



Netra Raksha: Safeguarding vision through Ayurvedic wisdom

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The eye is a vital sense organ, enabling perception and interaction with the external world. In today's digital age, excessive screen time, poor lifestyle choices, and environmental stressors significantly impact ocular health. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, provides holistic approaches to maintain and enhance eye health through preventive, promotive, and therapeutic strategies. This review integrates classical Ayurvedic texts with contemporary understanding of eye strain and digital vision syndrome. The principles of Dinacharya (daily routine), Ritucharya (seasonal regimen), dietary guidance, and herbal formulations were examined in relation to their role in maintaining ocular health. Key Ayurvedic interventions like Anjana (collyrium), Tarpana (retention of medicated ghee over the eyes), Netra Prakshalana (eye wash), and internal medicines such as Triphala were correlated with modern preventive strategies for eye care. Findings suggest that Ayurvedic practices effectively address common eye disorders including dryness, fatigue, and diminished vision. Herbs like Triphala, Yashtimadhu, and Amalaki are rich in antioxidants and have shown ocular benefits. Techniques like Trataka (yogic gazing) and Netra Vyayama (eye exercises) support muscular endurance and focus, mitigating the effects of prolonged digital exposure. Integrating Ayurvedic eye care with modern lifestyle modifications presents a sustainable approach for preserving visual health. Ayurvedic regimens are not only preventive but also rejuvenative, aiming to maintain Ojas and enhance the longevity of vision. Further clinical studies can strengthen the scientific basis of these practices and facilitate their wider adoption.

Keywords: Eye health, Ayurveda, Swasthavrutta, Preventive ophthalmology

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Introduction

Eye health and vision are crucial and have far-reaching effects on health, quality of life, sustainable development, and the economy. However, many individuals, families, and communities today still face the serious consequences of limited access to affordable, high-quality eye care, which often leads to vision impairment and blindness. For a sighted individual 80% of the impressions are perceived through the eyes. The threat of suffering from an ocular disease remains present throughout the course of one's life, right from the birth till old age. In 2020, an estimated 596 million people had distance vision impairment worldwide, of whom 43 million were blind. Another 510 million people had uncorrected near vision impairment, simply because of not having reading spectacles. A large proportion of those affected (90%), live in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, encouragingly, more than 90% of people with vision impairment have a preventable or treatable cause with existing highly cost-effective interventions.[1] In India also, various studies have shown the prevalence of various diseases from refractive errors to various eye infections which causes serious complications if left untreated. Many of these eye conditions are preventable or the progression can be arrested before it reaches a stage of blindness. Many clinical conditions may also occur due to faulty life style like Keratoconjunctivitis, Diabetic/ Hypertensive retinopathy, Dry eye syndrome, Premature senile cataract, Myopia etc.

Ayurveda highlights the importance or supremacy of eyes through the *Sloka* "Sarvendriyanam Nayanam Pradhanam,[2] *Ayurveda* has not only outlined treatment protocols for various eye diseases but has also elaborated on numerous preventive measures to avoid their occurrence. It puts forward the concept of *Chakshu* and *Chakshushya*,

Chakshu is that which illuminates the objects and enlightens the mind about its details and *Chakshushya* is any activity that enhances its functions. *Acharya Dalhana* quotes that anything that is *Hita* (good) for eyes is *Chakshushya*. [3] The *Ayurvedic* practices conducive to ocular well-being, referred to as *Chakshushya* practices, encompass a multifaceted approach that includes adherence to dietary regimens i.e., following the *Pathya Ahara* and avoiding the *Apathya Ahara*, adoption of beneficial lifestyle habits mentioned under the *Dinacharya* (observance of daily routines), *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimens), *Kriyakalpa* (utilization of specific ayurvedic therapeutic procedures). Practicing of eye exercises and *yoga* and adoption of simple, daily techniques also help to mitigate ocular fatigue and prevent other eye-related complaints.

Pathya and Apathya Ahara

Acharya Charaka defines *Pathya* as anything diet or regimens that calms the mind, beneficial to the body and provides nutrition to the body whereas *Apathya* is the opposite to this. Various *Acharyas* including *Susrutha*, *Vagbhata* and *Yogarajnanaka* gives a detailed information on the *Pathya* and *Apathya Ahara* of eyes. Generally, food items which are *Laghu* (light) and *Tikta Rasa* predominant (bitter taste) are said to be wholesome for the eyes. [4] In *Bhavaprakasha Netrarogadhikara*, drugs which are of *Katu* (pungent), *Alma* (sour) *Rasa*, *Guru* (heavy), *Teekshna* and *Ushna Gunas* are said to be *Ahitha* for *Akshi Roga*. [5] In *Chakaradutta, Netraroga Chikitsa Prakarana* *Acharya* has explained the *Pathya Aharas* and *Vihaaras* by the name *Chakshushya Varga*. *Raja Nighantu* has also explained the *Chakshushya Varga* which includes: *Karpara*, *Rakta chandana*, *Kasturi*, *Lavanga* and *Prapaundareeka*. [6] While explaining the *Apathya Ahara*, *Vagbhata* includes *Vidahi*, *Vishtambhakara*, *Ajeerni Ahara*. He considers *Athyashana* or excessive eating also as *Apathya* for *Netra*. [7]

Ahara Varga	Pathya	Apathya
Shukadhanya	Lohithashali (Red rice), Yava (Barley)	Virudhadhanya (over ripe, sprouted, germinated cereals)
Shimbi Dhanya	Mudga	Masha
Shaka Varga	Jeevanti (leptadenia reticulata), Vaastuka (Chenopodium album), Punarnava (Boerhavia procumbens), Patola (Trichosanthes dioeca), Karavella (Bitter-gourd), Kakamachhi (Solanum nigrum), Kumari (Aloe vera), Matsyakshi (Hinch repens), Meghanada (Amaranthus polygonoides)	Kalingaka patra (Hoarrhaena antidysentrica)
Phala Varga	Draksha, Dadima, Kustumbhuru	

Ksheera and Ksheera Kalpana	Nari Paya/ Sthanya (Breast milk), Go dugdha (Cow's milk), Hasteeni Paya, Sarpi(ghee), Ksheerotha Takra (buttermilk)	Dadhi (curd)
Ikshu Varga	Sita	Phanitha
Mamsa Varga	Mayura (peacock), Kurma Mamsa (Turtle flesh), Vihanga Mamsa (flesh of birds) Jangala Mamsa	Matsya (fish), Ajangala Mamsa (flesh of animals living in semi- arid tropics)
Ahara Kalpana	Peya, Vilepi, Yusha	
Sandhana Kalpana		Madya, Sura, Sukta, Aranala

Dinacharya[8,9]

The daily routine that one should follow from time of waking up to bedtime has been explained detailed by *Acharyas* under concept of *Dinacharya*. These regimens help maintain *Doshic* balance and enhance body's innate healing capabilities. It promotes mental clarity, physical vitality, and emotional stability by aligning body's rhythms with nature. Regular practice of *Dinacharya* is said to prevent disease, enhance longevity, and support overall well-being. Among these following has been mentioned especially to promote health of our eyes.

- **Netra Prakshalana:** Washing eyes with decoction of *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemosa* Roxb.) or with *Amalaka* (*Embllica officinalis*) *Kashaya* (juice) after getting up from bed in morning. *Chakradutta* also highlights *Netra Prakshalana* daily with *Triphala Kashaya*, which is said to prevent all kinds of ocular diseases.[9]
- **Anjana:** It is procedure of applying collyrium to eyes. *Souveeryanjana* which is pleasing to eyes can be used daily. According to *Hridayabodhika* commentary of *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Pakshma* or eye lashes become *Snigdha* (unctuous), eyes become clean with well-defined colors and will be endowed with sharp vision or *Sookshma Darshana*. *Rasanjana* is indicated to be applied once in a week, as it helps in secretion of *kapha*. *Acharya Susruta* explains application of *Sroto Anjana*. It helps in reducing burning, itching, watering and pain. Application of *Anjana* also helps in enhancing vision and helps to withstand sun, heat, wind and eye diseases. *Anjana* has also been mentioned as a *Pathya Vihara* to *Netra* in *Yogaratanakara*.
- **Abhyanga:** *Abhyanga* or application of medicated oil over body is recommended daily as it improve clarity of vision and gives nourishment to eyes. It has been especially indicated to *Shiras* (head), *Shravana*(ear) and *Pada*(feet). *Abhyanga* to *Shiras* prov. nourishment to all *Indriya's* (sense organ) & that when done to *Paada* (feet) is said to be *Drishti Prasadana* (vision enhance).

- **Padaprakshalana and Padatra Dharana:** Washing feet to keep feet clean and hygienic is very important to prevent diseases to eyes. Wearing of feet protections like footwear, shoes etc prevents feet from heat and trauma is also helpful in keeping eye healthy.
- **Snana:** Taking bath daily is said to be *Indriya Prabodhana*. *Acharya* specifies that head bath with cold water is more suitable for promoting eye health and that with hot water is *Achakshushya*.
- **Mukhalepa:** According to *Susrutha*, *Mukhalepa* gives strength to eyes and *Acharya Vagbhata* opines that one who is habituated to application of *Lepa* on face will have keen vision.
- **Chhatradharana:** Use of umbrella protects eyes from sun, heat, dust and smoke and is considered to be *Chakshushya*.
- **Kavala and Gandoosha:** When properly done is considered as *Indriya Prasadana*.

Kriyakalpa[10]

These are local ocular therapeutic measures employed for prevention and treatment of various ocular diseases.

- **Tarpana:** *Tarpana* is best method to *Tripti* or satisfaction to eyes. It is local procedure where a border is created around eyes and eyes are filled in with unctuous materials like *Ghritha Manda*. *Tarpana* provides nourishment to ocular tissues. For *Swastha*, time for retention of *Dravya* is 500 *Maatra Kaala*.

Yoga[11]

- **Trataka:** It is process of looking intently with an unwavering gaze at small point until tears are shed from eyes. Out of 2 types of *Trataka*, *Bahiranga Trataka* or external concentration gaze is practiced in dark room with candle placed 2-3 feet in front of subject & flame at eye level. Subject sits in comfortable meditative pose, body relaxed & gazing at flame without blinking eyes unless eyes are filled with tears.

- *Antaranga Trataka* or internal concentration is done with eyes closed and concentrating on a symbol in mind. *Trataka* is said to help in relieving all *Netra Rogas*.
- *Jala Basti* or yogic enema with water is said to purify the senses and mind by destroying the excessive *Doshas*.
- *Jala Neti* can be practiced everyday by a patient who is suffering from eye strain, it is said to cleanse all the diseases that occur in the *Kapala* (cranial region) and is said to be *Divya Drishti Prasada* (bestows with good vision).
- *Bhramari* and *Bastrika Pranayama* can be practiced as it helps to refresh the body and mind, regenerate and rejuvenate the whole body.

Sukshma Vyayama - Eye exercises

- *Netra Shuddhi* (eye wash)
- Palming
- Eye ball movement exercises - Upward-Downward, Up & Down, Complete circle - Up down left and round.
- Blinking and breathing
- Fusion or binocular vision

Rasayana Yogas

In *Ayurveda*, *Rasayana Chikitsa* is regarded as one of the eight fundamental branches of classical Ayurvedic medicine, known collectively as *Ashtanga Ayurveda*. The term *Rasayana* essentially means the path of nourishment and refers to the therapeutic measures that promote the longevity, vitality, immunity and the overall well-being of the body.

The following are the various *Rasayana Yogas* mentioned by various *Acharyas*:

Rasayana Yoga	Action
Chyavanaprasha[12]	Balamindriyanam
Amalaki Rasayana[13]	Indriyabalaprada
Haritaki Rasayana[14]	Sareera Indriya Budhi Bala Prada
Amalaka Ghrita[15]	Sthirendriyam cha Atibalendriyam
Lauhadi Rasayana[16]	Ati balendriya
Langali Rasayana[17]	Upachitapruthu Gatra Shrotra Netradi Yuktam

Classical books like *Rasaratna Samuchaya* and *Rasatarangini* has also mentioned certain *Rasoushadhis* as beneficial for eye diseases.

Swarna (Gold)	Chakshushyam, Ayushpradam
Yashada (Zinc)	Nayanamaya nashakam
Kaseesa (Ferrous sulphate)	Netryam
Samudraphena (Cuttle fish bone)	Chakshushya
Loha (Iron)	Nayanamayaghnam
Swarnamakshika (Copper pyrite)	Chakshushyam
Gairika (Hematite)	Netryam
Srotoanjana (Antimony sulphate)	Netryam
Tamra (Copper)	Netramayeshu uttamam
Abhraka (Mica)	Chakshushyam, Netryam

Discussion

Various *Chakshushya Dravyas* mentioned in our classics are rich sources of macro and micronutrients like Sorbitol, Glucose, Fructose, Glycogen, Calcium, Zinc, glutathione, Vitamins A, E, C, K, B1, B2, B6, B12, D which helps in maintaining normal functional and structural integrity of eyes. Practicing or intake of *Chakshushya Aahara* helps to prevent eye disorders which can be prophylactic in many highly prevalent lifestyle disorders which in turn causes pathological changes in eyes. Antioxidant action of *Pathya Aahara* has strong ability to scavenge free radicals and super-oxidase. *Mudga* is an excellent source of protein, especially in a vegetarian diet, one cup of *Mudga* provides 28% of protein requirement for a day. Protein is a very essential macro nutrient for eye as it helps to maintain structural integrity of eye. *Mudga* is also packed with micronutrients which have antioxidant properties. *Masha* has been mentioned under *Apathya* for eyes, *Masha* increases level of oxalates in body, decreases iron levels that are needed for formation of RBC thereby increasing oxidative stress and damaging surrounding tissue. When they deposit in eyes interferes with transport of glutathione - so it can be considered as an *Apathya*. *Lohita Shali* is a good source of Vitamin B - which helps in maintaining optic nerve health and preventing degeneration. It also has Zinc - which assists in vitamin A transport and supports retinal function, Magnesium - which supports vascular health and Anthocyanin - which is a powerful antioxidant that protects retina from oxidative stress. Dietary intake of *Draksha* (grapes) reduces oxidative stress and RPE dysfunction by virtue of its powerful polyphenolic compounds like resveratrol, flavonoids, anthocyanins etc. Molecules present in grapes have shown to have various beneficial effects in retina & in cultured retina cells, including antioxidant, anti-angiogenic & anti-inflammatory activities.

With its abundance of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, *Dadima* (pomegranate) can help combat sight loss conditions such as retinitis pigmentosa and macular degeneration, making it a valuable component of a diet aimed at preserving vision. Milk and milk products are a rich source of vitamin A and zinc. Vitamin A plays a crucial role in safeguarding the cornea, while zinc facilitates the delivery of vitamin A from the liver to the eyes. Zinc also aids in nighttime vision and supports cataract prevention. It is also rich in Vit. B12, which prevents damage to optic nerve.

Netraprakshalana removes the dirt and toxins physically cleansing the allergens, dust etc. from the ocular surface. Soothes the conjunctiva and improves the tear film quality. It acts as an ocular lavage, removing bacterial biofilm and inflammatory debris. *Triphala Kashaya* indicated for *Netraprakshalana* has antioxidant, anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory action and it promotes the collagen stability thus preserving the structural integrity of the corneal stroma and maintaining the transparency of the cornea. *Anjana* application helps to reduce burning sensation, itching, watering and pain. The eyes are always exposed to the external environment and is prone for the harmful changes in the environment including dust and pollution. *Anjana* application helps to enhance the vision and helps to withstand sun, heat, wind and eye diseases. Action of *Anjana* can be attributed to – dissolving the accumulated vitiated *Kapha* and drain it out, it dilates the blood vessels and increase the blood flow and maintaining of *Netra Srotas* intact. *Prana Vata* is in the *Murdha* and its proper functioning is important to maintain the health and functions of *Indriyas* including *Netra*. So *Abhyanga* to the *Shiras* helps in protecting the vital *prana* and prevents it from getting vitiated thus protecting the eyes. *Padabhyanga* is also said to be *Chakshushya*. *Acharya Dalhana* has explained that there is a connection from feet to *Shiras* through a *Nadi*, so medicines applied to the soles of feet can transcend to the eyes. By *Paadabhyanga*, the somatic sensory area of the cortex may get stimulation and as both feet and eyes are in the same areas II of cortex, its stimulation effect may go to the eyes and may act by improving the function of eyes and reducing the eye strain. Any trauma to the feet can impact the eyes also through these *Nadis* and thus wearing footwear and keeping proper hygiene of the feet is also of great importance.

Application of *Lepa* (medicinal paste) to the face gives strength to the eyes, gives luster to the face and *Acharya Vagbhata* opines that one who is habituated to application of the paste will have keen vision. Ocular manifestations are one of the most important and common associations of dermatological diseases due to its anatomical continuity and exposed surfaces. Many conditions affecting the skin like Acne rosacea, Herpes simplex etc. have ocular manifestations including keratitis, blepharitis, conjunctivitis, recurrent chalazion etc. So, it is important to maintain the skin health to prevent the ocular diseases. Face and eye have common nerve supply. Trochlear and zygomatic branch of facial nerve supplies orbicularis oculi muscle of eye lids and other branches supply the muscles of facial expression. Ophthalmic branch of Trigeminal nerve supplies eyelids, conjunctiva and cornea and other branches supply skin, mucous membrane and sinuses of the face. *Kavala* and *Gandusha* activates the sensory and motor fibers of the cranial nerves like CN V, CNVII, CN IX and CN X. Stimulation of these nerves can enhance ocular perfusion, reduce eye strain and support the lacrimal gland function. The structure of the eye gets nourished, stimulated, vitiated doshas get evacuated by the medicinal value of the drugs used for *Kavala*. In *Gandoosha* the same function can be explained due to increase in permeability of vessels, which in turn facilitates more absorption of medicines as well the nerve endings of oral cavity stimulated and brings reflex action in the eyes.

Tarpana when done properly results in sound sleep & blissful awakening, clearness of eye, perfect clarity of vision, normal functioning of eyes including that of eye lids, normal response to light, lightness of eyes. The lipophilic action of *Ghrta* facilitates transportation of drug to target organ & finally reaching cell, because cell membrane also contains lipid. The *Ghrta* used in *Akshi Tarpana* is prepared as a suspension, which allows for longer contact time with ocular tissues & improved bioavailability, thereby enabling attainment of effective therapeutic concentrations. Various eye exercises including *Trataka* & *Sukshma Vyayamas* strengthens extraocular muscles, improves ocular motility & coordination & helps to prevent conditions like convergence insufficiency & accommodative dysfunction. Exercises like binocular fusion stimulates ciliary muscle & improves lens flexibility thus delaying presbyopia & reducing digital eye strain.

Blinking and palming stimulates the meibomian glands thus preventing dry eye syndrome, improving the tear film stability and reducing the oxidative stress on the corneal surface. *Rasayanas* act at the *Dhathu* level, targeting the *rasa*, *Raktha* and *Majja Dhātu* thus playing a key role in maintaining the structural integrity of the eyes. Most of the *Rasayana Yogas* have *Triphala* as a major ingredient which is one of the most potent *Chakshushya* combination mentioned in our classics. Various chemical constituents like glutathione and ascorbic acid have marked antioxidant properties and prevents damage to the lens and retina due to the oxidative stress.

Conclusion

The *Ayurvedic* classical texts provide a holistic and time-tested approach to the preservation of vision and the prevention of ocular diseases. They emphasize not only the intake of *Chakshushya Dravyas* - rich in essential nutrients and antioxidants - but also the regular practice of *Netra Kriyas*, *Dinacharya*, and *Rasayana* therapies to support ocular health at both structural and functional levels. These practices work by maintaining the balance of *Doshas*, nourishing the *Dhatus*, and enhancing ocular circulation, neuromuscular coordination, and detoxification.

Ayurveda recognizes the eye as a highly sensitive and vital organ closely connected with systemic and environmental factors. By addressing diet, lifestyle, topical applications, and internal rejuvenation, classical *Ayurvedic* principles offer preventive, promotive, and curative measures for eye care. In an age where visual strain and lifestyle-induced ocular disorders are increasingly common, these age-old insights provide a comprehensive and sustainable strategy for maintaining optimal vision and preventing disease, proving once again the enduring relevance of *Ayurveda* in modern life.

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