



Ajirna: An Ayurvedic perspective on Indigestion

Mishra BR^{1*}

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^{1*} Brijesh R Mishra, Principal, Professor, Hod and Guide, Dept of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhant, Shri Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

Ayurveda emphasizes the central role of Agni (digestive fire) in maintaining overall health and well-being. Ajirna (indigestion) is a pathological state arising due to the impairment of Agni, leading to the formation of Ama (undigested metabolic toxins), which serves as a precursor to various systemic diseases. The primary etiological factors of Ajirna include improper dietary habits (Ahara), an unhealthy lifestyle (Vihara), and psychological disturbances (Manasika Bhava). Classical Ayurvedic texts, including the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, classify Ajirna into different types based on Dosha predominance, namely Amajirna (Kapha-dominant), Vidagdhajirna (Pitta-dominant), and Vishtabdhajirna (Vata-dominant), along with other forms such as Rasasheshajirna, Dinapaki Ajirna, and Vilambika Ajirna. The dysfunction of Agni results in three pathological states: Mandagni (weakened digestion), Tikshnagni (hyperactive digestion), and Vishmagagni (irregular digestion), all of which contribute to digestive disorders. The management of Ajirna in Ayurveda focuses on restoring Agni, eliminating Ama, and correcting underlying lifestyle and dietary imbalances. Therapeutic approaches include Langhana (fasting), Deepana (appetite-stimulating), Pachana (digestive aids), and Vatanulomana (regulation of Vata movement), along with Panchakarma therapies and Pathya-Apathya (dietary and lifestyle modifications). This paper aims to comprehensively explore Ajirna from an Ayurvedic perspective by integrating classical textual references with evidence-based therapeutic interventions for sustainable digestive health.

Keywords: Ajirna, Agni, Ama, Agnimandya, Indigestion, Ayurveda, Deepana, Pachana, Langhana, Panchakarma, Pathya-Apathya

Corresponding Author	How to Cite this Article	To Browse
Brijesh R Mishra, Principal, Professor, Hod and Guide, Dept of Ayurveda Samhita Siddhant, Shri Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India. Email: drbrijeshm74@gmail.com	Mishra BR, Ajirna: An Ayurvedic perspective on Indigestion . J Ayu Int Med Sci. 2025;10(1):206-211. Available From https://jaims.in/jaims/article/view/4203	

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Introduction

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, defines health as a state of equilibrium among *Doshas* (biological humors), *Agni* (digestive fire), *Dhatus* (tissues), and *Malas* (waste products). Among these, *Agni* plays a fundamental role in digestion and metabolism, influencing overall physiological functions. *Ayurveda* emphasizes the importance of *Agni*, stating that all diseases originate from *Mandagni* (weak digestive fire).

The vitiated digestive agent from an intermediate substance called *Ama* which turns sour (*shukta*), during fermentation and finally turns in poisonous substances. Disturbance in *Agni* results in *Ajirna* (indigestion), which serves as a precursor to various systemic disorders, including *Grahani* and *Amlapitta*. *Ajirna* is characterized by incomplete digestion, leading to abdominal discomfort, bloating, nausea, heaviness, altered bowel habits, and the formation of *Ama* (toxic metabolic by-products). *Ayurveda* classifies *Ajirna* based on *Dosha* predominance and symptomatology:

- *Amajirna* - *Kapha*-dominant indigestion, presenting as heaviness, nausea, and excessive salivation.
- *Vidagdhajirna* - *Pitta*-dominant indigestion, characterized by acidity, heartburn, and sour belching.
- *Vishtabdhajirna* - *Vata*-dominant indigestion, leading to bloating, flatulence, and abdominal pain.
- *Rasasheshajirna* - Incomplete digestion of *Ahara Rasa*, resulting in belching, heaviness, and lethargy.
- *Dinapaki Ajirna* - Delayed digestion, where food remains undigested until the next day without causing significant distress.

Gastrointestinal disorders, including dyspepsia and functional indigestion, are increasingly prevalent in modern society due to irregular eating habits, stress, and sedentary lifestyles. *Ayurveda* emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balanced *Agni* to ensure proper digestion and overall well-being. *Ayurvedic* management of *Ajirna* focuses on restoring *Agni* through dietary modifications, lifestyle adjustments, and therapeutic interventions, providing a holistic approach to preventing and managing digestive disorders.

Materials and Methods

This narrative review explores the etiology, pathophysiology, classification, and management of *Ajirna* from an *Ayurvedic* perspective.

Data Collection

Classical *Ayurvedic* texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, were reviewed.

Databases like PubMed, AYUSH Portal, Google Scholar were searched.

Peer-reviewed research on *Ayurvedic* and conventional management of indigestion.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analysed and findings were categorized into etiology, classification, and management of *Ajirna*.

Definition of Ajirna

Ajirna is derived from the Sanskrit word "*Jirna*," meaning digestion. *Ajirna* refers to the incomplete or impaired process of digestion and metabolism, resulting in the accumulation of *Ama* (toxins) in the body.

It is a pathological condition characterized by incomplete or impaired digestion due to *Agnimandya* (weakened digestive fire), primarily associated with the *Pittadhara Kala*.

In *Ayurveda*, *Ajirna* results in the accumulation of *Ama* (undigested metabolic toxins), which undergoes fermentation and putrefaction, leading to systemic toxicity. It is considered the root cause of various metabolic and gastrointestinal disorders. In conventional medicine, *Ajirna* corresponds to dyspepsia, derived from the Greek words *dys* (bad) and *pepsis* (digestion), referring to upper gastrointestinal discomfort and impaired digestive function.

Etiology of Ajirna

Ajirna is primarily caused by *Agnimandya* (weak digestive fire), which results from various dietary, lifestyle, psychological, and environmental factors. *Ayurveda* emphasizes that improper digestion leads to the formation of *Ama*, which further contributes to various systemic diseases. The etiological factors of *Ajirna* can be broadly classified as follows:

Dietary Factors (*Aharaj Hetu*)

Atyambupaana - Excessive consumption of water or liquids, especially immediately after meals, leading to *Agni* suppression.

Adhyashana - Overeating or consuming food before the previous meal is fully digested.

Vishamashana - Irregular eating habits, such as consuming food in excessive or inadequate amounts and at inappropriate times.

Samshana - Intake of incompatible food combinations, unwholesome diet, stale, refrigerated, or frozen foods.

Manda Charvana - Improper mastication and inadequate salivation, leading to inefficient digestion.

Lifestyle Factors (*Viharaj Hetu*)

Swapnaviparyaya - Sleep disturbances, including sleeping during the day and insomnia at night.

Vegavidharana - Suppression of natural urges such as hunger, thirst, flatus, and defecation, leading to disturbance in digestive physiology.

Avyayama - Lack of physical activity, resulting in sluggish metabolism and impaired digestive function.

Atyashrama - Excessive physical or mental exertion, weakening digestive capacity.

Psychological Factors (*Manasika Hetu*)

Irshya - Envy or jealousy while eating, disrupting digestive secretions.

Bhaya - Fear or panic, leading to stress-induced gastrointestinal disturbances.

Krodha - Anger and emotional distress, impairing *Agni* and altering digestion.

Chinta - Stress and anxiety, affecting gut motility and secretion.

Shoka - Grief and sadness, leading to digestive sluggishness.

Environmental and Seasonal Factors (*Kalaj Hetu*)

Ritu Parivartan - Seasonal variations affecting digestive strength, such as weak *Agni* during *Varsha Ritu* (monsoon).

Asatmya Desha Kala - Incompatibility with climatic and geographical conditions affecting digestion.

Iatrogenic and Pathological Factors

Atyukta Panchakarma - Improper administration of *Panchakarma* therapies (e.g., excessive *Virechana*, *Vamana*, or *Snehana*) leading to digestive imbalances.

Deerghakalika Vyadhi - Chronic debilitating diseases weakening *Agni* and contributing to indigestion.

Modern medicine correlates *Ajirna* with dyspepsia, which may arise due to overeating, improper food combinations, rapid eating, lack of mastication, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking, constipation, emotional stress, and sedentary habits.

Ayurveda provides a holistic approach to digestion by identifying and addressing these etiological factors to restore *Agni* and prevent the formation of *Ama*.

Types of *Ajirna* (Indigestion)

Ajirna, or indigestion, is a common gastrointestinal disorder described in *Ayurveda*, primarily caused by the vitiation of *Doshas* - *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. It manifests due to improper digestion of food, leading to various physiological disturbances. Based on the predominance of the vitiated *Doshas* and other contributing factors, *Ajirna* is classified into different types. *Amajirna*, *Vidagdhajirna* and *Vishtabdhajirna* are the main types of *Ajirna*.

1. *Amajirna*

Amajirna occurs due to the vitiation of *Kapha Dosh*. It is characterized by symptoms such as puffiness around the eyes and face, frothy and excessive salivation, nausea, repeated belching with the odour of ingested food, and a feeling of heaviness in the body. This condition primarily results from sluggish digestion and excessive mucus production, leading to an accumulation of undigested food (*Ama*) in the gastrointestinal tract.

2. *Vidagdhajirna*

Vidagdhajirna is caused by the vitiation of *Pitta Dosh*, leading to hyperacidity and excessive heat in the digestive system. Clinical manifestations include a burning sensation in the chest and throat, excessive thirst, sour eructations, nausea, giddiness, and fainting.

The condition arises due to improper digestion, resulting in the fermentation of undigested food, leading to acid reflux and discomfort.

3. Vishtabdhajirna

Vishtabdhajirna results from the vitiation of *Vata Dosha*, causing disturbances in gastrointestinal motility. It is characterized by abdominal pain, bloating, gaseous distension, body ache, fatigue, and difficulty in stool and flatus elimination. This condition is commonly associated with erratic eating habits and excessive consumption of dry and rough foods, leading to impaired digestion and absorption.

4. Rasasheshajirna

Rasasheshajirna occurs when a portion of the ingested food remains undigested, primarily affecting the *Ahara Rasa* (nutrient absorption process). It is typically caused by excessive consumption of heavy foods or eating late at night, leading to symptoms such as belching, heaviness in the chest, and increased salivation. Unlike other types, most of the food is digested, but residual undigested matter lingers, causing discomfort.

5. Dinapaki Ajirna

Dinapaki Ajirna, as described by *Vijayarakshita*, is a mild form of indigestion in which food digestion is delayed but completes within one day and one night. It primarily occurs due to the excessive quantity or improper timing of food intake. The condition is self-limiting, requiring only time for digestion to complete without causing significant harm.

6. Prakrita Ajirna

Prakrita Ajirna, also mentioned by *Vijayarakshita*, refers to a state of delayed digestion that persists until the consumed food is fully processed. Unlike other forms of indigestion, it does not exhibit classical *Ama*-related symptoms such as tympanitis. Instead, the individual experiences natural signs of digestion completion, including hunger, thirst, and bowel movements.

Amajirna, *Vidagdhajirna* and *Vishtabdhajirna* produce diseases named *Visuchika*, *Alasaka* and *Vilambika* respectively.

Visuchika

Symptoms of *Visuchika* are - vomiting with loose motion.

Vata predominant symptoms are -

- *Shul* (pain),
- *Anaah* (fullness of abdomen),
- *Bhram* (giddiness),
- *Kamp* (tremors),
- *Stambh* (stiffness)

Pitta predominant symptoms are -

- *Jwara* (fever),
- *Atisara* (diarrhoea),
- *Antardaah* (burning like sensation),
- *Trushna* (thirst),
- *Murchha* (unconsciousness)

Kapha predominant symptoms are -

- Vomiting,
- *Angaguruta* (heaviness in body),
- *Vaaksang*
- *Shtheevan*

Alasaka

Alasaka is characterized by symptoms such as extreme abdominal distension and mental confusion. The affected individual experiences severe discomfort, often crying out in distress. Due to obstruction in the lower digestive tract, gas is unable to pass downward and instead moves upward, causing further discomfort. Additionally, the condition is marked by the absence of bowel movements and flatus, accompanied by excessive thirst and frequent belching.

Vilambika

This condition primarily affects individuals with a weak digestive system, often due to suppression of natural urges (*Vegavidharana*). In this state, due to vitiated *Kapha* and *Vata*, food remains stagnant in stomach, unable to be expelled either through vomiting or purgation. As a result, undigested food accumulates, leading to obstruction of bodily channels (*Srotas*). When vitiated *Doshas* infiltrate these obstructed pathways, they begin to circulate abnormally throughout body, causing widespread dysfunction. In severe cases, this leads to *Dandalasaka*, a state where body becomes rigid, resembling a log of wood. Classical texts indicate that it is considered an untreatable situation, as it signifies a terminal stage of systemic derangement.

General Symptoms (*Roopa*)

- Constipation (*Vishthambha*)
- Tiredness (*Sadan*)
- Headache (*Shirashool*)
- Giddiness (*Murchha*)
- Vertigo (*Bhram*)
- Yawning (*Jrumbha*)
- Bodyache (*Angamarda*)
- Loss of appetite (*Aruchi*)
- Heaviness in the abdomen (*Gaurava*)
- Flatulence and bloating (*Adhmana*)
- Nausea and vomiting (*Chardi*)
- Bad breath (*Mukh Dourgandhya*)

Samprapti (Pathogenesis) of Ajirna

Ajirna (indigestion) occurs due to the excessive vitiation of *Agni* (digestive fire) caused by various etiological factors. Despite consuming food at an appropriate time, in proper quantity, and of wholesome and easily digestible nature, individuals with *Ajirna* fail to digest their meals efficiently. The undigested food undergoes fermentation, acquiring a sour taste and transforming into a toxic substance (*Ama*), which further hampers the digestive process.

Samprapti Ghatak

- *Dosha*: Primarily *Kapha*, along with *Tridosha* imbalance
- *Dushya*: *Anna, Rasa*
- *Strotas*: *Annavaha Srotas, Rasavaha Srotas, Purishvaha Srotas*
- *Strotodushti*: *Sanga* (obstruction)
- *Udbhavasthana*: *Amashaya*
- *Adhishtana* (Primary Location of Manifestation): *Amashaya* and *Pakwashaya* (intestines)
- *Agni Status*: *Jatharagnimandhya*

The imbalance in *Agni* leads to incomplete digestion, resulting in the accumulation of *Ama*, which further obstructs the physiological functions of the gastrointestinal and metabolic systems, contributing to the progression of *Ajirna*.

Management of Ajirna

1. Langhana (Fasting and Light Diet Therapy)

Ama Ajirna: Fasting with warm water or herbal infusions.

Vidagdha Ajirna: Light diet with cooling herbs.

2. Pachana and Deepana (Digestive and Carminative Herbs)

Shunthi (*Zingiber officinale*): Stimulates *Agni*, reduces bloating.

Trikatu (Black pepper, long pepper, ginger): Enhances digestion.

Hingu (*Asafoetida*): Relieves bloating and abdominal discomfort.

3. Herbal Formulations

Triphala Churna: Detoxifies and promotes digestion.

Ajamoda (*Carum copticum*) + *Jeeraka* (Cumin) + *Saindhava* (Rock Salt): Improves gut motility.

4. Panchakarma Therapies

Vamana (Emesis Therapy) - *Kapha*-dominant *Ajirna*

Virechana (Purgation Therapy) - *Pitta*-dominant *Ajirna*

Basti (Medicated Enema) - *Vata*-dominant *Ajirna*

5. Lifestyle Changes

- Try to eat your meals at the same time each day to maintain a steady routine.
- Eat at a relaxed pace, without rushing, so your body can properly digest the food.
- Enjoy your meals, but be mindful of portion sizes and moderation. Listen to your body and avoid foods that don't sit well with you.
- If possible, limit the use of NSAIDs, and check with a doctor before taking them.
- Reduce stress and emotional strain, as they can impact digestion and overall well-being.

Conclusion

Ajirna, or indigestion, is a significant disorder in *Ayurveda*, emphasizing the crucial role of *Agni* in maintaining digestive health. It results from impaired digestion, leading to the formation of *Ama*, which is considered a root cause of many diseases.

Classical *Ayurvedic* texts provide a detailed understanding of *Ajirna*, including its etiology, pathogenesis, & management. The condition is classified based on *Dosha* involvement, guiding personalized therapeutic interventions. A holistic approach combining dietary modifications, lifestyle adjustments, & herbal formulations is essential for restoring digestive balance. *Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana* (dietary guidelines) plays a crucial role, advocating for mindful eating practices, balanced food proportions, & meal timing to enhance digestive efficiency. *Panchakarma* therapies further aid in detoxification & rejuvenation, addressing chronic indigestion effectively. In modern era, rising prevalence of *Ajirna* due to unhealthy dietary habits, stress, & sedentary lifestyles highlights need for greater awareness & lifestyle modifications. Given its economic & social impact, integrating *Ayurvedic* principles with contemporary research can offer a more evidence-based approach to managing digestive disorders. However, there is still a need for more systematic studies to validate traditional Ayurvedic interventions & their long-term efficacy in improving digestive health & overall well-being.

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