

Impact of Indian Knowledge System on Health Promotion in Daily Life

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Abstract:

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is one of the ancient uninterrupted traditions on health and well-being for millennia. Based on Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) systems; folk medicine and nutrition values IKS perception of health is one where health is not just an absence of disease rather it is the equilibrium type state between body-mind-spirit-environment. The chapter considers the contribution of IKS to everyday health care, focusing on its preventive, promotive and curative dimensions. With an emphasis on quotidian rituals like dinacharya (daily routine), ritucharya (seasonal regimen), dietary principles, home remedies, and mind-body practices, it shows how ancient wisdom forever provides the foundation for contemporary healthcare. Integration of IKS with bio-medicine is further addressed in the chapter

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, Ayurveda, Dinacharya, Preventive healthcare, Functional foods, Folk medicine

Introduction

India has always been a pioneer in holistic health systems. Primary sources on concepts and formulations of Ayurveda like the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya go back to 1500–500 BCE The text, as well as teachings on Ayurveda has been a focal point in India since it is one of the most structured and detailed traditions. There is an integrative nature to the IKS concept of health that links all dimensions - physical, psychological, social, spiritual and environmental.

In the 21st century, while modern medicine has advanced in disease diagnosis, pharmaceuticals, and surgical technologies, it is also facing challenges such as overmedicalization, lifestyle-related disorders, antibiotic resistance, and rising

healthcare costs. IKS, with its preventive orientation and emphasis on self-care, offers complementary strategies that are cost-effective, sustainable, and accessible.

Philosophical Foundations of Health in IKS

Ayurveda describes health as a state of equilibrium:

“Samadosha, Samagnischa, Samadhātu Malakriyah, Prasannatmendriya Manah Swasthya iti Abhidhiyate” (Charaka Samhita).

This definition highlights:

- Balance of doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha): physiological forces that regulate the body.
- Proper functioning of agni (digestive fire): metabolism and assimilation of nutrients.
- Equilibrium of dhatus and malas: body tissues and waste products.
- Harmony of manas (mind), atman (soul), and indriya (senses): psycho-spiritual well-being.

Unlike the biomedical model, which often reduces health to biological mechanisms, IKS recognizes the psychosomatic and spiritual dimensions of human health, making it inherently preventive and holistic.

Preventive Healthcare Through Daily and Seasonal Regimens

Dinacharya (Daily Routine)

Maintaining body equilibrium and circadian rhythms depends heavily on dinacharya.

The following are suggested practices:

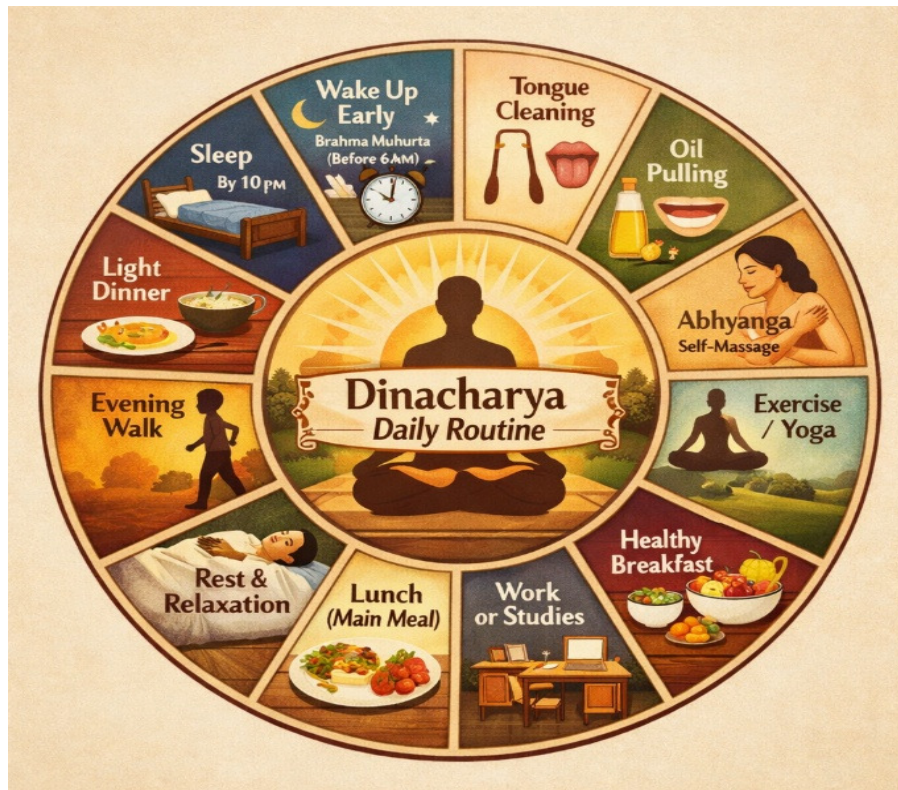
- Brahmanuhurta Jagaran: Getting up before dawn: Aligns the body's rhythms with the cycles of nature.
- Drinking water in the morning, or ushapana, aids in digestion and detoxification.

Danta dhavana & Gandusha (Oral hygiene): The use of oil pulling and herbal sticks (neem, babool) helps to prevent dental problems. Oil massage, or abhyanga, improves circulation, keeps the skin from drying up, and reduces weariness.

- Yoga (yoga, exercise): Preserves the health of the musculoskeletal system.
- Pranayama and Dhyana (meditation and breathing): Enhance focus and lower stress.

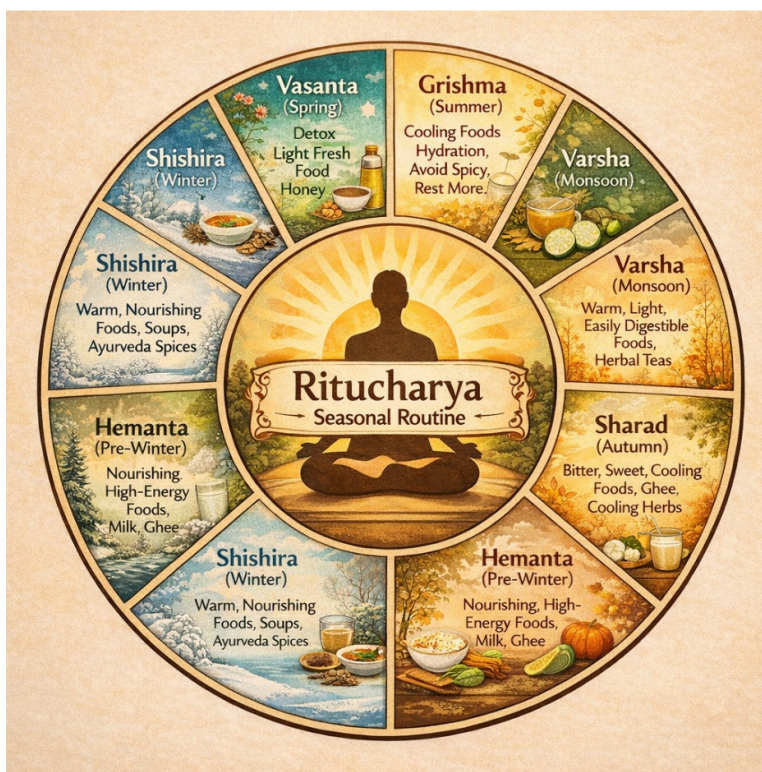
Contemporary chronobiology supports many of these practices by

demonstrating connections between lifestyle diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular problems and circadian misalignment.



Ritucharya (Seasonal Regimen)

- Seasonal adjustments are emphasized by IKS to boost immunity: Grishma (summer): avoiding heat exposure and cooling meals (cucumber, buttermilk).
- Varsha (Monsoon): Use pepper and ginger to protect digestion; eat light, readily digestible foods.
- Hemanta (winter): meals high in energy, massages with sesame oil, and warming spices like cinnamon and turmeric. These methods are similar to contemporary ideas of adaptive immunity and seasonal diet.



Diet, Nutrition, and Functional Foods in IKS

Ahara (Diet as Medicine): Ayurveda identifies ahara as one of the three pillars of health (alongside sleep and celibacy). Principles include:

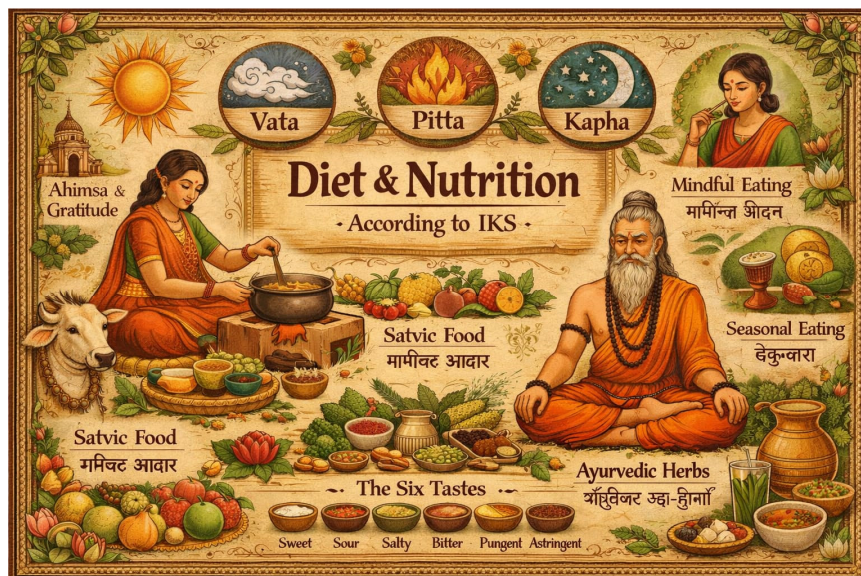
- Saatmya (Wholesomeness): Diet customized to individual constitution (prakriti).
- Viruddha Ahara (Incompatible foods): Avoiding harmful combinations such as milk with sour fruits.
- Mita Ahara (Moderation): Prevents digestive overload.

Functional Foods and Spices

Indian kitchens are reservoirs of therapeutic substances:

- Turmeric (Curcumin): Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant.
- Tulsi (Ocimum sanctum): Respiratory health, adaptogenic.
- Triphala (Amalaki, Haritaki, Bibhitaki): Digestive tonic.
- Cumin, Fennel, Coriander: Aid digestion and reduce bloating.

Recent nutraceutical research validates many of these traditional claims, positioning IKS dietary practices as key to addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

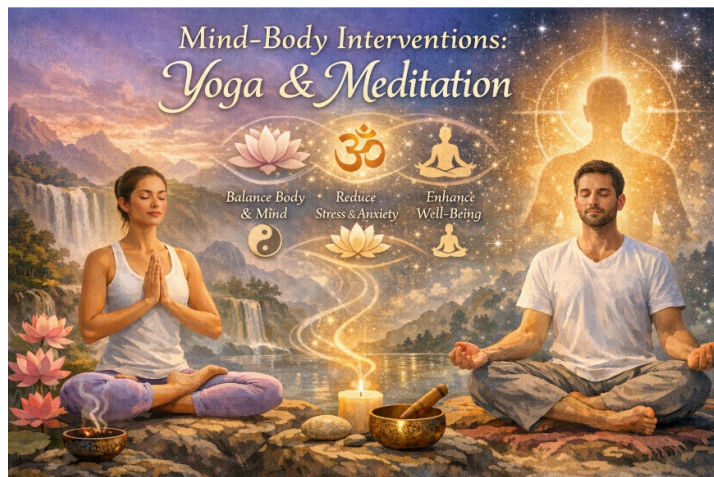


Mind-Body Interventions: Yoga and Meditation

Yoga is a vital component of IKS and has gained global recognition for its multidimensional health benefits.

- **Physical Health:** Improves flexibility, balance, and musculoskeletal strength.
- **Mental Health:** Reduces anxiety, depression, and stress by regulating the autonomic nervous system.
- **Chronic Disease Management:** Evidence shows yoga reduces hypertension, improves glycemic control in diabetes, and enhances cardiac rehabilitation outcomes.
- **Meditation and Pranayama:** Shown to enhance neuroplasticity, improve sleep quality, and regulate stress hormones such as cortisol.

Global initiatives like the UN's International Day of Yoga highlight its relevance in everyday healthcare.

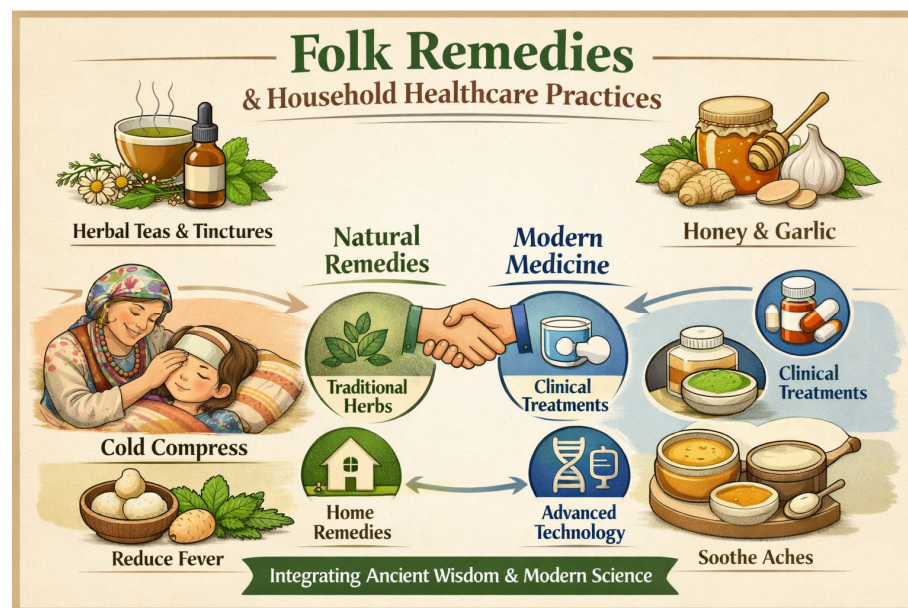


Folk Traditions and Household Healthcare Practices

IKS extends beyond classical Ayurveda into community-based practices. These include:

- Herbal decoctions (Kadha): Used for colds, coughs, and fever.
- Haldi doodh (Turmeric milk): Widely consumed for immunity and wound healing.
- Neem applications: Antiseptic for skin infections.
- Mustard oil massage: Enhances circulation, relieves joint stiffness.

These practices serve as low-cost, accessible healthcare measures, particularly in rural areas where biomedical access may be limited.

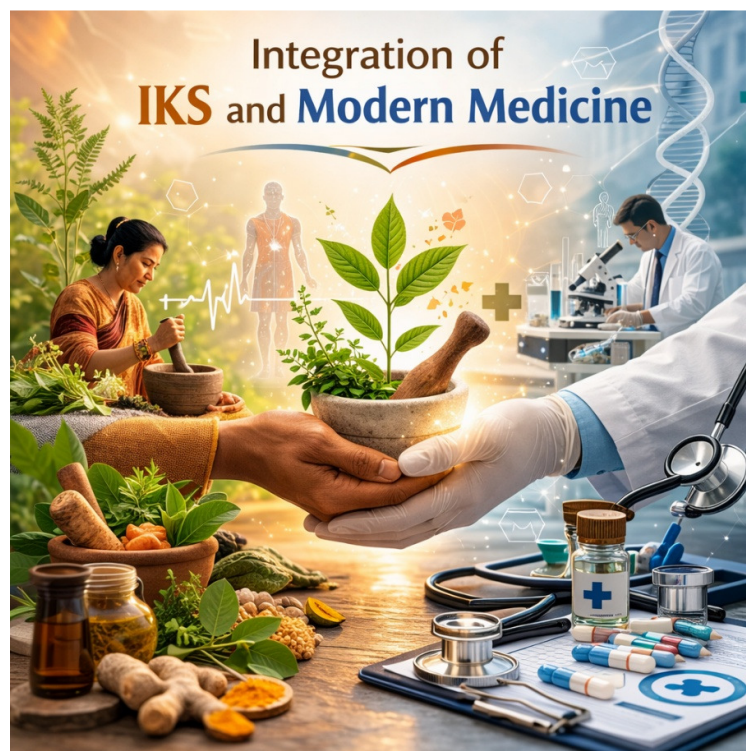


Integration of IKS and Modern Medicine

The Government of India has institutionalized IKS through the Ministry of AYUSH, promoting integrative medicine. WHO has also recognized the importance of traditional knowledge in primary healthcare.

- Integrative Clinical Models: Ayurveda and yoga are now incorporated into wellness centers across India.
- Scientific Validation: Studies on Ayurvedic formulations (e.g., Ashwagandha, Giloy) show promise in immunity, stress reduction, and infection management.
- Global Acceptance: Ayurveda and Yoga are increasingly incorporated into complementary and alternative medicine practices worldwide.

Challenges remain, including the need for rigorous clinical validation, standardization of formulations, and ensuring safety in integrative practices.



Contemporary Relevance

- Lifestyle Diseases: IKS promotes preventive strategies against obesity, hypertension, and diabetes through holistic diet and yoga.
- Immunity and Pandemic Response: During COVID-19, AYUSH protocols (use of kadha, yoga, pranayama) gained prominence.
- Mental Health Crisis: Meditation and mindfulness-based practices address stress, burnout, and depression.
- Sustainability: Use of local, seasonal foods and eco-friendly remedies align with sustainable healthcare.

Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System represents a living, evolving tradition that continues to shape day-to-day healthcare practices in India and beyond. Its focus on prevention, balance, and self-care offers a counterbalance to the biomedical model's disease-centric approach. By integrating IKS with evidence-based modern medicine, healthcare systems can achieve greater inclusivity, affordability, and sustainability.

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