

**KARSHYA IN CHILDREN W.S.R. TO PEDIATRIC UNDERNUTRITION: AN  
AYURVEDIC REVIEW****Dr. Ritika Gupta\***

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**INTRODUCTION**

Nutrition is a fundamental determinant of growth, development, immunity, and overall health during childhood.<sup>[1]</sup> Childhood represents a crucial phase characterized by rapid physical and mental development, and adequate nutrition during this period is essential for attaining optimal growth and preventing diseases.<sup>[2]</sup> Any nutritional deficiency during childhood may lead to growth retardation, impaired cognitive development, recurrent infections, and increased mortality.<sup>[3]</sup>

According to the World Health Organization, malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in energy and nutrient intake. Undernutrition specifically includes:

**Stunting Wasting Underweight  
Micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>[4]</sup>**

WHO defines wasting as low weight for height due to acute undernutrition, while stunting reflects chronic nutritional deprivation causing impaired linear growth.<sup>[5]</sup>

Recent **UNICEF-WHO-World Bank Joint Malnutrition** Estimates (2024) reported that globally around 150.2 million children under five years are stunted and 42.8 million are wasted<sup>6</sup>. Severe wasting affects approximately 12.2 million children worldwide. Undernutrition contributes to nearly 45% of deaths among children below five years of age globally.<sup>[7]</sup>

India bears a substantial burden of pediatric undernutrition. According to NFHS-5: 35.5% children under five are stunted, 19.3% are wasted, 32.1% are underweight

The incidence and prevalence of pediatric undernutrition are influenced by poverty, recurrent infections, inadequate breastfeeding, improper complementary feeding, poor sanitation, and micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>[8]</sup>

Ayurveda gives immense importance to child health under the branch of *Kaumarbhryta*. Proper nourishment through *Ahara*, balanced *Agni*, healthy *Dhatu Poshana*,

and maintenance of *Bala* are essential for normal growth and development.<sup>[9]</sup> The condition resembling pediatric undernutrition can be correlated with *Karshya*, described as excessive emaciation and tissue depletion due to inadequate nourishment.<sup>[10]</sup>

*Acharya Charaka* described *Karshya* among *Ashtaunindita Purusha* and stated that inadequate food intake, chronic diseases, excessive fasting, and psychological stress lead to *Dhatukshaya* and emaciation.<sup>[11]</sup> *Acharya Kashyapa* elaborated child nutrition, breastfeeding, *Lehana Karma*, and rejuvenative therapies for proper growth and immunity in children.<sup>[12]</sup>

Thus, understanding *Karshya* in the context of pediatric undernutrition may help develop an integrative approach for improving child health and nutrition.

**AIM**

To review *Karshya* in children with special reference to pediatric undernutrition from Ayurvedic and modern perspectives.

**OBJECTIVES**

To study the concept of *Karshya* in Ayurvedic literature.

To analyze pediatric undernutrition according to modern medicine.

To establish correlation between *Karshya* and pediatric

undernutrition. To evaluate Ayurvedic management principles for *Karshya* in children.

### Materials and Methods

The present review study was compiled from classical Ayurvedic texts, modern pediatric textbooks, WHO reports, research journals, and published scientific articles.

### Ayurvedic Sources

- Charaka Samhita
- Sushruta Samhita
- Ashtanga Hridaya
- Kashyapa Samhita

### Modern Sources

- WHO reports
- UNICEF reports
- NFHS-5 data
- Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics
- Ghai Essential Pediatrics
- PubMed indexed journals
- The collected information was critically analyzed and compiled systematically.

### Review of Literature

#### Concept of *Karshya* in Ayurveda

*Karshya* is described as a condition of excessive leanness or emaciation caused by inadequate nourishment of body tissues. It is predominantly a *Vata Pradhana* disorder resulting from *Apatarpana*.

#### Definition

*Acharya Charaka* described *Karshya* as:

“शुक्रस्निग्धरग्रीवो धमस्त्रिजालसन्ततः”<sup>[13]</sup>

This indicates emaciation of buttocks, abdomen, and neck with prominent veins. *Nidana* (Etiological Factors)

#### The causative factors include

- *Alpashana*
- *Vishamashana*
- *Ruksha Ahara*
- Excessive fasting
- Chronic diseases
- Psychological stress
- Excessive physical exertion

In children, improper breastfeeding, recurrent infections, delayed complementary feeding, and poor maternal nutrition also contribute significantly.

#### Samprapti (Pathogenesis)

Improper dietary intake and impaired *Agni* lead to defective formation of *Rasa Dhatu*. Consequently, nourishment of subsequent *Dhatu*s becomes impaired, resulting in *Dhatukshaya* and *Karshya*.<sup>[14]</sup>

#### Samprapti Ghataka

**Dosha:** *Vata* predominance

**Dushya:** *Rasa, Mamsa, Meda Dhatu*

**Agni:** *Jatharagni Mandya*

**Srotas:** *Rasavaha* and *Annavaha Srotas*

**Srotodushti:** *Sanga*

#### Lakshana (Clinical Features)

Clinical features include

- Emaciation
- Weakness
- Reduced muscle bulk
- Dryness of body
- Prominent veins
- Fatigue
- Poor immunity
- Delayed growth and development.<sup>[15]</sup>

#### Pediatric Undernutrition in Modern Medicine Definition

Pediatric undernutrition refers to deficiency of energy, protein, and micronutrients necessary for growth and maintenance of health.<sup>[16]</sup>

#### Types of Undernutrition

1. Underweight-Low weight for age.
2. Stunting-Low height for age due to chronic malnutrition.
3. Wasting-Low weight for height indicating acute malnutrition.
4. Micronutrient Deficiency-Deficiency of vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamin A<sup>17</sup>.

#### Etiology of Pediatric Undernutrition

Major causes include

- Poor dietary intake
- Poverty
- Recurrent infections
- Poor sanitation
- Inadequate breastfeeding
- Improper complementary feeding
- Malabsorption disorders
- Low maternal nutrition.<sup>[18]</sup>

#### Clinical Features

Common manifestations include

- Weight loss
- Growth retardation
- Muscle wasting
- Frequent infections
- Delayed milestones
- Irritability
- Anemia
- Poor cognitive performance.<sup>[19]</sup>

### Correlation Between Karshya and Pediatric Undernutrition Ayurvedic Concept Modern Correlation

Karshya	Undernutrition
Apatarpana	Nutritional deficiency
Agnimandya	Impaired digestion/metabolism
Dhatukshaya	Tissue depletion
Balahani	Reduced immunity
Brimhana Chikitsa	Nutritional rehabilitation

The clinical features and pathogenesis of Karshya closely resemble pediatric undernutrition.

Both conditions involve inadequate nourishment leading to poor growth and increased susceptibility to infections.

### Ayurvedic Management of Karshya

Ayurveda advocates a holistic and individualized approach in the management of *Karshya*. Since *Karshya* is mainly an *Apatarpana Janya* and *Vata Pradhana* disorder, treatment principles focus on *Brimhana*, *Agnideepana*, *Rasayana*, and enhancement of *Bala* and *Ojas*.<sup>[20]</sup>

#### 1. Nidana Parivarjana

Avoidance of causative factors is the first principle of treatment.

- Important Factors to Avoid
- Inadequate food intake
- Dry and non-nutritious foods
- Excess fasting
- Irregular meals
- Psychological stress
- Excessive physical activity.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### 2. Agnideepana and Pachana

Correction of impaired digestion is essential before administration of nourishing therapies. Commonly Used Drugs

- *Pippali*
- *Shunthi*
- *Jeeraka*
- *Musta*
- *Chitraka*.<sup>[22]</sup>

These improve: - Appetite, Digestion, Nutrient absorption, Metabolism According to *Acharya Kashyapa*, proper digestion is essential for healthy tissue nourishment and growth.

#### 3. Brimhana Chikitsa

*Brimhana* therapy forms the cornerstone of treatment.

- *Brimhana Ahara*
- Ayurveda recommends:
- *Ksheera*
- *Ghrita*
- *Navaneeta*

- *Shashtika Shali*
- *Mudga Yusha*
- *Mamsa Rasa*
- *Draksha*.<sup>[23]</sup>

These improve nourishment, strength, and body weight.

#### Brimhana Formulations

- *Ashwagandha Ghrita*
- *Bala Ghrita*
- *Vidaryadi Ghrita*
- *Chyawanprasha*
- *Shatavari Kalpa*.<sup>[24]</sup>

These possess: - *Balya*, *Brimhana*, *Rasayana*, *Medhya* properties

#### 4. Rasayana Therapy

*Rasayana* improves immunity, growth, and cognitive functions. Important *Rasayana* Drugs

- *Ashwagandha*
- *Guduchi*
- *Bala*
- *Yashtimadhu*
- *Amalaki*.<sup>[26]</sup>

#### Benefits include

- Enhanced immunity
- Better growth
- Improved strength
- Prevention of recurrent infections

#### 5. Lehana Karma

*Lehana* is a unique pediatric nutritional therapy described in *Kashyapa Samhita*.<sup>[27]</sup> It involves administration of herbal licks prepared with:

- *Ghrita*
- *Madhu*
- *Swarna*
- *Brahmi*

#### Benefits

- Improves appetite
- Enhances immunity
- Supports weight gain
- Improves intellect and development

#### 6. Swarna Prashana

*Acharya Kashyapa* described:

“फवर्णप्राशिं हेतत् मेधासिबलवधणिम्”<sup>[28]</sup>.

It enhances:

- *Medha*
- *Agni*
- *Bala*
- *Vyadhikshamatva*

## 7. External Therapies

- *Abhyanga*
- Daily massage with:
- *Bala Taila*
- *Ksheerbala Taila*
- *Ashwagandha Taila*.<sup>[29]</sup>

Benefits: - Improves circulation, enhances muscle tone, Reduces Vata, Promotes sleep

### Shashtika Shali Pinda Sweda Useful in:

- Muscle wasting
- Weakness
- Delayed growth
- It improves muscle nourishment and strength.

### Pathya-Apathya<sup>[30]</sup> Pathya

- Fresh warm food
- Milk and Ghrita
- Regular feeding
- Proper sleep
- Emotional support

### Apathya

- Junk foods
- Dry foods
- Cold foods
- Irregular meals
- Excessive fasting

### Prevention

Preventive measures include

- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Proper complementary feeding
- Maternal nutrition
- Immunization
- Deworming
- Nutrition education
- Hygiene maintenance

## DISCUSSION

*Karshya* described in Ayurveda closely resembles pediatric undernutrition in terms of etiology, clinical manifestations, and pathogenesis. Ayurveda explains the disease through *Agnimandya*, *Apatarpana*, and *Dhatukshaya*. Improper digestion and metabolism lead to inadequate nourishment of tissues causing emaciation and weakness.

Modern medicine mainly focuses on nutritional supplementation and infection control, whereas Ayurveda offers a holistic approach involving dietary correction, enhancement of digestion, tissue nourishment, immunity improvement, and psychological well-being.

*Acharya Kashyapa* emphasized infant nutrition, breastfeeding, *Lehana Karma*, and rejuvenative therapies for enhancement of growth and immunity. Ayurvedic therapies such as *Brimhana*, *Rasayana*, *Swarna Prashana*, and *Abhyanga* may help improve nutritional status and overall development in children.

Thus, integration of Ayurvedic principles with modern nutritional rehabilitation may provide better long-term outcomes in pediatric undernutrition.

## CONCLUSION

*Karshya* in children can be correlated with pediatric undernutrition based on similarities in etiology, symptomatology, and pathological changes. Ayurveda explains the disease as a consequence of *Apatarpana*, *Agnimandya*, and *Dhatukshaya*. Ayurvedic management through *Brimhana Chikitsa*, *Rasayana*, *Lehana Karma*, *Swarna Prashana*, and proper dietary regimens may play an important role in prevention and management of pediatric undernutrition. Integration of Ayurvedic and modern nutritional approaches may offer a comprehensive strategy for improving child health and development.

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