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Back to Basics: A Review on Skincare by Ayurveda vis a vis Contemporary Science

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ABSTRACT

Skin is the largest part of integumentary system. It not only prevents diseases but also enhances the appearance. Humans have always been curious about young and glossy skin. But the prevalence of skin issues has increased since few decades. This has raised demand of over-the-counter cosmetic products. The market of cosmetics is reportedly growing in India. Though such products have aesthetic property, they may lead to adverse effects. Ideal skincare includes a range of practice done to keep skin healthy and attractive. So, it has both preventive and aesthetic value. Ayurveda literature contains a scattered but detailed description about nurturing the skin and keeping it healthy. Apt use of *Panchakarma* (bio-cleansing regimen), *Rasayana* (rejuvenation therapy), judicious incorporation of *Pathya Ahar-Vihar* (diet and lifestyle regimen) described along with local applications like *Abhyanga* (massage), *Lepa* (topical application of medicinal paste) is the soul of skincare in Ayurveda. This article focuses on collecting and studying Ayurvedic perspective of skincare in the context of contemporary science. It would help for better understanding of described modalities and effective skincare practice in today's era.

Key words: Aesthetic, Ayurveda, Cosmetic, Prophylaxis, Skin, Skincare

INTRODUCTION

In India, the market of cosmetics is reportedly growing and is projected to register a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.23% over next five years.^[1] These products are popular not only in females but also among males. Male skincare market is growing rapidly and steadily since past few decades.^[2] Possible causes behind this growth are increased prevalence of skin issues and affirmative psychological impact of healthy, glowing skin. But these products have temporary effects and require frequent use making it less

economical. Most of the cosmetics have long term side effects like allergic reactions, cancer, hormonal disturbances, etc. due to toxic contents like sulphates, parabens, phthalates, nickel, synthetic colors, etc.^[3] Thus, such products perform better on aesthetic facet of skincare but fail in preventive one. Home skincare remedies, a part of folk medicine, have gained popularity through social media. But they may have side effects due to lack of scientific base. Therefore, these remedies do not fulfill the definition of skincare. Ideally, skincare is a range of practice done to keep skin healthy and attractive. It possesses both preventive and aesthetic value.

According to Ayurveda, internal health is essential to maintain external beauty. On the contrary, contemporary science focuses more on external applications for skincare. Ayurveda literature contains a scattered but detailed description about nurturing the skin and keeping it healthy. Apt use of *Panchakarma*, *Rasayana*, judicious incorporation of *Pathya Ahar-Vihar* described along with local applications like *Abhyanga*, *Lepa*, etc. is the soul of skincare in Ayurveda. The demand of Ayurvedic

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cosmetics is increasing day by day. But very few procedures like *Lepa*, *Ubatan* (body scrub) are becoming popular. All other modalities are need to be highlighted. The contents of herbal products can also be enriched with number of *Dravya* (drugs) having different *Twachya* (skincare) properties.

There is a lot of published work on effect of Ayurveda on skin diseases. But very less data is found on preventive and aesthetic aspect of skin in Ayurveda. This article is an attempt to explain the same. Also, this is a sincere effort to understand sequel of these remedies in terms of contemporary science. This can lead to thorough understanding ensuring effective Ayurvedic skincare practice in today's era.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To collect the scattered information about the concept skincare from Ayurvedic texts. Further also to search electronic databases for contemporary evidences so that the knowledge can be practiced in present era for preventive and aesthetic purpose.

METHODOLOGY

The information was collected and structured in a narrative style with the help of four steps described by Demiris et al.^[4]

- 1. Identifying Keywords:** Various keywords used for the search are - Skin (AND) Ayurveda, Skincare (AND) Ayurveda, Skincare (AND) Panchakarma.
- 2. Search Procedure:** Manual search for various aspects of skin health and treatment modalities for skincare was done through Ayurvedic texts including Charak Samhita, Sushrut Samhita, Ashtang Hridaya, Bhaishajyaratnavali, Bhavprakash. Search was supplemented by electronic databases like Google scholar, PubMed. Articles in English language were searched with no restriction on type of article.
- 3. Review of abstracts and titles:** Appropriate literature was selected and reviewed to collect the data.
- 4. Results documentation:** After reviewing the collected data, main text was structured in various

subsections. New evidence-based points were summarized in the discussion section and scope for future research defined in the conclusion section.

REVIEW RESULTS

On reviewing of literature following observations were made:

Concept of healthy skin and its variations

Ayurveda decides skin health by *Prakriti* (biological constitution), *Saar* (characteristic helpful in deciding strength), *Prabha* (luster) and *Varna* (complexion). These parameters have following variations:

I. Biological Variations:

Prakriti:

- 1. Kapha:** People of this prakriti have pleasing, tender, soft skin and clear complexion.^[5,6]
- 2. Pitta:** Skin of Pitta Prakriti people is hot, tender, with soft brown hairs. There are many freckles/ moles/ port wine marks on their skin. They are prone to premature wrinkles.^[3]
- 3. Vata:** These people have rough, dry skin which is more prone to cracking.^[3]

Saar:

- 1. Twakasara:** These people have lustrous, smooth, unctuous skin with soft tender superficial body hairs.^[7]
- 2. Raktasara:** These people have unctuous, red, beautiful, dazzling appearance of ears, eyes, face, nose, lips, nails, forehead, soles of hands and feet.^[5]
- 3. Meda and Majjasaar:** These people have unctuous complexion.^[5]
- 4. Shukrasaar:** These people have dazzling appearance with unctuous complexion.^[5]

Prabha/ Kanti:

It is luster of the skin which is maintained by *Bhrajak* Pitta.^[8]

Varna:

Ayurveda has described four normal complexions *Krishna* (black), *Shyama* (dark), *Shyamavadaat* (intermediate in dark to fair), *Avadaat* (fair).^[9]

II. Seasonal Variations:

1. Adankaal (summer solstice):

There is gradual increase of *Ruksha Guna* (dryness) in *Shishir* (winter), *Vasant* (spring) and *Grishma* (summer) *Ritu* which results in dry skin.^[10]

2. Visargakaal (winter solstice):

There is increased *Snigdha Guna* (unctuousness) in *Varsha* (monsoon), *Sharad* (autumn) and *Hemant* (late autumn) *Ritu* which results in oily skin.^[9]

III. Age-wise Variations and Abnormalities:

1. Balyawastha (childhood): This age group has *Kapha Dosha* dominance and weak immunity. Skin diseases like diaper rash, folliculitis, molluscum contagiosum, herpes zoster, chickenpox, measles, etc. are seen in children.

2. Madhyamawastha (middle age): This is the period of *Pitta Dosha* leading to skin issues like hyperhidrosis, oily skin, acne, comedones, blackheads, warts, melasma, dark spots, etc.

3. Vriddhawastha (old age): There is *Vata Dosha* dominance in this age group. Skin problems like dry skin, itching, bruises, wrinkles, age spots and skin tags, skin cancer, etc. are prominent in old age.

Causes of skin abnormalities^[11,12]

1. Ahar (Diet):

Abnormal dietary habits like *Ati Ahar* or overeating (as shown in table 1), *Mithya Ahar* or improper diet (as shown in table 2), *Viruddha Ahar* or faulty combinations of food items (as shown in table 3) have direct effect on skin.

Table 1: Food items affecting skin health if taken in excess.

Category	Ayurvedic Nidana	Explanation
Rasa	Amla, Lavana, Katu	Chinese food, Pickle, Chat, etc.
Guna	Guru and Snigdha Ahara	Puri, Paratha, Pizza, Burger, Samosa, Kachori, etc.

Dairy product	Payasa, Dadhi, Takra	Milk-cakes, fruit salad, butter, cheese, yoghurt, etc.
Grains	Navadhanya, Nishpava, Hayanaka, Uddalaka, etc.	Newly harvested rice
Pulses	Kulattha, Masha	Recipes of black gram like idli, dosa, etc.
Anupa Mamsa	Matsya, Varaha, etc.	Meat of marshy, aquatic animals
Prasaha Mamsa	Marjara, Lopaka, Jimudaka etc.	Meat of animals who take their food by snatching like cat, fox, jackal
Sweet	Madhu, Phaṇitam, Guda	Deserts like cakes, cookies, ice creams, candies, etc.
Oil	Tila, Sarshapa, Kusumbha	Food items containing oils of sesame, mustard.
Vegetables	Mulaka, Lakucha, Kakamachi	Vegetables like daikon radish, monkey jack
Others	Pishta Anna, Tila, Kola	Foods prepared from flour (rich in carbohydrates) like dosa, vada, dhokla

Til is explained as *Varnya* (improving complexion) but it causes *Kushtha* (skin diseases) if taken in excess.

Table 2: Improper dietary habits affecting skin health.

Category	Ayurvedic Nidana	Explanation
Foods	Vidahi, Vidagdha, Upaklinna, Putianna	Hot and spicy, Rotten, putrefied, fermented food
Food pattern	Ajirna Bhojan, Asatmya Bhojan, Ati Bhojan	Eating before digestion of previous meal, food which is not compatible, overeating.
Faulty dietary sequence	Shitoshna Viparyay,	Simultaneous consumption of hot

	<i>Santarpan</i> <i>Apatarpan</i>	and cold food, satiating and emaciating food
Psychological disturbance during meal	<i>Santap</i>	Excessive anger

Table 3: Food combinations affecting skin Health

Improper quantity	<i>Matra Viruddha</i>	Ghee and honey in equal quantity
Faulty methods of food preparation	<i>Samskar Viruddha</i>	Improper way of food preparation like refrying food items (Eg. potato chips) in same oil
Incompatible quality	<i>Veerya Viruddha</i>	<i>Ushna Veerya</i> Fish with <i>Sheeta Veerya</i> milk
Faulty instruments	<i>Paka Viruddha</i>	Food prepared in utensils of low-quality meals
Faulty combinations	<i>Samyog Viruddha</i>	Unhealthy combinations like banana and milk
Choice of a person	<i>Hrit Viruddha</i>	Unpleasant food

2. **Vihara (Lifestyle):**

Following are the faulty lifestyles (table 4) affecting skin health:

Table 4: Faulty lifestyles affecting skin health:

Category	Ayurvedic <i>Nidana</i>	Explanation
Suppression of natural Urges	<i>Chhardi Anyavega</i>	Suppression of vomiting
Environmental factor	<i>Atapa Sevana</i> <i>Anila Sevana</i>	Excessive exposure to sunrays and wind
Over exertion	<i>Ati Shrama</i> <i>Ati Vyayama</i>	Overexertion
Physiological factor	<i>Ratrijagraṇam</i> <i>Divasvapnam</i>	Improper sleeping times

Verbal	<i>Vacansi Asathyani</i>	Bragging and boasting, abusive language
Manner	<i>Guru Gharshanam</i> , <i>Vipra Gharshanam</i>	Dispute or mockery of elderly people
Nature	<i>Suranam Ninda</i> , <i>Sadhu Ninda</i>	Slander about noble personality

3. **Krimi (worms):**

It is considered as one of the causes of skin disorders.^[13]

Skincare Remedies Described in Ayurveda:

1. **Nidanpariwarjan:**

Avoidance of faulty dietary habits described above and proper daily regimen is important in protecting skin from various disorders.

2. **Ahara:**

Following food items are beneficial to skin^[12]

- i. **Fruits:** *Dadima* (Pomegranate), *Amalak* (Gooseberry), *Parushak* (Falsa), *Mridwika* (Grapes), *Kharjura* (Dates) are healthy for skin due to their *Pittashamak* and *Raktashuddhikar* properties.
- ii. **Cereals:** *Shali* and *Shashtika* (a variety of rice) nourish skin due to their *Tridosha-Shamak* (pacify all the three *Dosha*) and *Snigdha* properties. *Yava* (Barley) is cures skin disorders due to its *Sheeta*, *Ruksha* property and *Madhura rasa*.
- iii. **Pulses:** *Mudga* (Green gram) and *Masura* (Lentil) are *Pittashamak* and *Raktashuddhikar* (blood purifying). *Chanak* (Bengal gram) helps in improving skin complexion due to its *Madhura Rasa*, *Sheeta Virya* and *Pittashamak* properties.
- iv. **Vegetables:** *Patola* (Snake gourd) is *Krimighna* (wormicidal) and can help in prevention as *Krimi* are one of the causes of skin diseases. *Kakamachi* (Black nightshade) possess *Rasayan* property. *Karavellak* (Bitter gourd) is *Pittashamak* and *Raktashuddhikar*.

3. **Abhyanga:**

Daily practice of *Abhyanga* can prevent skin dryness in *Adankaal*. Ayurveda has described medicated oils to improve skin complexion and enhance skin glow:

- a) *Kumkumadi Tail*^[14]
- b) *Dwiharidradi Tail*^[15]
- c) *Manjishthadi Tail*^[15]
- d) *Kanak Tail*^[15]

4. *Snehapaan:*

Consumption of *Sneha* on regular basis improves skin complexion and prevents early ageing. Proper selection of *Sneha* should be done according to *Prakriti* and *Ritu*.^[16]

4. *Udwartan:*

Smooth rubbing of skin with a paste of different *Varnya Dravya* gives fair, clear skin.^[17]

5. *Lepa:*^[18]

The process of application of various medicinal drugs' paste is called as *Lepa*. It should be ½ *Angula* thick for the purpose of increasing skin luster. Regular application of *Lepa* results in unctuous and glowing skin resembling with lotus.

Season wise *Lepa:*

Weather has direct effect on skin quality. Therefore, different combinations are explained according to season.

Hemant: *Kolmajja* (*Ziziphus jujuba*), *Vrushanmula* (*Adhatoda vasica*), *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa*), *Gour-Sarshapa* (*Brassica juncea*).

Sishir: *Simhimula*, *Krishna-Til* (*Sesamum indicum*), *Darwitwak* (*Berberis aristata*), *Nistush Yava* (*Hordeum vulgare*).

Vasant: *Darbhamula* (*Desmostachya bipinnata*), *Karpura*, *Ushira* (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), *Shirisha* (*Albizia lebbek*), *Saunf*, *Tandula* (Rice).

Grishma: *Kumuda* (*Nymphaea alba*), *Utpala* (*Nymphaea nouchali*), *Kalhar* (*Citrullus lanatus*), *Durva* (*Cynodon dactylon*), *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Chandan* (*Santalum album*).

Varsha: *Kaliyaka* (*Coscinium fenestratum*), *Til*, *Ushira*, *Jatamamsi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), *Tagar* (*Valeriana jatamansi*), *Padmak* (*Prunus cerasoides*).

Sharad: *Talis* (*Abies spectabilis*), *Gundra* (*Typha angustata*), *Pundarik* (*Nilumbo nucifera*), *Yashtimadhu*, *Tagar*, *Agru* (*Aquilaria malaccensis*).

Table 5: Combinations improving skin glow on local application.^[15]

SN	Churna	Medium
1.	<i>Raktachandan</i> , <i>Manjishtha</i> , <i>Kushtha</i> , <i>Lodhra</i> (<i>Symplocos racemosa</i>), <i>Priyangu</i> (<i>Callicarpa macrophylla</i>), <i>Vatankura</i> (<i>Ficus benghanlensis</i>), <i>Masura</i>	<i>Godugdha</i> (cowmilk)
2.	<i>Shalmalikantaka</i> (<i>Bombax ceiba</i>)	<i>Godugdha</i>
3.	<i>Masura</i> (Lentil) fried in <i>Ghrita</i>	<i>Godugdha</i>
3.	<i>Daruharidra</i> (<i>Berberis aristata</i>), <i>Nilkamal</i> , <i>Kushtha</i> , <i>Badara</i> , <i>Priyangu</i>	<i>Dadhi</i> (curd)
4.	<i>Yawachurna</i> , <i>Yashtimadhu</i> , <i>Lodhra</i>	<i>Jala</i> (water)
5.	<i>Rakshoghna</i> (<i>Brassica juncea</i>), <i>Haridra</i> (<i>Curcuma longa</i>), <i>Daruharidra</i> (<i>Berberis aristata</i>), <i>Gairik</i> (red ochre)	<i>Goghrita</i> (cow ghee), <i>Bastapaya</i> (goat milk)
6.	<i>Sharapunkha</i> , <i>Kamal</i> , <i>Kushtha</i> , <i>Raktachandan</i> , <i>Ushira</i>	<i>Dadhi</i>

6. *Shastikshali Pinda-Sweda:*

Shashtishali is boiled in *Godugdha* and various *Varnya Dravya* like *Yashtimadhu*, *Sariva*, *Manjishtha* used for *Pindasweda*. It provides *Snehan* (massage), *Swedan* (hot fomentation) and *Brihan* (nourishment) simultaneously. It cleans microchannels of the body and improves the circulation. Improves skin complexion and luster.^[19]

7. *Panchakarma:*

Shodhana with the help of various *Panchakarma* procedures helps to get rid of toxins and prevention of diseases.

a) *Virechan* (therapeutic purgation):

As vitiated *Pitta* causes *Raktadushti* which results in various skin diseases, *Virechan* should be done every year to eliminate vitiated *Pitta* from body.^[20,21]

b) *Raktamokshan* (blood-letting):

It should be done once a year in *Sharad Ritu* order to eliminate impure blood.^[22]

c) Nasya (nasal drops):

Daily practice of *Pratimarsha Nasya* results in healthy and fresh skin.^[23]

8. Use of Twachya Dravya (Drugs nourishing skin):

Following is the list of *Dravya* having different skincare properties:

a) Varnya Dravya:

Following three groups of drugs have *Varnya* property:

1. Lodhradi-Gana: *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa*), *Sabaraka Lodhra* (*Symplocos crataegoides*), *Jinghini* (*Odina wodier*), *Sarala* (*Pinus roxburghii*), *Katphala* (*Myrica nagi*), *Yukta* (*Pluchea lanceolata*), *Kadamb* (*Anthocephalus cadamba*), *Kadali* (*Musa paradisiaca*), *Ashoka* (*Saraca asoca*), *Elavaluka* (*Prunus avium*), *Paripelava* (*Cyperus scariosus*), *Mocha* (*Salmalia malbarica*).^[24]

2. Eladi-Gana: *Sukshma Ela* (*Elettaria cardamomum*), *Tagar* (*Hydnocarpus laurifolia*), *Kushtha* (*Saussurea lappa*), *Phalini* (*Callicarpa macrophylla*), *Jatamansi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), *Hreeberam* (*Plectranthus vettiverioides*), *Devee* (*Anisomeles malbarica*), *Twak* (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*), *Tamala* (*Cinnamomum tamala*), *Tagara* (*Valeriana wallichii*), *Jaati* (*Myristica fragrans*), *Rasa* (*Commiphora myrrha*), *Nakha* (*Ostrea edulis*), *Vyaghranakha* (*Capparis sepiaria*), *Devadaru* (*Cedrus deodara*), *Agaru* (*Aquilaria agallocha*), *Srivasa* (*Pinus Longifolia*), *Kumkuma* (*Crocus Sativus*), *Guggulu* (*Commifera mukul*), *Punnaga* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), *Nagkeshara* (*Mesua ferra*).^[23]

3. Varnya Mahakashaya: *Shweta-Chandana* (*Santalum album*), *Nagkeshara* (*Mesua ferrea*), *Padmak* (*Prunus cerasoides*), *Ushira* (*Vetiveria zizanioides*), *Yashimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Sariva* (*Hemidesmus indica*), *Payasya*, *Sita* (white variety of *Cynodon dactylon*), *Lata* (green variety of *Cynodon dactylon*).^[25]

b) Rasayana Dravya:

Dravya having revitalizing action on *Rasa*, *Rakta* and *Mamsa Dhatu* can affect quality of skin:^[26]

- Rasadhatu: Mantha Kalpana* (medicated drinks)
- Raktadhatu: Lauha, Tamra, Abhrak, Raupya Bhasma*
- Mamsa Dhatu: Suwarna Bhasma, Kushmand, Bala, Nagbala, Shatavari.*

c) Vayasthapana Dravya:

These drugs prevent ageing which results in healthy, fresh skin:

Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*), *Amalaki* (*Phyllanthus emblica*), *Mukta* (pearl), *Shwet-Aparajita* (white variety of *Clitorea ternatea*), *Jiwanti* (*Leptadenia reticulata*), *Shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*), *Mandukparni* (*Cenntella asiatica*), *Sthira* (*Desmodium gangeticum*), *Punarnava* (*Boerhaavia diffusa*).^[27]

d) Madhu (honey):

It has *Tridoshashamak* and *Yogawahi* (bioenhancer) property. It can be used for skincare due to its moisturizing, rehydrating, healing, antioxidant properties.^[27]

DISCUSSION

Considering impact of *Prakriti*, *Vaya*, *Ritu* on skin is a fundamental factor for skincare through Ayurveda. *Prakriti* is a phenotypic classification of human constitution and it has association with human genome.^[28] Abundance of skin microbiome differs across different *Prakriti*.^[29] *Vata* and *Pitta Prakriti* skin is less hydrated while *Kapha Prakriti* skin is well hydrated.^[30] Thus, quality of skin depends on *Prakriti* which cannot be intervened. Also, *Vaya* (ageing), *Ritu* (seasons) are some other phenomena having direct effect on skin through parameters like hydration, pH, etc. The consequence of all these inevitable factors can be balanced with holistic approach like use of proper diet, lifestyle changes, *Panchakarma* and internal medicines.

Faulty diet and lifestyle cause disturbance of gut microflora.^[11] *Paap karma* mentioned in causes of skin disease results in mental stress which also leads to disturbance of gut microbiota. This can lead to various skin abnormalities.^[31] Oily, heavy food, overeating and excessive stress also causes *Rasavaha Srotas Dushti* which in turn leads to early ageing of skin. Corrosive, oily, hot foods, excessive exposure to sunlight and fire cause *Rakatvaha Srotas Dushti* which cause skin diseases. *Viruddhahar*, eating before digestion of previous meal or during indigestion cause *Raktaj Krimi* which results in various skin manifestations. Therefore, *Nidanpariwarjan* is essential component for prevention and treatment of skin disease.

Abhyanga opens body pores and removes the toxins. It directly affects Keratocytes, Melanocytes, Mast Cells and Fibroblasts and have cyto-stabilising effect on them.^[32] It should be strictly followed by *Vata Prakriti* people and in cold weather as *Snigdha*, *Ushna Guna* of *Sneha* balances *Ruksha*, *Sheeta Guna* and can avoid further complications.

Balanced *Vata Dosha* provides proper circulation of blood and nutrients to skin layers. Balanced *Pitta Dosha* is required for metabolic functions that coordinate chemical and hormonal reactions of skin. Balanced *Kapha Dosha* maintains skin moisture.^[33] Skin tone and luster depends on *Bhrajak Pitta*. In skin diseases, vitiated *Pitta* and *Kapha Dosha* causes *Rasa* and *Rakta Dhatu* imbalance. *Virechan* and *Raktamokshan* balance these *Dosha* and treat *Raktavaha Srotas Dushti*. Hence, prevents skin pathologies and improves its quality.

Local application of medicines in the form of *Lepa*, *Pindasweda*, etc. helps in allergy control and maintains elasticity of skin and improves its complexion. Tyrosinase is an enzyme present in melanocytes responsible for melanogenesis. *Varnya Dravya* show antityrosine activity and hence work as skin lightening.^[34]

Dhatu-Sarata denotes structural and functional health of a particular tissue. The health of *Rasa*, *Rakta* and *Mamsa Dhatu* is reflected in the skin. *Rasayana Dravya* possess immunomodulator, adaptogenic, antioxidant,

and antistress properties.^[35] It vitalizes *Dhatu*. Thus, it rejuvenates skin thereby preventing early ageing and various skin diseases. Various treatment modalities described here can be used in healthy individuals as well as during or after treatment of various skin issues like Melasma, Acne, etc. in order to regain immunity and aesthetic property of skin.

Dravya having skincare properties like *Varnya*, *Rasayan*, etc. can be used in facewash, soap, face packs, creams, etc. These drugs if used along with contemporary drugs can create a scope for integrative practice in this field.

CONCLUSION

Present article focuses on enhancing the quality of skin. Demand of ayurvedic skincare products is increasing day by day. But it is limited to local applications and route cause is ignored often. This review highlights the importance and effectivity of all other modalities in the context of contemporary science. Clinical trials are necessary to explore further practical applicability of such treatments.

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