

Ayurvedic Practices For A Strong Immune System



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The basic concept of immunity is well explained under the heading Vyadhi & kshmatva in classical texts of Ayurveda- A clear and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between immunity and lifestyle such as daily activities] seasonal regimens] diet] emotional factors and psychological factors is documented in ancient literature- According to Ayurveda] the most important contributing factors for the normal immune functioning of the body include Agni (digestive factors), Ahara (food), Nidra (sleep), Vyayama (physical activity/exercise), Satva (mental stability), and Rasayana (rejuvenators). In the present work, these factors influencing immunity were compiled from classical texts of Ayurveda and presented systematically with the help of published scientific literature- It is observed that good immunity in an individual will be due to effect of active and healthy functioning of the digestive system- It depends mainly on the type of food consumed- Higher diet quality is associated with the positive health of the body- Quality diet, required quantity and balanced

food is the base for the proper digestion and in turn for the development of a strong immune system- Exercises improve metabolic health which in turn provides a good immune system- Even sleep affects the immune system- Good sleep provides strong immune responses; it results in the formation of antibodies which along with white blood cells & cellular immune system of body and fight against the disease- Psychological well & being also can increase living comfort- Rasayana provides a defence mechanism against diseases (Vyadhi) in the body- Proper understanding and application of these concepts in clinical practice can be a preventive strategy for a number of diseases-

Keywords: Ayurveda, Bala, Immunity, Oja, Vyadhi- Kshamatva

Ayurveda concept of Immunity

The basic concept of immunity and immunology is existed and well- practiced in Ayurveda for centuries- The basic concept in Ayurveda is to prevent the disease and cure the diseased condition with different treatment modalities- This concept gives importance to

prevention rather than the curative aspect- Although the term Vyadhi- kshamatva is generally correlated with the term immunity] this concept has much wider implications- The term Vyadhi-kshamatva has been described under the term Vyadhibala Virodhitwa, Vyadhiutpada Pratibandhkatwa by Chakrapanidatta which means the strength in a person which waves off the strength of the disease and which inhibits the manifestation of the disease-[1]
व्याधिगतं व्याधिबलविरोधित्वं
व्याधुत्वात्प्रतिबन्धकत्वमिति यावत् ॥

-Ch- Su- 28/7 & Chakrapani

तत्र रसादीनां शुक्रान्तानां धातूनां यत् परं तेजस्तात्
सत्वोजस्तादेव बलमित्युच्यते, स्वशास्त्रसिद्धान्तात्
॥११॥

-Su- Su-15/19

According to Ayurveda] Ojas is the final essence of all the Dhatus (structural components of the body) and seat for the Bala (strength), which is provided by Prakruta Shleshma of an individual that helps to fight against a disease- If Ojas get vitiated or decreased, there manifests three kind of immunity:-[2]

1- Ojavisramsa (dislodged immune strength) such as autoimmunity-

सन्धिरित्तपो गात्राणां सदनं दोषच्यवनं क्रियासन्निरोधश्च
दिग्गसे ॥

-Su- Su-15/24

2. Ojavyapat (aberrant immune function brought about by morbid Dosha and Dushya interaction) such as hypersensitivities-

साध्यगुणात्रता वातशोफो वर्णभेदो ग्लानिस्तन्द्रा निद्रा च व्यापन्ते
॥

-Su- Su-15/24

3. Ojakshayas ¼decrease in its normal quantity½& immune deficiencies and causes many disease manifestation and over a period of time leads to death of a person as well-

मूर्धया मासशयो मोहः प्रलापो मरणमिति च क्षये ॥२४॥

-Su- Su-15/24

Although these three states of Oja are different] all of them indicate an immune deficiency- In all these cases] the aim is to enhance Bala- Oja is vital energy that infiltrates

into all tissues and cells and is also an element of our immune health and resistance to disease-

Factors Influencing the Immunity
Classical text of Ayurveda very clearly identified and explained the role of daily activities, seasonal regimens, diet] emotional and psychological factors in the proper functioning of the immune system- The most important factors that contribute to Vyadhi- Kshamatva include Agni (digestive factors), Ahara (food), Nidra (sleep), Vyayama (exercise), Satva (mental stability), Vyadhi and Vaya, patency of Srotas (structural and functional channels), normal Dosha (bodily humors) and balanced condition of Dhatu (Physiological parameters) and Rasayana- These factors oscillate around holistic perpetuity under Ayurveda and contribute to assessing the immunity of an individual- The Rasayana are rejuvenating and health promoting agents which support the body to build resistance against diseases- Oja is responsible to boost immunity and Rasayana are used since ancient times as Oja promoting herbs in Ayurveda-

Agni (Digestive/ metabolic factors)

Agni is the entity in the body that is responsible for digestion] metabolism and the assimilation of nutrients- As per Acharya Charaka classical text of Ayurveda, Agni is the fundamental causative agent for longevity, health, good strength, normal Ojas, resistance against infection] motivation, and skin lusture-[3] The cause of all diseases is Mandagni (hypometabolism) and the treatment protocol of any diseases in Ayurveda begins with normalizing the Agni-[4] Even the existence of an individual is said to be because of Agni-[5] Among all Agni] Jatharagni (metabolic factors located in the digestive tract) is the base for the normalcy of Bhutagni and Dhatvagni- Jatharagni is responsible for all the physiological and vital functions occurring in the body-[6] This shows if one wants strength] good immunity, and longevity, one should consume a wholesome diet with a healthy

lifestyle and contrary to that if one consumes an unwholesome diet, suffer from the disease with vitiation in Grahani ½ disturbance in the gastrointestinal tract ½-

Ahara (Diet/Food/Nutrients)

Ahara (food) is composed of Panchamahabhuta and is said to be Prana (life), which means that homeostasis of our body and mind is dependent upon the compatible diet, i-e- our diet has a direct impact on our immune system- Ahara (food) is the most important aspect as food contributes to building of body cells and enables to fight off disease- Yuktikrit Bala ½ acquired immunity ½ is achieved with a proper diet- One of the best way to enhance Bala and Ojas is through consuming proper food- Wholesome food is one of the important measures for strength, longevity, happiness-[7] Food consumed should be Pushtivardhak (nourishing), Medhya (increasing intellect) and Balya (increasing strength and immunity)- Nutritious diet supports the body throughout the life for healthy growth and development-

Vyayama (Physical Activity/ Exercise)

Vyayama is any physical activity that enhances the strength of body-[8] Any Karma which brings Ayasa (exhaustion) is called as Vyayama-[9] As per the classical text of Ayurveda physical activity, not only maintains health but also reflects its ill effects if done excessively and inadequately- The balance has to be stuck in both which stimulates the rejuvenation and immunomodulation of the body- It helps in maintaining the balance between three Dosha (regulatory functional factor of the body- Vata, Pitta, Kapha) enhances Ojas, stimulates Agni and maintains homeostasis in general- It maintains a healthy weight, bones, muscle strength, psychological well being and strengthens the immune system- According to Ayurveda treatises, lack of exercises leads to Pramcha Vyadhi[10] and Sthoulya-[11] All of this shows how it helps in preventing the disease- Acharya Charak defined Vyayama as Balavridhikarbhava i-e- immune enhancer- Acharya Sushruta has said that the function of

Oja is Sthirupachitamansata (well-nourished compact muscle) and assessment of Bala (strength) is done by Vyayama Shaktipariksha (evaluation of body strength)- This indicates the link between physical exercise or activity and immune mechanism-

Nidra (Sleep)

Nidra (sleep) is one of Trayopastambhas (three great subsidiary pillars) on which a person's health is firmly balanced- As per Ayurveda to determine the basic function of sleep Dosha plays a very important role- The dominance of Vata Dosha creates a disturbance in sleep quality and Kapha helps in quality sleep- Sleep is essential factors responsible for a healthy life, provides nutrition to maintain good health- Quality sleep is a reflector of a good health & supporting good immune system and stress reliever-[12] The body and nervous system convalesce in a condition of sleep-[13] It improves digestion] restores the natural equilibrium of body tissue- In a condition of sound sleep] the hormone that controls appetite] energy metabolism and glucose metabolism is secreted by the body and less sleep disrupts these and other hormones-[14] The quality of sleep has a strong relation with immunity and strength of the body- Nidra increases the Kapha Dosha and Kapha means Bala- The word Vyadhikashamatva is attributed to Kapha Dosha in Ayurveda- In the condition of Nidranasha, Bala is reduced- This shows a strong association between the immune system and Nidra (sleep)- The body's health and immune function is maintained by sleep as well and is the master co&coordinator between body, mind health and immunity- There is a relation between Dosha, Nidra (sound sleep) and immunity- The unique thing in Ayurveda is that major Dosha involved in the Prakruti of an individual determines the quality sleep and immune system-[15] The concept of sleep is being used in different diagnostic criteria's including different scales for diagnosing a variety of disorders- It is observed that individual with increased Vata Dosha takes more time to fall asleep and

individual with imbalanced Vata Dosha are likely to be more prone to infection and weak immune system- Good sleep is essential for an individual to enhance longevity- According to a new highlight homeostasis of the immune system is regulated by the circadian system and sleep-

Satva (Mental Strength) / Psychological Well-Being

According to Ayurveda, Satva is one among three distinct categories called Triguna and is an integral component of mind and energy requirement for creation- The mental characteristics of an individual are determined by the predominance of one or another Triguna (three primary attributes) Satva of the human being is significant to maintain the homeostasis within the body- Ayurveda describes three types of Satva i-e superior (Pravara), medium (Madhyam) and inferior (Avara)- Among all those with superior Satva or Pravara Satva, Sara Purusha (a person with strong mental strength) is able to withstand physical and psychological stress and these patients show a good response in treatment-[16] In Ayurveda by following Sadvritta for positive health and control of senses] if practiced simultaneously fulfills two objectives—maintenance of positive health and control over sense organs- And also explained the forbidden codes of conduct and Achara Rasayana which helps in maintaining proper Satva- To combat any disease condition] the mental well&being is given utmost importance for early recovery which directly or indirectly shows a strong immune response- According to Ayurveda, Yoga helps in the development of Satva Guna which heals the body, brings happiness, positive approach towards life and determines the strong Satva of an individual.

Satva i-e- mental strength/ psychological well-being increase the immune response and enhance resistance towards diseases- The immune response depends upon the psychological status of an individual-

Methods to Boost up Vyadhikshamatva:

In Ayurveda texts, various codes of conducts are

described for each person of any age (from conception to old age) to follow in different seasons] during healthy and diseased conditions terms of dietetic (ahara) and mode of life (vihar)-These are:

1. For outcome of healthy fetus -follow garbhini masanumasi paricharya] punshavana karma-
 2. To promote health of infant- Lehana Karma, various medhya rasayana (memory enhancing drugs)-
 3. Following swasthavrittta paripalana (Dinacharya, Ritucharya)-
 4. Proper nutritious diet (satmyaahara)-
 5. Regular proper sleep, exercise, yogic asanas,
 6. Adopting shodhana ¼Panchkarma½ according to ritu in swasth purush (healthy person)-
 7. Following achararasayana: for promoting mental and spiritual strength-
 8. Meditation for spritual growth-
 9. Use of various drugs: Vajikarakadravya (Vajikaranayogas help to acquire strength by fulfilling necessary deficiencies in deficient dhatus-)
 10. Rasayana therapy & It promotes andrejuvenate the physiology of body, produce resistance against disease both physically and mentally-
- According to Acharya Charaka, use of rasayanas results in disease&free long life (dirghamaayu), smiriti (recapitulating power), medha aarogyam (healthy wellbeing), tarunvaya (youthfulness), prabha, varna (complexion), voice] strength etc-

Thus, Ayurveda is a holistic science with a multi-dimensional approach and constitutes special methods to formulate good immunity.

