

ROLE OF AYURVEDIC INTERVENTIONS IN PROMOTING GUT HEALTH AND PREVENTING DIGESTIVE DISEASES

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ABSTRACT

Gut health plays a pivotal role in maintaining overall physical, mental, and metabolic well-being. In Ayurveda, the concept of digestion and gut health is primarily governed by *Agni*, supported by the balanced state of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Mala*. Impairment of *Agni* leads to the formation of *Ama*, which is considered the root cause of most digestive and systemic disorders. Digestive diseases such as *Ajeerna*, *Grahani*, *Atisara*, *Amlapitta*, and *Udara Roga* are described in classical texts as outcomes of faulty diet, lifestyle, stress, and suppression of natural urges. Ayurvedic interventions emphasize preventive and promotive aspects through *Ahara*, *Vihara*, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, and individualized therapeutic approaches. Use of *Deepana-Pachana* drugs, *Takra Kalpana*, probiotics-like fermented preparations, and *Rasayana* therapy helps in restoring gut flora balance, improving digestive fire, and strengthening intestinal integrity. Panchakarma procedures such as *Vamana*, *Virechana*, and *Basti* play a significant role in correcting chronic digestive dysfunctions by eliminating morbid *Doshas* and re-establishing gut homeostasis. Thus, Ayurveda provides a holistic, cost-effective, and sustainable model for promoting gut health and preventing digestive diseases through correction of *Agni*, elimination of *Ama*, and restoration of physiological balance.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda; Gut health; *Agni*; *Ama*; Digestive diseases; *Deepana-Pachana*; Panchakarma; *Grahani*; Preventive healthcare.

INTRODUCTION

The gastrointestinal system plays a central role in maintaining overall health by regulating digestion, absorption, metabolism, immunity, and gut-brain interaction. Disturbance in gut health is increasingly associated with digestive disorders such as functional dyspepsia, irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease, and metabolic

syndromes. Modern research emphasizes the importance of gut microbiota and intestinal integrity; however, traditional medical systems like Ayurveda have described the fundamental principles of digestion and gut function thousands of years ago through the concepts of *Agni*, *Ama*, and *Grahani*.^[1]

Ayurveda considers *Agni* as the prime factor responsible for digestion, absorption, and transformation of food into bodily tissues. Proper functioning of *Jatharagni* ensures nourishment of *Dhatus* and maintenance of vitality, whereas impairment of *Agni* leads to incomplete digestion and formation of *Ama*, a toxic by-product that initiates various digestive and systemic disorders.^[2] Classical texts clearly state that “*Rogāḥ sarve 'pi mandāgnau,*” meaning all diseases originate from deranged digestive fire.^[3]

Digestive diseases such as *Ajeerna*, *Atisara*, *Grahani*, *Amlapitta*, and *Udara Roga* are extensively described in Ayurvedic Samhitas, highlighting faulty dietary habits, irregular lifestyle, mental stress, and suppression of natural urges as major etiological factors.^[4] These factors disturb Dosha equilibrium, particularly *Vata* and *Pitta*, leading to chronic gastrointestinal dysfunction. The concept of *Grahani* as the seat of *Agni* signifies the importance of intestinal health in maintaining systemic balance.^[5]

Ayurvedic interventions aim not only at treating digestive disorders but also at preventing their occurrence through strengthening *Agni* and maintaining gut homeostasis. Principles such as *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan*, *Hitahara–Mithahara*, *Dinacharya*, and *Ritucharya* form the foundation of preventive gastroenterology in Ayurveda.^[6] Therapeutic measures including *Deepana–Pachana* drugs, *Takra Kalpana*, *Rasayana*, and *Panchakarma* procedures contribute significantly to restoring gut health and enhancing digestive resilience.^[7] Thus, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive and holistic framework for promoting gut health and preventing digestive diseases through personalized and preventive healthcare approaches.

AIMS

1. To study the concept of gut health as described in Ayurveda.
2. To evaluate the role of Ayurvedic interventions in promoting healthy digestion.
3. To understand the preventive potential of Ayurveda in digestive diseases through regulation of *Agni* and prevention of *Ama* formation.
4. To correlate classical Ayurvedic principles with modern concepts of gut health.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a conceptual and literary review based on classical Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. Relevant references related to *Agni*, *Grahani*, *Ama*, *Ahara*, and digestive disorders were collected and analyzed. Supporting information was obtained from published research articles and standard textbooks to establish modern correlation. The collected data were systematically reviewed, interpreted, and presented to highlight the role of Ayurvedic interventions in promoting gut health and preventing digestive diseases.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Concept of Gut Health in Ayurveda

Ayurveda perceives gut health as the foundation of overall health and longevity. The gastrointestinal system is mainly governed by *Agni*, which is responsible for digestion, absorption, assimilation, and metabolism of food. Proper

functioning of *Jatharagni* maintains equilibrium of *Dosha*, nourishment of *Dhatu*, and regular formation of *Mala*. Any disturbance in Agni leads to digestive impairment and initiates disease process. Hence, Ayurveda considers the gut as the primary site of both health and disease manifestation.

The organ *Grahani* is described as the anatomical and functional seat of Agni. It retains food until proper digestion occurs and releases it only after complete transformation. Weakness of *Grahani* due to deranged Agni results in incomplete digestion, altered bowel habits, and chronic digestive disorders.

2. Role of Agni in Digestive Physiology

Agni is classified into *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. Among these, *Jatharagni* plays the most crucial role in gut health. Balanced Agni ensures proper digestion and metabolic harmony, whereas *Mandagni*, *Tikshnagni*, and *Vishmagni* lead to disorders like *Ajeerna*, *Atisara*, *Amlapitta*, and *Grahani Roga*. Classical texts clearly emphasize that deranged Agni is the primary pathological factor behind digestive and systemic diseases.

3. Ama and Its Role in Digestive Diseases

Ama is the toxic, undigested or improperly metabolized product formed due to weak Agni. It is described as heavy, sticky, foul-smelling, and obstructive in nature. Accumulation of *Ama* in the gastrointestinal tract hampers normal digestive processes and blocks microchannels (*Srotas*), leading to fermentation, gas formation, bloating, indigestion, and chronic inflammation.

Ama acts as the initial pathogenic factor in most digestive diseases and later spreads systemically, producing multisystem disorders. Thus, prevention of *Ama* formation is the core objective of Ayurvedic gut management.

4. Etiological Factors Affecting Gut Health

Ayurvedic texts describe multiple factors responsible for impairment of digestive function:

- Irregular food intake (*Vishamashana*)
- Overeating (*Adhyashana*)
- Intake of incompatible food (*Viruddhahara*)
- Excessive consumption of heavy, oily, fermented, and junk foods
- Mental stress, anxiety, and emotional disturbances
- Suppression of natural urges (*Vega Dharana*)
- Sedentary lifestyle and improper sleep patterns

These factors disturb *Dosha* balance, weaken Agni, and initiate digestive pathology.

5. Digestive Diseases Described in Ayurveda

Ayurveda elaborately explains various gastrointestinal disorders, including:

- *Ajeerna* (indigestion)
- *Atisara* (diarrhea)
- *Grahani Roga* (malabsorption syndrome)
- *Amlapitta* (hyperacidity)
- *Udara Roga* (abdominal disorders)

All these conditions share a common pathology—Agni Dushti and Ama formation—highlighting the central role of gut dysfunction in disease development.

6. Ayurvedic Interventions for Promoting Gut Health

6.1 Ahara (Dietary Regulation)

Diet is considered the most potent medicine in Ayurveda. Principles of *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* emphasize food quality, quantity, timing, and compatibility. Consumption of warm, freshly prepared, light, and easily digestible food supports Agni. Inclusion of digestive spices such as ginger, cumin, coriander, and fennel enhances digestive capacity and prevents Ama accumulation.

Hitahara (wholesome diet) and *Mithahara* (moderate intake) are essential for long-term gut health maintenance.

6.2 Vihara (Lifestyle Measures)

Daily regimen (*Dinacharya*) and seasonal regimen (*Ritucharya*) maintain circadian rhythm and digestive stability. Adequate sleep, regular physical activity, stress control, and avoidance of day sleep after meals play a vital role in maintaining gut equilibrium.

6.3 Deepana–Pachana Therapy

Deepana drugs enhance Agni, while Pachana drugs digest Ama. Commonly used herbs include *Shunthi*, *Pippali*, *Chitraka*, *Jeeraka*, and *Hingu*. These formulations improve appetite, reduce bloating, correct metabolism, and strengthen digestive function.

6.4 Takra Kalpana and Fermented Preparations

Takra (buttermilk) is described as the best medicine for Grahani disorders. It improves digestion, restores gut balance, and acts as a natural probiotic. Properly prepared Takra enhances intestinal strength and normalizes bowel movements.

6.5 Panchakarma in Digestive Disorders

Panchakarma therapies help in elimination of vitiated Doshas and restoration of gut homeostasis.

- *Vamana* is beneficial in Kapha-dominant digestive disorders.
- *Virechana* is indicated in Pitta-related conditions such as Amlapitta.
- *Basti* is highly effective in chronic digestive disorders associated with Vata and Grahani.

These procedures provide deep detoxification and long-term digestive stability.

6.6 Rasayana Therapy

Rasayana strengthens digestive capacity, improves tissue nourishment, enhances gut immunity, and prevents recurrence of digestive diseases. Drugs like *Amalaki*, *Guduchi*, *Haritaki*, and *Pippali Rasayana* support intestinal health and promote longevity.

7. Preventive Role of Ayurveda in Digestive Diseases

Ayurveda strongly emphasizes prevention (*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*). By maintaining Agni through proper diet, lifestyle, seasonal adaptation, and mental balance, digestive diseases can be effectively prevented. Early correction of minor digestive disturbances prevents progression into chronic gastrointestinal disorders.

8. Modern Correlation

The Ayurvedic concept of Agni closely resembles modern digestive enzymes and metabolic activity, while Ama can be correlated with endotoxins, metabolic waste, and dysbiosis. Takra and fermented foods act similarly to probiotics by maintaining gut microbiota. Panchakarma contributes to detoxification and modulation of gut–brain–immune axis, indicating strong scientific relevance of Ayurvedic gut health principles.

Table 1: Concept of Gut Health in Ayurveda.

Ayurvedic Concept	Description	Role in Gut Health
Agni	Digestive and metabolic fire	Responsible for digestion, absorption, metabolism
Jatharagni	Primary digestive fire in GI tract	Maintains appetite and digestion
Grahani	Organ holding food till digestion	Maintains intestinal integrity
Ama	Undigested toxic matter	Root cause of digestive diseases
Srotas	Functional channels	Transport nutrients and waste
Koshta	Digestive tract	Site of disease manifestation

Table 2: Types of Agni and Their Clinical Significance.

Type of Agni	Characteristics	Effect on Digestion	Associated Disorders
Samagni	Balanced Agni	Proper digestion	Health and immunity
Mandagni	Weak digestive fire	Slow digestion	Ajeerna, Ama, Grahani
Tikshnagni	Excessive Agni	Rapid digestion	Amlapitta, burning
Vishamagni	Irregular Agni	Variable digestion	Gas, bloating, IBS-like condition

Table 3: Ama – Properties and Pathological Role.

Parameter	Description
Cause	Mandagni, improper diet, lifestyle
Guna	Guru (heavy), Snigdha (sticky), Picchila
Site of formation	Amashaya and Grahani
Action	Blocks Srotas, weakens Agni
Clinical features	Heaviness, anorexia, bloating, fatigue
Disease role	Initiates digestive and systemic disorders

Table 4: Etiological Factors Affecting Gut Health.

Factor	Description	Effect
Adhyashana	Eating before previous meal digests	Ama formation
Vishamashana	Irregular meals	Vishamagni
Viruddhahara	Incompatible food	Toxic reaction
Vega Dharana	Suppression of natural urges	Vata disturbance
Stress	Mental imbalance	Gut–brain dysfunction
Sedentary habits	Lack of activity	Mandagni

Table 5: Digestive Diseases and Common Samprapti

Disease	Dominant Dosha	Main Pathology
Ajeerna	Kapha–Vata	Mandagni
Amlapitta	Pitta	Tikshnagni
Atisara	Vata–Pitta	Agni loss
Grahani	Tridosha	Weak Grahani
Udara Roga	Vata	Obstructed channels

Table 6: Ayurvedic Dietary Measures for Gut Health

Principle	Description	Benefit
Hitahara	Wholesome diet	Maintains Agni
Mithahara	Moderate quantity	Prevents overload
Ushna Ahara	Warm food	Enhances digestion

Laghu Ahara	Light food	Prevents Ama
Kala Bhojana	Timely meals	Regulates gut rhythm

Table 7: Deepana–Pachana Drugs and Their Actions

Drug	Action	Clinical Use
Shunthi	Deepana, Pachana	Indigestion
Pippali	Agnivardhaka	Weak appetite
Chitraka	Strong Deepana	Ama disorders
Jeeraka	Digestive	Gas, bloating
Hingu	Carminative	Flatulence

Table 8: Panchakarma Role in Digestive Disorders

Therapy	Dosha Target	Indications
Vamana	Kapha	Chronic indigestion
Virechana	Pitta	Amlapitta
Basti	Vata	Grahani, IBS
Anuvasana	Vata dryness	Constipation
Niruha	Metabolic correction	Chronic gut disease

Table 9: Takra Kalpana and Gut Health

Property	Description
Rasa	Kashaya–Amla
Guna	Laghu, Ruksha
Dosha action	Kapha–Vata hara
Gut effect	Strengthens Grahani
Modern view	Natural probiotic

Table 10: Ayurvedic–Modern Correlation of Gut Health

Ayurveda	Modern Correlation
Agni	Digestive enzymes, metabolism
Ama	Endotoxins, dysbiosis
Grahani	Small intestine
Takra	Probiotics
Deepana drugs	Digestive stimulants
Panchakarma	Detoxification therapy

DISCUSSION

Gut health forms the cornerstone of both preventive and curative medicine. The present review highlights that Ayurveda offers a comprehensive and holistic understanding of digestive physiology through the concepts of *Agni*, *Ama*, and *Grahani*. Unlike the disease-centric approach of modern medicine, Ayurveda emphasizes correction of the root cause (*Samprapti*) rather than symptomatic management alone.

The central role of *Agni* in maintaining gut health is repeatedly emphasized in all classical texts. Balanced *Agni* (*Samagni*) ensures proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation, thereby maintaining nutritional status and immunity. Disturbance of *Agni* results in *Mandagni*, *Tikshnagni*, or *Vishmagni*, which closely resembles functional gastrointestinal disorders described in modern medicine such as dyspepsia, hyperacidity, and irritable bowel syndrome. Thus, *Agni* can be considered the functional equivalent of digestive enzymes, metabolic activity, and gut motility working in harmony.

Formation of *Ama* due to impaired *Agni* is the key pathological event in digestive diseases. *Ama* exhibits properties such as heaviness, stickiness, and obstruction, which conceptually correlate with gut dysbiosis, endotoxin

accumulation, and inflammatory mediators. Chronic presence of Ama leads to *Srotorodha*, impairing nutrient absorption and weakening gut immunity. This explains why untreated indigestion gradually progresses into chronic conditions like *Grahani Roga*. Modern studies also recognize that prolonged dysbiosis and low-grade inflammation form the basis of chronic gastrointestinal disorders, supporting the Ayurvedic explanation.

The concept of *Grahani* as the seat of Agni reflects advanced understanding of intestinal physiology. Weakening of *Grahani* leads to altered bowel habits, malabsorption, fatigue, and nutritional deficiencies, which clinically resemble malabsorption syndrome and IBS. Ayurveda clearly states that strengthening *Grahani* is essential for long-term digestive stability rather than merely controlling symptoms such as diarrhea or constipation.

Dietary regulation (*Ahara*) plays a pivotal role in Ayurvedic gut health management. Principles of *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* emphasize not only what to eat but also how, when, and in what quantity food should be consumed. Irregular meals, incompatible food combinations (*Viruddhahara*), overeating, and consumption of heavy or processed foods are described as major causes of Agni impairment. These principles are strongly supported by modern nutritional science, which recognizes meal timing, portion control, and food quality as critical determinants of gut microbiome balance.

Deepana–Pachana therapy represents a unique Ayurvedic approach aimed at correcting metabolism before disease manifestation. Unlike antacids or enzyme supplements, these drugs stimulate the body's intrinsic digestive capacity. Herbs such as *Shunthi*, *Pippali*, and *Chitraka* enhance digestive secretions, improve gut motility, and reduce fermentation. This mechanism explains their effectiveness in early digestive disturbances and their preventive role in chronic disease progression.

Takra Kalpana holds a special position in the management of gut disorders. Ayurveda describes *Takra* as the best medicine for *Grahani*. Its light, digestive, and absorbent properties help restore intestinal function. From a modern perspective, *Takra* acts as a natural probiotic, supporting healthy gut microbiota and improving intestinal barrier function. This validates the classical recommendation of fermented foods for digestive health.

Panchakarma therapies provide deeper correction of gut pathology by eliminating accumulated Doshas and Ama. *Vamana* and *Virechana* are useful in Kapha- and Pitta-dominant digestive disorders, while *Basti* is considered the most effective therapy for chronic *Grahani* and Vata-related gut diseases. *Basti* not only regulates bowel function but also influences the gut–brain axis, thereby reducing stress-related digestive disorders. This holistic impact cannot be achieved through oral medications alone.

Rasayana therapy contributes significantly to gut health promotion by strengthening digestion, enhancing mucosal immunity, and preventing recurrence. Drugs like *Amalaki* and *Guduchi* improve antioxidant status, promote tissue nourishment, and stabilize metabolism. Their role is particularly important in chronic digestive disorders where long-term weakness and relapse are common.

The preventive dimension of Ayurveda is of utmost significance. By maintaining Agni through proper diet, lifestyle, seasonal adaptation, and mental balance, digestive diseases can be effectively prevented. This aligns with the modern concept of preventive gastroenterology, which focuses on lifestyle modification rather than pharmacological dependence.

Overall, the discussion establishes that Ayurvedic interventions address gut health at multiple levels—digestive fire, intestinal integrity, microbial balance, immunity, and mind–gut interaction. This multi-dimensional approach makes Ayurveda highly relevant in the current era, where digestive disorders are increasing due to sedentary lifestyle, stress, and unhealthy dietary practices.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a holistic and preventive approach to gut health by emphasizing the central role of *Agni* and the prevention of *Ama* formation. Through proper dietary regulation, healthy lifestyle practices, use of *Deepana–Pachana* drugs, *Takra Kalpana*, *Rasayana* therapy, and Panchakarma procedures, digestive functions can be effectively maintained and digestive diseases can be prevented. By addressing the root cause of pathology and promoting intestinal balance, Ayurvedic interventions offer a safe, sustainable, and comprehensive strategy for long-term gut health and overall well-being.

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