

Role of Pathya Ahara (Wholesome Diet) In The Prevention and Management of Constipation Among Children: An Ayurvedic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the Science of Life, uses more than just medicines to treat diseases. It also uses Anupana, Ahara (food), and a lot of other methods to stay healthy and control diseases. Ayurveda stresses important ideas about food, such as how to choose the right foods, how to combine meals, how to cook, how to store food, how to eat, how to be clean, and how to behave. Pathya Ahara (Wholesome Diet) and Kalpana (Ayurvedic Dietetics) embody a unique concept. Pathya (Wholesome) means something that helps people by changing their diet and exercise habits. The primary aim of studying Pathya (Wholesome) Ahara Kalpana (Ayurvedic Dietetics) is to highlight the importance of providing suitable nutrition customized to an individual's constitution for the preservation of physical health and the balance of Dosha, Dhātu, Mala, and Agni to aid in the treatment of various ailments. "Pathya" (Wholesome) refers to the diet and way of life that are in line with a person's constitution, channels, and strength. The essential principle of Pathya (Wholesome) Ahara (diet) serves as the foundation for both the preventive and therapeutic dimensions of Ayurveda. The Ashtavidha Ahara Vidhi Viseshā Ayatana describes many ways to stop, find, and treat children's diseases as described in Ayurveda. So, taking steps to prevent problems can help you live a healthy life and keep your lifestyle in check.

KEYWORDS: Pathya Ahara, Kalpana, Ahara Kalpana, Ayurveda, Constipation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Health in Ayurveda is defined as a state in which both the body and mind remain free from disease. *Swasthavritta*, the science of health maintenance, emphasizes daily regimen (*Dinacharya*), appropriate use of medicines (*Aushadhi*), and wholesome diet (*Ahara*), all of which contribute to maintaining the equilibrium of the *Tridosha-Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* [1]. Ayurveda elaborates in detail on the proper selection, preparation, and consumption of food, recognizing that diet plays a central role in both the prevention and management of disease. *Pathya* (Wholesome) refers to food that is properly prepared, measured, and conducive to health. Acharya Kashyapa highlights that no medicine is effective without adherence to *Pathya*, underscoring the supremacy of diet in the healing process [2]. Among children, improper diet and irregular eating habits commonly lead to digestive disturbances, the most frequent being *Vibandha* (constipation). In Ayurvedic understanding, constipation results primarily from the vitiation of *Vata Dosha*, particularly *Apana Vayu*, and impairment of *Agni* (digestive fire). When *Agni* becomes weak due to intake of incompatible, stale, or heavy foods, *Mala Nirmana* (proper fecal formation) is disturbed, leading to dryness and obstruction in the colon. Over time, this causes discomfort, abdominal pain, and loss of appetite, adversely affecting growth and development in children [3]. *Pathya Ahara* (Wholesome Diet) forms the foundation for restoring *Agni*, normalizing *Vata*, and supporting *Mala Pravritti* (regular elimination). Foods that are light, warm, unctuous, and easily digestible help promote *Vata Anulomana* and relieve constipation naturally. Thus, *Pathya Ahara* not only prevents *Vibandha* but also aids in its management without reliance on harsh medications. This study seeks to elucidate the Ayurvedic concept of *Pathya Ahara* in the prevention and management of constipation among children, clarifying its underlying mechanisms in enhancing digestion, maintaining doshic balance, and promoting overall health and immunity [4]. So, Ahara (diet) should be a part of the diets of both sick and healthy people. Acharya Charak believes that healthy food helps people progress and stay healthy, while bad food is the cause of all diseases. To prevent early morbidity in infants, the food must be contrary to *Prakriti*. Consequently, the

adoption of Pathya (Wholesome) as a modified diet, separate from medication, is crucial for preserving children's health. This study seeks to clarify the mechanisms that contribute to disease and aid in the selection of suitable dietary items or formulations to enhance Agni, strengthen immunity, and reduce morbidity in children and all individuals. Classical Ayurvedic texts emphasize the use of light, easily digestible, and nourishing foods—such as Shali (rice), Mudga (green gram or moong), Yava (barley), and Godhuma (wheat)—as ideal for children due to their mild nature and compatibility with the developing digestive system. Among these, Moong dal holds special significance, being Tridosha-shamaka (balancing all three doshas), Laghu (light to digest), and Deepana-Pachana (enhancing digestion). Unctuous substances like Ghrita (clarified butter) and Taila (sesame oil) are recommended to alleviate Rukshata (dryness) and regulate Apana Vayu, which governs bowel movement. Inclusion of fruits such as Papaya, Banana, and Draksha (raisins) helps soften stool and maintain intestinal motility. In Ayurveda, Ahara (diet) is considered the cornerstone of health, forming the basis for both prevention and management of diseases. Pathya Ahara (Wholesome Diet) emphasizes foods that maintain Dosha balance, enhance Agni (digestive fire), and promote Mala Nirmana (proper fecal formation and elimination). Classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Kashyapa Samhita describe numerous dietary preparations (Ahara Kalpanas) suited for children due to their mildness, digestibility, and nourishing qualities. Among them, Shali (rice), Mudga (green gram/moong), Yava (barley), Godhuma (wheat), and Masura (lentil) are considered ideal base ingredients. Moong dal, in particular, is valued for its Laghu (light), Tridosha-shamaka (balances all three doshas), and Deepana-Pachana (stimulates digestion) properties, making it highly suitable for children with weak digestion or constipation. Traditional preparations such as Manda (thin rice gruel), Peya (semi-liquid rice preparation), Vilepi (thick porridge), Yusha (pulse soup), Krisara (soft rice and moong mixture), and Mamsarasa (meat broth) are prescribed according to digestive strength and clinical condition. Manda and Peya hydrate the intestines and kindle Agni, while Vilepi and Yusha promote satiety and gentle bowel stimulation. These foods, enriched with Ghrita (ghee), Tila Taila (sesame oil), and mild spices like Saindhava Lavana (rock salt) or Jeeraka (cumin), help pacify Vata Dosha, lubricate the colon, and relieve Vibandha (constipation). Additionally, fruits such as Papaya (Madhukarkati), Banana (Kadali), and Draksha (raisins), along with warm milk, soups, and boiled water (Ushnodaka), are recommended to maintain hydration and ease stool passage. Such preparations exemplify how Pathya Ahara functions not merely as nourishment but as a therapeutic tool, restoring digestive harmony and promoting holistic child health.

Concept of Pathya (Wholesome)

The notion of Pathya (wholesome) in Ayurveda is distinctive. The name "Pathya ahara" (wholesome meal) derives from the root word "Pathya," which translates to "wholesome" or "correct" in English. Pathya (wholesome) refers to both physical substances and certain behaviors, however in Ayurvedic literature, these concepts are predominantly linked to food habits [5].

Pathya (Wholesome) Ahara (Diet)

Pathya (wholesome) dietary substances nourish and maintain the health of the body and mind, ensuring balance among Dosha, dhatu, and Mala, as well as all sensory and motor organs (Gyanendriya and Karmendriya), mind, and soul [6]. Functional foods are foods that look like each other and may have health benefits beyond just basic nutrition. Acharya Charka says that healthy people should always eat a variety of foods, such as Mudga (Phaseolus radiatus Linn.), Saindhav (Sodium chloride/Rock salt/Bay salt), Amalaki (Embolica Officinalis Gaertn.), and Ghee (Butyrus depurum). These foods improve health and lower the chance of getting sick. Functional foods are foods that do more than just meet basic nutritional needs; they also have other health benefits. Good nutrition can lower the risk of illness, especially in children whose immune systems are still developing. After Prakruti Parikshana, the Pathya (Wholesome) paradigm should be employed as a clinical practice in personalized medicine. Pathya (Wholesome) Ahara (diet) can help lower the risk of illness, especially in children whose immune systems are still growing. After Prakruti Parikshana, the Pathya (Wholesome) framework ought to be utilized as a clinical approach in personalized medicine.

2. PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF CONSTIPATION (VIBANDHA) IN CHILDREN: AN AYURVEDIC VIEW

In Ayurveda, Vibandha (constipation) is considered a disorder of Vata Dosha, primarily due to the aggravation of Apana Vayu, which governs the downward movement of feces, urine, and reproductive fluids [6]. When Apana Vayu becomes vitiated—due to improper dietary habits, irregular meal timing, excessive consumption of dry, cold, or heavy food, or inadequate fluid intake—it loses its normal function, leading to obstruction and dryness within the colon (Pakvashaya). In children, immature digestive power (Mandagni) and an underdeveloped colon make them especially vulnerable to Vata aggravation. Contributing factors include delayed weaning, excessive intake of processed or constipating foods (e.g., bakery items, refined flour, or fried snacks), emotional stress, and irregular defecation habits. These disrupt the normal process of Ahara Paka (digestion and assimilation), resulting in incomplete Mala Nirmana (fecal formation) [7]. The retained feces dry up due to increased Vata, causing hardness, pain during defecation, and abdominal discomfort. From a modern perspective, these mechanisms correspond to reduced colonic motility, dehydration of stools, and poor dietary fiber intake. Ayurveda interprets these symptoms as outcomes of Agni Mandya (impaired digestive fire) and Vata Dushti (vitiating Vata function). Hence, the therapeutic aim in Vibandha Chikitsa (treatment of constipation) focuses on restoring

Agni, lubricating and softening stools, and promoting regular bowel movements through Pathya Ahara. A wholesome diet rich in easily digestible, unctuous, and fiber-containing foods (such as warm milk with ghee, green vegetables, fruits like papaya or banana, and whole grains) helps re-establish Vata Anulomana (normal downward movement of Vata), relieve dryness, and support intestinal motility [8]. Therefore, Pathya Ahara acts both as a preventive and curative measure in childhood constipation by strengthening digestion, balancing Vata Dosha, and maintaining proper elimination pathways.

3. ROLE OF VARIOUS AHARA KALPANAS IN RELIEVING CONSTIPATION (VIBANDHA) AMONG CHILDREN

Various Ahara Kalpanas have been delineated by the Acharyas in accordance with Swasthavritta, Dinacharya, and Ritucharya. These dietary formulations are designed to stimulate Jatharagni (digestive fire), regulate Vata Dosha, and promote Mala Pravrutti (proper elimination). Such regulation of digestion and elimination is crucial in preventing and managing Vibandha (constipation), particularly among children, where immature Agni and erratic eating habits frequently cause bowel irregularities.

The main categories of Ahara Kalpana used as Pathya (wholesome regimens) include:

- **Samsarjana / Pathya Kalpana:** Preparations such as Manda, Peya, Vilepi, etc., are gentle on digestion and help rekindle Agni while softening stools [9].
- **Shodhana Kalpana:** Preparations like Madanaphala Leha and Modaka assist in cleansing the gastrointestinal tract.
- **Shamana Kalpana:** Preparations such as Vishaghna and Yavagu deliver therapeutic substances to balance doshas and promote normal physiology.

Ayurvedic classics describe formulations where rice, pulses, or meat are cooked in varying proportions of water to achieve specific therapeutic actions:

- **Manda** (1:14 ratio of rice to water, supernatant liquid only) soothes Agni, hydrates tissues, and relieves dryness of the intestines - helpful in early-stage Vibandha in children and conditions like Jwara (fever) and Atisara (diarrhea).
- **Peya** (1:14, with equal liquid and solid parts) stimulates appetite and aids mild Vata Anulomana, promoting easier defecation and relieving fatigue.
- **Yavagu** (1:6, thicker consistency) supports Grahi and Brahmana functions and acts as a strengthening diet; in cases of Vibandha, it restores digestive capacity and nourishes the intestines.
- **Vilepi** (1:4, thick with little liquid) is Vatahara (Vata-calming), Balya (strength-promoting), and Malamutra Vardhaka (enhances fecal and urinary output), making it especially useful for children with recurrent constipation due to Vata prakopa.
- **Krisara**, a mixture of rice and Mudga (green gram) in a 1:6 ratio, improves digestion, provides mild unctuousness, and supports intestinal motility.
- **Yusha** (1:16 ratio, thin soup-like) is ideal for weak digestion (Mandagni) and serves as a light, nourishing food during constipation recovery.
- **Mamsarasa** (1:4, meat soup) acts as Prinana (nourishing) and Bala Vardhana (strengthening), suitable for debilitated children recovering from chronic Vibandha..

Each of these Ahara Kalpanas works by restoring Agni, lubricating intestinal walls, and promoting Vata Anulomana (downward movement of Vata) [10], thereby addressing the root cause of constipation. When appropriately selected based on a child's Prakriti and digestive strength, these Pathya preparations serve both preventive and therapeutic functions in Vibandha Chikitsa (management of constipation).

4. MECHANISM OF PATHYA AHARA IN RELIEVING CONSTIPATION AMONG CHILDREN

In Ayurveda, Vibandha (constipation) is primarily a Vata-pradhana Vyadhi (disorder dominated by Vata Dosha). The main site of Vata is the Pakvashaya (large intestine), where its vitiation disturbs the normal downward movement of Apana Vayu. This leads to dryness, obstruction, and hardening of feces [11]. In children, the condition is aggravated by Mandagni (low digestive power), irregular feeding habits, consumption of dry or junk food, and inadequate hydration. Because their gastrointestinal tract and digestive metabolism are still developing, even minor disturbances in Agni and Vata quickly manifest as Vibandha. Pathya Ahara-a wholesome diet planned according to an individual's Prakriti (constitution) and digestive capacity-acts on several levels to correct this pathology. Its mechanism of action can be understood through the principles of Agni Deepana (enhancing digestion), Vata Anulomana (restoring downward movement of Vata), Sneha Upachaya (improving lubrication), and Mala Nirmana (facilitating proper fecal formation) [12].

4.1 Stimulation and Regulation of Agni

The first step in relieving constipation is to restore Agni, the metabolic and digestive fire responsible for food transformation [13]. In children suffering from Vibandha, Agni is often weak or irregular due to consumption of heavy, incompatible, or stale food (Guru, Viruddha, Shushka Ahara). Pathya Ahara incorporates light, warm, and mildly spiced foods-such as Manda, Peya, and Vilepi-that gently kindle Jatharagni without overburdening digestion. These preparations provide easily assimilable nutrients while clearing Ama (undigested toxins). The inclusion of mild carminatives like cumin or ginger in such diets enhances peristalsis and appetite. Thus, Agni Deepana not only corrects digestive sluggishness but also sets the foundation for regular bowel movements.

4.2 Regulation of Vata Dosha and Apana Vayu

The principal Dosha involved in constipation is Vata, particularly Apana Vayu, whose normal function is Mala Pravritti (defecation) [14]. When Apana Vayu becomes vitiated due to irregular eating, cold food, lack of oil, or suppression of natural urges, it moves erratically, resulting in retention of stool and dryness. Pathya Ahara rich in Snigdha Guna (unctuousness) and Ushna Virya (warm potency) pacifies Vata Dosha and restores the downward flow of Apana Vayu. Warm fluids, ghee, sesame oil, and milk are recommended to counter the Ruksha (dry) and Sheeta (cold) qualities of aggravated Vata [15]. These foods act as natural lubricants, softening feces and promoting smooth evacuation.

4.3 Improvement of Mala Nirmana and Bowel Regularity

A key mechanism through which Pathya Ahara relieves constipation is by supporting Mala Nirmana-the physiological process of waste formation and elimination. Balanced Ahara ensures adequate fiber, moisture, and lubrication in the intestinal tract. Preparations like Vilepi and Krisara, which combine rice and Mudga (green gram) in precise proportions, provide both nourishment and mild bulk to stool. These diets regulate colonic motility, prevent hard stool formation, and ensure easy defecation. The inclusion of fruits such as papaya, banana, and soaked raisins, which are naturally rich in soft fibers, further improves fecal consistency [16].

4.4 Reduction of Rukshata (Dryness) and Maintenance of Hydration

Dryness of the colon (Rukshata) is a central component of Vata-induced Vibandha. Pathya Ahara emphasizes Snigdha (unctuous) and Drava (moist) foods to counteract this. Soupy preparations like Peya, Yusha, and Mamsarasa not only hydrate the system but also lubricate the intestinal walls [17]. Regular intake of lukewarm water and ghee-enriched diets maintains mucosal moisture and eases the passage of feces.

4.5 Strengthening of Gut Immunity and Child Health

Chronic constipation in children often leads to loss of appetite, irritability, and poor nutrient absorption. By enhancing Agni and ensuring timely elimination, Pathya Ahara supports the integrity of the gut microbiome and overall immunity (Bala) [18]. A well-functioning digestive system prevents the accumulation of Ama, which is considered the root of many pediatric disorders (Bala Rogas). Foods such as Krisara and Yavagu act as mild tonics, replenishing energy and aiding tissue nourishment (Dhatu Poshana).

4.6 Alignment with Modern Physiology

From a modern biomedical perspective, the mechanisms of Pathya Ahara correspond to improving gastrointestinal motility, hydration, and fiber intake [19]. Warm, lightly processed foods encourage peristalsis, while unctuous substances like ghee reduce intestinal friction and facilitate stool passage. The emphasis on routine eating habits parallels current dietary recommendations for pediatric constipation management, including regular meal timing, adequate water intake, and balanced nutrition.

Thus, Pathya Ahara acts through multiple interrelated mechanisms-stimulating digestion, balancing Vata, moisturizing the intestines, and ensuring regular bowel evacuation. In children, these effects not only relieve constipation but also promote healthy growth and immunity. Adopting Pathya Ahara as a daily practice aligns with Ayurveda's holistic vision, where diet itself functions as medicine (Ahara eva Aushadha). Through this approach, constipation in children can be effectively prevented and managed without dependence on restoring harmony in both body and mind in figure 1.



Figure 01: Mechanism of Pathya Ahara in Preventing and Managing Constipation Among Children

Ayurvedic diet emphasizes on consuming foods that help maintain balance and promote digestive health. Here are some dietary ingredients that can help with constipation:

Foods to Include

1. Fiber-rich foods: Whole grains like brown rice, whole wheat, and oats; fruits like figs, prunes, and apricots; vegetables like leafy greens, broccoli, and carrots.
2. Triphala: A blend of three herbs (Amalaki, Haritaki, and Bibhitaki) that helps regulate bowel movements.
3. Ghee: Clarified butter that lubricates the digestive tract and promotes bowel movements.
4. Warm liquids: Herbal teas, warm water, and soups that help stimulate digestion.
5. Fennel seeds: Carminative properties help reduce gas and bloating.
6. Ginger: Digestive properties help stimulate digestion and relieve constipation.
7. Ajwain: Carminative and digestive properties help relieve constipation and bloating.

Foods to Avoid

1. Processed foods: Can be low in fiber and high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats.
2. Dairy products: Can be constipating, especially for those with lactose intolerance.
3. Fried foods: Can be difficult to digest and worsen constipation.
4. Caffeine: Can dehydrate the body and worsen constipation.
5. Refined sugars: Can disrupt gut bacteria and worsen constipation.

Tips

1. Eat a balanced diet: Include a variety of whole foods in your diet.
2. Stay hydrated: Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
3. Exercise regularly: Regular physical activity can help stimulate bowel movements.
4. Manage stress: Stress can exacerbate constipation; practice stress-reducing techniques like yoga or meditation.

Consult with a healthcare professional or an Ayurvedic practitioner to determine the best dietary approach for your individual needs.

5. FUTURE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should focus on validating the role of Pathya Ahara (Wholesome Diet) in preventing and managing constipation among children through evidence-based approaches. Clinical trials and observational studies are required to assess the efficacy of specific Ayurvedic dietary formulations such as Manda, Peya, Vilepi, and Yusha in improving bowel regularity, digestion, and overall gut health in pediatric populations. Developing age-specific dietary guidelines based on Prakriti (constitution), digestive strength (Agni), and lifestyle can help in designing standardized pediatric nutrition protocols that are both preventive and therapeutic [20]. Integrating Ayurvedic dietary principles with modern nutritional science will enhance understanding of how Pathya Ahara influences gastrointestinal motility, hydration, and microbiome balance. Public health programs should promote awareness among parents, caregivers, and teachers regarding the

importance of wholesome food habits, emphasizing freshly prepared, fiber-rich, and easily digestible diets. Schools and child health centers can play a vital role by incorporating Ayurvedic dietary education into daily meal planning and health check-ups. Moreover, documentation and preservation of traditional pediatric diets mentioned in classical texts like Kashyapa Samhita and Charaka Samhita are essential for future reference and research validation. Long-term studies may also explore how early adherence to Pathya Ahara impacts immunity, metabolism, and cognitive development in later life. Recognizing Pathya Ahara as both a preventive and curative tool within pediatric healthcare policies can significantly reduce the prevalence of chronic constipation and related gastrointestinal disorders among children. Overall, interdisciplinary collaboration among Ayurvedic scholars, pediatricians, and nutrition experts is crucial for scientifically substantiating and implementing these dietary principles for holistic child health and wellbeing.

6. CONCLUSION

Constipation in children is a growing health concern that significantly affects their physical comfort, digestion, and overall well-being. Ayurveda, with its holistic approach, emphasizes Ahara (diet) as a foundational pillar of health and disease management. The concept of Pathya Ahara (Wholesome Diet) provides a practical and preventive strategy by aligning food choices with individual Prakriti (constitution), Agni (digestive capacity), and Dosha balance. Unlike symptomatic treatments, Pathya Ahara addresses the root cause of constipation by restoring proper functioning of Apana Vayu, enhancing Agni, and promoting Vata Anulomana (normal downward movement of Vata). Traditional Ayurvedic preparations such as Manda, Peya, Vilepi, and Yusha offer scientifically relevant dietary interventions that aid digestion, improve stool consistency, and strengthen gut motility in children. These simple yet effective formulations emphasize the preventive dimension of Ayurveda by ensuring nourishment, hydration, and digestive balance through natural means. Integrating Pathya Ahara principles into pediatric care can thus play a vital role in reducing dependency on laxatives and promoting sustainable bowel health. Further scientific validation through clinical studies will strengthen its applicability within modern child healthcare systems. In essence, adopting Pathya Ahara as a lifestyle practice rather than a temporary dietary measure can ensure the holistic development of children, prevent chronic gastrointestinal disorders, and uphold the Ayurvedic vision of Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam-preserving the health of the healthy.

Author Contribution

The author conceptualized the research, conducted the literature review and doctrinal analysis, drafted the manuscript, and finalised the article for submission.

Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest declared none.

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