

Role of Lifestyle Modification in Management of Cancer – Ayurvedic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background: Cancer is a major global health challenge with increasing incidence and mortality. Although modern oncology has made significant advancements, issues such as adverse effects of therapy, compromised immunity and reduced quality of life continue to affect patients. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of Ahara (diet), Vihara (lifestyle), Dinacharya, Ritucharya and Sadvritta in the maintenance of health and prevention of disease. Lifestyle modification forms a fundamental component of Ayurvedic management and plays an important role in chronic disorders, including cancer.

Objective: To review the role of Ayurvedic lifestyle modification in the prevention and supportive management of cancer.

Materials and Methods: Classical Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya were reviewed for concepts related to lifestyle, disease prevention and management of Arbuda and Granthi. Relevant published literature on lifestyle factors and cancer was also analyzed. Conceptual correlation was done between Ayurvedic principles and contemporary understanding of cancer care.

Discussion: According to Ayurveda, cancer can be correlated with Arbuda and Granthi, which develop due to chronic Dosh imbalance, Agnimandya and Dhatu vitiation. Faulty dietary habits, sedentary lifestyle, psychological stress and suppression of natural urges contribute to disease progression. Ayurvedic lifestyle measures such as wholesome diet, regular daily regimen, seasonal regimen, yoga, meditation and mental discipline help in improving Agni, enhancing immunity, reducing stress and supporting tissue health. These measures play a significant role as supportive therapy during and after conventional cancer treatment.

Conclusion: Ayurvedic lifestyle modification has considerable potential in cancer prevention and supportive management. Integration of these principles with modern oncology may help improve quality of life and overall treatment outcomes. Further clinical and integrative research is required to establish evidence-based protocols.

Keywords: Cancer, Lifestyle modification, Ayurveda, Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Arbuda, Supportive care

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide and poses a major challenge to global health systems. Despite remarkable advancements in diagnosis and treatment, cancer patients continue to experience adverse effects of therapy, reduced immunity, psychological distress and compromised quality of life.¹ These challenges highlight the need for a holistic and integrative approach that focuses not only on disease management but also on overall well-being.

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine, emphasizes maintenance of health through proper regulation of Ahara (diet), Vihara (lifestyle) and Aushadha (medicines). The fundamental principle of Ayurveda aims at “*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam and Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam*”, which underscores the importance of preventive healthcare.² Lifestyle

regulation forms the cornerstone of Ayurvedic practice and plays a vital role in preventing chronic lifestyle-related disorders.

In Ayurvedic literature, cancer can be conceptually correlated with Arbuda and Granthi, which are described as abnormal growths resulting from long-standing Dosha imbalance, particularly involving Kapha along with Vata and Pitta, associated with Dhatu dushti and impaired Agni.^{3,4} The pathogenesis involves chronic Agnimandya, accumulation of Ama and progressive involvement of deeper tissues leading to uncontrolled cellular proliferation.

Modern scientific research also recognizes lifestyle factors such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, chronic stress, disturbed sleep and addictions as significant contributors to cancer development and progression.⁵ These observations closely parallel Ayurvedic descriptions of improper Ahara and Vihara as major etiological factors in chronic diseases.

Ayurveda advocates systematic lifestyle modification through Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Achar Rasayana and Sattvavajaya Chikitsa, which aim to strengthen immunity, maintain metabolic balance and enhance psychological health.^{6,7} These measures play an important role in cancer prevention as well as in supportive care by improving treatment tolerance, reducing complications and enhancing quality of life.

Considering the increasing burden of cancer and the limitations of existing therapeutic modalities, exploration of Ayurvedic lifestyle principles as an integrative supportive approach becomes highly relevant. Hence, the present review aims to highlight the role of lifestyle modification based on Ayurvedic principles in the prevention and supportive management of cancer.

2. AIM

To review the role of Ayurvedic lifestyle modification in the prevention and supportive management of cancer.

3. METHODOLOGY

A conceptual and literary review was carried out by studying classical Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya. Relevant published research articles related to lifestyle factors and cancer were also reviewed. Data were analyzed to establish a conceptual correlation between Ayurvedic lifestyle principles and modern understanding of cancer care.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Concept of Cancer in Ayurveda

Ayurveda does not describe cancer as a single disease entity; however, conditions resembling malignancy are explained under the concepts of Arbuda and Granthi. Acharya Sushruta defines Arbuda as a firm, deep-rooted, painless swelling which does not suppurate and grows progressively. Such description closely resembles the clinical behavior of malignant tumors. The involvement of Doshas, particularly Kapha along with Vata and Pitta, leads to abnormal proliferation of tissues and loss of normal growth regulation.

According to Ayurvedic pathology, Arbuda develops due to chronic vitiation of Doshas with predominant involvement of Kapha, resulting in excessive growth, while Vata contributes to spread and pain, and Pitta is responsible for inflammatory and metabolic changes. The disease becomes incurable when deeper Dhatus are involved and when chronicity is established.

Role of Agni and Ama in Cancer Pathogenesis

Agni is the fundamental determinant of health in Ayurveda. Impairment of Jatharagni and Dhatvagni leads to incomplete digestion and metabolism, resulting in formation of Ama, which acts as a toxic substance at cellular level. Chronic Agnimandya creates a metabolic environment favorable for abnormal tissue growth.

Modern research also indicates that metabolic dysfunction, oxidative stress and chronic inflammation are key contributors in carcinogenesis. Thus, Ayurvedic concept of Ama can be correlated with metabolic toxins, free radicals and inflammatory mediators involved in cancer development.

Lifestyle Factors in Etiology of Cancer

Ayurveda gives great importance to lifestyle (Vihara) in disease causation. Improper dietary habits such as excessive intake of processed foods, incompatible food combinations (Viruddha Ahara), irregular meal timings and overeating disturb Agni

and promote Ama formation.

Similarly, sedentary lifestyle, lack of physical activity, suppression of natural urges (Vega Dharana), disturbed sleep and addictions like tobacco and alcohol significantly contribute to disease manifestation. These etiological factors are also recognized in modern medicine as major risk factors for cancer.

Ayurvedic Concept of Lifestyle Modification

Lifestyle modification in Ayurveda is structured through well-defined principles such as Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Achar Rasayana and Sattvavajaya Chikitsa. These measures aim at maintaining physiological balance and strengthening body–mind harmony.

Dinacharya (Daily Regimen)

Dinacharya promotes regularity in biological rhythms through practices like waking early, oral hygiene, Abhyanga, exercise and proper sleep. These practices help in maintaining metabolic balance and improving immunity.

Ritucharya (Seasonal Regimen)

Ritucharya emphasizes adaptation of diet and lifestyle according to seasonal variations, thereby preventing Dosha accumulation and maintaining immune stability.

Ahara Vidhi (Dietary Regulation)

Ayurveda describes detailed dietary guidelines including quality, quantity, timing and compatibility of food. A wholesome diet supports Agni, nourishes Dhatus and prevents toxin accumulation.

Role of Achar Rasayana and Mental Health

Psychological stress is a significant contributing factor in cancer development and progression. Ayurveda emphasizes mental discipline through Achar Rasayana, which includes ethical conduct, emotional control, positive thinking and social harmony.

Modern psychoneuroimmunology also supports the role of mental well-being in enhancing immune function and improving cancer outcomes. Yoga, meditation and mindfulness practices help reduce stress hormones and improve quality of life.

Lifestyle Modification in Supportive Cancer Care

Ayurvedic lifestyle measures play a major role as supportive therapy during cancer treatment. They help in:

- Improving digestion and appetite
- Enhancing immunity
- Reducing fatigue and weakness
- Improving sleep quality
- Managing anxiety and depression
- Enhancing tolerance to chemotherapy and radiotherapy

Such supportive care improves patient compliance and overall therapeutic outcomes.

Integration of Ayurveda with Modern Oncology

Integrative oncology aims to combine conventional cancer treatment with supportive therapies that enhance quality of life. Ayurvedic lifestyle modification provides a cost-effective, non-invasive and patient-centered approach.

Adopting Ayurvedic lifestyle principles alongside modern oncology can reduce treatment-related complications, improve functional status and promote holistic healing.

Need for Scientific Validation

Although classical texts strongly advocate lifestyle regulation, there is a need for well-designed clinical studies to scientifically validate these principles. Evidence-based integrative models can strengthen acceptance of Ayurveda in cancer care.

Table: Ayurvedic Correlation of Cancer with Classical Samhita References

Modern Concept (Cancer)	Ayurvedic Correlation	Classical Description	Samhita Reference
Abnormal tissue growth	Arbuda	Deep-rooted, firm, slowly growing, non-suppurating swelling	Sushruta Samhita, Nidana Sthana 11/3
Benign tumor	Granthi	Nodular, circumscribed swelling caused by vitiated Doshas	Sushruta Samhita, Nidana Sthana 11/4

Malignant tumor	Maha-Arbuda	Large, progressive, difficult to treat swelling	Sushruta Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana 11/9
Metastasis / spread	Dhatugatavastha	Doshas spreading to deeper Dhatus	Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana 15/43
Uncontrolled proliferation	Kapha Pradhana Dosha Dushti	Excessive growth due to Kapha vriddhi	Sushruta Samhita, Nidana Sthana 11
Pain in advanced cancer	Vata Anubandha	Vata causes pain and spread	Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 17/78
Inflammation / ulceration	Pitta Anubandha	Pitta responsible for suppuration and burning	Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana 15
Tissue invasion	Dhatu Dushti	Progressive involvement of Rasa to Majja	Charaka Samhita, Vimana Sthana 8
Cachexia / weight loss	Dhatu Kshaya	Progressive depletion of tissues	Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 28
Chronicity & incurability	Asadhya Vyadhi Lakshana	Long-standing disease involving deep Dhatus	Charaka Samhita, Indriya Sthana 9

5. AYURVEDIC CONCEPTUAL CORRELATION OF CANCER WITH DOSHA INVOLVEMENT AND DIETARY GUIDELINES

1. Arbuda - Malignant Tumor

In Ayurveda, Arbuda is described by Acharya Sushruta as a deep-rooted, firm, slowly progressive swelling that does not suppurate easily and tends to increase in size gradually. Arbuda is formed due to chronic vitiation of Doshas, predominantly Kapha, with involvement of deeper Dhatus such as Mamsa, Rakta and Meda.

The classical description of Arbuda resembles malignant tumors in modern medicine due to its progressive nature, deep tissue involvement, tendency for recurrence and difficulty in management. When Doshas penetrate deeper Dhatus and become chronic, the disease attains an Asadhya or Krichchhra-sadhya stage.

Diet according to Samhita

- Laghu (light) and easily digestible diet
- Yava (barley), Mudga (green gram), Kulattha
- Shali rice in moderate quantity
- Tikta and Kashaya rasa pradhana ahara
- Avoid Guru, Snigdha, Abhishyandi food

(Ref: Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 28)

2. Granthi - Benign Tumor

Granthi is described as a localized nodular swelling formed due to vitiated Doshas, mainly Kapha and Vata. Unlike Arbuda, Granthi is relatively circumscribed, less aggressive and slower in progression.

Granthi can be correlated with benign tumors as they show limited growth and lesser tissue invasion. When Granthi is not properly managed, it may progress into Arbuda due to persistent Dosha vitiation.

Diet according to Samhita

- Tikta, Katu and Kashaya rasa
- Takra (buttermilk)
- Shigru, Patola, Karavellaka
- Avoid excessive Madhura and Snigdha ahara

(Ref: Sushruta Samhita, Nidana Sthana 11)

3. Kapha – Responsible for Uncontrolled Growth

Kapha Dosha is responsible for stability, growth and nourishment. When Kapha becomes aggravated due to excessive intake of Madhura, Snigdha and Guru ahara, it leads to abnormal tissue proliferation.

In cancer pathogenesis, Kapha contributes to:

- Excessive cellular growth
- Tissue heaviness and mass formation
- Slow but continuous progression

Hence, Kapha is considered the primary Dosha in Arbuda formation.

Kapha-pacifying diet (Samhita-based)

- Katu, Tikta and Kashaya rasa
- Yava, Kodrava, Mudga

- Warm and freshly prepared food
- Avoid dairy excess, sweets, fried food

(Ref: Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 21)

4. Vata – Responsible for Spread, Pain and Degeneration

Vata governs movement, division and dispersion. When Vata associates with vitiated Kapha and Rakta, it facilitates spread of disease, tissue degeneration and pain.

In cancer:

- Vata causes pain (Shoola)
- Promotes metastasis (spread to other Dhatus)
- Leads to emaciation, weakness and fatigue

Thus, Vata plays a major role in advanced and metastatic stages.

Vata-shamaka diet (Samhita-based)

- Snigdha, Ushna and Laghu food
- Ghrita in small quantity
- Shali rice, wheat
- Meat soup (Mamsa rasa) in indicated cases
- Avoid dry, cold and fasting habits

(Ref: Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 27)

5. Pitta – Responsible for Inflammation, Ulceration and Metabolic Changes

Pitta governs metabolism, transformation and heat. When aggravated, it causes:

- Inflammation
- Ulceration
- Burning sensation
- Rapid tissue destruction

In cancer, Pitta is involved in inflammatory tumors, ulcerated growths and metabolic disturbances.

Pitta-shamaka diet (Samhita-based)

- Madhura, Tikta and Kashaya rasa
- Shita virya food
- Milk (in suitable patients), ghee
- Draksha, Amalaki, Shatavari
- Avoid spicy, sour and fermented foods

(Ref: Charaka Samhita, Sutra Sthana 26)

Integrated Dietary Principle in Cancer (Ayurveda)

Ayurveda emphasizes that diet should be:

- Agni-friendly
- Dosha-specific
- Seasonal (Ritucharya)
- Taken in proper quantity and time

A balanced Ahara helps in:

- Reducing Ama
- Strengthening immunity
- Improving tissue quality
- Supporting cancer therapy

Role of Panchakarma in Cancer (Ayurvedic Perspective)

Cancer is a chronic, progressive disease involving long-standing Dosha imbalance, Agnimandya, Ama accumulation and Dhatu dushti. In Ayurveda, conditions resembling cancer are explained under Arbuda and Granthi, which develop due to Kapha-dominant pathology with association of Vata and Pitta.

Panchakarma plays an important role in cancer management as Shodhana and supportive therapy, helping in detoxification, improvement of Agni, enhancement of immunity and better tolerance to conventional cancer treatments.

Principles of Panchakarma in Cancer

Panchakarma is selected based on:

- Strength of patient (Bala)

- Stage of disease
- Involvement of Dosha and Dhatu
- Digestive capacity (Agni)

In cancer patients, **Mridu (mild) Panchakarma** is preferred to avoid exhaustion.

1. Snehana (Oleation Therapy)

Role:

- Pacifies aggravated Vata
- Prevents tissue degeneration
- Improves strength and nourishment
- Reduces dryness caused by chemotherapy

Forms Used:

- Internal: Ghrita (Tikta ghrita, Panchagavya ghrita – selectively)
- External: Abhyanga with medicated oils

Benefit in cancer:

- Reduces fatigue
- Improves sleep
- Prevents cachexia (Dhatu kshaya)

2. Swedana (Sudation Therapy)

Role:

- Removes srotorodha
- Improves circulation
- Enhances metabolic activity

Preferred types:

- Mridu Swedana
- Nadi Sweda
- Patra Pottali Sweda

Benefit:

- Reduces pain and stiffness
- Improves mobility
- Enhances absorption of medicines

3. Vamana (Therapeutic Emesis)

Indication:

- Kapha-dominant tumors
- Early-stage disease
- Strong patients only

Role:

- Eliminates vitiated Kapha
- Reduces abnormal tissue growth tendency

Rarely used in advanced cancer due to weakness.

4. Virechana (Therapeutic Purgation)

Role:

- Eliminates vitiated Pitta and Rakta
- Corrects metabolism
- Reduces inflammatory processes

Benefit in cancer:

- Helps in liver detoxification
- Useful in inflammatory and ulcerative tumors
- Improves digestive fire

Preferred as **Mridu Virechana**.

5. Basti (Medicated Enema Therapy)

Most important Panchakarma in cancer

Acharya Charaka states:

Role:

- Controls Vata (pain, spread, degeneration)
- Nourishes Dhatus
- Improves immunity
- Prevents disease progression

Types used:

- Matra Basti
- Anuvasana Basti
- Yapana Basti

Benefits:

- Reduces cancer-related pain
- Improves appetite
- Improves quality of life

6. Nasya (Nasal Therapy)

Role:

- Useful in head and neck cancers
- Improves mental clarity
- Reduces anxiety and depression

Used in mild doses only.

7. Raktamokshana (Selective use)

Role:

- Removes vitiated Rakta
- Reduces local inflammation

Indicated in localized lesions only, not in systemic malignancy.

Panchakarma as Supportive Oncology Care

Panchakarma helps in:

- Detoxification
- Immune modulation
- Reduction of chemotherapy side effects
- Appetite improvement
- Pain management
- Emotional well-being

Thus, Panchakarma acts as **adjuvant therapy**, not replacement of modern oncology.

Safety Considerations

- Should be performed only after Bala assessment
- Avoid strong Shodhana in advanced stages
- Individualized treatment essential
- Integration with oncologist is advised

6. DISCUSSION

Cancer is a complex chronic disease characterized by progressive tissue proliferation, metabolic dysregulation and immune suppression. From an Ayurvedic perspective, conditions resembling cancer are described under Arbuda and Granthi, which arise due to long-standing Dosha imbalance, particularly Kapha dominance with association of Vata and Pitta. The chronic nature of the disease indicates involvement of deeper Dhatus and impairment of Agni, leading to accumulation of Ama and progressive tissue pathology.⁸

Ayurveda emphasizes that chronic diseases cannot be effectively managed by symptomatic treatment alone; rather, correction of the underlying Dosha–Dushya–Agni disturbance is essential. Panchakarma is described as the principal therapeutic modality for achieving **Shodhana**, which helps in elimination of vitiated Doshas and restoration of physiological balance.⁹

In cancer pathogenesis, Kapha contributes to abnormal cellular proliferation, Vata facilitates disease spread and pain, while Pitta is responsible for inflammatory and metabolic alterations. Panchakarma addresses each of these pathological

components through its multidimensional actions.¹⁰

Snehana plays a vital role in pacifying aggravated Vata and preventing Dhatu kshaya. In cancer patients, tissue degeneration, fatigue and dryness are common, especially following chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Proper oleation therapy enhances nourishment, supports tissue integrity and improves tolerance to treatment.¹¹

Swedana helps in relieving srotorodha and improving microcirculation. By facilitating movement of vitiated Doshas from peripheral tissues toward the gastrointestinal tract, Swedana prepares the body for effective Shodhana and improves metabolic activity.¹²

Among Shodhana procedures, Virechana is particularly useful in conditions involving Pitta and Rakta dushti. In cancer patients, mild purgation helps in detoxification, correction of hepatic metabolism and reduction of inflammatory mediators. Hence, Mridu Virechana is preferred to avoid exhaustion.¹³

Basti is regarded as the most important Panchakarma therapy due to its systemic influence on Vata, which governs movement, division and degeneration. Since Vata plays a significant role in cancer progression, pain and metastasis, Basti therapy helps in controlling disease advancement, improving strength and enhancing quality of life.¹⁴

Nasya therapy contributes to mental clarity and neuroendocrine balance. Psychological stress is a major factor affecting immune function in cancer patients. Nasya along with Sattvavajaya Chikitsa supports emotional well-being and reduces anxiety and depression.¹⁵

Raktamokshana, though not routinely indicated in systemic malignancy, may be useful in selected localized inflammatory or ulcerative lesions. It aids in removal of vitiated Rakta and reduces local symptoms when carefully administered.¹⁶

The integrated application of Panchakarma therapies contributes to Agnideepana, Ama pachana, Dosha shodhana and Dhatu poshana, thereby strengthening host resistance. Modern research also supports the role of detoxification, immune modulation and stress reduction in improving cancer outcomes, which parallels Ayurvedic principles.¹⁷

Thus, Panchakarma should be considered not as an alternative but as a supportive and complementary modality in integrative oncology. When administered judiciously, with careful assessment of patient strength and disease stage, Panchakarma enhances therapeutic tolerance and improves quality of life.¹⁸

Pathya–Apathya in Cancer (Ayurvedic Perspective)

Cancer can be correlated with Arbuda and Granthi, which arise due to long-standing Dosha imbalance, especially Kapha dominance with association of Vata and Pitta. Hence, Pathya–Apathya should aim at Agni deepana, Ama pachana, Kapha shamana and Dhatu poshana.

Aharaja Pathya (Wholesome Diet)

Category	Pathya Ahara
Cereals	Shali rice, Yava (barley), Godhuma (wheat – moderate)
Pulses	Mudga (green gram), Masura
Vegetables	Patola, Karavellaka, Shigru, Vartaka
Fruits	Amalaki, Draksha, Dadima
Liquids	Ushnodaka, Takra (properly prepared)
Fats	Goghrita (in small quantity)
Rasa predominance	Tikta, Kashaya, Laghu
Cooking method	Fresh, warm, easily digestible

Benefits:

Improves Agni, reduces Ama, pacifies Kapha and supports immunity.

Āhāraja Apathya (Unwholesome Diet)

Category	Apathya Ahara
Heavy foods	Guru, Abhishyandi ahara
Dairy excess	Curd at night, cheese, paneer
Sweet foods	Excess sugar, sweets, bakery items
Fried foods	Deep fried, oily foods
Processed food	Preserved, packaged, reheated food
Viruddha ahara	Milk with sour fruits, incompatible combinations

Addictions	Alcohol, tobacco
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Effects:

Aggravates Kapha, produces Ama, promotes abnormal tissue growth.

Vihāraja Pathya (Wholesome Lifestyle)

Aspect	Pathya Vihara
Daily routine	Dinacharya
Seasonal routine	Ritucharya
Physical activity	Mild exercise, walking
Mental health	Meditation, Yoga, Pranayama
Sleep	Adequate and timely sleep
Emotional health	Positive thinking, Sattvika lifestyle
Therapies	Abhyanga, mild Panchakarma

Benefits:

Improves immunity, reduces stress, enhances treatment tolerance.

Vihāraja Apathya (Unwholesome Lifestyle)

Aspect	Apathya Vihara
Lifestyle	Sedentary habits
Stress	Anxiety, fear, grief
Sleep	Night awakening, day sleep
Suppression	Vega dharana
Activity	Excess exertion
Mental habits	Anger, depression, negative thoughts

Effects:

Aggravates Vata and Pitta, weakens immunity, worsens disease progression.

Classical Basis

Ayurveda emphasizes that proper diet and lifestyle play a decisive role in disease prevention and management.

7. CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic principles view cancer as a chronic disorder arising from long-standing Dosha imbalance, Agnimandya and Dhatu dushti. Panchakarma, when applied judiciously as supportive therapy, helps in detoxification, Dosha regulation and improvement of quality of life. Integration of Panchakarma with lifestyle modification and conventional oncology may provide a holistic approach in cancer care.

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