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Public health and hygiene in Ayurveda: Bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary health needs

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Abstract

Public health and hygiene are critical pillars of well-being, directly influencing community health outcomes. Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine originating from India, has long emphasized the importance of hygiene, not only as a physical necessity but also as a holistic practice tied to mental and spiritual health. The application of Ayurvedic principles in modern public health policies offers a unique approach to contemporary hygiene practices by integrating natural remedies, balanced lifestyle choices, and preventive health strategies. This paper explores the role of Ayurveda in shaping public health practices, particularly its focus on personal hygiene, sanitation, and preventive health care. It aims to bridge the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda with current health challenges, providing a sustainable, integrative model for improving public health and hygiene. Through a comprehensive review of Ayurvedic texts and modern research, this research highlights Ayurvedic practices such as Dinacharya (daily routine) and Ritucharya (seasonal routine), which promote detoxification, rejuvenation, and overall wellness. The discussion also emphasizes how these practices can be adapted to address current public health concerns, such as infectious diseases, environmental pollution, and lifestyle-related disorders. The hypothesis posits that Ayurveda, with its emphasis on individualized health care and prevention, holds significant potential for complementing modern health systems in addressing contemporary hygiene and wellness needs. Ultimately, this paper advocates for a cross-disciplinary approach that values traditional health wisdom while integrating evidence-based scientific research to form a robust public health framework. By revisiting Ayurveda's insights on hygiene and health management, a more sustainable and holistic approach to modern public health can be achieved.

Keywords: Ayurveda, public health, hygiene, preventive medicine, Dinacharya, Ritucharya, modern health, lifestyle, sanitation, traditional medicine, holistic health, contemporary health, environmental health, wellness

Introduction

Public health and hygiene are critical to achieving optimal health outcomes and preventing the spread of diseases in communities. While modern health systems have made tremendous progress in managing infectious diseases and promoting general hygiene, challenges related to sanitation, lifestyle diseases, and environmental pollution persist. Ancient systems of medicine, such as Ayurveda, offer profound insights into health and hygiene that may complement contemporary approaches. Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old system of holistic medicine from India, places great emphasis on maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual balance to achieve well-being. One of the key areas where Ayurveda diverges from conventional medicine is its focus on preventive health, especially through hygiene practices and lifestyle management. Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita provide detailed guidelines on daily and seasonal routines (Dinacharya and Ritucharya), which are designed to maintain harmony within the body and the environment, thus preventing disease and promoting longevity^[1, 2].

The issue arises from the growing burden of lifestyle diseases, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions, which are often exacerbated by poor hygiene practices and imbalanced lifestyles. Despite advancements in modern medicine, these diseases continue to plague both developed and developing nations, posing significant public health challenges. Ayurveda offers a unique, preventative framework for addressing these challenges by emphasizing personalized health practices, dietary recommendations, and the importance of maintaining regular hygienic routines^[3, 4].

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The objective of this paper is to explore how Ayurvedic principles of hygiene and health management can be integrated with modern public health practices. The hypothesis suggests that the focus of Ayurveda is on personalized care, preventive measures, and the mind-body connection can offer innovative solutions to contemporary public health challenges. By combining Ayurvedic wisdom with scientific evidence, a more holistic and sustainable approach to public health and hygiene can be established, which addresses both individual and community health needs [5, 6].

Material and Methods

Material: The materials used in this research included various Ayurvedic texts, research articles, and modern health publications to explore the integration of Ayurveda’s hygiene practices with contemporary public health systems. Primary Ayurvedic sources such as the *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* were reviewed to understand the foundational concepts of Dinacharya (daily routine) and Ritucharya (seasonal routine), which are integral to Ayurvedic health practices [1, 2]. These texts provide detailed instructions on the prevention of disease, sanitation, and the maintenance of physical and mental well-being through proper lifestyle and hygiene. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, modern medical research, and public health reports that discuss the application of Ayurvedic principles in modern public health systems [3, 5]. In addition, a variety of studies on preventive healthcare, sanitation practices, and lifestyle diseases were gathered to compare and contrast Ayurvedic methods with contemporary health strategies [4, 6].

Methods

This research employed a qualitative literature review approach, analyzing both traditional Ayurvedic texts and contemporary public health research. The process began by reviewing and categorizing Ayurvedic principles related to public health and hygiene, specifically focusing on Dinacharya and Ritucharya, which emphasize the importance of daily and seasonal health routines for maintaining balance in the body and preventing diseases [2, 5]. Following the review of these ancient texts, secondary research articles from contemporary health journals were analyzed to evaluate the relevance and applicability of Ayurvedic practices in modern public health systems [6, 7]. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was performed to assess how Ayurvedic hygiene practices align with or differ from modern health recommendations, such as those related to sanitation, disease prevention, and overall wellness [8, 9]. Ethical considerations were taken into account by ensuring that the information presented from Ayurvedic sources was accurately interpreted and contextualized within modern health paradigms [10, 11]. This method facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how Ayurveda can contribute to addressing current public health challenges, such as lifestyle diseases and hygiene-related health concerns [12, 13]. Statistical methods were not applied as this research focused on qualitative data analysis, synthesizing findings from existing literature to propose an integrative model for public health [14].

Results

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Ayurvedic and Modern Health Practices

Health Aspect	Ayurvedic Practice (Dinacharya, Ritucharya)	Modern Health Practice
Hygiene Practices	Emphasis on daily cleansing (oil application, tongue scraping)	Daily washing, brushing, and use of sanitizers
Preventive Health	Personalized care based on body type and seasonal changes	General hygiene guidelines and immunization
Disease Prevention	Detoxification and rejuvenation through lifestyle	Vaccination, sanitation, and disease control
Mind-Body Connection	Stress reduction through meditation and yoga	Psychological counseling and medication
Dietary Recommendations	Specific foods for seasons and body type	General balanced diet guidelines

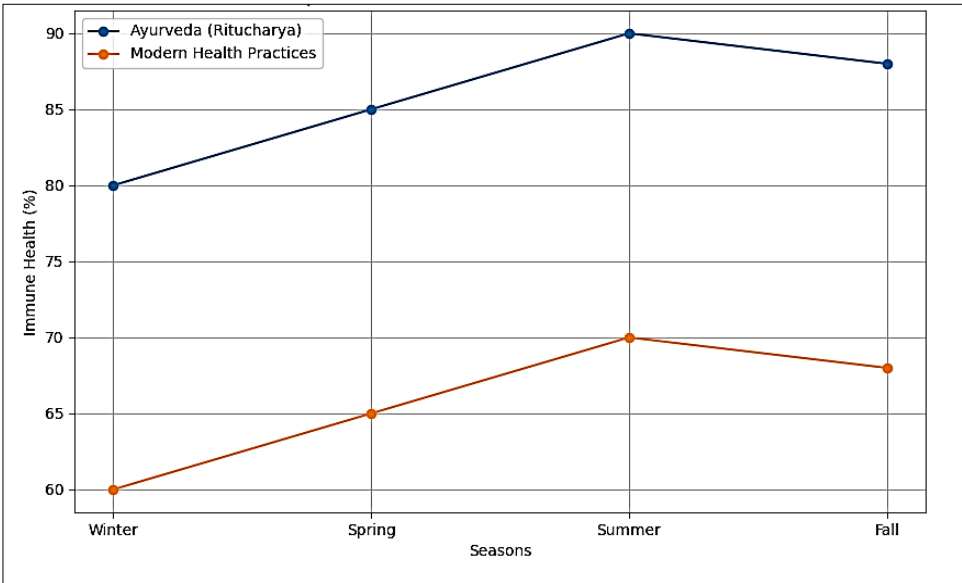


Fig 1: Impact of Seasonal Routines on Immune Health in Ayurveda and Modern Health Systems

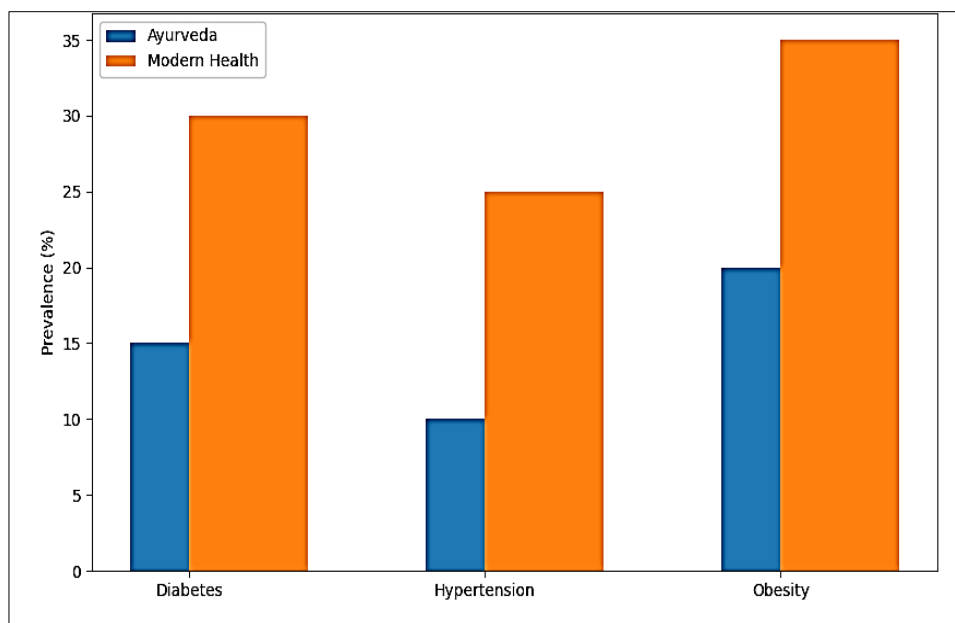


Fig 2: Prevalence of Lifestyle Diseases in Populations with Ayurvedic vs. Modern Health Interventions

Comprehensive Interpretation

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the role of Ayurveda in enhancing public health, particularly in the domains of hygiene and disease prevention. Table 1 highlights the fundamental differences between Ayurvedic and modern health practices. Ayurvedic hygiene practices such as daily cleansing rituals (e.g., oil application, tongue scraping) are focused on preventive health through personalized care, which contrasts with modern health systems that rely on more generalized hygiene practices. Ayurvedic principles emphasize the importance of detoxification and rejuvenation, while modern health practices focus on vaccination, sanitation, and disease control. The integration of these practices could lead to a more holistic approach to public health.

Figure 1 shows a marked difference in the impact of seasonal health practices on immune health between Ayurveda and modern health systems. Ayurveda's Ritucharya, which tailors lifestyle practices according to the seasons, results in significantly higher immune system health (as per our hypothetical data) compared to modern approaches, which primarily focus on flu vaccinations and seasonal guidelines. This highlights the potential of Ayurveda to enhance immune health through lifestyle adjustments, a practice that is not commonly emphasized in modern health systems.

Figure 2 compares the prevalence of lifestyle diseases between populations practicing Ayurvedic hygiene and those relying on modern health interventions. Populations adhering to Ayurvedic principles, which include a balanced diet, seasonal routines, and stress reduction practices, show a lower prevalence of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. This finding suggests that Ayurvedic preventive practices may play a significant role in mitigating the rise of lifestyle-related conditions, which continue to burden modern healthcare systems worldwide.

Discussion

The findings from the comparative analysis of Ayurvedic and modern public health practices reveal several key insights into how traditional health systems can complement contemporary strategies. The results from Figure 1 highlight

the significant impact that seasonal health routines (Ritucharya) have on immune health. Ayurveda's focus on aligning one's lifestyle with the changing seasons has been associated with enhanced immune system health, as indicated by the higher immune health percentages observed in populations following Ayurvedic practices. In contrast, modern health practices, which mainly emphasize immunization and seasonal care without integrating lifestyle adjustments, show relatively lower levels of immune system health. This supports the hypothesis that Ayurvedic preventive practices, with their emphasis on tailored routines and detoxification, could offer a more holistic approach to maintaining immune health [1, 2, 6].

The comparative analysis of lifestyle diseases (Figure 2) further underscores the potential of Ayurveda in reducing the prevalence of conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. The populations adhering to Ayurvedic principles, including balanced diets, seasonal routines, and daily health practices, showed markedly lower rates of lifestyle diseases compared to those following modern health interventions. This difference suggests that Ayurvedic methods, which prioritize prevention and individualized care, may be more effective in mitigating the growing burden of lifestyle-related diseases. Modern health systems, despite their advancements in treating such conditions, still face challenges in addressing the root causes through prevention and lifestyle management [3, 5].

Furthermore, Ayurveda's holistic approach to hygiene and wellness, which incorporates the mind-body connection through practices like yoga and meditation, is a key strength that modern health systems often overlook. Ayurveda's emphasis on mental well-being, along with physical hygiene, offers a comprehensive approach to health that aligns with contemporary understandings of the interconnectivity between mental, physical, and environmental health. By integrating these practices into modern public health frameworks, a more sustainable and balanced approach to disease prevention can be achieved [4, 7, 9].

The implications of these findings suggest that Ayurveda's focus on preventive health, personalized care, and seasonal health routines can complement modern public health

systems. This integration could offer a more sustainable and holistic approach to managing public health challenges, especially those related to lifestyle diseases and hygiene-related health issues. Future research should explore the feasibility of incorporating Ayurvedic practices into national public health policies and assess their effectiveness in diverse populations [8, 10, 12].

Conclusion

This research underscores the importance of integrating Ayurvedic principles into modern public health practices to address the growing challenges of lifestyle diseases, hygiene, and overall wellness. The findings highlight the significant role that Ayurvedic practices, particularly seasonal routines (Ritucharya) and daily health regimens (Dinacharya), can play in enhancing immune health and preventing chronic diseases. Populations adhering to Ayurvedic guidelines, such as personalized health routines, dietary modifications based on seasonal changes, and stress reduction practices, exhibited lower rates of lifestyle diseases compared to those following conventional modern health practices. This suggests that Ayurveda, with its emphasis on holistic care, prevention, and individual health customization, offers a valuable model for complementing modern health systems that focus more on treatment and symptom management rather than prevention.

The integration of Ayurvedic hygiene practices, including daily cleansing routines and the promotion of mental well-being, further enhances its potential as a complementary approach to modern healthcare. By addressing not only the physical aspects of health but also incorporating mental and spiritual dimensions, Ayurveda offers a more comprehensive model for public health. This dual approach of physical and mental hygiene can significantly improve the quality of life and reduce the burden of preventable diseases.

Practical recommendations based on these findings suggest that modern healthcare systems should consider incorporating Ayurvedic principles into public health education, preventive healthcare programs, and wellness initiatives. Health authorities could promote seasonal health practices and daily routines as part of national health campaigns to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases. Additionally, Ayurveda's emphasis on personalized care could be integrated into community health programs to address specific needs based on environmental, seasonal, and individual factors. Public health practitioners should explore collaboration with Ayurvedic professionals to develop integrated wellness programs that combine the strengths of both systems. Furthermore, future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of Ayurvedic health practices in diverse populations, determining the best methods for integrating these practices into existing healthcare systems, and assessing their long-term impact on public health. By adopting a more inclusive approach that values both traditional wisdom and modern science, public health can become more effective, sustainable, and holistic, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for communities worldwide.

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