

AYURVEDIC DESCRIPTION OF AVASTHAPAKA AND PHYSIOLOGY OF SEPARATION OF SARA AND KITTA

Dr. Revati Fulchand Burse*¹, Dr. Parinita R. Kunkulol²

¹Assistant Professor, Sharirkriya Department, Dr. Rajesh Ramdasji Kambe Ayurved College & Hospital, Turkhed Murtizapur, Maharashtra, India.

²Professor, Sharirkriya Department, Dr. Rajesh Ramdasji Kambe Ayurved College & Hospital, Turkhed Murtizapur, Maharashtra, India.



***Corresponding Author: Dr. Revati Fulchand Burse**

Assistant Professor, Sharirkriya Department, Dr. Rajesh Ramdasji Kambe Ayurved College & Hospital, Turkhed Murtizapur, Maharashtra, India. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21786018>

How to cite this Article: Dr. Revati Fulchand Burse*¹, Dr. Parinita R. Kunkulol² (2026). Ayurvedic Description Of Avasthapaka And Physiology Of Separation Of Sara And Kitta. World Journal of Pharmaceutical and Medical Research, 12(8), 382-384.

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Article Received on 05/07/2026

Article Revised on 25/07/2026

Article Published on 01/08/2026

ABSTRACT

Avasthapaka is the term associated with the three different processes of digestion as per Ayurvedic modalities, whereby food consumed is gradually changed in course of time through the action of the digestive juices. When the food consumed is completely brought to a digestible state, the *Sara* are then obtained after separation from the *Kitta* part of food, and hence become suitable for absorption into the body tissues. The whole process of *Avasthapaka* is divided into three parts; *Madhura Avastha Paka*, *Amla Avastha Paka* and *Katu Avastha Paka*, which differ in body parts involved in digestion. The *Katu Avastha Paka* occurs in the large intestine. At this point, the undigested substances undergo significant transformation by means of water and electrolytes absorption, involved with the intestinal microflora fermentation like the final stage of the digestion process. The process of gradual dehydration transforms the contents of the intestine into the dense substances in which process is controlled by *Vata Dosha*, and the last step is elimination of waste matters, *Kitta*. Present article emphasizes Ayurvedic description of *Avasthapaka* and physiology of separation of *Sara* and *Kitta*.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, *Avasthapaka*, *Sara*, *Kitta*, Physiology.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient Indian medicine system Ayurveda says that digestion is carried out by the joint efforts of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*, which gradually transmute food intake into simpler absorbable substances. The considered component one is *Jatharagni* a principal fire and the basis of functioning of other *Agnis*. For that reason, it is necessary to maintain normal *Agni* for the purposes of proper digestion, metabolism, and physiological homeostasis. Several processes take place at the *Jatharagni's* sites, which are also called *Pittadhara Kala*.^[1-3] The next levels of the digestion process are also activated at the *Grahani* organ. These processes are the result of the processes of *Samana Vayu*, *Kledaka Kapha*, and *Pachaka Pitta*. *Samana Vayu* is the link between the processes of the gastro intestines and *Jatharagni* and transforms all productive and waste matters of food. *Kledaka Kapha* is responsible for moistening the food to prepare it for enzymes to act on

food, while *Pachaka Pitta* provides digestive energy, which changes the food chemically.^[4-6]

Ahara or food is an integral part of the *Trayopastambha* in Ayurveda, which has a vital role in supporting life, feeding the tissues or *Dhatus*, and keeping the normal bodily functions. Nevertheless, the benefits of food can only be utilized if it is digested properly. Digestion involves the coordination of *Agni* and digestive enzymes, which facilitate the conversion of complex food into simple absorbable substances, which in turn nourish the body and replenish *Dhatus* and provide energy for growth, maintenance, and normal functions of the body. In addition to it, digestion helps maintain the balance of *Doshas*, *Agni*, *Dhatus*, and *Malas*, thereby bringing *Bala*, *Ayu*, *Varna*, and health.

Thus, the role of digestive efficiency is determined not only by the digestive capacity of *Agni* but also by the physical features of food, specifically the *Guru* and

Laghu characteristics of food. The process of digestion is designed as *Ahara Pachana* by the influence of a few factors and providing the end products; *Sara* and *Kitta*. The principle of *Avasthapaka* in Ayurveda helps to explain the physiological processes that take place during the digestive system enabling the nutrients to be absorbed by the tissues of the body.^[5-7]

Avasthapaka

The digestive process is initiated immediately after the intake of food and continues throughout the three stages; *Madhura Avastha Paka*, *Amla Avastha Paka*, *Katu Avastha Paka*, which are together known as *Avasthapaka*, which in turn indicates the gradual change of food as they pass through different parts of the digestive tract under the influence of *Agni* and *Doshas*. The first stage, *Madhura Avastha Paka* occurs in *Amashaya* where the ingested food is combined with *Kledaka Kapha*, moistening, softening the food. The initial action of *Jatharagni* initiates the digestion of carbohydrates, creating predominantly the *Madhura rasa*. During this phase *Kapha Dosha* is formed, which leads to lubrication of the GI tract and development of feeling of fullness and satiety after the meal. In this stage, the food that has gone through some digestion undergoes the effect of *Pachaka Pitta*, which performs a similar function to the digestive enzymes, bile, and gastric acid. Massive biochemical digestion of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats takes place at this stage resulting in the predominance of the *Amla rasa*. Immense shifts happen in digestion thus nutrients become absorbed into the systemic circulation being oriented by *Pitta Dosha*.^[6-8]

The second stage is *Amla Avasthapaka* which occurs in the *Pachyamana Ashaya*. At this time, the food that has undergone partial digestion gets the treatment from *Pachaka pitta* and the process of digestion takes place. The *Amla bhava* is dominant at this stage. This phase is responsible for the conversion of food to a digestible form and absorption of nutrient ingredients.

The last phase of the process is *Katu Avasthapaka*. This final stage of digestion takes place in the *Pakvashaya* or colon where nutrients are absorbed, water and electrolytes are reabsorbed and the residue is fermented by bacteria with the help of *Vata Dosha*. The fecal matter is also undergoing *Katu bhava*. With continuous loss of water during the digestion process, faeces become dry and *Katu* predominates in this stage of digestion.^[7-9]

Sara Kitta Vibhajana

Ayurveda posits that digestion takes place in three stages called *Avasthapaka*; the last phase of this process is *Katu Avasthapaka*. This final stage of digestion takes place in the *Pakvashaya* or colon where nutrients are absorbed, water and electrolytes are reabsorbed, and the residue is fermented by bacteria with the help of *Vata Dosha*. The fecal matter is also undergoing *Katu bhava*. With continuous loss of water during the digestion process, faeces become dry and *Katu* predominates in this stage of digestion.

Sara-Kitta Vibhajana occurs after *Avasthapaka* has occurred (**Figure 1**). This is an important step in the process of digestion which helps in separation of the nutrition from the waste. *Sara* comes to be the purest form of that food after its digestion. This is where the split takes place under influence of *Pachaka Pitta* and the *Samana Vayu*. This simply means that there is a split of the two components of nutrition. The nutrition is then passed through *Rasavaha Srotas* which helps in forming the very first tissue called *Rasa Dhatu*.^[5-8]

The next substance is indigestible substance which is called *Kitta* which represents an unwanted product of a metabolic process. After being influenced by *Apana Vayu* from above the waste part goes on a way downwards and gets differentiated into *Purisha* and all other waste.

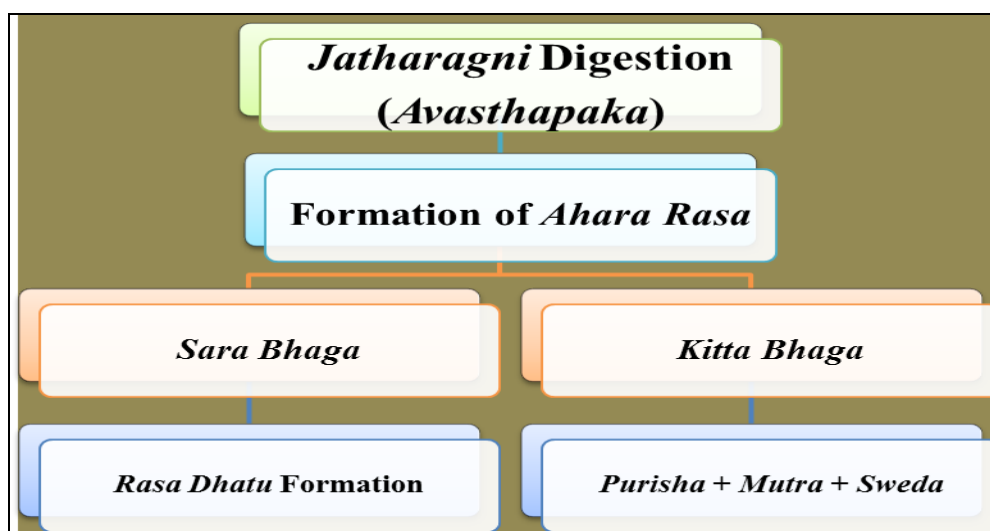


Figure 1: Physiological Representation of Sara-Kitta Vibhajana after Avasthapaka.

Absorption and Assimilation of Nutrients

Following *Sara-Kitta Vibhajana*, the process of absorption and assimilation of the nutritious essence (*Sara*) consists of two levels, gross absorption and specific absorption. The first level of absorption is gross absorption, is mostly carried out in the small intestine. Here the nutrient fluid, called *Ahara Rasa* is absorbed and transported into the body with the help of *Samana Vayu* which ensures motility of the intestines and distribution of nutrients through the body. In the meantime, the large intestine, or *Pakvashaya*, absorbs the water and electrolytes and regulates the fluid and electrolytic balance of the body.^[6-9]

The second level of absorption is characterized by tissue-specific absorption and metabolism known as *Dhatvagni Paka*. After entering the system, the *Ahara Rasa* enters the body tissues, or *Sapta Dhatus*, and the process of *Dhatvagni* operates to metabolize the nutrients into *Ahara* in accordance with the specialty of each *Dhatu*. Thus, each *Dhatu* absorbs and uses nutrients necessary for its nourishment, while producing its own metabolic products known as *Dhatu Kitta*.^[8-10]

CONCLUSION

According to Ayurveda, the concept of *Avasthapaka* explains in detail the physiological process involved in the digestion, absorption and assimilation of food. Every food goes through three processes of digestion, namely *Madhura*, *Amla* and *Katu Avasthapaka* before converting into absorbable nutrients. Each process has its efficiency depending on the factors like nature of the food consumed and the degree of efficiency of the *Jatharagni* and condition of the *Doshas*. Heavy foods that are oily and sweet cause a great degree of activity of the *Madhura Avasthapaka*. On the other hand, hot, spicy, and sour food increases process of *Amla Avasthapaka* where *Pachaka Pitta* predominate helps in biochemical digestion. Finally, *Katu Avasthapaka* is characterized by the action of *Vata Dosha* that assists in the absorption of water and elimination of waste. The physiological process that happens in these three stages depends upon the predominance of *Dosha* in various regions of the body. The process of digestion which involves the separation of the food substances after the process, then absorption of *Ahara rasa* and finally metabolism of *Ahara* into their respective *Dhatus* takes place which helps to nourish *Sapta dhatus* and promotes health.

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