

RELEVANCE OF PATHYA AND APATHYA IN LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT IN  
THE PRESENT ERA

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## ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is not merely a medical system but a comprehensive science of life. Its primary objective is to promote and preserve health while providing effective treatment for diseases. *Pathya* refers to food and lifestyle practices that align with Ayurvedic management principles. These include substances and routines that do not harm bodily channels and bring mental satisfaction. *Sadapathya dravyas* are those foods considered beneficial for most healthy disease management. Following proper dietary guidelines and lifestyle practices is essential for maintaining the balance of *Dhatus* and preventing further aggravation of *Doshas*. Diet prescribed according to specific diseases by an Ayurvedic physician significantly contributes to successful treatment and is also recommended as a preventive and therapeutic measure. The concepts of *Pathya* and *Apathya Ahara-Vihara* (wholesome and unwholesome diet and lifestyle) remain highly relevant today, as they provide a holistic approach to health, disease prevention, immunity enhancement, and personalized care in accordance with Ayurvedic principles.

**KEYWORDS:** Patya, Apatya, Ahara, Vihara.

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is not merely a medical science but a holistic science of life. Its primary aim is to promote and preserve health while also providing effective treatment for diseases. In Ayurveda, *Pathya* refers to food substances and lifestyle regimens that form an integral part of management. Those practices and substances that do not harm the bodily channels and bring mental satisfaction are considered *Pathya*, while *Sadapathyadravyas* are foods beneficial for most healthy individuals. A wholesome diet (*Pathya*) plays an equally important role in the management of diseases as medicines do. It is essential to follow proper dietary rules and lifestyle regimens to maintain the balance of *Dhatus* and prevent further aggravation of *Doshas*.<sup>[1]</sup>

The physician-prescribed diet, tailored to the specific disease, contributes significantly to successful treatment and also serves as a prophylactic and interventional measure. The concepts of *Pathya* and *Apathya*—in terms of both diet (*ahara*) and lifestyle (*vihara*)—remain highly relevant in the modern era, offering a holistic approach to health, disease prevention, immunity enhancement, and personalized care in accordance with Ayurvedic principles. The primary purpose of proper intake is to reduce the risk of various diseases. A medicine or regimen should also cheer the mind, because it is said that any drug or diet taken unwillingly will not be effective, while the same, when accepted willingly,

proves more beneficial and helps in maintaining normal health.

## Nirukti (Etymology) of Pathya

The term *Pathya* is derived from the word *Path*, which literally means “channel” or “way.” *Pathya* and *Apathya* include both substances and regimens, though in general they are mostly applied in the context of diet.

## Synonyms

- *Pathya*: Satmya, Swasthahitakara, Upashaya, Swasthaparipālaka, Hita-Āhāra, Swasthāurjaskara, Sharmakara, Dhātu-avirodhi, Sukhapharināmkara, Dhātu-sāmyakara.
- *Apathya*: Asatmya, Swasthāhitakara, Anupashaya, Ahitakara, Asukhapharināmkara, Asharmakara, Dhātu-asāmyakara.

## Traya Upastambha (Three Sub-pillars)

Acharya Charaka has described *Traya Upastambha*—the three sub-pillars of life that support healthy living. These are:

1. *Āhāra* (Diet)
2. *Nidrā* (Sleep)
3. *Brahmacharya* (regulated sexual activity)

When applied skillfully in daily life, these three pillars maintain health, enhance strength, complexion, and

nutrition, and ensure proper growth and development of the individual.

### Importance of Pathya in Ayurveda

The suitable use of the *Traya Upastambha* (three sub-pillars of life) ensures a healthy body and long life. Among them, *Āhāra* (diet) is considered the foremost component. It emphasizes the consumption of ideal food to attain and sustain good health.

Acharya Suśruta highlighted that *Āhāra* provides nutrition, strength, vitality, complexion, enthusiasm, memory, and *Ojas*<sup>[2]</sup> (vital essence) (Su. Chi. 24/68). He further explained that food is the root cause of life, strength, complexion, and Ojas, and it plays a role in the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the body. Conversely, irregularity and disproportionality in diet lead to diseases<sup>[3]</sup> (Su. Su. 46/3).

According to Ayurveda, diseases arise due to *Kha-vaigunya* (defects in bodily channels) or *Srotodushti* (vitiation of channels), especially noticeable in the fourth stage of *Kriyakāla*. Acharya Charaka mentioned that food similar in properties to the aggravated *Dosha* but opposite to the qualities of *Dhatu* causes vitiation of that particular *Srotas*, resulting in disease. Hence, food and regimens beneficial for *Srotas* should always be followed to prevent and cure diseases. Any food or regimen that supports the healthy functioning of channels is termed *Pathya*.

### Classical Importance of Pathya

- **Acharya Charaka:** Considered *Pathya* as a synonym for *Chikitsā*<sup>[4]</sup> (treatment) (Ca. Chi. 1/3).
- **Acharya Suśruta:** Dedicated an entire chapter “Hita-Ahiteeya Adhyaya” to wholesome and unwholesome diet.
- **Acharya Kāśyapa:** Declared that health depends on food; wholesome food itself is the best medicine<sup>[5]</sup> (Ka. Khi. 5/9).
- **Acharya Harita:** Emphasized that disease cannot be cured by medicine alone if *Pathya* is ignored; medicine without wholesome diet is ineffective<sup>[6]</sup> (Ha. Saṃhitā, pg. 173).
- **Acharya Bhela:** Explained that wholesome food makes a person happy, strong, and supports the nourishment of *Dhatu*s. On the other hand, unwholesome food aggravates *Doshas* and worsens disease<sup>[7]</sup> (Bhela Saṃhitā, pg. 12).

### Most wholesome dietetic articles

Varga (Categories)	Pathya(wholesome)	Apathya(unwholesome)
Shuka dhanya	Lohit shali (red rice)	Yavaka (a variety of barley)
Shami dhanya	Mudga (green gram)	Masha (black gram)
Udaka	Antariksha udaka (rain water)	Varsha nadeyabudaka (river water of rainy season)
Lavana	Saindhav (rock salt)	Ushar (saline salt)
Shaak	Jeevanti shaak ( <i>Leptadenia reticulata</i> )	Sarshap shak (mustard)
Mriga maans	Ain (meat of antelope)	Gau-mans (meat of cow)

- **Acharya Yogaratnākara:** Stated that *Nidāna* (etiology), *Aushadha* (medicines), and *Pathya* (wholesome food/regimen) are the three essential components of treatment, comparable to the way rainfall sustains seedlings<sup>[8]</sup> (Yo. pg. 251).
- **Vaidya Lolimbarāja:** Remarked that if a person follows *Pathya* diligently, medicine becomes unnecessary. If diseased, he recovers easily with *Pathya*. But medicine without *Pathya* yields no benefit.
- **Acharya Charaka:** Gave equal importance to *Pathya Āhāra* (wholesome diet) and *Pathya Vihāra* (wholesome lifestyle). He observed that if a person indulges in *Chintā* (anxiety), *Śoka* (grief), *Bhaya* (fear), *Krodha* (anger), *Dukhaśayya* (uncomfortable sleep), or *Jāgaraṇa* (insomnia), even wholesome food fails to digest properly (Ca. Vi. 2/9). Hence, diet and lifestyle together form the basis of health.<sup>[9]</sup>

### General Pathya-Apathya for a Healthy Individual Sadā-Pathya Āhāra (Wholesome foods suitable for daily use)

- *Śāṣṭika* (a variety of rice)
- *Śāli* (rice variety)
- *Mudga* (green gram, *Phaseolus radiatus* Linn.)
- *Saindhava* (rock salt)
- *Āmalaka* (*Emblica officinalis*)
- *Yava* (barley, *Orza sativa*)
- *Antarikṣa Jala* (rain water)
- *Kṣhīra* (milk)
- *Jāṅgala Māṃsa* (meat of animals living in arid places)
- *Madhu* (honey)

### Sadā-Pathya Vihāra (Wholesome regimens)

- *Snāna* (bathing)
- *Vyāyāma* (exercise)
- *Nidrā* (sleep)
- *Pratimarsha Nasya* (nasal therapy)
- *Dantadhavana* (oral/dental cleaning)

### Sadā-Apathya (Unwholesome foods)

- *Vallura* (dried meat)
- Dry vegetables
- Lotus rhizome and stalk
- Meat of diseased animals

Pakshi	Laav (quail, biter)	Kaankapot (young dove)
Bileshaya	Godha (iguana)	Bhek (frog meat)
Matasya	Rohit (rohu fish)	Chilchim (ground fish)
Sarpi	Gavya sarpi (cows ghee)	Aavik (ghee of sheep's milk)
Ksheer	Gau kshir (cow milk)	Avikshir (milk of sheep)
Sthavar sneh	Til tail (sesame oil)	Kusumbh isneh (Canthamus tinctorious Linn)
Anup mrig vasa	Varah vasa (fat of pig)	Mahisha vasa (fat of bull)
Matsya vasa	Chuluki vasa	Kumbhir vasa (water fowl)
Jalchar vihang vasa	Paak hans vasa (white swan fat)	Kaak mudga vasa (crocodile)
Vishkar shakuni	Kukkut vasa (fat of chicken meat)	Chatak vasa (pied cuckoo or sparrow)
Shakha meda	Ajmeda (fat of goats meat)	Hastimeda (fat of elephant's meat)
Kand	Shringver (ginger)	Aalu (potato)
Phal	Mridvika (raisin)	Nikuch (barhar or monkey jack)
Ikshu vikaar	Sharkara (sugar candy)	Faanit (treacle)

### Most Wholesome Vihāra (Lifestyle Practices)

The following regimens are considered highly beneficial for maintaining health:

- *Brahmacharya* (regulated conduct, celibacy in context of health)
- *Nivāta Śayana* (sleeping in a calm, wind-free place)
- *Uṣṇodaka Snāna* (bathing with warm water)
- *Niśā Swapna* (adequate night sleep)
- *Īyāyāma* (regular exercise)
- *Vega Avadhāraṇa and Anudīraṇa* (proper control and timely elimination of natural urges)
- *Mātrāvata Āsana* (eating in proper quantity)
- *Kāla Bhojana* (eating at proper time)
- *Abhyanga* (oil massage)
- *Bhojana Jirne* (taking meals only after digestion of the previous one)
- Observance of *Sadvṛtta* (ethical conduct) and *Swasthya Vṛtta* (daily and seasonal health regimen).

### Disease-Specific Pathya

In diseased conditions, *Pathya* is prescribed according to:

- The nature of the disease,
- The general condition of the patient,
- The *Doṣha* involved,
- The *Prakriti* (constitution) of the person, and
- The *Bala* (strength/immunity) of the individual.

### General Parameters for Deciding Pathya and Apathya

- One-year-old *Śāli* rice and *Śukadhānya* are considered wholesome, as they are light, easily digestible, and unctuous.
- Whole grains in general are more easily digested than freshly harvested ones.
- Cereals and grains with shorter harvesting periods are *Laghu* (light and easy to digest), while those with longer harvesting times tend to be heavier and more difficult to digest.

### Unwholesome Foods (Apathya)

- **Meat:** Flesh of animals that have died naturally, are emaciated, dried after death, excessively fatty, too old or too young, killed by poison, not from their natural habitat, or bitten by snakes is considered unwholesome.
- **Vegetables:** Those infested with insects, exposed to sunlight for long durations, dried, old, or unseasonal are unfit for consumption.
- **Fruits:** Unripe, insect- or snake-infested, overexposed to sunlight, not from natural habitats, unseasonal, or putrefied fruits are regarded as unwholesome.

A person should always consume wholesome food in proper quantity and at the right time, while maintaining control over mind and senses. Intake of unwholesome or improper diet undoubtedly leads to various serious diseases<sup>[10]</sup> (Ca. Chi. 6/11).

### Concept of Pathya and Apathya

The idea of wholesome (*Pathya*) and unwholesome (*Apathya*) diet is not fixed but varies according to:

- *Mātrā* (quantity),
- *Kāla* (time/season),
- *Kriyā* (individual's activity/work capacity),
- *Bhūmi* (habitat or geographical conditions),
- *Deha* (body constitution), and
- *Doṣha* (state of doshic balance)<sup>[11]</sup> (Ca. Su. 25/45).

Therefore, diet should be planned according to the individual's condition, and one must adhere to it for maintaining health. As Acharya Charaka emphasized, a person should follow diet and lifestyle practices opposite to the aggravated *Doṣha* for effective health management.

### Prakriti and Pathya-Apathya

Diet (*Ahāra*) and lifestyle (*Vihāra*) should not be the same as a person's *Prakriti*, but rather opposite to it, so that aggravated *Doṣhas* can be pacified and homeostasis maintained in the body. If an individual has *Sama Prakriti* or *Samadhātu Prakriti*, then he should take a

diet that includes all types of *Rasa* and *Guṇa* so that all *Doṣhas* remain balanced<sup>[12]</sup> (Ca. Su. 7/41).

A person is considered healthy when his *Doṣhas* (humors), *Agni* (digestive fire), *Dhātus* (tissues), *Malas* (waste products), and *Kriyās* (physiological functions) are in equilibrium, and when his *Ātma* (soul), *Indriyas* (senses), and *Mana* (mind) are in a state of happiness<sup>[13]</sup> (Su. 15/10).

Thus, the entire concept of *Pathya-Apathya Ahāra-Vihāra* aims to establish balance in *Doṣha-Agni-Dhātu-Mala-Kriyā*, thereby maintaining homeostasis and ensuring a healthy life through proper lifestyle practices.

## DISCUSSION

Following *Pathya Ahāra-Vihāra* is the Ayurvedic way of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This concept is designed to keep a person healthy both physically and mentally, ensuring overall well-being. By adhering to a wholesome diet and lifestyle, one can enhance lifespan, complexion, enthusiasm, memory, *Ojas* (vitality), and *Agni* (digestive power)<sup>[14]</sup> (Su. Chi. 24/68).

Acharya Suśruta emphasized that observance of *Pathya* strengthens immunity (*Ojas*), prevents future diseases, and provides energy for daily activities. *Sadā-Pathya Ahāra* also maintains proper digestive fire (*Agni*), which ensures timely digestion and assimilation of food. Strong *Agni* prevents the formation of *Āma* (toxins), thus protecting the body from *Āmaja Vyādhis* (diseases due to indigestion). Acharya of *Aṣṭāṅga Hrdaya* also stated that all diseases arise due to *Mandāgni* (low digestive fire), and by following *Pathya*, *Agni* remains stable and disease-free.

### Pathya Ahāra as a Balanced Diet

The Ayurvedic concept of *Pathya Ahāra* aligns with the modern understanding of a balanced, nutritious diet.

- **Carbohydrates:** obtained from *Godhuma* (wheat), *Śālī*, and *Śaṣṭika Dhānya* (varieties of rice).
- **Essential fatty acids:** provided by *Ghṛta* (ghee) and milk.
- **Proteins:** available from meat, milk, and *Śāmidhānya* (pulses).
- **Minerals & antioxidants:** supplied by vegetables and fruits like leafy greens, *Āmalaka* (*Emblica officinalis*), and pomegranate. These also provide antioxidants, which neutralize free radicals and protect the body.
- **Dietary fiber:** obtained from fruits and vegetables, supporting healthy gut function.
- **Water (*Antarikṣa Jala*):** hydrates tissues, maintains fluid and temperature balance, aids absorption, secretion, nutrient transport, and ensures normal bowel function.

### Sadāpathya Vihāra in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, *Sadāpathya Vihāra* is described under *Swasthya Vṛtta* and *Sadvṛtta*. *Swasthya Vṛtta* focuses on

daily hygiene, maintaining sensory excellence, developing a healthy and harmonious mind, and enhancing the overall strength (*Bala*) of the body.

### Examples from Ayurveda texts

- **For hygiene:** practices like *Dantadhavana* (tooth brushing), *Jihva Nirlekhaṇa* (tongue scraping), and *Snāna* (bathing).
- **For excellence of Indriyas:** *Karna Pūrāṇa* (oil instillation in ears), *Śiro-Abhyāṅga* (head massage), *Nasya* (oil instillation in nose).
- **For physical strength:** *Vyāyāma* (regular exercise) and *Abhyāṅga* (oil massage).  
Daily exercise promotes strength, improves muscle tone, controls weight, and maintains overall health. Daily oil massage improves blood circulation, eliminates toxins, reduces stress, fatigue, and pain, and keeps the skin healthy and lustrous, thereby enhancing disease resistance.

### Preventive Aspect of Sadvṛtta

Acharya Charaka emphasized that for protection against external causes of disease, one must control the intellect (*Buddhi*), regulate the senses, preserve memory, have awareness of surroundings and environment, and follow *Sadvṛtta*<sup>[15]</sup> (Ca. Su. 7/53). He further mentioned that one who desires well-being both in this life and beyond should always follow wholesome diet and lifestyle practices<sup>[16]</sup> (Ca. Su. 7/60).

For mental peace and harmony, control over *Mānasika Vegas* (mental urges) such as desire, anger, greed, attachment, and hatred is essential. *Sadvṛtta* prescribes ethical and social conduct such as.

- *Brahmacharya* (control over sense organs),
- *Jñāna* (knowledge),
- *Dāna* (charity),
- *Maitrī* (healthy relationships with good people),
- *Karūṇā* (kindness),
- *Harṣa* (cheerful attitude),
- *Upekṣā* (ignoring unnecessary matters), and
- *Praśama* (calmness).

Such practices ensure a stress-free, peaceful, and happy life, supporting both mental and social health. Acharya Charaka also explained that one who consumes wholesome diet, follows proper regimen, practices detachment, avoids addictions, donates wealth to the needy, treats all beings equally, speaks truth, is forgiving, and serves the wise and virtuous always remains healthy<sup>[17]</sup> (Ca. Sha. 2/46).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, *Pathya* in Ayurveda refers to diet and regimen that should be incorporated into daily life to maintain health and prevent diseases. While *Pathya Ahāra* provides proper nutrition and strengthens immunity, *Pathya Vihāra* maintains hygiene, enhances physical resilience, and promotes mental peace, thereby ensuring overall wellbeing.

A healthy and happy social life promotes overall well-being and leads to a stress-free existence. According to Ayurveda, the principles of *Pathya* and *Apathya Ahara-Vihara* (diet and lifestyle) remain highly relevant in the modern era. Their significance can be understood in the following ways.

- 1. Prevention of Lifestyle Disorders:** Adoption of wholesome diet and lifestyle practices as described in *Pathya Ahara-Vihara* helps in preventing lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular ailments, and stress-induced disorders, which are increasingly prevalent today.
- 2. Strengthening Immunity:** In the present era of pollution, stress, and toxin exposure, maintaining strong immunity is vital. Nutrient-rich and antioxidant-loaded *Pathya Ahara* supports immune function and safeguards the body against infections and illnesses.
- 3. Management of Chronic Diseases:** Many individuals today suffer from chronic conditions such as hormonal imbalances, autoimmune disorders, and digestive disturbances. Personalized *Pathya Ahara-Vihara* practices, based on an individual's constitution, aid in better management of such ailments.
- 4. Mental Health and Emotional Balance:** With rising stress, anxiety, and depression in today's fast-paced life, *Pathya Ahara-Vihara* practices that promote mental equilibrium and calmness play a vital role in maintaining psychological well-being.
- 5. Sustainable Living:** Ayurveda emphasizes consuming fresh, seasonal, and locally available foods. Following these principles not only supports individual health but also encourages environmentally responsible and sustainable living.
- 6. Holistic Health Approach:** Ayurveda perceives health as a multidimensional state encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Incorporating *Pathya Ahara-Vihara* in daily life ensures overall harmony and balance in all aspects of health.
- 7. Personalized Healthcare:** Since Ayurveda recognizes individuality in constitution (*Prakriti*) and imbalances (*Vikriti*), the guidelines of *Pathya Ahara-Vihara* provide customized healthcare strategies that address personal needs, thereby enhancing total well-being.

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