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Critical Review of Ayurvedic approach on Mental illnesses: Anxiety & Depression

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is known as "The Science of Life" and it's a medical science that treats people's bodily, mental and spiritual well-being. It views life as an amalgam of the senses, mind, body and soul. Ayurveda provides thorough information regarding social, mental and spiritual health in addition to treating physical ailments. In order to maintain and enhance health as well as prevent and treat multiple illness, Ayurveda employs the concepts of sound physical and mental health. Mental disorders known as "*Manovikara*" are handled like illness. Ailments stem from the imbalances of the three *Doshas* that comprise our *Prakruti* or Ayurvedic constitution. Phobias and anxiety are typical signs of *Vata* imbalance, rage and obsessions are typical signs of *Pitta* imbalance and depression can result from *Kapha* imbalance. The three components of Ayurveda therapy are emphasized as *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, *Yuktivyapashray* and *Daivyapashray Chikitsa*. In Ayurveda, *Sattvavajaya* treatment is employed as a novel form of psychotherapy and is mentioned in the Charaka samhita. In order to cure mental health difficulties and other important features, this article attempts to bring together all of the Ayurvedic knowledge on *manas* and *manovikara* treatment in one orderly place.

Key Words *Manas. Depression. Anxiety. Mental health*

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda defines "*Swasthya*" as having three essential components: physical, spiritual and mental well-being. According to the World Health Organization, mental health is a condition of well-being in which each person may reach their full potential, manage everyday stressors, work effectively and profitably and make a positive contribution to their community. A person's ability to communicate, learn, feel, think and have self-worth is all based on their mental

health. A person's ability to maintain healthy mental health is essential for many aspects of life, including interpersonal connections, emotional stability and productive participation in society. All diagnosable mental disorders that cause notable changes in thought, feeling and/or behavior as well as functional issues in the home, workplace and family context are sometimes referred to together as mental illnesses¹.

The body (*Sarira*), the sensory and motor abilities (*Indriya*), the intellect (*Sattva*) and the soul (*Atma*) are the four interrelated components of

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life, according to Ayurveda. A balanced combination of these elements—which include mental, bodily, sensory and spiritual aspects—is necessary to lead a healthy life. The importance of mental health is also emphasized by Ayurveda, which encompasses traits like happiness, contentment, restful sleep, steady mental processes, active senses, self-control over negative emotions, resilience in the face of hardship and adaptability³. *Mana*, the ultimate analytical tool, is the home of the soul or *Atma*, which controls the body as a whole. It is also known as the center of understanding since it permits the higher senses to operate. Ayurveda affirms that knowledge proves the existence of mind (*y{k.ka eulks Kkua*⁵) Since the mind is said to have "*Ubhayatmaka*" (*mHk;kReda eu%*⁵) or to possess both sensory and motor abilities, it is regarded as a higher faculty since it directs and coordinates all other faculties that are connected to it.

The term "mind" is used broadly in modern psychology to refer to the combined functioning of the brain and body as well as memory, worldview, personality, soul, and other intangible facets of human existence and psychology. It encompasses social interactions, learning and self-expression, as well as an individual's relationship to abstract ideas like metaphysics, spirituality, and religion. The concrete expressions of thought, perception, emotion, willpower, memory, knowledge, conscience and imagination that arise within the brain are all included in the mind.

Depression and anxiety are not diseases per se; rather, they are symptoms of many other disorders. It could be caused by a number of factors, including things that pertain to a person's personal and professional lives. The primary distinctions between these two circumstances are Worry is an indicator of anxiety. Two types of aberrant worry exist: either the patient worries about everything on a regular basis, or the patient worries only in specific circumstances. The primary characteristic of depression is apathy, sorrow, lack of activity and bad mood. *Rajo Guna* is mostly impacted by anxiety, while *Tamo Guna* is impacted by depression. Hyperactivity, poor decision-making skills and depression coupled with a decreased level of activity or inactivity are typical characteristics of anxiety⁶.

The usefulness of psychotherapy (*Satvavajaya*) in treating both psychiatric and somatic disorders was recognized in Ayurveda. The foundation of psychotherapy has been present in different forms since the dawn of civilization, when elders would offer supportive or rehabilitative counselling to those in need. *Satvavajaya* can only be attained by means of spiritual knowledge, philosophical comprehension, perseverance, gratitude, and focus. A part of the *Daivavyapasraya Chikitsa* (spiritual therapy), which was thought to be beneficial for both physical and mental illnesses, were *mantras* (incantations), *manidharan* (precious stones), *oushadam* (amulets), *mangalam* (rites), *balih* (sacrifice), *homah* (oblations), *upavasah* (fasting), *japah* (prayer), and *vratham* (vows)¹.

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One of the most underestimated concepts in psychiatry is the role that nutrition plays in maintaining a healthy mind. The brain needs varying amounts of complex carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, amino acids, vitamins, minerals and water to stay healthy. To lower the prevalence of mental disorders, an integrated approach that simultaneously reflects the interplay of biological, psychological, spiritual and social aspects of psychiatry is required¹. Improving a population's mental well-being will also increase that population's physical well-being, which will boost social and economic wellbeing as a whole.

Prevalence

Research indicates that 20% of children and adolescents experience some form of mental problem and that at least 10% of the global population is afflicted by mental illness. According to a study, 38 million Indians suffer from anxiety disorders, while 56 million suffer from depression. An analysis by WHO on depression, approximately 7.5% of Indians have serious or mild mental illnesses that call for medical attention. "Every sixth Indian needs mental health help", according to the country's national health survey¹.

Ayurvedic perspectives on health

The four interconnected parts of life, according to Ayurveda, are the mind (*Satva*), the soul (*Atma*), the body (*Shareera*) and the sensory and motor faculties (*Indriya*). The idea of health therefore includes the bodily, mental, sensory and spiritual domains since a healthy life requires the ideal

complementarity of all these components. Additionally, it is said that an individual who possesses all five of these qualities—*Swastha Mana* (a sound mental state), *Prasanna aatmendriya* (a joyful soul with appropriate sense organ function), *Sama Agni* (a well-balanced state of dosha), *Sama Dhatu* (proportionate body organs and tissues) and *Sama Kriya* (proper physiology)—is in perfect health².

The achievement of **Physical health** is

- Desire for prompt food consumption and appropriate digestion of that food
- Timely removal of excretory materials
- Pleasantness to the sensory organs
- Proper and satisfactory sleep and timely awakening without any distress
- Normal growth and development of body
- Nice complexion, texture and lusture of the body
- Good immunity.
- Absence of lethargy, heaviness and laziness.
- Steady, active and harmonious activities of mind and its attributes.
- Proportionate musculature and compactness to the body.
- Ability to withstand temperature variations and hunger.

The achievement of **Mental Health** is

- A pleasant and well-balanced mental state.
- Being kind and joyful.
- Proper and satisfactory sleep
- Steady and well-balanced mental faculties

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- Pleasant and active state of sensory attributes
- Control over *Dharaniya Vega Kama*(lust), *Krodha*(anger), *Bhaya*(fear), *Iershya*(spite), *Shoka*(grief), *Lobha*(greed) and *Moha*(infatuation)
- Mind not getting excessively afflicted with adverse events and ability to adjust with such other things

Anxiety and Depression in Ayurveda

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a prevalent and debilitating disorder marked by tension, anxiety symptoms, and continuous worrying about a range of daily issues for a minimum of six months⁷. The manifestations of this illness bear similarities to the *Chittodwega* (excited mental state), which is one of the *Manovikara* (mental illnesses) described by Acharya Charaka. The *vata prakopa lakshanas*⁸ correspond to excess thinking, irritability, palpitations and other symptoms of GAD, while the *pitta prakopa lakshanas*⁹ are associated with changed bowel habits, fear, wrath and other negative emotions. Thinking about the dhatus associated with the illness, *ati chinta* or overthinking, is a contributing element to *rasa dhatu dusti*¹⁰, which again manifests as physical and mental symptoms.

Ayurveda refers to depression as either *Kaphaj unmada*, *Manodukhaj unmada*, *Vishaad*, or *Avsada*. Acharya Dhalhan claims that it is a disorder that stems from fear of failing, which prevents the mind and soul from operating normally. Depression can be caused by *sharirik*

doshas, *dhatu*, *strotas*, *satva bala*, *agni*, *ojas*, *mansic dosha*, *gyanendriya*, and *karmendriya*. *Vishada* and *avasada* represent Minor Depressive Episodes, and Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is equated to *Kaphaja Unmada*. MDD is a chronic, episodic disorder that presents with disturbance in mood, interest, cognition, and vegetative symptoms. It has a major impact on the quality of life of the patients by affecting their physical, mental, personal, social and spiritual wellbeing. Some information about mental disorders and their therapies can be found in Ayurvedic scriptures. Among the *vataja natatmaja vikara*¹³ is mentioned *Vishada*. The *Tama Pradhana Raja Dosha* is the *Manasika Dusti* involved. *Hina satwa purusha* (reduced mental strength) is more common in cases of *vishada* (C.S.Vi.8.119). One's *manas* (thought) (C.S.Su.16.14, C.S.Su.25.40), speech (*Vak*), and body (*kaya*) might all become deranged as a result of this condition. Co-existing medical disorders get worse when *vishada* is present (C.S.Su.25.40). Ayurveda approach for depression is as per *kaphaja unmada*.

It is mentioned that *hridaya* is the seat of mind in terms of location of mind¹¹. Acharya Charaka also clarified the *Samavayi sambandha* (inseparable link) between *twak* (skin) and mind, meaning that the mind is present wherever skin is¹². Because of this, the *vata kopa* brought on by *rasa kshaya* and *pita* will reside in the *shiras* and *hridya* where there is a *khavaigunya* (vitiated bodily channels) and cause symptoms to appear all over the body. Long-term worry and repeated

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thoughts are the root cause of this *khavaiguynya*, which is further aggravated by stress and other life-difficulty events that eventually lead to

mental illness. Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression appear as both psychological and somatic as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety		Depression	
Psychological	Somatic	Psychological	Somatic
Worries	Rise of Palpitation	Low mood	Low appetite or excess of appetite
Irritability	Tremors	Unhappiness	Weight gain or weight loss
Anticipation of bad things	Sweating of hands, feet, etc.	Negative thoughts	Disturbed sleep
Lack of concentration	Dizziness	Suicidal thoughts	Reduced libido, erectile dysfunction
Fearfulness	Muscle tension		Constipation or diarrhea
Reduced memory	Fatigue		
Inferiority complex	Insomnia		

Body-mind relationship in illness

The relationship between the mind and body is well established, dating back thousands of years. Physical issues are a common way for psychological distress to manifest. Physical signs of impaired emotion recognition and expression include sleep disturbances, appetite swings, libido loss, exhaustion, unexplained bodily aches and pains, eating disorders, and anger management problems. Anxiety and stress are believed to have a worsening effect on certain physical disorders such as psoriasis, eczema, autoimmune diseases, blood pressure, etc. The severity of a physical illness at any given time may depend on an individual's mental state. Disorders such as somatization, conversion and hypochondriasis are thought to have their origins in mental health issues.

The impact of a treatment on the body can also be influenced by the mind, either positively or negatively. The placebo effect has a beneficial influence on treatment because of the mind. The

intrinsic optimism of the person also influences how well a patient responds to treatment. In Ayurveda, the idea of *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* focuses on the mind by encouraging a person to feel well. According to Ayurveda, a person is treated as a whole, taking into account both their body and mind.

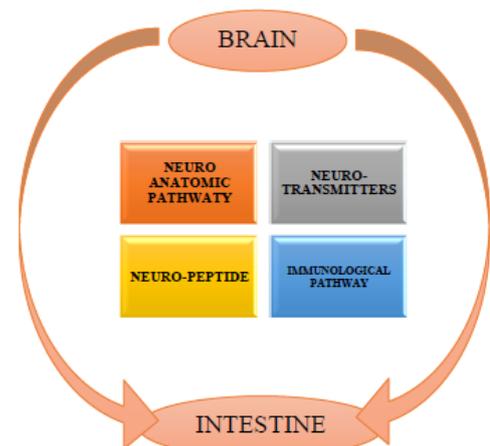


Figure. 1 Gut Brain Axis

Gut-Brain Axis

New fields like "Nutritional Psychiatry" have emerged as a result of the gut-brain axis' discoveries, which have expanded our understanding of and ability to treat mental disease. There is a connection between

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appropriate central nervous system (CNS) function and intestinal health. It is well known that signals from the gut can reach the brain directly or through autonomic neurons. These signals can come from hormones, neurotransmitters and immune factors as shown in Fig. 1. Still, Ayurveda has recorded the "body-mind" connection since ancient times. From the very beginning of the Vedic period, there were

Table 2 Ayurvedic Psychology

a.	Biological Humors	Balancing, Pitta and Kapha
b.	Vital essences	Strengthening Prana, Tejas and Ojas, the master form of Vata, Pitta and Kapha
c.	Impressions	harmonizing the mind and sense
d.	Consciousness	Promoting the correct functions of consciousness

Anti-anxiety drugs - *Medhya Rasayanas*: *Tagara, Brahmi, Mandukaparni, Shankapuspi, Ashwagandha, Jatamamsi, Parasika Yavani.*

Antidepressants - *Manobalya*: *Jyotismati, Vacha, Gandira.*

Aphrodisiac - *Putranjiva, Kokilaksha, Kapikacchu.*

Rasayanas - *Shilajatu, Amalaki, Aswagandha, Abhraka, Yashada, Mukta, Shukti, Swarna, Rajata*

Satvavajaya - It entails making an effort to regulate the abnormal mental activity through the practice of *dhyana* (meditation and concentration), *asana* (a variety of yogic postures that help to impart stability to both the body and mind), *pranyama* (control of breath), which clears blockages that are the cause of disease, and *yama* (code of conduct).

Mode of action

a. *Bramhi (Baccopa monneiri)*- recognized as an adaptogenic plant that strengthens the body's ability to withstand stress. Studies reveal that it

attempts to investigate the mind from a scientific standpoint. Yajurveda has attempted to characterize the mind as a medium for memory and perception.

Management of Anxiety and Depression through Ayurveda

Ayurvedic psychology deals with four level of treatment as described in Table 2.

improves serotonin levels, which improve mood, and lowers cortisol levels, which assist in reducing stress and anxiety¹⁷.

b. *Tagar (Valeriana wallichii)*- Because *tagara* roots have sedative qualities that soothe the central nervous system, they aid in promoting better sleep. It reduces anxiety by raising GABA levels, or gamma aminobutyric acid, which aids in nerve cell regulation. By promoting blood flow and relaxing smooth muscles, it is also helpful in controlling blood pressure¹⁸.

c. *Mandukparni (Centella asiatica)*- Includes brahminoside, brahmoside that binds to G protein-coupled receptors known as cholecystinin receptors, which bind the peptide hormone cholecystinin and may be involved in the control of anxiety¹⁹.

d. *Shankhpushi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)*- It increases dopamine secretion and restores neurotransmitter equilibrium, which in turn controls serotonin levels and lessens anxiety symptoms.

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e. *Jatamansi* (*Nardostachys jatamansi*)- Increases in serotonin, 5-hydroxyindole acetic acid, taurine, monoamines, and inhibitory amino acids all contribute to its antidepressant effects²⁰.

f. *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*)- It appears to have a moderating effect on the activity of the HPA axis in stressed adults since it lowers cortisol and DHEA-S levels²¹.

Some of the formulations which are helpful in conditions;

1. Brahmi Rasayana
2. Saraswatarishta
3. Kalyanaka Ghrita
4. Mahakalyanaka Ghrita
5. Manasamitra Vati

Panchakarma in Anxiety and Depression²²

Patients can be treated with several forms of *Panchakarma Chikitsa* in addition to the above-mentioned drugs. Below is a description of some beneficial procedures:

a. *Abhyang*- Medicated oil massage which increases blood circulation in the body and brain. *Srotas* gets activated which release stress and relax the *Manas*. It is effective in balancing the *Vata* which is the main cause for mental illness.

b. *Shirodhara*- It's among the calmest forms of relaxation therapy. When applied to the forehead in a circular pattern, medicinal oil or *Takra*, activates all of the forehead's points. It revitalizes the central nervous system, which becomes clogged with accumulated stress, bad habits, and pressure from the workplace. It

alleviates several ailments brought on by vitiated the *Vata Dosha*.

c. *Nasya*- medicated oil is administered into the nasal cavity which helps in relieving headaches, sinus related migraines, reduces anxiety, strengthens the mind and stimulates the nervous system.

Ayurvedic counselling and behavior modification

Counselling is probably the most important psychological therapeutic method.. A person should learn about the various facets of their nature (*Prakriti*) and adjust them for their best well-being through a process of education. This is the foundation of all constitutional Ayurvedic counselling. In order to achieve mental stability, an individual with *Vataj*, *Pittaj* or *Kaphaj prakriti* needs be aware of their defining characteristics and adhere to a detailed and well-defined living routine. They should also practice opposite-nature therapy, which is translated as thinking opposite-nature ideas or they should work to create a balanced state of mind¹⁶.

Importance of Ahara-Vihara on Mental illnesses

The extensive knowledge of Ayurveda encompasses not only the vital impact of nutrition and routine on these bodily factors—such as *Ojas*, *Rasa Dhatu*, *Panchavidha Vata*, *Pachaka Pitta*, *Sadhaka Pitta* and others—but also the influence of mind on them. Mental health issues and unhealthy habits, such as eating poorly and exercising, have a reciprocal relationship that can lead to a variety of serious health conditions,

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including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other life-threatening illnesses.

Ayurveda describes *Dinacharya*, *Rtucharya*, *Sadvrta*, and *Nidra* in detail, emphasizing the role a healthy lifestyle has in preventing and treating a wide range of illnesses. An increasing amount of research has shown that changing one's lifestyle can be just as successful at treating chronic illnesses as medication, with the added benefit of being safe and having no negative side effects. A lifestyle is an observable collection of activities, such as consumption, entertainment, and social interactions, that make sense to an individual and to others in a particular time and place.

Diet is considered the foundation of life, strength, complexion, Ojas, growth and development, happiness, vocal clarity, luster, pleasure, increased *Dhatu*s, intellect, health and so on. The subtle and abstract aspect of the *Anna* is *Mana*, as per the Chhandogya Upanishad, which states that the nourishment inside the body is separated into three parts: *Sthoola*, *Madhyama*, and *Anu Bhaga*, which nourish *Purisha*, *Mamsa*, and *Mana*, respectively.

A well-known statement from the Chandogyo Upanishad is "*Annamayam hi soumya manah*," which translates to "the mind is the essence of food we take". Similar to how the best portion of butter gathers when curd is churned, the finest portion of food rises and feeds *Manas*.

The very existence of living things depends on the meals that have features like color, smell, taste and touch, which can all be pleasant to the

senses and beneficial to health when consumed in line with the rules. When used properly, they stimulate the fire in the stomach, strengthen the tissues, improve mental and physical acuity, and please the senses; when used improperly, they can be dangerous¹⁵.

A relatively new area of contemporary research is called "nootropics," and it studies medications, supplements, and other substances that may enhance memory, motivation, creativity, and other cognitive abilities. In Ayurveda, botanical nootropics are referred to as *Medhya*, *Buddhi Vardhaka*, *Smritikara*, etc. These characteristics can be found in a variety of fruits and vegetables, such as black pepper, coconut, pomegranate, ash gourd, garlic, and sesame seeds. Given that 60% of the dry weight of the brain is made up of fat, the amount of fat we eat may have a direct impact on the composition and structure of it. The necessary fatty acids omega-3 and omega-6, which are obtained externally through diet, make up twenty percent of the fat in our brains. A multitude of mental health issues, such as depression and issues with focus and memory, have been linked to unequal intakes of omega-3 and omega-6 fats.

A substantial amount of current research indicates that nutrition affects mental health in a similar manner to how it affects physical health. Healthy neurotransmitter activity can be supported by feeding the brain a diet rich in vital fats, complex carbs, amino acids, vitamins, minerals, and water. It has been demonstrated that oxidants have a detrimental influence on

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mood and mental health, but it can shield the brain from their effects.

Importance of *Pathya* and *Apathya*

Pathya refers to the *Ahara* and *Vihaara* that are beneficial for the body, nourish the mind and also promote happiness; *Apathya* is the reverse of these. Disease is lessened when a person follows a diet and lifestyle that is harmonious with their mind and senses, and encourages *Tushti* (mental pleasure), *Urja* (mental strength) and *Sukha* (happiness)¹⁴.

Unhealthy food may not cause illness immediately, but it can still be hazardous based on the environment, timing, ingredients, potency, frequency, and quantity consumed. Therefore, depending on the individual's location, the season, the related *Doshas* and *Dhatus*, the location of the illness, and the amount consumed, the effect could be mild or severe. A person's body becomes saturated with vitiated *Doshas* and becomes vulnerable to major ailments when they consume an unhealthy diet on a regular basis. Additionally, it is mentioned that those who have a poor mental capacity and a practice of eating unhealthily are more prone to mental and physical illnesses.

CONCLUSION

The idea of a reciprocal interaction between the "Psyche" and "Soma" is central to the ideas of Ayurvedic psychiatry. Daily activities and dietary consumption are examples of physical elements that impact psychological factors in general. The

Ahara and *Vihara* exert an effect that either maintains or depletes the *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, and *Ojas*, the structural and functional components of the body that determine one's state of health or illness. These factors also have a reciprocal effect on the status of "Satva." The current data on psychiatric diseases also shows how haphazardly modern diets and routines are followed. In this sense, modern times find enormous value in following Ayurvedic advice. Long-term mental illness has a detrimental effect on a person's overall health. The ideas of *Acharya Rasayana* and *Sadvrita* aid in keeping the mind from going astray. The theories of *Satvavajaya* and *Daivavyapasraya* can be appropriately applied to both individual rehabilitation and therapy modalities.

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