



Ayurveda And Integrative Medicine: A Review

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Abstract

Ayurveda health based on individualized constitution, mind-body balance, and lifestyle optimization. With rising global interest in holistic and preventive care, Ayurveda is increasingly integrated into modern healthcare models. This review explores the theoretical foundations of Ayurveda, one of the world's oldest medical systems, offers a comprehensive framework for including the tridosha concept, digestive and metabolic regulation, and personalized lifestyle practices and examines how these principles intersect with contemporary integrative medicine. Current evidence supports the role of Ayurvedic interventions such as herbal formulations, dietary therapy, yoga, meditation, and Panchakarma in managing chronic conditions including metabolic syndrome, musculoskeletal disorders, mental health concerns, and gastrointestinal dysfunctions. Although promising, challenges persist regarding standardization, quality control, clinical validation, and safe integration with conventional treatments. Advancements in Ayurgenomics, systems biology, and rigorous clinical research are strengthening the evidence within integrative medicine. Overall, Ayurveda represents a valuable, multidimensional resource for holistic, preventive, and patient-centered healthcare when integrated responsibly with modern scientific approaches.

❖ Keywords

- Ayurveda
- Integrative medicine
- Complementary and alternative medicine
- Holistic health
- Personalized medicine
- Prakriti
- Panchakarma
- Herbal medicine
- Ayurgenomics
- Lifestyle medicine
- Mind-body interventions

- Preventive healthcare

I. Introduction

Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of India, represents one of the oldest continuously practiced frameworks for promoting health, preventing disease, and treating illness. Rooted in principles of individualized constitution (prakriti), mind-body balance, and harmony with natural rhythms, Ayurveda emphasizes comprehensive lifestyle management, dietary regulation, herbal pharmacology, and preventive care. As chronic, lifestyle-related diseases rise globally, interest in holistic and person-centered health approaches has expanded, positioning Ayurveda as an important contributor to the evolving field of integrative medicine.

Integrative medicine seeks to combine evidence-based complementary therapies with conventional biomedical practice to optimize patient outcomes, enhance quality of life, and address the physical, psychological, and social determinants of health. Many Ayurvedic interventions including yoga, meditation, Panchakarma therapies, botanical formulations, and personalized nutrition align with contemporary priorities in preventive and lifestyle medicine. Recent research advances, including Ayurgenomics, phytochemical standardization, and clinical evaluations of Ayurvedic therapies, have further bridged traditional knowledge with modern scientific paradigms.

Despite growing acceptance, challenges remain in standardization, quality control, regulatory oversight, and the integration of Ayurvedic treatments into conventional medical settings. This review examines the theoretical foundations, evidence base, clinical applications, opportunities, and limitations of Ayurveda within integrative medicine, emphasizing the potential for collaborative, safe, and scientifically informed models of holistic healthcare.



II. METHODS OR TYPES OF AYURVEDA

Ayurveda employs a wide range of therapeutic methods aimed at restoring balance in the body, mind, and spirit. These methods can be broadly categorized into dietary recommendations, herbal remedies, detoxification therapies, lifestyle practices, and physical therapies.

Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations of Ayurveda

Panchamahabhutas (Five Elements)

Ayurveda posits that all matter—including the human body—is composed of:

- **Prithvi (earth)** – structure, solidity
- **Jala (water)** – cohesion, fluids
- **Tejas/Agni (fire)** – metabolism, transformation
- **Vayu (air)** – movement
- **Akasha (space)** – communication, cavities

These elements combine into three functional principles (“doshas”).

Tridosha Theory

1. **Vata:** movement, respiration, nerve impulses
2. **Pitta:** digestion, metabolism, temperature regulation
3. **Kapha:** structure, lubrication, immunity

Each person has a unique **prakriti (constitution)**. Imbalance (**vikriti**) generates disease.

Concepts of Health

Health (Svastha) means:

- Balanced doshas
- Balanced digestive fire (Agni)
- Proper tissue formation (Dhatus)
- Efficient excretion (Malas)
- Mental, sensory, and spiritual peace

Diagnostic Methods in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic diagnosis is comprehensive and individualized:

Trividha and Ashtavidha Pariksha

- **Darshana (inspection)**
- **Sparshana (palpation)**
- **Prashna (interrogation)**

Eightfold examination includes:

- Nadi (pulse)
- Jihva (tongue)
- Drik (eyes)
- Shabda (voice)
- Sparsha (touch/temperature)
- Mala (stool)
- Mutra (urine)

- Akruti (body build)

Prakriti Analysis

Used for:

- Disease susceptibility
- Personalized diet
- Predicting drug response (Ayurgenomics)

Core Ayurvedic Therapies

Dietary Therapy (Ahara)

Customized meal plans based on dosha:

- Vata: warm, moist, grounding foods
- Pitta: cooling, sweet/bitter foods
- Kapha: light, spicy, dry foods

Lifestyle Routines (Dinacharya and Ritucharya)

Practices for daily and seasonal balance:

- Oil pulling
- Tongue scraping
- Self-massage (Abhyanga)
- Meditation and yoga
- Sleep hygiene
- Seasonal detoxes

Herbal Medicine (Dravyaguna)

Common Ayurvedic herbs:

- **Ashwagandha** – adaptogen, stress modulation
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** – anti-inflammatory
- **Triphala** – digestive tonic
- **Brahmi** – cognitive support
- **Neem** – antimicrobial
- **Guggulu** – lipid-lowering

Panchakarma (Detoxification Therapies)

Includes:

1. Vamana – therapeutic emesis
2. Virechana – purgation
3. Basti – medicated enemas
4. Nasya – nasal administration
5. Raktamokshana – bloodletting (rarely used today)

Evidence indicates improvements in inflammatory markers, metabolic parameters, and subjective well-being.

Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapy)

Focus on anti-aging, immunity, vitality:

- Chyawanprash
- Amalaki

Here are some of the key methods:

1. Diet and Nutrition:

- **Dietary Guidelines (Ahara):** Food is considered a powerful form of medicine in Ayurveda. Diet is tailored



to the individual's dosha (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) to promote balance.

- For example, **Vata types** (dry, cold, light) may need grounding, warming, and moist foods, while **Pitta types** (hot, sharp, intense) benefit from cooling and calming foods.
 - **Kapha types** (heavy, slow, stable) require light, stimulating foods to avoid stagnation.
 - **Food Combinations:** Ayurveda advises on the proper combination of foods (e.g., avoiding milk and fish together), as food combinations can influence digestion and overall health.
2. Herbal Medicine (Dravya Chikitsa):
- Ayurveda utilizes a vast pharmacopoeia of herbs and plant-based treatments. These herbs are often used in the form of powders, tablets, teas, oils, or pastes.
 - For example, **Ashwagandha** is often used for stress and fatigue (Vata imbalance), while **Turmeric** is renowned for its anti-inflammatory and detoxifying properties.
 - Ayurvedic formulations may also combine several herbs to work synergistically to restore balance in the body.
3. Detoxification (Panchakarma):
- **Panchakarma** is a therapeutic process designed to cleanse the body of toxins (ama) and restore dosha balance. It involves five main therapies:
 - **Vamana (Emesis):** Inducing vomiting to remove excess Kapha.
 - **Virechana (Purgation):** Cleansing the intestines to eliminate Pitta.
 - **Basti (Enemas):** Therapeutic enemas to balance Vata.
 - **Nasya (Nasal therapy):** Involves administering medicated oils or powders through the nostrils to treat head and neck conditions.
 - **Raktamokshana (Bloodletting):** A method for purging toxins from the blood

(less commonly practiced today).

4. Yoga and Meditation:

- **Yoga:** Integral to Ayurveda, yoga helps maintain balance by improving flexibility, strength, and mental clarity. Asanas (physical postures) are prescribed based on an individual's dosha.
- **Pranayama (Breathing Techniques):** These exercises help to regulate the flow of prana (life energy) in the body, calming the nervous system and improving vitality.
- **Meditation:** Meditation practices in Ayurveda focus on cultivating mental clarity, emotional stability, and spiritual well-being.

5. Lifestyle Practices (Dinacharya):

- Ayurveda emphasizes daily routines that align with nature's rhythms. These include:
 - **Early rising:** Waking up at dawn to connect with the body's natural circadian rhythms.
 - **Self-care practices:** Oil massages (Abhyanga) to nourish the skin and enhance circulation, tongue scraping, and cleansing rituals.
 - **Sleep hygiene:** Ayurveda encourages going to bed early and ensuring a restful sleep cycle for optimal health.

6. Therapeutic Body Treatments:

- **Abhyanga (Oil Massage):** Regular oil massages are believed to rejuvenate the body and soothe the nervous system. Different oils are used based on the person's dosha.
- **Shirodhara:** A treatment where a steady stream of warm oil is poured onto the forehead, traditionally used for calming the mind and promoting mental clarity.

Integrative Medicine and Ayurveda Methods in Integrative Medicine:

Integrative medicine

Integrative medicine is an approach to healthcare that combines conventional Western medicine with evidence-based complementary therapies,



focusing on the whole person body, mind, lifestyle, and environment.

An approach that:

- Is patient-centered
- Incorporates evidence-based complementary therapies
- Emphasizes lifestyle, prevention, and whole-body systems

Includes: acupuncture, yoga, mind-body therapies, nutrition, functional medicine, meditation, and Ayurveda.

Integrate Ayurveda

Ayurveda brings:

- Personalized dietary models
- Stress reduction and mind-body alignment
- Herbal formulations with pharmacological potential
- Sustainable lifestyle behaviors

Evidence Base for Ayurvedic Interventions

❖ Conditions With Growing Evidence

Metabolic and Cardiovascular Diseases

- Improved glycemic control with herbal blends (e.g., Gymnema, turmeric)
- Guggulu and Triphala show lipid-modulating potential

Mental Health

- **Ashwagandha** reduces stress, anxiety, and cortisol
- Meditation and yoga improve mood and neuroplasticity

Musculoskeletal Disorders

- Ayurvedic oils and herbs beneficial in osteoarthritis and chronic pain
- Panchakarma reduces inflammation in rheumatoid conditions

Digestive Disorders

- Triphala supports constipation, gut microbiome health
- Ayurveda uses Agni-balancing diets to treat dyspepsia, IBS

Reproductive and Hormonal Conditions

- Herbs like Shatavari and Ashoka support women's health
- Ayurveda is widely used in PCOS management

Limitations and Gaps in Evidence

- Variation in herbal formulations
- Need for larger RCTs
- Standardization of practice
- Potential contamination in some commercial products (heavy metals)

III. METHODS INVOLVED IN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

Integrative medicine combines conventional Western medical practices with complementary therapies, seeking to create a comprehensive, personalized treatment plan. The focus is on the whole person, and methods vary based on the individual's condition, needs, and preferences. Below are the key therapeutic methods employed in integrative medicine:

1. Conventional Medical Treatments:

- **Pharmaceuticals and Surgery:** While integrative medicine emphasizes the use of natural therapies, conventional treatments such as prescription drugs, surgery, and diagnostic tests are used when necessary.
- **Chronic Disease Management:** Conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease are treated with both conventional drugs and complementary therapies (e.g., acupuncture, diet, or herbal supplements).

2. Complementary Therapies:

Integrative medicine incorporates a variety of **alternative** treatments to enhance well-being:

- **Acupuncture:** Based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), acupuncture involves inserting fine needles at specific points on the body to stimulate energy flow (Qi) and balance the body's systems.
- **Chiropractic Care:** Focuses on adjusting the spine to treat musculoskeletal issues, particularly related to the nervous system.
- **Massage Therapy:** Includes various forms of therapeutic bodywork to improve circulation, reduce stress, and alleviate muscular tension.
- **Mind-Body Techniques:** Practices like **meditation, yoga, tai chi**, and **biofeedback** are used to reduce stress, improve mental health, and promote physical healing.

3. Nutritional Therapy:

- **Dietary Modifications:** Nutrition is key in integrative medicine. A functional medicine approach often involves specific diets (e.g., anti-inflammatory diets, gluten-free diets) to treat chronic conditions.



- **Supplements:** Integrative medicine uses vitamins, minerals, probiotics, and herbal supplements to support health. This can range from using **fish oil** for heart health to **probiotics** for gut health.
 - **Herbal Medicine:** Like Ayurveda, integrative medicine often uses herbal remedies (e.g., **Echinacea**, **St. John's Wort**, **Turmeric**) to complement or enhance conventional treatments.
4. Physical Therapies:
- **Physical Therapy (PT):** Targeted exercises and therapies that improve physical function, mobility, and reduce pain.
 - **Hydrotherapy:** The use of water in different forms (steam, ice baths, water exercises) to improve circulation and promote healing.
5. Psychological and Emotional Support:
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Often incorporated into integrative care plans for managing mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.
 - **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):** Meditation and mindfulness practices that help patients reduce stress and enhance emotional well-being.
 - **Hypnotherapy:** Uses guided relaxation and focused attention to treat pain, anxiety, and certain chronic conditions.
6. Energy Medicine:
- **Reiki, Healing Touch, and Qigong:** Practices that involve the manipulation of the body's energy fields to promote healing. These methods are used to balance the body's energy and restore vitality.
7. Detoxification and Cleansing:
- **Detox Diets and Juice Fasts:** **Designed to eliminate toxins and promote overall health. These may include fasting, juice cleanses, or specialized detox programs.**
 - **Infrared Saunas and Colon Hydrotherapy:** **These treatments are sometimes used in** integrative medicine to eliminate toxins from the body.

❖ Benefits of Integrating Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine

1. Holistic and Patient-Centered Care

The integration of Ayurveda with integrative medicine promotes a **whole-person approach**, addressing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of health. Ayurveda's emphasis on **mind-body balance** complements integrative medicine's patient-centered model, leading to more comprehensive care than symptom-based treatment alone.

Benefit:

- Improved patient satisfaction
- Enhanced therapeutic outcomes
- Focus on root causes rather than isolated symptoms

2. Personalized and Precision-Based Treatment

Ayurveda classifies individuals according to **Prakriti (constitutional type)** and dosha balance, while integrative medicine uses **personalized, functional, and lifestyle-based approaches**. Their integration enables highly individualized treatment plans.

Benefit:

- Tailored diet, lifestyle, and therapy plans
- Reduced trial-and-error in treatment
- Better management of chronic and lifestyle diseases

3. Enhanced Prevention and Health Promotion

Ayurveda emphasizes **preventive healthcare** through daily routines (Dinacharya), seasonal regimens (Ritucharya), and dietary discipline. Integrative medicine similarly prioritizes prevention through lifestyle modification and wellness strategies.

Benefit:

- Early disease prevention
- Reduced healthcare burden
- Promotion of long-term wellness and healthy aging

4. Improved Management of Chronic Diseases

Chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, stress disorders, and autoimmune diseases benefit significantly from integrated approaches.

- Ayurveda provides herbal medicines, detoxification (Panchakarma), and lifestyle guidance.
- Integrative medicine combines these with modern diagnostics, pharmacotherapy, and rehabilitation.

Benefit:



- Better symptom control
- Reduced disease progression
- Lower dependence on long-term pharmaceuticals

5. Reduced Side Effects and Drug Dependency
Ayurvedic therapies are generally **natural and gentle**, while integrative medicine emphasizes minimizing medication burden where possible.

Benefit:

- Reduced adverse drug reactions
- Lower risk of polypharmacy
- Safer long-term treatment strategies

6. Strengthened Mind–Body Medicine

Ayurveda's use of **yoga, meditation, pranayama, and mental discipline** aligns well with integrative medicine's mind-body therapies such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

Benefit:

- Improved mental health and emotional resilience
- Effective stress and anxiety management
- Better outcomes in psychosomatic disorders

7. Evidence-Informed Traditional Practice

Integrative medicine provides a scientific framework to **evaluate, validate, and standardize Ayurvedic practices** using modern research methodologies.

Benefit:

- Increased credibility of Ayurvedic therapies
- Safer and more standardized clinical use
- Improved acceptance in global healthcare systems

8. Cost-Effectiveness and Accessibility

Preventive care, lifestyle modification, and natural therapies can reduce the need for expensive interventions and hospitalizations.

Benefit:

- Lower healthcare costs
- Increased accessibility, especially in low-resource settings
- Sustainable healthcare models

9. Support for Global and Public Health

The integration supports **traditional knowledge systems** while aligning with global health goals such as preventive care, mental health promotion, and non-communicable disease control.

Benefit:

- Preservation of traditional medical knowledge
- Contribution to global integrative healthcare models
- Culturally acceptable healthcare solutions

10. Improved Quality of Life

By addressing physical symptoms, emotional well-being, lifestyle habits, and spiritual health, integrated care enhances overall quality of life.

Benefit:

- Better functional health
- Increased patient empowerment
- Long-term wellbeing and life satisfaction

❖ **Limitations and Challenges in Integrating Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine**

1. Lack of Standardization

Ayurvedic formulations vary based on region, practitioner, raw material quality, and preparation methods. Integrative medicine, however, relies heavily on standardized protocols.

Challenges:

- Variability in dosage and formulation
- Difficulty in ensuring reproducibility
- Inconsistent therapeutic outcomes

2. Insufficient Scientific Evidence

While Ayurveda is based on centuries of empirical knowledge, many treatments lack validation through modern clinical trials.

Challenges:

- Limited randomized controlled trials (RCTs)
- Inadequate pharmacokinetic and toxicological data
- Difficulty aligning traditional concepts (doshas, Agni) with biomedical models

3. Safety and Quality Control Issues

Concerns exist regarding contamination, adulteration, and improper use of Ayurvedic medicines.

Challenges:

- Presence of heavy metals in some formulations
- Poor manufacturing practices in unregulated settings
- Potential herb–drug interactions when combined with modern medicines

4. Herb–Drug Interactions

Integrating Ayurvedic herbs with conventional drugs can result in unexpected interactions.



Challenges:

- Lack of interaction databases
- Limited practitioner awareness
- Risk of reduced efficacy or increased toxicity

5. Differences in Philosophical Frameworks

Ayurveda follows a holistic, qualitative, and individualized philosophy, while integrative medicine largely adopts a quantitative, evidence-based biomedical approach.

Challenges:

- Conceptual mismatch between systems
- Difficulty translating Ayurvedic principles into biomedical terminology
- Resistance from practitioners of both systems

6. Inadequate Education and Training

Most healthcare professionals are trained in either modern medicine or Ayurveda, not both.

Challenges:

- Lack of cross-disciplinary curricula
- Poor communication among practitioners
- Limited understanding of integrated treatment planning

7. Regulatory and Legal Barriers

Different countries have varying regulations for traditional and complementary medicine.

Challenges:

- Absence of unified regulatory frameworks
- Legal restrictions on practice scope
- Issues related to licensing and professional accountability

8. Ethical and Clinical Responsibility Issues

Unclear clinical responsibility in integrative care settings may affect patient safety.

Challenges:

- Ambiguity in decision-making authority
- Delayed referral to conventional care in serious conditions
- 9. Patient Misconceptions and Self-Medication

Patients may assume Ayurvedic therapies are completely safe and use them without professional guidance.

Challenges:

- Overuse or misuse of herbal products
- Delayed diagnosis and treatment
- Non-disclosure of alternative medicine use to physicians

10. Limited Infrastructure and Research Funding
Integrative medicine requires specialized centers, interdisciplinary teams, and funding support.

Challenges:

- Lack of integrative healthcare facilities
- Insufficient research grants
- Limited government and institutional support

11. Cultural and Acceptance Issues

Skepticism exists among biomedical professionals regarding traditional medicine, while traditional practitioners may resist modernization.

Challenges:

- Professional bias and mistrust
- Poor collaboration
- Resistance to integrative models

❖ Future Prospects of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine

1. Evidence-Based Integration

The future of Ayurveda within integrative medicine lies in strengthening its **scientific validation** through modern research methodologies.

Prospects:

- Increased randomized controlled trials (RCTs)
- Systems biology and omics-based research on Ayurvedic concepts
- Evidence-informed clinical guidelines for integrated care

2. Development of Integrative Healthcare Models

Healthcare systems worldwide are increasingly adopting **integrative care models** that combine traditional medicine with modern clinical practice.

Prospects:

- Integrative hospitals and wellness centers
- Collaborative practice between Ayurvedic and allopathic physicians
- Inclusion of integrative care in national health policies

3. Personalized and Precision Medicine

Ayurveda's concept of **Prakriti-based classification** aligns well with modern precision medicine and genomics.

Prospects:

- Prakriti-genomic correlation studies
- AI-driven personalized treatment protocols



- Integration of Ayurvedic diagnostics with biomarkers

4. Role in Preventive and Lifestyle Medicine

The rising global burden of lifestyle disorders positions Ayurveda as a key contributor to preventive healthcare.

Prospects:

- Community-based wellness programs
- Integration of Dinacharya and Ritucharya into public health
- Non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention strategies

5. Chronic Disease Management

Integrative approaches show promise in managing chronic and degenerative diseases where conventional medicine has limitations.

Prospects:

- Integrative protocols for diabetes, arthritis, cancer supportive care, and neurodegenerative disorders
- Improved quality of life and symptom management
- Reduced long-term drug dependency

6. Mental Health and Stress Management

Ayurveda's mind-body therapies complement integrative medicine's emphasis on mental wellness.

Prospects:

- Integration of yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic psychotherapies
- Holistic approaches for anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic disorders
- Workplace and school mental wellness programs

7. Global Acceptance and Policy Support

International recognition of traditional medicine is increasing.

Prospects:

- WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy implementation
- Global regulatory frameworks for Ayurveda
- Cross-border academic and clinical collaborations

8. Technological Advancements

Modern technology can enhance Ayurveda-integrative medicine integration.

Prospects:

- Digital health platforms for integrative consultations
- Telemedicine for Ayurvedic care
- AI-based diagnostic and decision-support tools

9. Standardization and Quality Assurance

Future integration depends on ensuring safety and quality of Ayurvedic products.

Prospects:

- Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) enforcement
- Herbal pharmacovigilance systems
- Global quality standards for herbal medicines

10. Education and Capacity Building

Interdisciplinary education is critical for sustainable integration.

Prospects:

- Integrative medicine curricula in medical education
- Dual-degree and cross-training programs
- Continuing medical education (CME) in integrative care

11. Research and Innovation in Drug Discovery

Ayurveda offers a vast repository of medicinal knowledge.

Prospects:

- Reverse pharmacology and ethnopharmacology
- Discovery of novel therapeutic molecules
- Integration of traditional knowledge with modern drug development

12. Sustainability and Eco-Friendly Healthcare

Ayurveda promotes harmony with nature, aligning with sustainable healthcare goals.

Prospects:

- Promotion of plant-based therapeutics
- Conservation of medicinal plants
- Ayurveda contributes a holistic framework emphasizing individualized treatment, prevention, lifestyle regulation, and mind-body balance, while integrative medicine provides evidence-based validation, modern diagnostics, and multidisciplinary clinical care.

IV. Conclusion

Ayurveda and integrative medicine together represent a comprehensive and patient-centered approach to healthcare that combines ancient wisdom with modern scientific chronic disease management, mental health promotion, and overall quality of life. However, challenges such as lack of standardization, limited scientific evidence, safety concerns, educational gaps, and regulatory barriers must be addressed to ensure safe and effective integration.



Future progress depends on rigorous research, quality assurance, interdisciplinary education, supportive health policies, and ethical clinical practice. With these measures in place, the integration of Ayurveda into modern healthcare systems has the potential to create a sustainable, personalized, and globally acceptable model of medicine that enhances health outcomes and promotes holistic well-being.

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