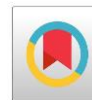


Seasonal Regimen In Ayurveda (*Ritucharya*): An Ancient Lifestyle Science With Modern Applications



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Abstract

Ritucharya provides a systematic framework for adapting to environmental shifts to prevent illness, boost immunity, and promote overall vitality. Drawing extensively from classical Ayurvedic texts, particularly the *Charaka Samhita*, this paper details specific seasonal recommendations across the six *Ritus* (seasons). Furthermore, it bridges this ancient wisdom with modern scientific understanding, discussing how contemporary research in chronobiology, metabolism, immune function, and the gut microbiome validates many of Ayurveda's core tenets. The report highlights *Ritucharya*'s potential as a proactive, personalized approach to health maintenance, offering valuable strategies for addressing the rising prevalence of lifestyle disorders in the modern era and identifying key areas for future empirical research. A cornerstone of Ayurvedic philosophy is its strong emphasis on preventive medicine, encapsulated in the dictum "*Swasthyashya Swasthya Rakshanam*" (to maintain the health of the healthy). This proactive stance aims to prevent the onset of disease rather than solely focusing on its cure, highlighting a foresight into health management that remains highly relevant today. *Ritucharya* can be understood as a comprehensive manual for adjusting daily routines to the environment, ensuring the body's internal equilibrium is maintained. This systematic framework for human physiological and behavioral adaptation to environmental shifts demonstrates a profound, ancient understanding of human ecology, where health is viewed as a dynamic balance with the external world. It provides a proactive blueprint for resilience against environmental stressors, a concept increasingly vital in modern environmental health discussions.ⁱ

The principles of *Ritucharya* are deeply embedded in classical Ayurvedic literature, being prominently discussed in the foundational *Ayurvedic Samhitas*. The *Charaka Samhita*, considered one of the foremost texts of Ayurveda, dedicates its sixth chapter of *Sutra Sthana*, known as "*Tasyashiteeya Adhyaya*", to elaborating on the detailed seasonal regimens.

Key words- Ayurveda, *Ritucharya*, *Charaka Samhita*, Holistic Science, *Tasyashiteeya Adhyaya*.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Holistic Science of Ayurveda and its Preventive Philosophy ⁱⁱ

Ayurveda, an ancient system of natural healing with roots in India, is a holistic science that emerged over 5,000 years ago, advocating for harmony among the mind, body, and spirit to achieve optimal health. This traditional medical system focuses not merely on recuperating the body but also on rejuvenating it. Each person possesses a distinct combination of these *Doshas* at the time of conception, which defines their unique physical and mental constitution, termed *Prakriti*. Beyond the *Tridoshas*, Ayurveda identifies other vital principles essential for health.

These include *Dhatus* (seven essential bodily tissues: plasma, blood, muscles, fat, bone, bone marrow, and reproductive tissue), *Malas* (waste products like urine, feces, and sweat, whose proper elimination is crucial), *Agni* (the digestive and metabolic fire responsible for transforming substances), and *Srotas* (various channels transporting nutrients, *Doshas*, and waste throughout the body). Maintaining the proper quantity and balanced function of these *Dhatus*, efficient elimination of *Malas*, clear *Srotas*, and optimal *Agni* are all imperative for robust health.

1.2. Defining *Ritucharya*: Concept, Historical Roots, and Significance

The term "*Ritucharya*" is derived from two Sanskrit words: "*Ritu*", meaning season, and "*Charya*", denoting discipline, routine, or regimen. It encapsulates the crucial Ayurvedic practice of living in harmony with nature's cyclical rhythms to maintain optimal health and well-being throughout the year. This ancient practice involves consciously adapting one's lifestyle and dietary habits to mitigate the physical and mental impacts of changing seasons. The significance of *Ritucharya* lies in its capacity to prevent seasonal illnesses, bolster immunity, and promote overall vitality. By following these guidelines, individuals can enhance their physical strength and mental resilience against ailments that commonly arise with seasonal transitions.ⁱⁱⁱ

1.3. The Rationale for Seasonal Adaptation in Health Maintenance

The fundamental rationale underpinning *Ritucharya* is the Ayurvedic understanding that the human body is a microcosm, inherently influenced by the same elemental forces and energies that govern the larger universe. Consequently, the body's physiological needs and responses are not static but dynamically fluctuate with the changing seasons. Each season uniquely impacts the *Tridoshas* (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), leading to predictable phases of their accumulation (*Chaya*), aggravation (*Prakopa*), and eventual pacification (*Prashama*). For instance, Vata tends to accumulate during summer and aggravates in the rainy season, Pitta accumulates during the rainy season and aggravates in autumn, and Kapha accumulates in winter and aggravates in spring. *Ritucharya* provides specific dietary and lifestyle guidelines designed to maintain the equilibrium of these *Doshas* throughout the year, thereby preventing the imbalances that are often the root cause of various health issues.

1.4. Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Contemporary Scientific Understanding

Ritucharya to offer valuable insights into preventive healthcare. The increasing global prevalence of lifestyle disorders, often attributed to a disharmonious relationship between human lifestyles and their natural environment, highlights an urgent need for comprehensive preventive strategies. *Ritucharya* presents a structured, time-tested approach that can address these modern health challenges. While classical Ayurvedic texts extensively document the effectiveness of *Ritucharya*, there is a recognized need for more empirical research and rigorous clinical trials to further validate its benefits through a scientific lens.

2. Foundational Ayurvedic Principles Governing *Ritucharya*^{iv}

2.1. The *Panchamahabhutas* and *Tridosha* Theory (*Vata, Pitta, Kapha*)

Ayurveda's foundational understanding of the universe and the human body is rooted in the *Panchamahabhutas*, or five great elements: Akasha (Ether), Vayu (Air), Agni (Fire), Jala (Water), and Prithvi (Earth). These elements are believed to constitute all matter, both animate and inanimate, throughout the cosmos. Within the human physiological system, these five elements coalesce in varying degrees to form the three fundamental biological humors, known as the *Tridoshas*: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.

2.2. The Central Role of Agni (Digestive Fire) and its Seasonal Dynamics

Agni, often translated as "digestive fire," is a central and indispensable concept in Ayurveda, representing the entirety of metabolic and transformative processes occurring within the body. Its influence extends from the initial digestion of food in the gastrointestinal tract to the intricate cellular metabolic activities. Ayurveda firmly asserts that "no disease ever arises without the derangement of Agni," underscoring its pivotal role in maintaining health. The entire preventive and therapeutic methodology in Ayurveda is thus fundamentally centered on the modulation and management of *Agni*. The strength and efficiency of *Agni* are not static; they fluctuate significantly in response to the changing environmental conditions of each season. This dynamic interaction between internal *Agni* and external climate forms the basis for *Ritucharya*'s dietary and lifestyle recommendations.

2.3. The Concept of *Bala* (Strength) and its Seasonal Variation^v

- **Adaana Kaala (Mid-January to Mid-July):**
 - **Shishira (Late Winter):** Strength is relatively low due to the cold and windy environment.
 - **Vasanta (Spring):** Strength remains average.
 - **Grishma (Summer):** Strength is significantly diminished due to intense heat and dryness.
- **Visarga Kaala (Mid-July to Mid-January):**
 - **Varsha (Monsoon):** Strength is low due to humidity and impaired digestion.
 - **Sharad (Autumn):** Strength is moderate.
 - **Hemanta (Early Winter):** Strength reaches its peak, with individuals possessing total energy and vitality.

3. *Ritucharya* in Classical Ayurvedic Texts: Insights from *Charaka Samhita*^{vi, vii}

3.1. Overview of *Charaka Samhita* and its Classification of Seasons

1. **Adaana Kaala (Northern Solstice / Uttarayana):** This period, from mid-January to mid-July, is characterized by the sun's northward movement. The sun and wind are strong, leading to increased dryness (*rauṣya*) and a reduction in the strength (*bala*) of individuals. The predominant tastes that emerge are bitter (*tikta*), astringent (*kaṣāya*), and pungent (*kaṭu*). The seasons within *Adaana Kaala* are:

- *Shishira Ritu* (Late Winter: Mid-January to Mid-March)
- *Vasanta Ritu* (Spring: Mid-March to Mid-May)
- *Grishma Ritu* (Summer: Mid-May to Mid-July)

2. **Visarga Kaala (Southern Solstice / Dakshinayana):** This period, from mid-July to mid-January, marks the sun's southward movement. The sun's intensity is diminished, and the moon's influence is stronger. The environment becomes cooler, more unctuous, and nourishing due to clouds, rain, and cold winds, leading to an increase in human strength. The predominant tastes are sour (*amla*), salty (*lavaṇa*), and sweet (*madhura*). The seasons within *Visarga Kaala* are:

- *Varsha Ritu* (Monsoon: Mid-July to Mid-September)
- *Sharad Ritu* (Autumn: Mid-September to Mid-November)
- *Hemanta Ritu* (Early Winter: Mid-November to Mid-January)

3.2. *Adaana Kaala (Northern Solstice): Shishira, Vasanta, Grishma* ^{viii}

3.2.1. *Shishira Ritu* ^{ix} (Late Winter: Mid-January to Mid-March)

Shishira Ritu is characterized by extreme cold and strong, dry winds, leading to increased dryness in the environment. During this period, the body's *Agni* (digestive fire) is at its strongest, as the external cold forces the internal heat inward. This robust *Agni* enables efficient digestion of heavy foods, but overall strength may be less. The *Kapha Dosha* tends to accumulate. The *Charaka Samhita* advises specific practices for *Shishira Ritu*:

“हेमन्तशिशिरौ तुल्यौ शिशिरेऽल्पं विशेषणम्। रौक्ष्यमादानजं शीतं मेघमारुतवर्षजम्”

Dietary Recommendations (*Ahara*): Foods that are sweet (*madhura*), sour (*amla*), and salty (*lavaṇa*) are highly beneficial. Cereals and pulses, particularly wheat, gram flour items, new rice, and corn, are suggested. Ingredients like ginger, garlic, *Haritaki*, *Pippali*, and sugarcane products should be incorporated. Milk and dairy products, fats, and ghee are also recommended due to the strong *Agni*. Bitter (*tikta*), pungent (*kaṭu*), astringent (*kaṣāya*), light (*laghu*), and cold (*shita*) foods should be avoided.

Warm water or ginger tea is preferred over cold drinks.

Lifestyle Recommendations (*Vihara*): Daily oil massage (*abhyanga*) with warm oil, followed by a bath with lukewarm water, is advised to combat dryness and cold. Exposure to sunlight (*atapa-sevana*) and wearing heavy, warm clothes are essential. Vigorous exercises, including wrestling, are recommended to generate heat and maintain circulation. Staying in warm, wind-protected houses is crucial. Avoiding exposure to cold and strong breezes, fasting, and daytime sleep are contraindicated.

3.2.2. *Vasanta Ritu* (Spring: Mid-March to Mid-May)

The *Charaka Samhita* provides the following guidelines for *Vasanta Ritu*:

वसन्ते निचितः श्लेष्मा दिनकृद्धाभिरीरितः। कायाग्निं बाधते रोगास्ततः प्रकुरुते बहूना॥२२॥ तस्माद्वसन्ते कर्माणि वमनादीनि कारयेत्। गुर्वम्लस्निग्धमधुरं दिवास्वप्नं च वर्जयेत्॥२३॥ व्यायामोद्धर्तनं धूमं कवलग्रहमञ्जनम्। सुखाम्बुना शौचविधिं शीलयेत् कुसुमागमे॥२४॥ चन्दनागुरुदिग्धाङ्गो यवगोधूमभोजनः। शारभं शाशमैण्यं मांसं लावकपिञ्जलम्॥२५॥ भक्षयेन्निर्गदं सीधुं पिबेन्माध्वीकमेव वा। वसन्तेऽनुभवेत् स्त्रीणां काननानां च यौवनम्॥२६॥

Acharaya Charaka said Shleshma accumulated in hemanta ritu gets liquefied by hot rays of the Sun in vasanta ritu, which in turn disturbs/decreases the digestive power and ultimately causes many diseases. Therefore in vasanta season the purification procedures like vama (therapeutic emesis) and others should be done. One should avoid heavy to digest, sour, unctuous and sweet food items and should not sleep during the daytime. In kusumagama kala (at the advent of spring) when flowers blossom (vasanta) one should regularly resort to physical exercise, dry massage, medicated smoking, gargling, and collyrium. Bathing and cleaning of excretory orifices should be done with lukewarm water. A person should apply the paste of chandana (*Santalum album* Linn) and aguru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb) (eagle-wood) on the body. One should take food made up of barley and wheat, meat of sharabha (wapiti), shasha (rabbit), ena (antelope), lava (common quail) and kapinjala (grey partridge). One should drink clean alcoholic drinks like sidhu and madhvika (types of wine preparations) in vasanta and enjoy the youthfulness of women and of gardens."

• **Dietary Recommendations (*Ahara*):** Emphasis is placed on foods that are light (*laghu*), dry (*ruksha*), and easily digestible. Foods with bitter (*tikta*), pungent (*kaṭu*), and astringent (*kaṣāya*) tastes are preferred to counteract *Kapha*. Old wheat,

rice, and barley are recommended grains, along with lentils (*Mugda*). Honey can be added to the diet. Cold, heavy, sweet, sour, and oily foods, as well as new rice, should be avoided. Medicated water with ginger, *khadira*, and *Musta* is advised. Meat of terrestrial animals (*Jangala Mamsa*) like rabbit is indicated. Clean alcoholic drinks like *sidhu* and *madhvika* may be consumed.

- **Lifestyle Recommendations (Vihara):** Therapeutic emesis (*vamana*) and other purification procedures (*Panchakarma*) are highly recommended to eliminate excess Kapha. Regular physical exercise (*vyayama*) is crucial for stimulating *Agni* and reducing Kapha. Dry massage (*udvartana*) with powders of *Chandana* (sandalwood) and *Agaru* (eagle-wood) is beneficial. Medicated smoking (*dhumapana*), gargling (*kavala*), and collyrium (*anjana*) are also indicated. Bathing with lukewarm water is advised. Daytime sleep (*divasvapna*) and direct exposure to sunlight or dew should be strictly avoided

3.2.3. Grishma Ritu (Summer: Mid-May to Mid-July)*

The *Charaka Samhita* outlines the following for *Grishma Ritu*:-

मयूखैर्जगतः स्नेहं ग्रीष्मे पेपीयते रविः। स्वादु शीतं द्रवं स्निग्धमन्नपानं तदा हितम्॥२७॥ शीतं सशर्करं मथं जाङ्गलान्मृगपक्षिणः। घृतं पयः सशाल्यन्नं भजन् ग्रीष्मे न सीदति॥२८॥ मद्यमत्पं न वा पेयमथवा सुबहूदकम्। लवणाम्लकटूष्णानि व्यायामं च विवर्जयेत् ॥२९॥ दिवा शीतगृहे निद्रां निशि चन्द्रांशुशीतले। भजेच्चन्दनदिग्धाङ्गुः प्रवाते हर्म्यमस्तके॥३०॥ व्यजनैः पाणिसंस्पर्शश्चन्दनोदकशीतलैः। सेव्यमानो भजेदास्यां मुक्तामणिविभूषितः॥३१॥ काननानि च शीतानि जलानि कुसुमानि च। ग्रीष्मकाले निषेवेत मैथुनाद्विरतो नरः॥३२॥

*Acharaya Charaka said "In Grishma Ritu (summer season), the Sun, by its rays, excessively dries up the environment. So, in this season, food and drinks having sweet, cold, liquid and unctuous qualities are considered wholesome. In summer season, any individual taking cold and sweet mantha (a type of liquid diet), meat of wild animals and birds, ghee and milk with shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn) does not become weak (i.e., does not suffer from diseases). Alcoholic beverages should be consumed in little quantities or should not be consumed at all, or if taken, should be diluted with plenty of water. One should not consume salty, sour, pungent and hot food, and physical exercise should be avoided. During daytime, one should sleep in a cool shelter and during night after applying the paste of *chandana* (*Santalum album* Linn) on the body sleep in the airy roof/terrace of the house which is cooled by the*

Moon-rays. One should be seated on a surface decorated with pearl and gems and make use of a fan and touching by soft hands, both cooled with sandal water. In Summer, one should enjoy the coolness of gardens, cold water and flowers, and should abstain from sexual intercourse."

- **Dietary Recommendations (Ahara):** Foods and drinks should primarily be sweet (*madhura*), cold (*shita*), liquid (*drava*), and unctuous (*snigdha*). Plenty of fluids like cold water, buttermilk, fresh fruit juices (e.g., mango, grapes, pomegranate), tender coconut water, and *Mantha* (a cooling liquid prepared from soaked dried fruits) are highly recommended. *Gulkand* (rose petal preserve) is suggested for its cooling properties. *Shali* rice, ghee, and milk are beneficial. Alcoholic beverages should be consumed minimally or avoided, and if taken, heavily diluted with water. Spicy, sour (*amla*), salty (*lavaṇa*), pungent (*kaṭu*), and hot foods, as well as deep-fried items and yogurt, should be strictly avoided.

- **Lifestyle Recommendations (Vihara):** Resting and sleeping for a short period during the day in a cool shelter (*shītagrhe*) is recommended due to the shorter nights and increased fatigue. At night, sleeping on airy rooftops cooled by moon rays, after applying sandalwood paste (*chandana*) to the body, is advised. One should stay indoors as much as possible, avoiding direct sun exposure and strenuous exercise (*vyāyāma*). Wearing thin, light-colored clothes and using cooling perfumes is beneficial. Abstinence from sexual intercourse (*maithunādviratō narah*) is also recommended. Enjoying gardens, cold water, and flowers contributes to cooling the body.

3.3. Visarga Kaala (Southern Solstice): Varsha, Sharad, Hemanta

3.3.1. Varsha Ritu (Monsoon: Mid-July to Mid-September)

The *Charaka Samhita* provides the following guidance for *Varsha Ritu*:-

आदानदुर्बले देहे पक्ता भवति दुर्बलः। स वर्षास्वनिलादीनां दूषणैर्बाध्यते पुनः॥३३॥ भूबाष्पान्मेघनिस्यन्दात् पाकादम्लजलस्य च। वर्षास्वप्तिबले क्षीणे कुप्यन्ति पवनादयः॥३४॥ तस्मात् साधारणः सर्वो विधिर्वर्षासु शस्यते। उदममथं दिवास्वप्नमवश्यायं नदीजलम्॥३५॥ व्यायाममातपं चैव व्यवायं चात्र वर्जयेत्। पानभोजनसंस्कारान् प्रायः क्षौद्रान्वितान् भजेत्॥३६॥ व्यक्ताम्ललवणस्नेहं वातवर्षाकुलेऽहनि। विशेषशीते भोक्तव्यं वर्षास्वनिलशान्तये॥३७॥ अग्निसंरक्षणवता यवगोधूमशालयः। पुराणा जाङ्गलैर्मसैर्भोज्या यूषैश्च संस्कृतैः॥३८॥ पिबेत् क्षौद्रान्वितं चाल्पं माध्वीकारिष्टमम्बु वा। माहेन्द्रं तप्तशीतं वा

कौपं सारसमेव वा॥३९॥ प्रघर्षोद्वर्तनस्नानगन्धमाल्यपरो भवेत्। लघुशुद्धाम्बरः स्थानं भजेदक्लेदि वार्षिकम्॥४०॥

Acharaya Charaka said "In a weak body, during the period of dehydration, agni is also weak, and deteriorates further due to vitiated vata and other dosha during rainy season. In this season, due to evaporating vapors from the Earth, rainfall and acidic transformation of water, the agni is weakened, thus leading to the further vitiation of vata and other dosha. Hence, in rainy season all basic rules regarding diet and lifestyle are advised to balance all three dosha. One should avoid diluted mantha (excess liquid diet), sleeping during the day, exposure to dew, river water, physical exercise, sun rays and sexual intercourse in this season. One should use food and drinks mostly added with honey in small quantity to pacify the kleda (moisture) of rainy season. In the rainy season when the days are cooler due to wind and rain, one should predominantly take sour, salty and unctuous food to alleviate vata. A person taking care of his agni should consume old barley; wheat and shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn) along with meat of wild animals and processed soup. Whenever madhvika or other fermented liquors and water are consumed, they should be mixed with a little amount of honey. Rain water or water from wells or ponds should be properly boiled and cooled. In the rainy season, one should practice pragharsa (friction massage), udwartana (dry massage), snana (bath), use of fragrance, garlands, wearing light and clean clothes and should reside in the place which is free from humidity."

- **Dietary Recommendations (Ahara):** Foods should be light, warm, and freshly cooked, as the digestive fire is weak. Predominantly sour (*amla*), salty (*lavana*), and unctuous (*snigdha*) foods are advised to pacify vitiated Vata. Old barley, wheat, and *shali* rice are recommended grains, consumed with meat of wild animals (*jangala mamsa*) and processed soups (*yusha*). Honey should be added to food and drinks to counteract the dampness. Boiled and cooled water, or medicated water with ginger, cumin, or fennel, is essential for drinking. Avoid heavy, oily, raw, and cold foods, as well as excess liquids, river water, and complex preparations.^{xi}

- **Lifestyle Recommendations (Vihara):** Residing in places free from humidity is important. Daily oil massage (*abhyanga*) with sesame oil is beneficial for calming Vata and improving circulation. Herbal powder baths (e.g., neem, *Triphala*) can prevent skin infections. Wearing light, clean clothes and using fragrances and garlands are advised. Therapeutic procedures like *Basti*,

Virechana, and *Vamana* may be indicated. Avoid sleeping during the daytime (*divasvapna*), exposure to dew, physical exercise (*vyayama*), direct sun rays (*atapa*), sexual intercourse (*vyavaya*), and eastern winds.

3.3.2. Sharad Ritu (Autumn: Mid-September to Mid-November)

The *Charaka Samhita* provides the following guidelines for *Sharad Ritu*:-

वर्षाशीतोचिताङ्गानां सहसैवार्करश्मिभिः। तप्तानामाचितं पित्तं प्रायः शरदि कुप्यति॥४१॥ तत्रात्रपानं मधुरं लघु शीतं सतिक्तकम्। पित्तप्रशमनं सेव्यं मात्रया सुप्रकाङ्क्षितैः॥४२॥ लावान् कपिञ्जलानेणानुरभ्राञ्छरभान् शशान् शालीन् सयवगोधूमान् सेव्यानाहुर्धनात्यये॥४३॥ तिक्तस्य सर्पिषः पानं विरेको रक्तमोक्षणम्। धाराधरात्यये कार्यमातपस्य च वर्जनम्॥४४॥ वसां तैलमवश्यायमौदकानूपमामिषम्। क्षारं दधि दिवास्वप्नं प्राग्वातं चात्र वर्जयेत्॥४५॥ दिवा सूर्याशुसन्तप्तं निशि चन्द्राशुशीतलम्। कालेन पक्वं निर्दोषमगस्त्येनाविषीकृतम्॥४६॥ हंसोदकमिति ख्यातं शारदं विमलं शुचि। स्नानपानावगाहेषु हितमम्बु यथाऽमृतम् ॥४७॥ शारदानि च माल्यानि वासांसि विमलानि च। शरत्काले प्रशस्यन्ते प्रदोषे चेन्दुरश्मयः॥४८॥

Acharaya Charaka said "When a body habituated to cold and rain is suddenly subjected to the heat of sun-rays in the sharada (autumn) season, the accumulated pitta dosha in the body often gets aggravated. In this season food and drinks predominantly of sweet, light, cold and slightly bitter qualities and having pitta alleviating properties should be taken in proper quantity, only when there is good appetite. In ghanatyaya (sharada ritu), the meat of lava (common quail), kapinjala (grey partridge), ena (antelope), urabhra (sheep), sharabha (wapiti) and shasha (rabbit), shali rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn), barley and wheat should be taken. In sharada, whenever the rain clouds disappear, the intake of tikta ghee (ghee medicated with bitter items), use of purgatives, and blood-letting are indicated. In this season exposure to Sun, intake of muscle fats and oils, exposure to dew, meat of aquatic and marshy animals, alkaline preparations, and curd are contraindicated. One should not sleep during daytime and restrict exposure to easterly wind. Water naturally heated with sunrays during daytime and cooled with moon rays during night, well purified by the course of time and detoxified by the effects of Agastya (the star Canopus) is called Hamsodaka. This is available during sharada and is clean and clear. This water is beneficial as nectar when used for the purpose of bathing and drinking. In sharada ritu, garlands of seasonal flowers, clean clothes (apparels), and exposure to moon-rays in early nights are very beneficial."

• **Dietary Recommendations (Ahara):** Foods and drinks should be predominantly sweet (*madhura*), light (*laghu*), cold (*shita*), and slightly bitter (*tiktaka*), with properties that pacify Pitta *Dosha*. Food should be consumed in proper quantity, only when there is good appetite. *Shali* rice, barley, and wheat are recommended grains. Meat of arid animals (*Jangala mamsa*) like common quail, grey partridge, antelope, sheep, wapiti, and rabbit are advised. Milk, sugar, and sugarcane products are indicated, along with the intake of *Tikta Ghee* (ghee medicated with bitter items). *Hamsodaka* (water naturally purified by sun and moon rays) is highly beneficial for drinking and bathing. Avoid sour (*amla*), pungent (*katu*), sharp (*tikshana*), and hot-dry foods, as well as muscle fats, oils, alkaline preparations, curd, ginger, and liquor.

• **Lifestyle Recommendations (Vihara):** Therapeutic purgation (*virechana*) and blood-letting (*raktamokshana*) are indicated to pacify Pitta. Exposure to moon rays in early nights is very beneficial. Wearing garlands of seasonal flowers and clean clothes is recommended. Sitting on surfaces adorned with pearls and gems, using fans, and receiving gentle touches cooled with sandal water are suggested for comfort. Avoid sleeping during the daytime (*divasvapna*), physical exercise (*vyayama*), exposure to the sun (*atapa sevana*), dew, and easterly winds.

3.3.3. Hemanta Ritu (Early Winter: Mid-November to Mid-January)

The *Charaka Samhita* provides these recommendations for *Hemanta Ritu*:-

शीते शीतानिलस्पर्शसंरुद्धो बलिनां बली। पक्ता भवति हेमन्ते
मात्राद्रव्यगुरुक्षमः॥९॥ स यदा नेम्नं युक्तं लभते देहजं
तदा। रसं हिनस्त्यतो वायुः शीतः शीते प्रकुप्यति॥१०॥
तस्मात्तुषारसमये स्निग्धाम्ललवणान् रसान्। औदकानूपमांसानां
मेघानामुपयोजयेत्॥११॥ बिलेशयानां मांसानि प्रसहानां
भूतानि च। भक्षयेन्मदिरां शीथुं मधु चानुपिबेन्नरः॥१२॥
गौरसानिक्षुविकृतीर्वसां तैलं नवौदनम्।
हेमन्तेऽभ्यस्यतस्तोयमुष्णं चायुर्न हीयते॥१३॥ अभ्यङ्गोत्सादनं
मूर्ध्नि तैलं जेन्ताकमातपम्। भजेद्भूमिगृहं चोष्णमुष्णं गर्भगृहं
तथा॥१४॥ शीतेषु संवृतं सेव्यं यानं शयनमासनम्।
प्रावाराजिनकौषेयप्रवेणीकुथकास्तृप्तम्॥१५॥ गुरुष्णवासा
दिग्धाङ्गो गुरुणाऽगुरुणा सदा। शयने प्रमदां पीनां
विशालोपचितस्तनीम्॥१६॥ आलिङ्ग्यागुरुदिग्धाङ्गीं सुप्यात्
समदमन्मथः। प्रकामं च निषेवेत मैथुनं शिशिरागमे॥१७॥
वर्जयेदन्नपानानि वातलानि लघूनि च। प्रवातं
प्रमिताहारमुदमन्थं हिमागमे॥१८॥

Acharaya Charaka said "During sheeta kala (hemanta) due to the contact of cold wind, the agni (digestive power) of strong/healthy individuals gets trapped in the body (like in a closed chamber) and becomes strong or powerful enough to digest food

that is inherently heavy and excess in quantity. If adequate food is not made available to the body, then this increased agni consumes/absorbs the rasa (the intrinsic fluids of the body). Vata having sheeta (cold) property gets vitiated in this cold season. In the period of snowfall, unctuous, sour and salty food items should be consumed predominantly. Meat of fatty, aquatic and marshy animals should be taken. Meat of burrowing animals and roasted meat of animals that eat by snatching the prey should be consumed and after that drinking of madira and sidhu type of wines and honey is advised. A person who is habituated to consuming milk products, cane sugar products, fats and oils, new rice and warm water during hemanta ritu, never sees his lifespan decrease (i.e. these help in prevention from early aging and diseases). In hemanta ritu, abhyanga (massage), utsadana (anointing), murdhni taila (applying oil on the head), fomentation by jentaka (a type of fomentation/sudation) method, sunbath, spending time in hot underground houses and warmer, inner rooms of the house is indicated. In winter season, vehicles, beds and seats should be well covered and spread over with thick quilts, deer or tiger skins, silken sheets, gunny-cloth sheets or blankets. In the winter season, one should always wear thick and warm clothes and the body should be anointed with thick paste of aguru (*Aquilaria agallocha* Roxb) (eagle-wood). A man who has strong passion should sleep in the bed at night embracing a healthy woman having well developed, plump breasts and herself anointed with the paste of aguru. One may indeed indulge in sexual intercourse up to full satisfaction. At the advent of winter season intake of food and drinks that cause vata vitiation and inherently light to digest in property, (getting exposed to) strong winds, inadequate quantities of food, and intake of diluted gruel are contraindicated."

• **Dietary Recommendations (Ahara):** One should consume unctuous (*snigdha*), sweet (*madhura*), sour (*amla*), and salty (*lavana*) foods. New rice, flour preparations, green gram (*Masha*), and other cereals and pulses are suggested. Various meats, including fatty, aquatic, marshy, burrowing, and roasted meats, are advised. Milk and milk products, sugarcane products, fats, oils, and *Shidhu* (fermented preparations) are also to be incorporated. Warm water should be consumed regularly. Foods that aggravate Vata, such as light (*laghu*), dry (*ruksha*), and cold foods, along with cold drinks and diluted gruel (*udamantha*), should be avoided.

• **Lifestyle Recommendations (Vihara):** Regular exercise (*vyayama*), body massage (*abhyanga*), head massage (*murdhni taila*), and

anointing (*utsadana*) are beneficial. Fomentation using the *jentaka* method and sunbaths (*atapa-sevana*) are recommended for warmth. Wearing thick, warm clothes and applying a thick paste of *Agaru* to the body are essential. Spending time in hot underground houses or warmer inner rooms is advised. Beds, seats, and vehicles should be well-covered with thick quilts and animal skins. Sexual indulgence to full satisfaction is indicated. Exposure to strong winds and daytime sleep should be avoided.

4. Modern Scientific Validation and Clinical Relevance^{xii}

4.1. Chronobiology and Seasonal Variations in Human Physiology

Research demonstrates that human circadian "clocks" track the changing amount of daylight across seasons, even in modern contexts with artificial lighting. This biologically hardwired seasonal timing affects how individuals adjust to daily schedules and can have significant implications for overall health. Studies show that day length dramatically affects sleep patterns, with people sleeping longer in winter (15-20 minutes longer) compared to summer. This persistent influence of seasonal sunlight on human sleep, despite modern lifestyles, highlights the deep-seated connection between our internal biological clocks and natural environmental cycles. The recognition that circadian rhythms are not a single clock but rather a dual system tracking both dawn and dusk further emphasizes the complexity and hardwired nature of human seasonality. Disruptions in this alignment, or "desynchronization," are linked to increased risks of various health issues, including metabolic, cardiovascular, and psychological disorders.

4.2. Impact on Metabolism, Immune Function, and Hormonal Balance^{xiii}

Metabolism: Modern research corroborates Ayurveda's assertion regarding *Agni's* seasonal fluctuations. Lower ambient temperatures in winter enhance appetite and elevate the basal metabolic rate (BMR), aligning with the Ayurvedic view of strong *Agni* during colder months. Conversely, warmer climates in summer slow down digestive processes and metabolism, consistent with Ayurveda's concept of diminished *Agni*.

Immune Function: The human immune system exhibits significant seasonal variability. Studies have revealed that the activity of almost a quarter of human genes (over 5,000) differs according to the time of year, with many controlling immune function and inflammation. For instance, a gene called ARNTL, which suppresses inflammation, is more active in summer and less active in winter, potentially

explaining higher inflammation levels and aggravated autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis in colder months.

Hormonal Balance: Seasonal variations subtly affect hormonal balance, including levels of vitamin D, estrogen, cortisol, and melatonin. Increased sunlight exposure in summer boosts vitamin D production, which supports healthy estrogen levels and promotes emotional stability. Conversely, reduced UV exposure in winter can lead to lower vitamin D and estrogen, potentially worsening premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms and irritability.

4.3. Relevance to Modern Lifestyle Disorders and Preventive Health^{xiv}

The insidious onset and delayed development of these diseases make prevention paramount. In this context, *Ritucharya* offers a well-organized, conventional healthcare system that promotes health maintenance and disease prevention through adherence to balanced diet and lifestyle practices. Ayurvedic principles, such as consuming prebiotic-rich herbs like turmeric, amla, and black pepper, are being validated for their beneficial impact on gut microbiota, promoting beneficial strains like *Akkermansia* and *Lactobacillus*. The Ayurvedic emphasis on mindful eating, portion control (*ardha sauhitya*), and respecting hunger cues also finds support in modern nutritional science regarding insulin sensitivity and digestive efficacy.

5 Discussion and Conclusion^{xv}

Ritucharya, the ancient Ayurvedic seasonal regimen, represents a profound and sophisticated understanding of the dynamic interplay between human physiology and the natural environment. Rooted in the foundational principles of *Panchamahabhutas*, *Tridoshas*, *Agni*, and *Bala*, Ayurveda has, for millennia, prescribed detailed dietary and lifestyle adjustments for each of the six *Ritus* to maintain health and prevent disease. The *Charaka Samhita*, a cornerstone of Ayurvedic literature, meticulously outlines these seasonal guidelines, emphasizing a proactive approach to health by aligning the body's internal state^{xvi} with external climatic changes.

The enduring relevance of *Ritucharya* is increasingly being corroborated by modern scientific research. Contemporary chronobiology confirms that human biological rhythms are deeply influenced by seasonal shifts in daylight, impacting sleep patterns, metabolism, immune function, and hormonal balance. Studies on the gut microbiome further validate Ayurvedic dietary principles, demonstrating how seasonal eating can foster a healthy microbial environment, thereby supporting overall well-being

and preventing opportunistic infections. While the efficacy of *Ritucharya* is well-documented in classical texts, further rigorous empirical research and clinical trials are essential to fully integrate this ancient wisdom into mainstream healthcare. Future studies should focus on comprehensive *Ritucharya* interventions, leveraging modern scientific tools to elucidate the physiological mechanisms and quantify the health outcomes. By bridging the gap between

ancient Ayurvedic wisdom and contemporary scientific understanding, *Ritucharya* can provide invaluable, personalized strategies for promoting holistic health, enhancing resilience, and fostering a harmonious relationship with nature in the 21st century.

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