

THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF *USHAPAA*N IN PROMOTING DIGESTION, IMMUNITY, AND LONGEVITY

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INTRODUCTION

Ushapaan (sometimes called *Ushapāna*) is an Ayurvedic practice that involves drinking water—usually warm—on an empty stomach immediately after waking up. It is part of the ***Dinacharya*** (daily routine) in classical Ayurvedic texts. Proponents claim that *Ushapaan* helps awaken the digestive fire (*Agni*), clears accumulated waste (*Ama*), and supports overall health. Modern interpretations suggest it may promote better digestion, immune function, and even longevity through hydration-based physiological effects. This article reviews the traditional basis of *Ushapaan*, explores possible mechanisms of action, evaluates its therapeutic potential, and assesses scientific evidence.

Ayurvedic Basis of *Ushapaan*

In Ayurveda, the early morning is considered a key time for internal cleansing. According to Ayurvedic teachings, water sipped at dawn can help flush out metabolic waste that accumulates overnight, especially due to reduced digestive activity during sleep. Traditional sources mention that *Ushapaan* helps remove undigested food particles, prevents *Ama* formation, and supports the small intestine's cleansing, thereby enhancing nutrient absorption and digestive efficiency.^[1]

Ayurvedic practitioners also highlight its role in maintaining *Dosha* balance: it mitigates *Kapha* stagnation (which tends to accumulate overnight) and supports *Vata* and *Pitta* in readying the body for daily metabolic processes.^[1]

Mechanisms of Action: Traditional and Modern Perspectives Enhancement of Digestive Fire (Agni)

- **Traditional View:** According to Ayurvedic theory, *Ushapaan* kindles *Agni*, the metabolic “digestive fire,” making the digestive system more ready to process the day’s first meal. It helps remove the slimy coating (*Kapha*) that may have settled in the GI tract overnight.
- **Modern Correlate:** Hydration in the morning can stimulate gastrointestinal motility. Warm water may help relax the smooth muscles of the gut, promoting peristalsis and improving gastric emptying.

Detoxification and Ama Removal

- **Traditional View:** *Ama* refers to poorly digested metabolites. *Ushapaan* is believed to dissolve and mobilize these toxins, facilitating their elimination via bowel movements.
- **Modern Correlate:** Water intake promotes renal and hepatic clearance of metabolic by-products. Early morning hydration may help flush out waste more efficiently.

Channel Cleansing (Srotoshodhana)

- In Ayurveda, *srotas* are micro-channels responsible for transporting nutrients, fluids, and waste. *Ushapaan* is thought to clear obstructions in *Annavaha* (channels carrying digested food), *Rasavaha* (nutrient channels), and *Mutravaha* (urinary channels), thus aiding systemic flow and function.

Immunity Enhancement

- **Traditional View:** By promoting elimination of toxins and optimizing digestion, *Ushapaan* contributes to the strengthening of *Ojas*, the subtle essence of immunity.
- **Modern Correlate:** Proper hydration supports lymphatic circulation and the transport of immune cells. Water is essential for maintaining mucosal barriers and antibody distribution. Dehydration impairs immune function, while hydration facilitates the optimal performance of immune mechanisms.

Longevity (Ayushya) Support

- From an Ayurvedic angle, longevity arises from balanced *Doshas*, a strong *Agni*, and minimal accumulation of *Ama* or toxins. *Ushapaan* serves all three of these needs, contributing to a long and healthy life.
- On the molecular level, chronic mild dehydration is associated with oxidative stress, reduced cellular repair, and impaired metabolic function. Maintaining good hydration helps preserve cellular homeostasis and may slow age-related decline.

Therapeutic Potential Digestion

Ushapaan aids in:

1. **Regular bowel movements:** By stimulating gut motility in the morning.
2. **Reduced bloating and gas:** By breaking down residual overnight secretions and loosening gut contents.
3. **Improved nutrient absorption:** Clearer gut lining may absorb nutrients more effectively.
4. **Prevention of digestive disturbances:** Such as *Grahani* (a concept in Ayurveda that may loosely correspond to irritable bowel or malabsorption), as claimed in traditional sources.^[1]

Modern evidence supports the benefit of warm (or heated) water in digestion. For instance, studies indicate that warm water can improve intestinal motility and gas expulsion.^[2]

Moreover, warm water stimulates digestive secretions, helping the gut process food more efficiently.^[3]

Immunity

By promoting detoxification and eliminating residual metabolites, *Ushapaan* may reduce the load on the immune system. Hydration also supports:

- Lymphatic drainage
- Transport of immune mediators
- Functioning of mucosal immunity

Though direct clinical trials on *Ushapaan* per se are scarce, animal studies using heated water (at moderate temperature) have demonstrated enhanced immune markers. For example, a study on yak calves showed that those given heated water had higher levels of immunoglobulin M and interleukin-6 compared to those given cold water.^[4]

Longevity

The potential anti-aging benefits of *Ushapaan* are mediated through:

- **Hydration:** Which sustains cellular function and minimizes oxidative damage.
- **Toxin elimination:** Reducing chronic low-grade inflammation, a driver of aging.
- **Metabolic support:** By preserving efficient digestion and nutrient uptake.

Traditional Ayurveda underscores improved *Ayushya* (longevity) as a benefit of *Ushapaan*.^[1] From a modern health viewpoint, adequate daily hydration is linked to reduced risk of chronic diseases (e.g., kidney dysfunction, cardiovascular disease) and better long-term organ health.^[5]

Practical Considerations for *Ushapaan*

1. **Water Temperature:** Warm or lukewarm water (not scalding hot) is most commonly recommended. Ayurveda suggests that excessively hot water might damage *Agni* rather than support it. Modern nutritionists also recommend a moderate temperature: e.g., Healthline suggests 54–71°C as a safe range for hot beverages.^[2]
2. **Quantity:** One or two glasses (about 200–300 ml) is common in traditional practice, though there is no single standard.
3. **Vessel:** Classic traditions sometimes prefer storing or drinking from a copper vessel, which is believed to impart beneficial properties; however, modern evidence on this is limited.
4. **Timing:** On an empty stomach, ideally immediately after waking, before other morning routines.
5. **Cautions:** People with certain conditions—such as fluid restriction due to kidney disease, heart failure, or specific GI disorders—should be cautious. Also, water at very high temperature can pose a risk of burns.

Limitations and Research Gaps

- **Lack of Human Clinical Trials:** While traditional texts vouch for *Ushapaan*, there is a paucity of controlled clinical studies in humans that conclusively demonstrate its long-term benefits.
- **Specificity of Effects:** Many modern studies examine *warm/ heated water*, but they do not replicate the exact timing, volume, or ritual context of *Ushapaan*.
- **Risk Assessment:** Potential risks related to over-hydration or water intake in vulnerable populations are under-explored.

- **Mechanistic Insights:** More research is needed to map how a simple morning water habit influences molecular pathways (e.g., inflammatory markers, oxidative stress, gut microbiome) over time.

CONCLUSION

Ushapaan—a seemingly simple practice of drinking water early in the morning on an empty stomach—holds promising therapeutic potential in promoting digestion, immunity, and longevity, grounded in both Ayurvedic tradition and emerging scientific understanding. By enhancing digestive fire, aiding detoxification, supporting immune balance, and maintaining cellular hydration, it aligns with fundamental principles of preventive health. However, robust human clinical trials are needed to substantiate and quantify its benefits in modern contexts. For individuals interested in holistic health, integrating *Ushapaan* into daily routine may represent a low-cost, low-risk intervention with meaningful wellness returns.

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