

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Inter-Relationship between *Prakriti*, *Diet*, and *Lifestyle*: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes personalized health through the concept of *Prakriti* (individual constitution). This constitutional type forms the basis for prescribing suitable diet and Lifestyle regimens to maintain health and prevent disease. It is considered an important concept of *Ayurveda* that explains individuality. *Prakriti* is a fundamental concept accepted by all *Acharyas*, falling into the category of *Sarviantra Siddhanta*. The concept of *Prakriti* is scattered all over the texts, covering all aspects of health maintenance as well as disease manifestation. This review explores the interconnectedness of *Prakriti*, diet (*Ahara*), and Lifestyle (*Vihara*), referencing classical Ayurvedic texts. The understanding of this inter-relationship aids in disease susceptibility assessment, treatment planning, and promotion of holistic well-being. A deeper understanding of *Prakriti* allows practitioners to approach health in a truly individualized manner, integrating physical, psychological, environmental, and behavioral dimensions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present millennium has witnessed several changes in the lifestyle patterns of the masses. The alluring world of advertisement has a great impact on our day-to-day lives. Imitation has become an integral part of our lives. We all are attracted to the things that glitter. But in the long run, we ignore the fact that not everything that glitters is not gold. To decide the credibility and utility of things, we first have to observe, evaluate, and then form our opinions about them. Ayurveda science has also propagated different types of *Pariksha* to assess the human nature to its core. *Prakriti* of an individual is one such tool to assess the physical and mental nature of an individual. *Acharya Arundatta* has defined *Prakriti* as “*Shariraswarupama*.”^[1] With the proper understanding of the concept of *Prakriti*, it becomes easier to prescribe an appropriate drug as well as the right kind of diet and lifestyle.^[2] Ayurveda stressed that one must protect the body at foremost by leaving all worldly things because without a healthy body, there is nothing in the world to do and for live happy life, health it is very essential matter. Nowadays to gain optimum health *Prakriti*-based diet and lifestyle is the first and prime need for society.

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1.1. Aim

To comprehensively review the inter-relationship between *Prakriti* (individual constitution), diet (*Ahara*), and lifestyle (*Vihara*) in Ayurveda and elucidate their collective role in personalized health management, disease prevention, and holistic well-being.

1.2. Objectives

1. Conceptual analysis: Examine classical definitions, determinants, and classifications of *Prakriti*, *Ahara*, and *Vihara* from authoritative Ayurvedic texts.
2. Inter-relationship assessment: Investigate how *Prakriti* influences dietary and lifestyle prescriptions and vice versa, emphasizing *Dosha* equilibrium.
3. Clinical utility evaluation: Assess the implications of *Prakriti*-based diet and lifestyle for disease susceptibility, treatment planning, and preventive healthcare.
4. Guideline synthesis: Consolidate *Prakriti*-specific recommendations for diet, daily/seasonal regimens (*Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya*), and ethical conduct (*Sadvrutta*).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a literature review approach to examine the conceptual and practical integration of *Prakriti* (individual constitution), *Ahara*

(diet), and *Vihara* (lifestyle) as presented in classical Ayurvedic literature. The review is grounded in a thorough examination of primary source materials, including foundational Ayurvedic texts such as the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. These texts were studied alongside authoritative commentaries and interpretations by esteemed Ayurvedic scholars, including Acharya Arundatta and Vriddha Vagbhata, to gain deeper insights into the traditional understanding of *Prakriti* and its implications for health management.

In addition to classical sources, relevant secondary literature – such as Ayurvedic manuals, peer-reviewed articles, and contemporary research focused on *Prakriti*-based health interventions – was also reviewed. These resources provided context for interpreting classical concepts in light of modern perspectives on personalized medicine and preventive care.

The methodology involved the systematic extraction and organization of references related to *Prakriti*, diet, and lifestyle from the selected texts. These references were then comparatively analyzed to identify the specific dietary and lifestyle recommendations corresponding to different *Prakriti* types. Special attention was given to understanding how these practices align with *Dosha* dominance and seasonal variations.

Finally, the principles extracted from classical texts were synthesized into a cohesive conceptual model demonstrating the interrelationship among *Prakriti*, *Ahara*, and *Vihara*. This model was further interpreted in the context of contemporary health needs to highlight the relevance and application of Ayurvedic guidelines in modern preventive and personalized medicine.

2.1. Understanding *Prakriti*

Prakriti, derived from the root words “*Pra*” and “*Kri*,” signifies the natural condition or state of anything, its nature, or natural form.^[3] It is defined as the group of characters inherited prior to birth, formed at the time of the union of *Shukra* (sperm) and *Shonita* (ovum). This inherent constitution is considered largely unchangeable throughout life and determines an individual’s unique physical, physiological, and psychological traits.^[4] *Acharya Charaka* states that *Prakriti* is named according to the constitutional predominance of a particular *Dosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha*). This predominance of *Dosha* at conception develops into seven types of *Prakriti*: *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*, *Vata-Pitta*, *Vata-Kapha*, *Pitta-Kapha*, and *Sama Prakriti* (equilibrium of all three *Doshas*).

The formation of *Deha Prakriti* is influenced by several factors at the time of *Shukra-Shonita* union, including the qualities of *Shukra* and *Shonita*, the position and status of the uterus, the age of the woman, the season of conception, the nutrients the fetus receives, and the mother’s *diet* and behavior during pregnancy.^[5] Specifically, *Shukra* and *Shonita* are considered *Panchbhautika* and contain *Tridosha* and *Triguna* inherited from parents. *Kalagarbhashaya Prakriti* relates to the season of fertilization and the parents’ age, which influence the *Dosha* variations in *Shukra-Shonita*.^[6] *Maturahara Vihara Prakriti* is derived from the mother’s *diet* and regimens during menstruation, before and after cohabitation, during pregnancy, and after delivery.^[7] *Mahabhuta Vikara Prakriti* is formed by the action of sixteen factors, including *Shukra*, *Shonita*, *Rasa* (nutritive fluid), and *Atma* (soul), which are composed of the five *Mahabhutas*.^[7]

Beyond the factors at conception, *Prakriti* is also influenced by *Jati* (race), *Kula* (familial inheritance), *Desha* (geographical or agro-climatic location), *Kala* (seasonal variations and age), and

Pratyatmaniyata (individual variations despite similarities). *Acharya Vriddha Vagbhata* also adds *Bala* (strength) as an influencing factor.

The characteristics of each *Dosha Prakriti* are extensively described in ancient texts based on physical, physiological, psychological, and behavioral traits. For instance, *Vata Prakriti* individuals are generally lean, with prominent veins and tendons, rough and dry skin, unsteady joints, and scanty hair. They are often talkative, have a feeble voice, irregular appetite, and less sweating.^[8,9] *Pitta Prakriti* individuals tend to have a delicate body, attractive looks, soft and tender skin with moles and freckles, yellowish or coppery complexion, and warm body temperature. They are less talkative, have a pleasant voice, frequent hunger and thirst, and profuse sweating.^[10,11] *Kapha Prakriti* individuals are characterized by a good build, smooth and glossy skin, fair complexion, well-knitted joints, and dense, black hair. They are calm, don’t get irritated easily, have a deep and influential voice, less hunger and thirst, and excessive sleep.^[12,13]

Manasa Prakriti, the psychological constitution, is determined by the predominance of the three *Mahagunas*: *Satva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. *Satva* is associated with purity, knowledge, self-control, and positive disposition. *Rajas* is responsible for hasty actions, restlessness, craving, and attachment. *Tamas* is characterized by lethargy, sluggishness, inactivity, and heedlessness.

2.2. *Ahara* (Diet)

Ahara, or *diet*, is considered a fundamental pillar of life and is essential for not only the continuity of life but also for achieving optimal strength, complexion, and overall health. Ayurveda emphasizes that the body and diseases are both influenced by food; wholesome (*Hita*) and unwholesome (*Ahita*) food are responsible for happiness and misery, respectively. The very same factors that, in wholesome combination, create living beings, in unwholesome combination, lead to various diseases.

Ayurveda gives equal importance to the food itself (*Ahara Dravya*) and the method of its intake (*Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*). *Ahara Dravya* are classified as *Hitakara* (beneficial) and *Ahitakara* (detrimental).^[14] *Hitakara* and *Pathya* (wholesome) *Ahara Dravya*, according to different *Acharyas*, including various grains, lentils, salts, water, *ghi*, meat, honey, milk, fruits, and vegetables, are listed in classics. Conversely, *Ahitakara Ahara Dravya* are also listed, such as certain grains, lentils, water sources, salts, vegetables, meats, fruits, and milk products.

Ahara Vidhi Vidhana refers to the system, method, manner, or rules for *diet* intake. *Acharya Charaka* emphasizes the proper use of food preparations considering factors contrary to habitat, time, and the user’s own self. The eight factors of *Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana*, which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effects of *diet*, are *Prakriti* (natural qualities of the food), *Karana* (processing), *Samyoga* (combination), *Rashi* (quantity), *Desha* (habitat), *Kala* (time), *Upayoga Samstha* (dietary rules), and *Upayokta* (the consumer).^[15] *Ayurveda* elaborates on these factors, highlighting how each influences the digestibility and effect of food on the body. It also details dietary rules such as consuming warm and unctuous food, eating in proper quantity and after the digestion of the previous meal, avoiding contradictory food potencies, eating at a proper place, and paying due regard to oneself. *Acharya Sushruta* provides additional descriptive views on *Ahara Vidhi*, including kitchen regimen, types of utensils, dining place, dining time, disadvantages of improper dining time, non-edible food, considerations with tasteful foods, and post-meal regimen.^[16]

The importance of *Ahara* is further emphasized by *Acharya Kashyap* that no medicament like food is available, and one cannot sustain life without food.^[17] Wholesome food promotes growth, strength, health, color, and keenness of sense organs, while improper use leads to ill health.

2.3. *Vihara* (Lifestyle)

Vihara, or Lifestyle, encompasses a person's typical behaviors, habits, customs, and daily activities. In *Ayurveda*, lifestyle is categorized into ideal and faulty. The ideal Lifestyle, known as *Swasthavrutta*, involves aligning daily and seasonal activities with natural rhythms to maintain good health. *Swasthavrutta* includes *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), *Ratricharya* (night regimen), and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), as well as *Sadvrutta* (good conduct).^[18]

Dinacharya provides a detailed framework for daily activities, from waking up in the morning to sleeping at night. It includes practices like brushing teeth, cleaning the tongue, gargling, smoking (*Dhumapana*), nasal application (*Nasya*), oil application (*Abhyanga*), bathing, and exercise (*Vyayama*). General advice for daily regimen includes waking up early, using lukewarm water, performing exercise according to capacity, not stopping natural urges, avoiding daytime sleep (except in summer), observing proper food, sleep, and sex, and practicing *Vyayama* regularly.^[19]

Ritucharya outlines seasonal recommendations to balance the *Doshas*, which are more active during specific seasons. The *Ayurveda* provides detailed regimens for *Hemanta* (early winter), *Shishira* (extreme winter), *Vasanta* (spring), *Grishma* (summer), *Varsha* (rainy season), and *Sharada* (autumn), including dietary and Lifestyle adjustments suitable for each season.^[20]

Ratricharya focuses on the night regimen, recommending a light dinner and going to bed early. *Sadvrutta* encompasses good mental, social, personal, moral, and religious conduct for a balanced life. The *Ayurveda* lists various conducts one should follow in each of these categories.^[19]

The importance of proper lifestyle is highlighted by the fact that following these regimens helps restore the normal state of body elements, reduces susceptibility to diseases, and even slows down the pace of aging. Conversely, faulty lifestyles, such as excessive exercise, suppressing natural urges, staying up at night, and daytime sleep, can lead to various diseases.

2.4. The Inter-Relationship: *Prakriti*, *Diet*, and Lifestyle

The core of *Ayurvedic* health lies in the understanding and management of the inter-relationship between *Prakriti*, *Diet*, and Lifestyle. *Prakriti* serves as the fundamental blueprint, determining an individual's inherent strengths and weaknesses and their predisposition to certain imbalances and diseases. *Ayurveda* states that *Prakriti* is a deciding factor during the prognosis and treatment of diseases.

Diet and Lifestyle choices have a direct and significant impact on maintaining the equilibrium of *Doshas* and, consequently, the health of an individual based on their *Prakriti*. The *Ayurveda* explicitly states that "Prakriti-based guidelines for *diet* and Lifestyle result in healthy tissues and homeostasis of the body *Dosha*." It further explains that a *Hitakara Ahara* for one *Prakriti* type might be *Ahitakara* for another. For example, a *Vata Prakriti* person should avoid bitter taste, which aggravates *Vata*, while it helps maintain *Pitta* equilibrium in a *Pitta Prakriti* person. Similarly, ginger, garlic, and chili, which decrease *Kapha*, can cause ulcers or irritability in a *Pitta Prakriti* person. This

underscores the need for individualized dietary recommendations based on *Prakriti*.

The *Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana*, particularly the "Upayokta" factor, emphasizes that every person must consider their own constitution, digestive capacity, season, time, and the state of digestion of the previous meal when consuming food. This reinforces the idea that dietary rules are not universally applicable but must be tailored to the individual's *Prakriti* and current condition.

Lifestyle practices also need to be aligned with one's *Prakriti* and the changing seasons (*Ritucharya*) to prevent *Dosha* imbalances. The *Ayurveda* provides specific examples of how Lifestyle choices can affect different *Prakriti* types. For instance, daytime sleep should be avoided by *Kapha Prakriti* individuals but can be suitable for *Vata Prakriti* individuals. Similarly, in *Hemanta Ritu*, *Vata*-dominant individuals can maximally benefit from the advised Lifestyle, while *Kapha*-dominant individuals need to take special care due to *Kapha* accumulation. In *Grishma Ritu*, *Vata Prakriti* individuals should avoid Lifestyle practices like staying up at night, exercise, and excessive sexual activity, while *Pitta Prakriti* individuals need to strictly follow the advised Lifestyle.^[21]

Specific Lifestyle practices like *Dhumapana*, *Nasya*, *Gandusha*, *Abhyanga*, and *Vyayama* are also recommended or contraindicated based on the individual's *Prakriti* and the vitiation of *Doshas*. For example, *Sneha Gandusha* is recommended for *Vata Prakriti* to counter dryness, while *Katu* and *Kashaya Gandusha* are suggested for *Kapha Prakriti* to counter the excess viscosity of saliva. Regular oiling of the head is beneficial for *Pitta* and *Vata*-dominant *Prakriti* to prevent hair loss and early greying. *Udvartana* is beneficial for *Kapha*-dominant *Prakriti* as it reduces *Kapha* and *Meda*. The intensity of *Vyayama* should also be adjusted based on the individual's strength, which varies according to *Prakriti*.

The *Ayurveda* further notes that if *Vikara Prakriti* (nature of disease) and the individual's *Prakriti* are similar, the disease is difficult to manage. This highlights how one's inherent constitution influences their susceptibility to certain diseases and the prognosis. By following a *diet* and Lifestyle that are in accordance with one's *Prakriti*, individuals can strengthen their inherent resistance and prevent the manifestation of diseases to which they are predisposed.

3. DISCUSSION

The review establishes *Prakriti* as the cornerstone of *Ayurvedic* personalized medicine, shaping dietary and lifestyle protocols to maintain *Dosha* equilibrium. Key insights:

3.1. *Prakriti* Dictates Dietary and Lifestyle Customization

3.1.1. *Diet (Ahara)*

- *Vata*-dominant individuals benefit from warm, unctuous foods (e.g., ghee, nuts) but must avoid bitter tastes and cold items that aggravate *Vata*.
- *Pitta*-dominant persons require cooling foods (e.g., coconut, sweet fruits) but suffer from pungent spices (e.g., chili and ginger), which induce hyperacidity.
- *Kapha*-dominant types thrive on light, spicy foods (e.g., legumes, honey) but are harmed by heavy, oily items (e.g., dairy and excess grains).
- The *Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana* framework (e.g., *Prakriti* of food, *Desha*, *Kala*) ensures diet is tailored to individual constitution, digestive capacity (*Agni*), and environmental context.

3.1.2. Lifestyle (*Vihara*)

- *Dinacharya*: *Vata* types benefit from gentle *Abhyanga* (oil massage) and avoidance of excessive exercise, while *Kapha* types require vigorous *Vyayama* (exercise) and *Udvartana* (dry powder massage).
- *Ritucharya*: Seasonal adjustments are critical. *Vata* worsens in winter (*Hemanta*), necessitating warm routines, whereas *Pitta* exacerbates in summer (*Grishma*), demanding cooling practices.
- *Sadvrutta* (ethical conduct) mitigates psychological *Dosha* imbalances (e.g., *Satva*-promoting meditation for *Rajas/Tamas* dominance).

3.2. Health Implications of Prakriti-Based Practices

3.2.1. Preventive potential

Adherence to *Prakriti*-aligned routines reduces disease susceptibility. For instance:

- *Kapha Prakriti* individuals following low-fat diets and active lifestyles avert obesity and diabetes
- *Pitta Prakriti* persons avoiding spicy foods and stress prevent ulcers and inflammatory disorders.

3.2.2. Therapeutic utility

When *Vikara Prakriti* (disease nature) mirrors inherent *Prakriti*, treatment complexity increases (e.g., *Vata*-type arthritis in *Vata*-dominant individuals). Here, diet/lifestyle interventions become adjuvant therapies to *Shamana* (palliative) and *Shodhana* (purification) procedures.

3.3. Modern Relevance and Challenges

3.3.1. Personalized health

Prakriti assessment offers a holistic alternative to genetic profiling in lifestyle medicine, integrating physical, psychological, and environmental factors.

3.3.2. Implementation barriers

- Subjectivity in *Prakriti* diagnosis
- Limited accessibility to Ayurvedic experts
- Sociocultural shifts favoring standardized diets over individualized plans.

3.3.3. Research gaps

Clinical validation of *Prakriti*-specific interventions through randomized trials is needed.

3.4. The Ayurvedic Health Pyramid: A Unified Framework

The inter-relationship forms a hierarchical model [Figure 1]:

- Base: *Prakriti* (constitutional bedrock).
- Middle: *Ahara* and *Vihara* (personalized inputs for *Dosha* balance).
- Apex: *Swasthya* (health) and *Arogya* (disease-free state).

This pyramid underscores that disregarding *Prakriti* disrupts the entire system, leading to *Dosha* vitiation and disease.

The synergy of *Prakriti*, *Ahara*, and *Vihara* epitomizes Ayurveda's preventive and personalized approach. Future integration with technology (e.g., *Prakriti* assessment apps) and evidence-based research can bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary healthcare, empowering individuals to achieve *Swasthavrutta*.

4. CONCLUSION

The provided conceptual study of *Prakriti* in *Ayurveda* underscores the fundamental role of individual constitution in determining health and disease susceptibility. The intricate inter-relationship between *Prakriti*, *Diet* (*Ahara*), and lifestyle (*Vihara*) is a cornerstone of Ayurvedic preventive and curative medicine. Understanding one's unique *Prakriti* allows for personalized recommendations regarding diet and lifestyle choices that can help maintain the equilibrium of *Doshas*, promote optimal health, and prevent the onset of diseases. The detailed guidelines on *Hitakara* and *Ahitakara* foods, *Ahara Vidhi*, *Vidhana*, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, and *Sadvrutta* all emphasize the importance of aligning one's choices with their inherent constitution and the changing environment. By adhering to these principles, individuals can harmonize their internal environment with the external world, leading to a long, healthy, and fulfilling life. The knowledge of *Prakriti* is not only essential for physicians in diagnosing and treating diseases but also for every individual seeking to optimize their well-being and achieve a state of balance and harmony.

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9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

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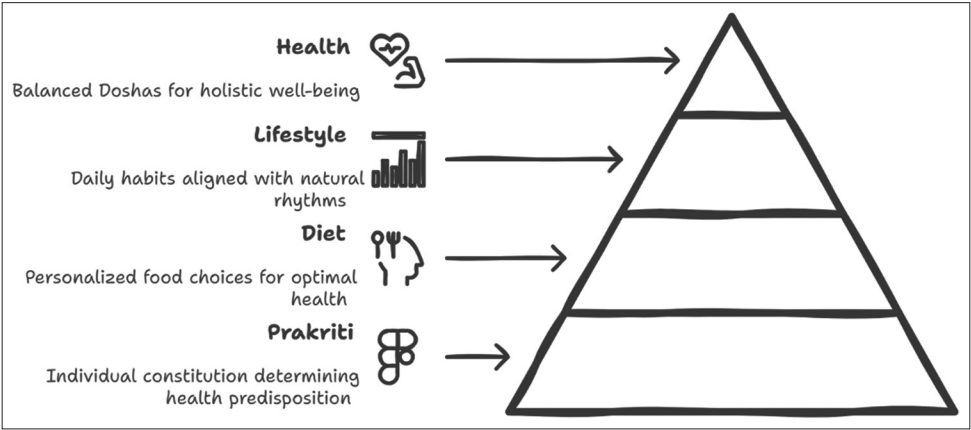


Figure 1: Ayurvedic health pyramid