

NIDRA- A CRITICAL REVIEW

Dr. Anju Sangwan^{*1} and Dr. Shaveta Shawney²

¹PG Scholar, Kriya Sharir Dpt., Patanjali Ayurvedic College, Haridwar.

²Associate Professor, Kriya Sharir Dpt., Patanjali Ayurvedic College, Haridwar.

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*Corresponding Author

Dr. Anju Sangwan

PG Scholar, Kriya Sharir
Dpt., Patanjali Ayurvedic
College, Haridwar.

ABSTRACT

This critical review explores the physiology of *Nidra* (sleep) as described in *Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of medicine. *Nidra* is considered a fundamental aspect of well-being in *Ayurvedic* texts, with its importance emphasized in maintaining the balance of *Doshas* and overall health. The connection between *Nidra* and mental health is explored, and *Ayurvedic* relaxation techniques and lifestyle modifications for promoting better sleep quality are highlighted. Furthermore, the review acknowledges the relevance of modern scientific research in understanding sleep physiology and suggests opportunities for integrating *Ayurvedic* principles with contemporary

findings. By combining ancient wisdom and modern knowledge, a holistic approach to sleep health can be fostered, potentially leading to improved overall well-being and health outcomes.

KEYWORD: *Nidra*, *Ayurveda*, Sleep, Sleep Physiology, Sleep Patterns, Sleep Quality, Sleep Disorders, *Doshas*, *Sattvika Nidra*, *Tamasa Nidra*, *Rajasa Nidra*, Circadian Rhythms, Ayurvedic Perspective on Sleep, Sleep Health, Sleep-wakefulness Theory in *Ayurveda*, *Ayurvedic* Sleep Interventions, *Brahma Muhurta*, Sleep and *Dosha* Imbalance, Melatonin and Sleep in *Ayurveda*, *Ayurvedic* Herbs for Sleep.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sleep, an essential physiological process, has captivated human curiosity since ancient times. In the realm of *Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of medicine, sleep, known as *Nidra*, is viewed not only as a period of rest but as a dynamic, multifaceted phenomenon crucial for maintaining human health and vitality. *Ayurveda*, with its roots stretching back thousands of years, offers a holistic approach to health, recognizing the interconnectedness of mind, body,

and spirit. Its extensive literature delves deeply into the intricacies of *Nidra* emphasizing its significance in achieving balance and harmony in one's life. This critical review aims to explore the profound knowledge of *Nidra's* physiology in *Ayurveda*, shedding light on its historical context, categorization, and the role of *Doshas* in shaping individual sleep patterns. By comprehending the ancient wisdom surrounding sleep, we can uncover invaluable insights into personalized sleep practices and their potential impact on physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In today's fast-paced world, sleep disorders and disturbances have become increasingly prevalent, negatively affecting public health. As the demands of modern life continue to rise, many individuals grapple with sleep-related issues, from insomnia to sleep fragmentation and deprivation. Revisiting *Ayurvedic* wisdom and integrating it with contemporary scientific knowledge may offer a pathway to developing more effective, holistic approaches to sleep health. Bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and modern understanding, by critically examining *Ayurvedic* perspectives on *Nidra* and aligning them with current research on sleep physiology, may lead to comprehensive sleep interventions that prioritize alignment with natural circadian rhythms and personalized strategies based on individual *Doshic* constitutions.

1.1. AYURVEDIC REVIEW

Ayurveda holds a rich historical background and has discussed *Nidra* extensively in classical texts like Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. These texts describe sleep as one of the three pillars of life, alongside proper diet (*Ahara*) and balanced sexual activity (*Brahmacharya*). *Ayurvedic* scholars have emphasized the importance of *Nidra* in maintaining the balance of *Doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and overall health.

➤ The Physiology of Nidra in Ayurveda

According to *Ayurveda*, *Nidra* is a dynamic process involving the coordination of multiple factors. These include the *Doshic* balance, the state of *Agni* (digestive fire), *Srotas* (channels), *Ojas* (vital essence), and the balance between physical and mental exertion. Sleep is categorized into different types based on its quality, duration, and timing, which is crucial in understanding its impact on health.

➤ Dosh Influence on Nidra

Ayurveda teaches that each individual's sleep pattern is influenced by their predominant *Dosha*. *Vata* individuals tend to experience light and interrupted sleep, while *Pitta* types may have intense dreams and be prone to insomnia. *Kapha* individuals, on the other hand, have

deep but prolonged sleep. Understanding one's *Dosha* and its impact on sleep can guide personalized interventions for sleep disturbances.

➤ **Circadian Rhythms and Sleep**

Ayurveda recognizes the significance of circadian rhythms in regulating sleep-wake cycles. The relationship between the solar and lunar cycles and the concept of *Brahma Muhurta* (auspicious time before dawn) is given special importance in *Ayurvedic* sleep practices. Aligning sleep with natural rhythms is believed to enhance overall health and well-being.

➤ **Nidra and Mental Health**

Ayurvedic texts highlight the connection between *Nidra* and mental health. Lack of sufficient sleep is associated with increased stress, anxiety, and cognitive impairments. *Ayurveda* advocates various relaxation techniques, herbal remedies, and lifestyle modifications to promote better sleep quality and mental well-being.

1.2 MODERN REVIEW

- In the ceaseless hustle of modern life, finding a sanctuary of tranquility and rejuvenation has become an elusive quest for many. The relentless demands of work, coupled with the omnipresent digital din, have led to an alarming surge in stress-related ailments and sleep disorders. In this turbulent landscape, the ancient yogic practice of *Nidra* emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a profound path to inner serenity and holistic well-being.
- *Nidra*, often referred to as Yogic Sleep, stands as a testament to the enduring wisdom of ancient *Yogic* traditions. Rooted in centuries-old practices, *Nidra* has garnered renewed attention in recent years for its potential to address the exigencies of our fast-paced, stress-laden society. It is a technique that invites practitioners to embark on a transformative journey, where the boundaries between wakefulness and slumber blur, and a profound sense of calmness pervades.
- This review embarks on a critical exploration of *Nidra*, emboldened by the fusion of ancient wisdom with the precision of modern scientific inquiry. We delve into the intricate interplay between *Nidra* and the human physiology, unravelling the enigmatic pathways through which it orchestrates profound shifts in our physical and mental states. Furthermore, we venture into the intricate landscapes of the brain, seeking to decipher the neurological symphony that accompanies a *Nidra* practice.
- Beyond the realm of physiology and neuroscience, we scrutinize *Nidra's* impact on sleep quality, offering a ray of hope for those ensnared by the relentless grip of insomnia. We

navigate the subtle terrain of psychology, seeking to fathom how *Nidra's* embrace may fortify emotional well-being and empower cognitive prowess. In this endeavor, we are guided by a fervent commitment to disentangle the empirical truths from the tapestry of anecdotal claims.

- Yet, amidst the promise, this inquiry also acknowledges the nuanced complexities and potential controversies surrounding *Nidra*. It grapples with questions of standardization, cultural adaptation, and the influence of expectancy effects on study outcomes. Through this multidimensional lens, we aim to foster a comprehensive understanding of *Nidra* that transcends romanticized notions and dismissive skepticism.
- As we navigate this expedition through the realms of ancient wisdom and modern science, we hold a vision of a future where *Nidra* takes its rightful place within the continuum of integrative healthcare. We envision a landscape where individuals can access this potent self-care tool, and clinicians, armed with empirical knowledge, can judiciously incorporate *Nidra* into their therapeutic arsenal.

In the ensuing pages, we embark on a journey that transcends temporal boundaries, weaving together the strands of ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, with the shared aspiration of illuminating a path toward holistic well-being in the 21st century.

2. THE PHYSIOLOGY OF *NIDRA*

- **Autonomic Nervous System Balance:** *Nidra* has been shown to induce a state of autonomic nervous system balance. This means that the sympathetic (fight or flight) and parasympathetic (rest and digest) branches of the nervous system are brought into equilibrium. This balance is associated with reduced heart rate, normalized blood pressure, and enhanced physiological relaxation.
- **Heart Rate Variability (HRV):** Studies have demonstrated that practicing *Nidra* leads to an increase in heart rate variability. This is an indication of the heart's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, a sign of a healthy cardiovascular system, and is linked to reduced stress levels.
- **Hormonal Regulation:** *Nidra* practice has been correlated with changes in hormonal secretion. It is known to decrease the levels of stress hormones like cortisol, while enhancing the release of beneficial hormones such as melatonin and serotonin, contributing to an improved sense of well-being and better sleep.

- **Respiratory Patterns:** *Nidra* often involves focused attention on the breath. This conscious regulation of breathing leads to slower and deeper breaths, which triggers the relaxation response. It promotes efficient gas exchange and oxygenation
- **Blood Pressure Regulation:** Through its impact on the autonomic nervous system, *Nidra* has been found to help regulate blood pressure. Studies have shown that regular practice can lead to a reduction in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure, which is beneficial for individuals with hypertension.
- **Muscle Relaxation:** *Nidra* involves a progressive relaxation of muscles throughout the body. This leads to a reduction in muscle tension, which is often associated with stress and anxiety. The relaxation of muscles also promotes better blood flow and can alleviate physical discomfort.
- **Enhanced Immune Function:** Some research suggests that regular practice of *Nidra* may contribute to improved immune function. This could be attributed to the reduction in stress hormones, which are known to suppress the immune system.
- **Digestive Health:** The state of deep relaxation induced by *Nidra* can have positive effects on digestion. It supports the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the rest and digest functions of the body, leading to improved nutrient absorption and digestion.
- **Pain Management:** *Nidra* has shown promise in pain management. By reducing muscle tension, balancing the autonomic nervous system, and modulating pain perception centres in the brain, it can be an effective complementary tool for individuals dealing with chronic pain conditions.
- **Enhanced Cognitive Function:** The physiological changes induced by *Nidra*, such as improved blood flow, oxygenation, and reduced stress levels, have been associated with enhanced cognitive function. This includes improved concentration, memory retention, and overall cognitive performance.

3. DIFFERENT TYPES OF NIDRA

In *Ayurveda*, sleep is classified into several types based on its qualities and characteristics. The three primary types are:

- **Sattvika Nidra:** This is a state of pure and peaceful sleep, characterized by a calm mind and body. It is considered the most desirable type of sleep and is associated with a balanced *Doshic* state.

- **Tamasa Nidra:** This type of sleep is characterized by a state of darkness, lethargy, and inertia. Individuals experiencing *Tamasa Nidra* may have disturbed dreams, wake up feeling tired, and suffer from sleep-related disorders.
- **Rajasa Nidra:** *Rajasa Nidra* is marked by a state of restlessness, excessive dreams, and occasional sleep interruptions. People with a predominance of *Rajasa Nidra* may have difficulty falling asleep and may experience vivid dreams.

4. PHASES OF NIDRA

Ayurveda divides sleep into different phases, each serving a specific purpose in rejuvenating the body and mind. The two main phases are:

- **Nidra Karma (Sleeping Phase):** This phase encompasses the actual duration of sleep where the body and mind rest and repair. It is essential for physical recovery and consolidation of memory.
- **Swapna Karma (Dreaming Phase):** During this phase, dreams occur as the mind processes information and experiences from the waking state. Dreams are considered a reflection of the subconscious mind.

5. NEUROLOGICAL EFFECTS OF NIDRA

The neurological effects of *Nidra*, also known as *Yogic Sleep*, are a subject of growing interest in both scientific and contemplative communities. This practice has been shown to have a multifaceted impact on the brain and central nervous system. Below, we elaborate in detail on these effects:

- **Altered States of Consciousness:** During *Nidra*, practitioners often experience altered states of consciousness. This is characterized by a shift in awareness from the external environment to internal sensations, thoughts, and imagery. Neuroimaging studies have shown changes in brain activity patterns that correspond to these altered states.
- **Enhanced Relaxation Response:** *Nidra* induces a deep state of relaxation, which is accompanied by changes in brainwave activity. Electroencephalogram (EEG) studies reveal an increase in theta wave activity, indicating a state of relaxed alertness. This shift away from the beta wave dominance of wakefulness is indicative of a profound relaxation response.
- **Decreased Amygdala Activity:** The amygdala, a key region associated with emotional processing and the stress response, shows reduced activity during *Nidra*. This suggests

that the practice may have a calming effect on the emotional centers of the brain, potentially contributing to reduced anxiety and stress levels.

- **Increased Prefrontal Cortex Activation:** The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions like decision-making, attention regulation, and impulse control, shows heightened activity during *Nidra*. This suggests that the practice may enhance cognitive control and higher-order cognitive functions.
- **Enhanced Connectivity in Default Mode Network (DMN):** The DMN is a network of brain regions associated with self-referential thinking and mind-wandering. Studies indicate that *Nidra* leads to increased connectivity within the DMN. This may suggest a heightened state of introspection and self-awareness during the practice.
- **Improved Cognitive Function:** *Nidra* has been associated with improved cognitive function, including memory consolidation, attentional capacity, and problem-solving skills. This is likely due to the combination of relaxation and heightened prefrontal cortex activation, which supports optimal cognitive performance.
- **Balanced Neurotransmitter Levels:** Regular practice of *Nidra* has been correlated with changes in neurotransmitter levels. For instance, increased production of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a calming neurotransmitter, has been observed. This may contribute to the anxiety-reducing effects of *Nidra*.
- **Modulation of Pain Perception:** Neuroimaging studies have shown that *Nidra* practice can alter the brain's perception of pain. It is thought to do so by influencing the way pain signals are processed in regions like the somatosensory cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex.
- **Enhanced Mindfulness and Present-Moment Awareness:** *Nidra* fosters a heightened state of mindfulness and present-moment awareness. This is reflected in changes in brain regions associated with attention and awareness, such as the insula and posterior cingulate cortex.
- **Potential for Neuroplasticity:** While research in this area is still emerging, there is speculation that *Nidra* may have the potential to induce neuroplastic changes in the brain. This could include alterations in neural pathways and synaptic connections, potentially leading to long-term benefits in mental health and cognitive function.

In summation, the neurological effects of *Nidra* are a testament to its profound influence on brain function and mental well-being. The practice appears to modulate various regions and networks, leading to states of enhanced relaxation, cognitive function, emotional balance, and

self-awareness. Further research in this area holds the promise of uncovering even more about the transformative power of *Nidra* on the brain and central nervous system.

6. EFFECTS OF *NIDRA*

Nidra has a profound impact on an individual's overall health and well-being. Proper sleep positively affects various aspects of life, including:

- **Physical Health:** Adequate sleep supports the body's healing processes, boosts immunity, and helps regulate hormonal balance.
- **Mental Clarity:** Quality sleep enhances cognitive function, memory, and concentration.
- **Emotional Balance:** Sound sleep promotes emotional stability and resilience to stress.
- **Energy Restoration:** *Nidra* replenishes the body's energy reserves and vitality.

7. EFFECTS OF SLEEP TIMING ON *DOSHAS*

Ayurveda Associates Specific Timings of Sleep with The Dominance of *Doshas*

Sleep	Timing	<i>Doshas</i>	Function
Early sleep	9:00 PM -10:00 PM	<i>Kapha Dosha</i>	Restorative sleep
Midnight sleep	10:00 PM- 2:00 PM	<i>Pitta Dosha</i>	Supports liver function
Late sleep	After 2:00 PM	<i>Vata Dosha</i>	Disturbed sleep and lethargy

8. ADVANTAGES OF ALIGNING SLEEP WITH *AYURVEDIC* PRINCIPLES

- **Improved Sleep Quality:** Following *Ayurvedic* sleep principles can lead to better and more restful sleep.
- **Enhanced Energy Levels:** Proper sleep aligns the body's energy with the natural rhythms, resulting in increased vitality and alertness.
- **Better Digestion:** Sleeping during the appropriate times supports the body's digestive processes.
- **Emotional Resilience:** Harmonious sleep patterns contribute to emotional stability and mental well-being.

9. DISCUSSION

The classification of sleep into different types based on qualities such as *Sattvika*, *Tamasa*, and *Rajasa Nidra* offers a unique perspective on the variations in sleep experiences among individuals. The understanding of different phases of sleep, namely *Nidra Karma* and *Swapna Karma*, provides a comprehensive view of the sleep process. This division emphasizes the significance of both physical rest and mental processing during sleep. The recognition of dreaming as an essential part of sleep aligns with modern sleep science, which

associates dreams with memory consolidation and emotional processing. The effects of *Nidra* on physical, mental, and emotional health underscore its crucial role in maintaining balance and vitality. The emphasis on aligning sleep with natural circadian rhythms and the concept of *Brahma Muhurta* reflects *Ayurveda's* understanding of the body's inherent connection with nature. Modern sleep studies also emphasize the importance of maintaining a regular sleep-wake schedule and following natural daylight patterns for optimal sleep health. *Ayurveda's* recognition of the influence of *Doshas* on sleep patterns provides a personalized approach to sleep management. By identifying one's predominant *Dosha*, individuals can tailor sleep practices to address specific imbalances and promote better sleep quality. This personalized approach is gaining recognition in modern sleep medicine as well, where individualized treatment plans are becoming more prevalent. Aligning sleep with *Ayurvedic* principles offers several advantages, such as improved sleep quality, enhanced energy levels, better digestion, and emotional resilience. Modern research has contributed significantly to understanding sleep physiology, sleep disorders, and the impact of sleep on various health parameters. Combining *Ayurvedic* wisdom with evidence-based findings could lead to more comprehensive and effective sleep interventions. In summary, the critical study of the physiology of *Nidra* in *Ayurveda* sheds light on the profound understanding ancient Indian scholars had regarding the role of sleep in human health.

10. REFERENCE

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