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Ritucharya - Prevention of Lifestyle Related Disorders

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ABSTRACT

Ritu, the season, is classified by different features and expresses different effects on the body as well as the environment. *Ayurveda* has depicted various rules and regimens (*Charya*) regarding diet and behavior to acclimate to seasonal enforcement easily without altering body homeostasis. The prime principle of the *Ayurvedic* system of medicine is prevention, which can be achieved by the change in diet and practices in response to the change in climatic conditions. This is a very important aspect of preventive medicine, as mentioned in *Ayurvedic* texts. Lifestyle disorders are very common in the present era, basically originating from a lack of following seasonal regimens due to a lack of concentration in seasonal characteristics. A firm scientific analysis is the base, which holds true even on a date. In this review article, various regimens in diet and lifestyle as mentioned in the classics of *Ayurveda* and their importance on lifestyle disorders has been discussed.

Key words: *Ritu*, *Ritucharya*, *lifestyle disorders*, *seasonal regimens*, *seasonal variations*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the age-old science of life, has always emphasized maintain the health and prevent the diseases by following proper diet and lifestyle regimen rather than the treatment and cure of diseases. The basic principle followed in the *Ayurvedic* system of medicine is *Swasthshya Swasthya Rakshanam*, which means to maintain the health of the healthy, rather than *Aturashya Vikara Prashamana* means to cure the diseases of the diseased.^[1] For this purpose, the *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal

regimen) have been mentioned in the classics of *Ayurveda*.^[2]

The change in seasons is very visible in the environment we live in. We notice various changes in the biosphere around us, such as plants flowering in the spring and losing their leaves in the autumn, many animals hibernating as winter approaches, and so on. Because humans are part of the same ecology, their bodies are heavily influenced by their surroundings. Many exogenous and endogenous rhythms have specific phase relationships with one another, implying that they interact and synchronies with one another. If the body is unable to adapt to stressors due to changes in specific seasonal traits, it may result in *Dosha Vaishamy*, which may lead to disease.^[3]

Because adaptation to changing conditions is essential for survival, knowledge of *Ritucharya* (seasonal diet) is essential. People do not know or ignore the appropriate types of food, dressing, and other regimen to be followed in a specific season, which leads to homeostasis derangement and causes various diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and so on. People's inappropriate relationship with their

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environment causes lifestyle diseases. These lifestyle diseases manifest insidiously, develop slowly, and are difficult to treat.^[4]

Because of the rapid change in disease profile in our country, the situation is quite alarming. The World Health Organization has identified India as one of the countries that will have the majority of lifestyle diseases in the near future. Lifestyle disorders are not only becoming more common, but they are also affecting the younger generation. As a result, the population at risk shifts from 40+ to possibly 30+ or even younger. Already known as the diabetes capital of the world, India appears to be on track to earn the dubious distinction of being the capital of lifestyle related diseases as well. According to a study conducted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Max Hospital, the prevalence of hypertension, obesity, and heart disease is rising at an alarming rate, particularly among the young, urban population. A sedentary lifestyle combined with an increase in the consumption of fatty foods and alcohol, according to doctors, is to blame for cases of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and so on.

Ritucharya is mentioned prominently in the first few chapters of most *Ayurvedic Samhita*. The holistic science of *Ayurveda* first and foremost goal is disease prevention and health maintenance. "*Tasya Shitadiya Ahaarbalam Varnascha Vardhate*," it is written in the *Tasyashitya* chapter of the *Charaka Samhita*. "*Tasyartusatmayam Vaditam Chestaharvyapasrayam*," which means 'the strength and complexion of the person knowing the suitable diet and regimen for every season and practicing accordingly are enhanced.'^[5] The primary goal of this chapter is to educate people on how to live in harmony with the environment. This article discusses the *Ritucharya* mentioned in *Ayurvedic* classics, with an emphasis on the likely impact of *Ritucharya* on lifestyle disorders.

Classification of season

According to *Ayurveda*, the year is divided into two parts. *Ayana* (solstice) is *Uttarayana* (the northern solstice) or *Dakshinayana* (the southern solstice) depending on the direction of the sun's movement (the

southern solstice). Each is made up of three *Rituses* (seasons). *Ritu* is a *Sanskrit* word that means "to go." It is the way nature expresses itself in a particular and specific sequence in present forms, in short, the seasons.^[6]

Shishira (winter), *Vasanta* (spring), and *Grishma* (summer) are the seasons in *Uttarayana*, and *Varsha* (monsoon), *Sharad* (autumn), and *Hemanta* (late autumn) are the seasons in *Dakshinayana*. Because *Ayurveda* originated in India, the above seasonal changes are primarily observed in the Indian subcontinent.

Uttarayana and its effect

Uttarayana denotes the sun's ascension or movement northward. The sun and wind are particularly strong during this time of year. The sun saps people's strength and depletes the earth's cooling capacity. It increases the *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent), and *Katu* (pungent) *Rasa* (taste), causing dryness in the body and decreasing the *Bala* (strength). It is also known as *Adana Kala*. This can be compared to the gradual movement of the earth around the sun to the position where the sun's rays fall perpendicularly at the 30-degree meridian of the North Pole on June 21st every year, known as the summer solstice. The Sun moves northward from the Tropic of Capricorn to the Tropic of Cancer. During *Uttarayana*, the seasons in the Indian subcontinent change from *Shishira* (winter) to *Vasanta* (spring) and finally to *Grishma* (summer). The time period can be compared to mid-January to mid-July, when the weather becomes warmer and drier. It has a debilitating effect on the environment, of which humans are a part.

Dakshinayana and its effect

Dakshinayana denotes the sun's descent or movement in a southern direction. The wind is not very dry during this time, and the moon is more powerful than the sun. Clouds, rain, and cold winds cause the earth to cool. Unctuousness pervades the atmosphere, and *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), and *Madhura* (sweet) *Rasa* predominate, so a person's strength increases during this period. *Visarga Kala* is another name for it. According to modern science, this can be compared to

the earth's gradual movement around the sun to the position where the sun's rays fall over the 30 degree meridian. The winter solstice occurs every year on December 21st, when the South Pole is perpendicular to the equator. The sun moves southward from the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn. During *Dakshinayana*, the Indian subcontinent experiences seasonal changes from *Varsha* (monsoon) to *Sharad* (autumn) and *Hemanta* (winter) (late autumn). This period is comparable to mid-July to mid-January, when cool sets in and anabolic activity outnumbers catabolic activity in the environment.

State of strength

Weakness occurs at the beginning of *Visarga Kala* and the end of *Adana Kala*, that is, during *Varsha* and *Grishma*. Strength remains moderate in the middle of the solstices, that is, during *Sharad* and *Vasanta*; maximum strength is seen at the end of *Visarga Kala* and the beginning of *Adana Kala*, that is, during *Hemanta* and *Shishira*.^[7]

Regimen of different seasons

1. *Shishira* (winter)

General condition

Shishira Ritu is observed from approximately mid-January to mid-March (winter). The environment, as well as the cold wind, remains cold during this season. During this season, the predominant *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* are *Tikta* (bitter) and *Akasha*, respectively. The person's strength declines, *Kapha Dosha* deposition occurs, and *Agni* (catabolism) remains elevated.

Diet Regimen

Foods with a strong *Amla* (sour) flavor are preferred. Cereals and pulses, wheat and gram flour products, new rice, corn, and other products are recommended. The diet should include ginger, garlic, *Haritaki* (fruits of *Terminalia chebula*), *Pippali* (fruits of *Piper longum*), sugarcane products, and milk and milk products. Avoid foods with *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent), or predominant *Rasa*. It is recommended that *Laghu* (light) and *Shita* (cold) foods be avoided.

Lifestyles

Massage with oil/powder/paste, bathing in lukewarm water, exposure to sunlight, and wearing warm clothing are all recommended. Lifestyles that aggravate *Vata*, such as exposure to cold wind, excessive walking, and sleeping late at night, should be avoided.

2. *Vasant* (Spring)

General Condition

The approximate time is from mid-March to mid-May. This is the season of flowering and the emergence of new leaves. During this season, the predominant *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* are *Kashaya* (astringent) and *Prithvi* and *Vayu*, respectively. The person's strength remains medium, *Kapha Dosha* becomes vitiated, and *Agni* remains in the *Manda* state.

Diet Regimen

Diet should consist of easily digestible foods. Old barley, wheat, rice, and other cereals are preferred. Lentil, *Mugda*, and other pulses can be used. *Tikta* (bitter), *Katu* (pungent), and *Kashaya* (astringent) food items are to be taken. Aside from those, honey should be included in the diet. Meats that are easy to digest, such as *Shahsa* (rabbit), can be consumed. Foods that are difficult to digest should be avoided. Those that are *Sheeta* (cold), *Snigdha* (viscous), *Guru* (heavy), *Amla* (sour), and *Madhura* (sweet) are not preferred. New grains, curd, cold drinks, and other items are also prohibited.

Lifestyles

Bathing should be done in warm water, and exercise should be done during *Vasant Ritu*. *Udvardana* (massage) with powders of *Chandana* (Santalum album), *Kesara* (*Crocus sativus*), *Agaru*, and others is recommended, as well as *Kavala* (gargle), *Dhooma* (smoking), *Anjana* (collyrium), and evacuative measures such as *Vamana* and *Nasya*. During this time of year, daytime sleep is strictly prohibited.

3. *Grishma* (Summer)

General condition

The *Grishma* (summer) season lasts approximately from mid-May to mid-July. The environment is

prevalent, with extreme heat and hazardous wind. The riverbeds had dried up, and the plants appeared to be lifeless. The predominant *Rasa* is *Katu* (pungent) and *Mahabhuta* are *Agni* and *Vayu*. The person's strength decreases, and *Vata Dosha* deposition occurs, but the vitiated *Kapha Dosha* is pacified during this season. The *Agni* will continue to be mild.

Diet Regimen

Foods with *Madhura* (sweet), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Sheeta* (cold), and *Drava* (liquid) *Guna*, such as rice, lentil, and so on, should be consumed. It is necessary to drink plenty of water and other liquids, such as cold water, buttermilk, fruit juices, meat soups, mango juice, and churned curd with pepper. Milk with sugar candy is to be consumed before going to bed. *Lavana* and foods with *Katu* (pungent) and *Amla* (sour) flavors, as well as *Ushna* (warm) foods, should be avoided.

Lifestyles

Staying in cool places, applying sandalwood and other aromatic pastes to the body, wearing light dresses, and sleeping during the day are all beneficial. During the night, one can enjoy the breeze and the cooled moon rays. Excessive exercise or hard work should be avoided, as should excessive sexual indulgence and alcoholic preparations.

4. Varsha (Monsoon)

General condition

Varsha Ritu is observed from approximately mid-July to mid-September. Clouds cover the sky during this season, and rain falls without thunderstorms. Water is present in the ponds, rivers, and so on. During this season, the most common *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* are *Amla* (sour), *Prithvi*, and *Agni*. The person's strength decreases due to the vitiation of *Vata Dosha* and the deposition of *Pitta Dosha*; *Agni* also becomes vitiated.

Diet Regimen

Amla (sour), *Lavana* (salty), and *Sneha* (unctuous) foods should be consumed. Old barley, rice, wheat, and other cereals are recommended. *Yusha* (soup), etc. are to be included in the diet in addition to meat soup. It is stated that one should drink medicated or boiled

water. River water, churned preparations with more water, excess liquid, and wine should be avoided. Foods that are heavy and difficult to digest, such as meat, are forbidden.

Lifestyles

It is recommended to take a bath with boiled water and to properly rub the body with oil afterward. As an evacuative measure to expel vitiated *Dosha*, a medicated *Basti* (enema) is prescribed. Rain, day sleep, exercise, hard work, sexual indulgence, wind, staying on a river's bank, and other activities are prohibited.

5. Sharad (Autumn)

General condition

Sharad Ritu is observed from mid-September to mid-November (autumn). During this time, the sun shines brightly, the sky is clear, with occasional white clouds, and the earth is covered in wet mud. *Lavana* (salty) is the predominant *Rasa*, and *Aap* and *Agni* are the predominant *Mahabhuta*. The person's strength remains medium; vitiation of vitiated *Vata Dosha* and vitiation of *Pitta Dosha* occur, and *Agni* activity increases during this season.

Diet Regimen

Foods with *Madhura* (sweet) and *Tikta* (bitter) flavors, as well as *Laghu* (light to digest) and cold properties, are recommended. Foods with anti-vitiated *Pitta* properties are recommended. Wheat, green gram, sugar candy, honey, *Patola* (*Trichosanthes dioica*), and dry land animal flesh (*Jangala Mamsa*) are to be consumed. Foods that are hot, bitter, sweet, or astringent should be avoided. Foods such as fat, oils, aquatic animal meat, curds, and so on should also be avoided during this season.

Lifestyles

It is advised to eat only when there is a strong desire to do so. For drinking, bathing, and other activities, water should be purified by the sun's rays during the day and the moon's rays at night. It is recommended to wear flower garlands and apply *Chandana* (*Santalum album*) paste to the body. Moon rays are said to be beneficial to health during the first three hours of the night.

During this season, medical procedures such as *Virechana* (purging), *Rakta-Mokshana* (bloodletting), and so on should be performed. Excessive sleeping, eating, and exposure to sunlight, among other things, should be avoided.

6. Hemanta (Late autumn)

General condition

Hemanta (late autumn) *Ritu* is observed from mid-November to mid-January. Cold winds begin to blow, and a chill is felt. During this season, the predominant *Rasa* is *Madhura*, and the predominant *Mahabhuta* are *Prithvi* and *Aap*. A person's strength remains at its peak, and the vitiated *Pitta Dosha* is soothed. *Agni's* activity has increased.

Diet Regimen

Unctuous, sweet, sour, and salty foods should be used. New rice, flour preparations, green gram, *Marsha*, and other cereals and pulses are mentioned as being used at the same time. Foods that aggravate *Vata*, such as *Laghu* (light), cold, and dry foods, should be avoided. Cold drinks are also not recommended.

Lifestyles

Exercise, body and head massage, warm water use, *Atapa Sevana* (sunbath), *Agaru* application to the body, heavy clothing, sexual indulgence with one partner, and residing in warm places are all recommended. Exposure to strong and cold winds, as well as habits of day sleep, is all mentioned as things to avoid.^[2, 8-13]

DISCUSSION

This is how the ancient sages devised a regimen for different seasons based on analytical reasoning in order to achieve *Swasthya* (health) and prevent diseases. The examples set by them stand as a hint for deciding other *Dosha* and don'ts in the regimen - *Ritucharya* [Table]. The nature of the land, water, and various atmospheric phenomena such as temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric pressure are examples of environmental factors. All of these environmental factors are constantly changing, and no two moments in a given place are ever the same. As a

result, as the sun rises, the temperature rises and gradually drops at night. The maximum and minimum temperatures vary throughout the day, but they are highest in the summer and lowest in the winter. Similarly, all of these factors exhibit diurnal as well as seasonal variations, and these variations for a specific time period are referred to as a "season."^[14]

The effects of photoperiod on immune function and hormone synthesis, which influence the development of opportunistic disease, were discovered in a study on animals with seasonal changes.^[15] Another study found that free-living species from various regions can modulate glucocorticoid release seasonally. In other words, the magnitudes of both unstressed and stressed glucocorticoid concentrations vary with the season.^[16]

Table 1: The Seasonal Do's and Don'ts

<i>Shishira Ritu</i> (winter)	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), Wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), <i>Tila</i> (<i>Sesamum indicum</i>), etc., Milk and milk products, sugarcane (<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>) and its products jaggery, etc., fats, edible oil, flour products, green vegetables, <i>Sunthi</i> (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>), <i>Lashuna</i> (<i>Allium sativum</i>), <i>Haritaki</i> (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>), <i>Pippali</i> (<i>Piper longum</i>), etc.	Cold drinks, <i>Vata</i> aggravating foods like Bengal gram/ <i>Chana</i> (<i>Cicer arietinum</i>), etc. Too much of foods having sour, bitter, and astringent taste.
<i>Vasanta Ritu</i> (spring)	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), maize (<i>Zeamays</i>), barley (<i>Hordium vulgare</i>), green gram (<i>Vigna radiate</i>), lentil (<i>Lens culinaris</i>), red gram (<i>Cajanus cajan</i>), etc. Honey, <i>Khadir</i> (<i>Acacia catechu</i>), <i>Musta</i> (<i>Cyprus rotandus</i>), ginger (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>), <i>Haridra</i> (<i>Curcuma</i>	Cold drinks, too much of sweet foods like sweets prepared from milk. Sour foods like curd, etc. Fatty and oily foods. Heavy foods like meats (in excess), new grains, black gram (<i>Vigna mungo</i>), etc.

	<i>longa</i>), <i>Tulsi (Ocimum sanctum)</i> , <i>Neem (Azadirachta indica)</i> leaves, etc.	
Grishma Ritu (summer)	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), green gram (<i>Vigna radiate</i>), etc. Fruits such as mango (<i>Mangifera indica</i>), water melon (<i>Citrulus vulgaris</i>), fruit juices, coconut water, <i>Takra</i> (buttermilk), curd with pepper (<i>Piper nigrum</i>), meat juices, Jaggery (<i>Gur</i>), fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>), etc.	Heavy and warm foods like <i>Urad/black gram (Vigna mungo)</i> , mustard (<i>Brassica campestris</i>), etc. Excess of meat, salt, chili, etc.
Varsha Ritu (monsoon)	Old barley (<i>Hordium vulgare</i>), rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), etc. Meat soup, <i>Yusa</i> (soup), <i>Panchakola (Piper longum, Piper chaba, Plumbago zeylanicum, Zingiber officinale, Saindhav Lavana (rock salt)</i>), etc.	Excessive liquid and wine, river water, churned and fermented preparations, etc. Heavy diet, excess of salts, etc.
Sharad Ritu (autumn)	Easily digestible cereals and whole pulses, green gram (<i>Vigna radiate</i>), etc. <i>Sakkara</i> (sugar candy), flesh (<i>Jangala Mamsa</i>), vegetables like <i>Patola (Trichosanthes dioica)</i> , fenugreek (<i>Trigonella foenum</i>), etc., fruits, such as <i>Amlaki (Phyllanthus emblica)</i> , dates (<i>Phoenix sylvistris</i>), grapes (<i>Vitis vinifera</i>), etc.	Sour and fermented foods, such as Curd, etc. Fats and oils, meat of aquatic animals, etc.
Hemanta Ritu (late autumn)	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), black gram (<i>Vigna mungo</i>), etc. Milk and milk products, sugar-cane (<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>) juice and its products, fats and oils,	Cold drinks, <i>Vata</i> aggravating foods, such as Bengal Gram/Chana (<i>Cicer arietinum</i>), etc. Light foods, such as puffed rice, etc.

	fermented preparations, <i>Sunthi (Zingiber officinale)</i> , <i>Lashuna (Allium sativum)</i> , <i>Haritaki (Terminalia chebula)</i> , <i>Pippali (Piper longum)</i> , fenugreek (<i>Trigonella foenum</i>), <i>Tila (Sesamum indicum)</i> , etc.	
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In *Ayurveda*, knowledge of *Ritucharya* is a first-hand guide to the concept of *Kriya-Kala*, which describes the modes and stages of disease development in relation to the state of different *Dosha - Vatu, Pitta, and Kapha* - as time passes. A thorough understanding of it is critical for early diagnosis and prognosis in order to implement preventive and curative measures.

It is well known that imbalances in the *Dosha - Vatu, Pitta, and Kapha* - cause *Roga* (disease). The goal of *Ayurvedic* medicine is to maintain harmony. Changes in diet and lifestyle cause changes in the *Tridosha* state, which is bound to affect us, causing disharmony and causing lifestyle diseases. *Ritu*, like *Vyanjaka* or *Nimittakarana*, contributes to disease aggravation and manifestation. An evening (afternoon) headache, for example, is primarily caused by *Vata*. *Vata*-related diseases tend to worsen during the rainy season.^[17]

Flu and dry skin are more common in the winter, heat stroke in the summer, pollen allergy in the spring, a high incidence of airborne and waterborne diseases in the rainy season, and skin diseases in the autumn. Thus, the concept of *Ritucharya* is supported by physiology.^[18] According to studies, the winter season has a higher incidence of asthma attacks. Modern science also makes mention of seasonal affective disorder.^[19]

People's diets shifted dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century, with an increase in consumption of meat, dairy products, vegetable oils, fruit juice, and alcoholic beverages and a decrease in consumption of starchy staple foods like bread, potatoes, rice, and maize flour. These findings suggest that different populations' diets [or lifestyles] may play a role in the prevalence of cancer and other lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular

disease, and so on.^[20] Pneumonia/influenza, tuberculosis, and diarrhea/enteritis were the top three causes of death in the United States in 1900. Communicable Diseases were responsible for roughly 60% of all deaths. Heart disease and cancer were ranked fourth and eighth, respectively, in 1900. Since the 1940s, heart disease, cancer, and other degenerative diseases have accounted for the vast majority of deaths in the United States. Degenerative diseases accounted for more than 60% of all deaths by the late 1990s.^[21] Already known as the diabetes capital of the world, India now appears to be on track to become the capital of lifestyle-related diseases as well. According to a study conducted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Max Hospital, the incidence of hypertension, obesity, and heart disease is rising at an alarming rate, particularly among the young urban population.^[22]

Doctors, on the other hand, believe that a strict diet and regular exercise, combined with cholesterol-lowering medications, can help to prevent lifestyle diseases. However, with the knowledge of *Ritucharya*, we can certainly avoid these by practicing a regimen in accordance with the *Ritu* to maintain the *Tridosha* harmony and to stay healthy forever. Growing public awareness, with the help of the government and corporate wellness programmers, may be able to halt the rapid rise in the incidence of such diseases, saving lives and saving crores of rupees in costs. With global warming and seasonal variations, it is reasonable to question the relevance of *Ritucharya* in the current context. It should be noted that the background on which *Ritucharya* is based, that with global warming and seasonal variations, it is reasonable to question the relevance of *Ritucharya* in the current context. It is important to understand the background on which *Ritucharya* is based, namely *Dosha* and *Panchmahabhuta* theory. Although today's *Ritu* are not uniform, the level of *Dosha* and *Panchmahabhuta* can be analyzed to determine the regimen, to which this *Ayurvedic* knowledge serves as a guide. These principles undoubtedly necessitate closer examination for clarity.

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