



NUTRACEUTICALS: AN AYURVEDIC AND MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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Article Received: 24 October 2025 | Article Revised: 14 November 2025 | Article Accepted: 5 December 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17939685>

How to cite this Article: Dr. Pallavi, Dr. Dhulappa M., Dr. Shailaja J. R., Dr. Sonali P., Dr. Jaya (2025) NUTRACEUTICALS: AN AYURVEDIC AND MODERN PERSPECTIVE. World Journal of Pharmaceutical Science and Research, 4(6), 317-320. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17939685>



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ABSTRACT

Nutraceuticals, defined as food-derived substances that provide therapeutic and health-promoting benefits beyond basic nutrition, have gained significant global attention in preventive and integrative healthcare. Although the term "nutraceutical" is modern, the conceptual foundation is deeply embedded in Ayurveda, India's traditional system of medicine. Ayurveda views food (Ahara) as a primary pillar of life and emphasizes its role not only in nourishment but also in disease prevention, tissue rejuvenation, and enhancement of immunity. Classical Ayurvedic concepts such as Rasayana, Medhya Rasayana, Pathya-Apathya, and functional foods closely align with the modern understanding of nutraceuticals. Ayurvedic texts describe numerous herbs and natural foods-such as Amalaki, Ashwagandha, Guduchi, Haldi, ghee, honey, and milk-that exhibit antioxidant, immunomodulatory, anti-inflammatory, cardioprotective, and adaptogenic properties. Many classical formulations like Chyawanprash, Triphala, and Pippali Rasayana also function as polyherbal nutraceuticals with wide-ranging therapeutic potential. Contemporary scientific research increasingly validates these actions, highlighting their relevance in modern healthcare for supporting immunity, improving metabolic health, reducing stress, enhancing cognition, and preventing chronic diseases.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Nutraceuticals, Rasayana, Functional foods, Immunity, Antioxidants, Traditional medicine, Preventive healthcare.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term nutraceutical was coined by Dr. Stephen DeFelice in 1989, referring to food-derived products that offer medical or health benefits, including disease prevention and treatment.^[1] Ayurveda, however, has long emphasized the role of diet (Ahara) and lifestyle (Vihara) in maintaining health and preventing disease.

In Charaka Samhita, it is said

आहारसम्बवो देहः, आहारो हि महाबलः।

रोगाश्वाष्यन्यथास्युः, कुर्वन्त्याहारनिग्रहम्॥(Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 28/45)

Meaning: The body is derived from food; food ↓ is the great sustainer Life. Improper diet is the is the great sustainer of life. Improper diet is the root cause of diseases.

Thus, Ayurveda inherently recognizes the concept of food as medicine-an idea that modern nutraceutical science validates.^[2]

2. Ayurvedic Perspective on Nutraceuticals

2.1 Conceptual Basis

In Ayurveda, food substances (Ahara dravyas) are classified according to their Rasa (taste), Guna (qualities), Virya (potency), Vipaka (post-digestive effect) and Prabhava (specific action). The attributes determine their effects on the Doshas Dhatus and their effects on the Doshas, Dhatus, and overall health.

2.2 Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapy)

The concept of Rasayana represents the Ayurvedic counterpart to nutraceuticals. Rasayana dravyas promote longevity, enhance immunity (Vyadhikshamatva), improve memory, and delay aging.

बलं वर्णं च वर्धन्ति स्मृतिं प्रज्ञां च वर्धयेत्।

दीपयन्ति च मेधां च, रसयानानि देहिनाम् ॥(Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana 1/7)

Meaning: Rasayana substances enhance strength, complexion, memory, intellect, and overall vitality.^[3]

2.3 Examples of Ayurvedic Nutraceuticals

| Ayurvedic Herb/Formulation | Modern equivalent/action | Active component |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Amalaki | Antioxidant ,vitamin c source | Ascorbic acid,tannins |
| Ashwagandha | Adaptogens,stress reducer | Withanolids |
| Guduchi | Immunomodulator | Tinosporin |
| Shatavari | Reproductive tonic | Saponins,isoflavones |
| Haridra | Anti inflammatory | Fatty acids |

MODE OF ACTION ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA

The pharmacodynamics of Rasayana therapy in Ayurvedic texts are linked to:

- **Agni Deepana:** Enhancement of digestive and metabolic fire.
- **Dhatu Poshana:** Proper nourishment of body tissues.
- **Srotoshodhana:** Cleansing of microchannels for optimal nutrient absorption.
- **Ojas Vriddhi:** Promotion of immunity and vitality.

3. MODERN SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

3.1 DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION

According to modern nutrition science, nutraceuticals are products derived from food sources that provide health benefits in addition to basic nutritional value. They can be classified as

1. **Dietary Supplements** - vitamins, minerals, amino acids
2. **Functional Foods** - fortified foods like omega-3 enriched milk
3. **Medicinal Foods** formulated for specific health conditions
4. **Pharmaceutical-like Nutrients** - isolated compounds like curcumin, resveratrol, etc.

3.2 MECHANISM OF ACTION

Modern nutraceuticals exert their effects through:

- **Antioxidant activity** (reducing oxidative stress),
- **Anti-inflammatory effects** (e.g., curcumin, omega-3)
- **Modulation of gene expression** (nutrigenomics)
- **Enhancement of immunity** (probiotics, vitamins)
- **Regulation of metabolism** (polyphenols, flavonoids)

3.3 SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Several studies have validated the health-promoting effects of nutraceuticals:

- Curcumin shows anti-inflammatory and anticancer effects.^[4]
- Ashwagandha improves resistance to stress and enhances testosterone levels.^[5]
- Amalaki exhibits strong antioxidant and anti-aging properties.^[6]

4. INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

AYURVEDA MEETS MODERN NUTRACEUTICALS

It means using the philosophy, diagnostics, and herbs of Ayurveda together with standardized extracts, probiotics, vitamins, minerals, and functional foods from modern science.

- **Digestion:** Trikatu (Ayurveda) + Probiotics (modern)
- **Stress:** Ashwagandha (Ayurveda) + L-Theanine / Omega-3 (modern)
- **Immunity:** Turmeric (Ayurveda) + Vitamin C, D, Zinc (modern)
- **Joints:** Boswellia (Ayurveda) + Collagen peptides (modern).^[7]

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a holistic foundation for understanding nutraceuticals. While modern science isolates specific bioactive compounds, Ayurveda views them in synergy with nature, body constitution (Prakriti), and metabolism (Agni). Future research integrating both perspectives can pave the way for evidence-based functional foods and personalized nutraceutical therapies.

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