Basti* (enema) is also recommended to help remove excess *doshas* from the body.

Activities like getting wet in the rain, sleeping during the day, doing heavy exercise, and sexual activity should be avoided during this season.

Sharad (autumn)

The months from September to November are considered *Sharad Ritu* (autumn season).

During this time, the sun shines brightly, and the sky is clear at night.

The main taste (*Rasa*) is salty (*Lavana*), and the dominant elements (*Mahabhutas*) are Water (*Apa*) and Fire (*Agni*). A person's strength remains moderate, *Vata dosha* gets balanced, *Pitta dosha* becomes disturbed, and the digestive fire (*Agni*) becomes stronger.

Diet regimen

During *Sharad Ritu* (autumn season), it is advised to eat cooling foods that have sweet (*Madhura*) and bitter (*Tikta*) tastes and are light to digest (*Laghu*). Foods that help balance *Pitta dosha* should be chosen. You can include wheat, sugar candy, honey, green gram (moong dal), *Patola* (a type of gourd – *Trichosanthes dioica*), and the meat of dry land animals (*Jangala Mamsa*) in your diet. Foods that are hot, heavy, or increase *Pitta*, such as fats, oils, curd, and meat of aquatic animals, should be avoided during this season.

Lifestyle

During *Sharad Ritu* (autumn season), a person should eat only when hungry and avoid overeating. It is recommended to wear flower garlands and apply sandalwood (*Chandana*) paste on the body to stay cool and refreshed. It is also believed that exposing the body to moonlight during the first 3 hours of the night is good for health. Medical treatments like *Virechana* (purging) and *Rakta Mokshana* (bloodletting) are advised during this season. Activities such as sleeping during the day, overeating, and too much exposure to sunlight should be avoided.

Hemanta (late autumn)

Mid-November to mid-January is considered *Hemanta Ritu* (late autumn/winter season).

During this time, cold winds begin to blow, and the weather feels chilly.

The main taste (*Rasa*) in this season is sweet (*Madhura*), and the dominant elements (*Mahabhutas*) are Earth (*Prithvi*) and Water (*Apa*). A person's strength is at its highest, *Pitta dosha* gets balanced, and the digestive fire (*Agni*) becomes strong and active.

Diet regimen

During *Hemanta Ritu* (late autumn/winter), one should eat foods that are unctuous (oily), sweet, sour, and salty in taste. Among cereals and pulses, new rice, flour-based dishes, green gram (*moong*), and black gram (*masha*) are recommended. The diet should also include different types of meat, fats, milk and milk products, sugarcane products, fermented drinks (like *Shidhu*), and sesame seeds (*Tila*). Foods that increase *Vata dosha*, such as those that are light, cold, or dry, should be avoided. Cold drinks are also not recommended during this season.

Lifestyle

During *Hemanta Ritu* (late autumn/winter), one should bathe with warm water, take sunbaths (*Atapa-sevana*), and apply *Agaru* (fragrant herbal paste) on the body. Wearing warm and heavy clothes, staying in warm places, and having sexual activity with one partner are recommended for maintaining health. On the other hand, exposure to strong, cold winds and the habit of sleeping during the day should be avoided.

DISCUSSION

This is how the ancient sages created seasonal routines (*Ritucharya*) through careful observation and reasoning, with the aim of maintaining health (*Swasthya*) and preventing diseases. They studied how environmental factors like the nature of land and water, temperature, humidity, wind, rainfall, clouds, and air pressure keep changing constantly.

No two moments in the environment are ever exactly the same. For example, as the sun rises, the temperature increases, and it drops again at night.

Temperatures vary throughout the day, reaching their highest in summer and lowest in winter. In the same way, all these environmental changes show daily (diurnal) and seasonal patterns, and when these patterns last for a certain period, they are called a season. Modern studies have also shown that changes in sunlight (photoperiod) can affect the immune system and hormone production, which may lead to seasonal diseases. Another study found that wild animals from different regions can naturally adjust the release of stress hormones (glucocorticoids) depending on the season. In simple terms, the levels of these hormones — whether under stress or not change with the seasons.

In *Ayurveda*, the knowledge of *Ritucharya* (seasonal routine) serves as a practical guide to understanding *Kriya-Kala*, which explains how diseases develop over time based on the changes in the *Doshas Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. Having a clear understanding of this is very important for the early detection and prediction of diseases, so that preventive and treatment methods can be applied at the right time.

It is well known in *Ayurveda* that an imbalance in the *Doshas Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* leads to disease (*Roga*). The main goal of *Ayurvedic* medicine is to keep these *Doshas* in balance. When a person's diet or lifestyle changes, it can disturb this balance, leading to disharmony and causing lifestyle-related diseases. Seasons (*Ritu*) also play a role in worsening or triggering diseases, just like other external factors (called *Vyanjaka* or *Nimittakarana*). For example, a headache in the afternoon or evening is mostly due to *Vata* imbalance. In fact, *Vata*-related diseases usually get worse during the rainy season (*Varsha Ritu*).

Flu and dry skin are more common in winter, heat stroke happens more often in summer, pollen allergies increase in spring, airborne and waterborne diseases are more common in the rainy season, and skin problems often occur in the autumn. This clearly shows that the concept of *Ritucharya* (seasonal routine) is supported by how our body responds to different seasons. Studies have found that asthma attacks are more frequent in winter, and modern science also recognizes Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of depression related to seasonal changes. In the second half of the 20th century, people's diets changed a lot there was a rise in eating meat, dairy,

oils, fruit juice, and alcohol, and a drop in starchy staple foods like bread, potatoes, rice, and maize flour. These changes in diet and lifestyle may have contributed to the rise in cancer and other lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart problems. In 1900, the top three causes of death in the United States were pneumonia/influenza, tuberculosis, and diarrhea/enteritis, with communicable diseases causing around 60% of all deaths. Back then, heart disease and cancer were much less common, ranking only fourth and eighth. But since the 1940s, heart disease, cancer, and other degenerative (non-infectious, long-term) diseases have become the main causes of death.

By the late 1990s, these diseases were responsible for over 60% of all deaths. India, already known as the diabetes capital of the world, is now also heading towards becoming the global hub of lifestyle-related diseases. A study by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Max Hospital found that hypertension (high blood pressure), obesity, and heart disease are rising rapidly, especially among the young urban population.

Doctors believe that a proper diet, regular exercise, and medicines to control cholesterol can help prevent lifestyle diseases. However, with the knowledge of *Ritucharya* (seasonal routine), we can avoid many of these diseases by following seasonal guidelines to keep the balance of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) and stay healthy for life. Increasing public awareness, along with support from the government and wellness programs by companies, can help reduce the rising number of lifestyle diseases saving many lives and a large amount of money. With global warming and changes in seasons, it is natural to question whether *Ritucharya* is still relevant today. It is important to understand that *Ritucharya* is based on the principles of *Doshas* and *Panchamahabhutas* (five elements). Even though seasons today are not as consistent as they once were, we can still observe the state of *Doshas* and elements in the body and environment to decide the right seasonal routine. *Ayurveda* provides valuable guidance for this, and these principles deserve deeper study to understand them better.

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