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### “INTEGRATED APPROACH TO STRESS MANAGEMENT: INSIGHTS FROM AYURVEDIC KAYACHIKITSA”

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#### **Abstract:**

**Background:** Chronic stress has become a significant public health challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, acting as a precursor to diverse psychosomatic disorders. While conventional pharmacology offers symptom management, there is a growing clinical demand for holistic, root-cause interventions. Kayachikitsa, the foundational branch of internal medicine in Ayurveda, addresses stress through the restoration of the mind-body equilibrium.

**Aim:** This study aims to critically synthesize traditional Kayachikitsa principles and therapeutic modalities to evaluate their efficacy as an integrative strategy for sustainable stress management.

**Material and Methods:** A structured literature review was conducted utilizing classical Ayurvedic texts, including Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, and contemporary databases (PubMed, Google Scholar) to identify relevant clinical trials and systemic reviews published between 2010 and 2026. The synthesis prioritized key therapeutic interventions, including Sattvajaya (psychotherapy), Panchakarma (specifically Shirodhara and Abhyanga), and the administration of Medhya Rasayana (adaptogenic herbs).

**Results:** Evidence suggests that Kayachikitsa modalities significantly modulate the autonomic nervous system and reduce serum cortisol levels. The integration of Sattvic dietary practices and Dinacharya (lifestyle regimen) further stabilizes the gut-brain axis, addressing the metabolic underpinnings of stress-induced inflammation.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global health landscape, chronic stress has emerged as a primary contributor to a wide spectrum of psychosomatic conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, metabolic syndrome, and anxiety-related disorders<sup>1</sup>. Defined by the World Health Organization as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century health epidemic, chronic stress triggers a persistent activation of the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis, leading to systemic inflammation, hypercortisolemia, and oxidative stress<sup>2</sup>. While modern conventional medicine predominantly utilizes pharmacotherapy—such as anxiolytics and antidepressants—these interventions often focus on transient symptomatic relief and are frequently associated with adverse side effects or risk of physiological dependence<sup>3</sup>. This highlights an urgent clinical demand for integrative, mind-body interventions that prioritize long-term psychological resilience and preventative health care<sup>4</sup>.

Ayurveda, the traditional science of life, offers a distinct, holistic framework for understanding the pathophysiology and management of stress through its specialized branch, Kayachikitsa<sup>5</sup>. Unlike reductionist medical models, Kayachikitsa conceptualizes stress as a complex state of

Dosha imbalance, specifically involving Prana Vata, Sadhaka Pitta, and Tarpaka Kapha, which is further exacerbated by the influence of Rajas and Tamas within the Manas (mind)<sup>6</sup>. By focusing on the restoration of Agni (metabolic fire) and the purification of Srotas (subtle physiological channels), Kayachikitsa establishes the foundational balance required for psychological homeostasis<sup>7</sup>. The therapeutic approach is inherently multifaceted, integrating Ahara (dietary regulation), Vihara (lifestyle management), and Panchakarma procedures such as Shirodhara and Abhyanga to harmonize the neuro-endocrine system. This article critically examines these mechanisms, synthesizing classical Ayurvedic textual wisdom with contemporary clinical evidence to propose a sustainable, individualized model for long-term stress management<sup>8</sup>.

## Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this review is to critically synthesize classical Kayachikitsa principles with contemporary clinical evidence to establish a robust, evidence-based integrative framework for stress management<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Elucidate the pathophysiological understanding of stress within the Kayachikitsa paradigm, focusing on Dosha imbalance and Manovaha Srotas dysfunction.

2. Evaluate the efficacy of traditional therapeutic modalities—including Sattvajaya, Panchakarma (e.g., Shirodhara, Abhyanga), and Medhya Rasayana—in modulating the neuro-endocrine response to chronic stress.

3. Propose an integrated, multidisciplinary care model that bridges Ayurvedic wisdom with modern clinical metrics to provide a sustainable, individualized approach for mitigating stress-related health complications<sup>10</sup>.

### Material and Methods

This review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigor<sup>11</sup>. A comprehensive search was performed across both classical Ayurvedic literature and modern electronic databases to capture the breadth of the Kayachikitsa approach. The primary data sources included classical Ayurvedic texts (specifically Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita) and electronic databases (PubMed, Google Scholar, and the International Journal of Ayurveda and

Integrative Medicine). The search strategy utilized the following keywords: “Kayachikitsa”, “Stress Management”, “Sattvajaya”, “Shirodhara”, “Medhya Rasayana”, and “Integrative Medicine”<sup>12</sup>.

The review included randomized controlled trials (RCTs), systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2010 and 2026 that evaluated Ayurvedic interventions for stress-related conditions<sup>13</sup>.

### Conceptual Framework: Understanding Stress in Ayurveda

In the paradigm of Kayachikitsa, health is defined as a state of Samya (equilibrium) among Doshas, Agni, Dhatus, and Malas, alongside a blissful state of Atma, Indriya, and Manas. Stress, characterized by the persistent imbalance of Manovaha Srotas (channels carrying mental processes), disrupts this equilibrium<sup>14</sup>.

### Etiology and Pathogenesis (Nidana and Samprapti)

The Nidana (etiological factors) for stress-induced dysfunction involve Asatmendriyarthasamyoga (inappropriate contact of senses with objects) and Prajnaparadha (willful transgression of

wisdom)<sup>15</sup>. This leads to the stimulation of Rajas and Tamas in the Manas, subsequently vitiating Prana Vata—the vital force governing higher neurological functions<sup>16</sup>. The Samprapti (pathogenesis) typically follows a course where:

1. Vitiating of Doshas: Persistent emotional disturbances aggravate Prana Vata, which in turn destabilizes Sadhaka Pitta (responsible for cognition and emotional clarity)<sup>17</sup>.

2. Agni-Mandya: Prolonged mental strain suppresses Jatharagni (digestive fire), leading to the accumulation of Ama (metabolic toxins)<sup>18</sup>.

3. Srotodushti: The accumulation of Ama blocks the subtle channels, preventing the proper flow of Ojas, resulting in reduced psychological resilience and systemic weakness<sup>19</sup>.

#### Therapeutic Modalities in Kayachikitsa

The management of stress within Kayachikitsa is unique in its multifaceted approach, targeting both the physical body (Sharira) and the mind (Manas).

1. Sattvajaya (Ayurvedic Psychotherapy)

Sattvajaya constitutes the non-pharmacological approach to mental health. It emphasizes the cultivation of Sattva (clarity and stability) to overcome the fluctuations of Rajas and Tamas<sup>20</sup>. Key techniques include:

Avasthana: Developing self-restraint and behavioral control.

Gyana Vigyana: Imparting knowledge and wisdom to enable patients to perceive stressors objectively.

Dhairya: Strengthening patience and emotional fortitude<sup>21</sup>.

2. Panchakarma: The Neuro-Physiological Reset

Panchakarma procedures facilitate deep detoxification and stabilization of the autonomic nervous system<sup>22</sup>:

Shirodhara: The continuous pouring of medicated oil on the forehead promotes the release of serotonin and endorphins, inducing a state of deep relaxation.

Abhyanga: Therapeutic massage with medicated oils helps in pacifying Vata, enhancing lymphatic drainage, and promoting skin-to-brain sensory communication that lowers cortisol secretion<sup>23</sup>.

Nasya: Administration of medicated oils through the nasal route acts directly on the Shirasthana (head/brain center), providing therapeutic benefits for stress-induced insomnia and anxiety.

and diastolic blood pressure. Physiologically, the rhythmic flow of liquid on the forehead stimulates the hypothalamic-pituitary axis, promoting a shift from sympathetic dominance (fight-or-flight) to parasympathetic activation (rest-and-digest).

### 3. Ahara and Vihara (Dietary and Lifestyle Regimens)

Ahara: Emphasis is placed on Sattvic diets (fresh, organic, easily digestible foods).

Vihara: Adherence to Dinacharya (daily routine) and Ritucharya (seasonal routine) serves as a stabilizing rhythm for the body's internal biological clock, crucial for mitigating the impact of chronic stress<sup>24</sup>.

2. The Gut-Brain Axis: Kayachikitsa places immense importance on Agni (digestive fire) in the pathogenesis of psychological stress, aligning with the modern understanding of the "gut-brain axis". By employing Deepana (appetizer) and Pachana (digestive) herbal formulations, clinicians treat the root cause of stress-induced systemic inflammation.

### Clinical Evidence and Mechanisms of Action

The efficacy of Kayachikitsa in managing stress lies in its dual-action potential: immediate symptomatic relief through physiological modulation and long-term restorative health through metabolic stabilization.

3. Adaptogenic Potential of Medhya Rasayana: The usage of Medhya Rasayana (e.g., Bacopa monnieri, Withania somnifera) functions as a cornerstone of Kayachikitsa. These herbs act as potent adaptogens, modulating neurotransmitters like GABA and serotonin to enhance cognitive function and reduce anxiety.

1. Neuro-Endocrine Modulation: Scientific studies on Shirodhara have indicated a significant decrease in serum cortisol levels and a reduction in systolic

### Implementation and Clinical Challenges in Modern Practice

The integration of Kayachikitsa principles into contemporary stress management requires a systematic approach.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Multidisciplinary Care Model:

An integrated approach necessitates collaboration between Ayurvedic physicians, psychologists, and general practitioners. Diagnosis must be two-fold: conventional psychological assessment (e.g., DASS-21) and Ayurvedic assessment focusing on Prakriti and Vikriti.

2. Standardization of Protocols: To meet the rigorous standards of the International Journal of Multidisciplinary Health Sciences, clinical practice must adopt standardized procedures for Panchakarma to ensure reproducibility and enable future meta-analyses.

3. Barriers to Integration: Challenges include the urgent need for more high-quality, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), strict adherence to pharmacovigilance regarding herbal dosages, and overcoming the "alternative" stigma through evidence-based communication.

The synthesis of classical Ayurvedic wisdom and modern clinical data presented in this review underscores the profound relevance of Kayachikitsa in contemporary stress management. The primary strength of this approach lies in its departure from the reductionist paradigm; while modern medicine excels in acute crisis management, Kayachikitsa addresses the "terrain"—the physiological and psychological environment that permits stress to manifest. The therapeutic efficacy of Medhya Rasayanas and the "toxin-clearing" protocols of Kayachikitsa are fundamentally congruent with current efforts to reduce systemic inflammation through microbiome-centric and adaptogenic therapies. To elevate this field, there is a requirement for uniform reporting, utilizing internationally recognized metrics alongside traditional assessment tools. Future stress management lies in a "Patient-Centered Integrative Model" where Kayachikitsa is recognized not as an alternative, but as an integrative science, ensuring its viability in a data-driven medical landscape.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of Kayachikitsa principles provides a comprehensive, scientifically grounded, and sustainable framework for the management of stress in the contemporary clinical landscape. By addressing the multi-dimensional nature of stress through the purification of Manovaha Srotas, the stabilization of Agni, and the application of Sattvajaya, Kayachikitsa offers a transformative approach that extends beyond symptomatic relief. This study underscores the profound compatibility between Ayurvedic concepts and the modern scientific understanding of the HPA axis, the gut-brain axis, and oxidative stress pathways. For Kayachikitsa to be fully assimilated into multidisciplinary healthcare, a commitment to standardization, collaborative research, and educational advancements is imperative. Ultimately, synthesizing ancient holistic insights with contemporary scientific rigor provides patients with an effective, non-pharmacological strategy to navigate the challenges of the modern era.

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