

DIET AND LIFESTYLE MODIFICATION OF WINTER SEASON (HEMANTA AND SHISHIR RITU): AYURVEDIC AND MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Ritu (the season) classified by different features expresses different effects on the body as well as the environment. *Ayurveda* has depicted various rules and regimens (*Charya*), regarding diet and behavior to acclimatize seasonal enforcement easily without altering body homeostasis. It is widely explained in different classics of *Ayurveda*. The Change of season will affect the external environment where we are living which in turn will affect our body. Therefore our body should adapt to this changing environment without disturbing the Homeostasis of the body. The important principle of *Ayurveda* deals with the preventive aspects which can be achieved by properly following regimens which are mentioned in our classics. In this review

article, various regimens during *hemant and Shishir Ritu* (winter) in diet and lifestyle as mentioned in the classics of *Ayurveda* and their importance on lifestyle disorders has been discussed. Dietary and behavioral regimens of *Hemanta and Shishira Ritus* are highlighted here along with its modern aspects. For preventing Life style disorders the only way is to understand *Ritucharya* and makes the body to adjust with this changing environment.

KEYWORDS: Lifestyle disorders, Ayurveda, Ritucharya, Hemanta, Shishira, seasonal regimens, winter season.

INTRODUCTION

Health in any season is dependent on 2 factors – Food and Lifestyle. Food affects the body internally and lifestyle affects from outside. If appropriate food and lifestyle is followed, the person will never suffer from any disease and will constantly go adding healthy years to his lifeline.

Internal homeostasis of people living in cold climates fluctuates very little from the ideal healthy state (provided they have enough heat and food) and therefore they have more chances of living healthy and longer.^[1]

Every season has two aspects in terms of *Dosha*, which can be understood as the vacillation of a ball from its rope. The ball goes from one end to the other. Two things happen at the same time. The ball goes to one end and, in the process, generates the momentum to go to the opposite end. Similarly here we can consider 3 *Dosha* to be at play. One *Dosha* is active during one season with its effects and another *Dosha* is getting filled up, at the same time, to be released in the next season, the third *Dosha* being balanced. This also can be considered as an effect of inertia of the body while adjusting to the changes in the outer environment.^[2]

The position of India is such that effect of sun rays is specific and that is the reason for six seasons of equal duration in India. The description of seasons and months in *Ayurveda* is based on India's location on the map, the months and seasons may vary in other regions. But you may follow the region according to the corresponding season in your zone. The actual classification (as given in *Ayurveda* texts) is done according to the lunar calendar. The solar months indicated above may not exactly match with lunar months but are just approximate equivalents of the corresponding lunar months. For example, when it is winter in India (December-January), it is summer in Australia, so people living in that region should follow the regimen for summer and not for winter.^[3]

According to *ayurveda* if we do not take proper nutrition during winters then this *Pachakagni* (fire of hunger) will start burning the body fat (*Kaphaj parts*) and vitiate the *Vata* (space and motion element). Therefore it is very important to take healthy and ample amount of food. If the body fat decreases, insulation benefits of the fatty layer go as well and it becomes difficult to preserve the heat. In turns, one will feel more hungry, in order to generate some heat through food. This negative spiral might result in even death. This is the reason why the

healthiest season also has a lot of poor dying because of low availability of food, proper clothing and shelter.^[4]

Also, not all *Dosha* get imbalanced at the same time. This is so because the qualities of one *Dosha* conflicts with the other and therefore they balance each other. For example *Vata* is exaggerated by cold, whereas *Pitta* is diminished by the same factor. In *Swastha Chatushka* of Charaka Samhita, Acharya clearly mentions about the *Pathya Aharas* and *Viharas* that everyone should follow for attaining healthy state of both *Shareera and Manas*. And also explains about its importance in preventing the diseases that can occur in future.

These should be followed by considering the Ritus. The main aims of Ayurveda are.^[5]

- *Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*.
- *Athurasya Vikara Prashamanam*.

Therefore for maintaining the healthy state, *Dinacharya and Ritucharya* have been explained by different Acharyas. *Ritucharya* is defined as the dietary and behavioural regimens that we should follow in different seasons for the maintenance of health and also for preventing the diseases. At present time, we don't have enough time to think about our health and other things as we all are behind our life goals. Changes in season will affect the environment in which we are living. As we human beings are also a part of this environment, any change in it will affect our body also. So our body should have to get familiar with this changing environment. If we are not doing so, it will affect our *Doshas* and will lead to *Dosha Vaishamyas* and finally to diseases. The main key for the survival in this changing environment is to adapt quickly to these changes. In the 6th chapter of Charaka *Sutrasthana*, *Tasyashitiya Adhyaya* it is told like "If a person understands and follows diet and regimens in accordance with different seasons will help the person to get *Bala*(strength) and *Varna*(complexion). By these we can prevent life style disorders."^[6]

Classification of Season

The year according to Ayurveda is divided into two periods *Ayana* (solstice) depending on the direction of movement of sun that is *Uttarayana* (northern solstice) and *Dakshinayana* (southern solstice). Each is formed of three *Ritus* (seasons). The word *Ritu* means —to go. It is the form in which the nature expresses itself in a sequence in particular and specific in present forms in short, the seasons.^[6] A year consists of six seasons, namely, *Shishira* (winter), *Vasanta* (spring), and *Grishma* (summer) in *Uttarayan* and *Varsh* (monsoon),

Sharada (autumn), and Hemanta (late autumn) in Dakshinayana. As Ayurveda has its origin in India, the above seasonal changes are observed predominantly in Indian subcontinent.^[7]

• **Uttarayana and its effect:** *Uttarayana* indicates the ascent of the sun or northward movement of the sun. In this period the sun and the wind are powerful. The sun takes away the strength of the people and the cooling quality of the earth. It brings increase in the Tikta (bitter), Kashaya (astringent), and Katu (pungent) Rasa (taste), respectively, which brings about dryness in the body and reduces the Bala (strength). It is also called Adana Kala. According to modern science, this can be compared with the gradual movement of earth around the sun to the position, in which the rays of the sun falls perpendicularly at 30 degree meridian of the North Pole on June 21st every year, called as summer solstice. The northward journey of the Sun from Tropic of Capricorn to Tropic of Cancer happens. During Uttarayana the seasonal changes in Indian subcontinent is from Shishira (winter) to Vasanta (spring) and to Grishma (summer). The period can be compared to mid-January to mid-July, when warmness and dryness in weather increases. It has an overall debilitating effect on environment, to which human being is also a part.^[8]

• **Dakshinayana and its effect:** *Dakshinayana* indicates the descent of the sun or movement of the sun in southern direction. In this period, the wind is not very dry; the moon is more powerful than sun. The earth becomes cool due to the clouds, rain, and cold winds. Unctuousness sets in the atmosphere and Amla (sour), Lavana (salty), and Madhura (sweet) Rasa are predominant, so the strength of person enhances during this period. It is also called Visarga Kala. According to modern science, this can be compared with the gradual movement of the earth around the sun to the position, in which the rays of the sun fall over 30 degree meridian of the South Pole perpendicularly on December 21st every year, is called as winter solstice. The southward movement of the Sun occurs from Tropic of Cancer to Tropic of Capricorn. State of strength In the beginning of Visarga Kala and ending of Adana kala, that is, during Varsha and Grishma, weakness occurs. In the middle of the solstices, that is, during Sharata and Vasanta, strength remains in moderate grade and in the end of Visarga Kala and in the beginning of Adana Kala, that is, during Hemanta and Shishira, maximum strength is seen.^[9]

This is the way the ancient sages set up the regimen for various seasons on analytical reasoning to obtain Swastha (health) and prevent the diseases. The examples set by them

stand as a hint to decide other dos' and don'ts' in the regimen—Ritucharya The environmental factors include the nature of the land, water, and various atmospheric phenomena, including temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric pressure. All these environmental factors undergo a continuous change and at a time, no two moments are exactly alike in a given place. Thus with the rising Sun the temperature keeps on rising and gradually drops at night. The maximum and minimum temperature fluctuates daily but it is highest in summer and lowest in winter. Similarly, all these factors show diurnal as well as seasonal variations and these variations for a particular time are known as season.

Modern Perspective of Winter Season

Nature has devised its own mechanism to keep the inhabitants of all places completely healthy and to have a long life, if they stick to the circle of health. People living in cold climate are mostly non-vegetarian, which suits them well for multiple reasons. Vegetables or plant food might not be easily available in very cold areas and meat provides adequate nutrition and heat (during digestion) to the body in the cold. Body is also able to digest and absorb the food properly, because of good digestive power. Meat can be conveniently preserved in cold climate and is safer to use for longer duration, as compared to the hotter climates.^[10]

People in the hotter areas have a huge assortment of vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices to live on. Vegetarian diet is easier to digest, produces lesser heat and creates lesser toxins while getting digested. It has lots of roughage to prevent constipation, since the body in hot temperatures also lose water through perspiration and might not be adequate to drain the food conveniently through intestines.

Concept of Dietary Pattern of Winter Season

In response to cold weather, the body constricts the skin pores and superficial connective tissue to prevent heat loss, which directs the heat away from the peripheral tissues and into the body's core, including the stomach. *Agni* (and, therefore, your appetite) becomes stronger in winter. However, if *kapha* or *vata* are provoked, *agni* plummets, leaving you more susceptible to colds, poor circulation, joint pains, and negative emotions.^[10]

As we are aware, immunity-boosting foods are those that are fresh, organic, easy to digest, pure and wholesome. These include fresh vegetables and fruits/dry fruits, dairy products, nuts/oilseeds, whole grains / legumes and ghee. Besides these, some spices also have anti-

microbial properties that protect us from colds and infections. They also act to increase digestive enzymes and cellular metabolic function, and ensure complete assimilation of nutrients.^[11]

In winter, our body craves for rich food which provides warmth along with nourishment. We need warming foods to satisfy this craving. Any vegetable that takes time to grow, and in which the edible part grows beneath the surface of the ground is usually warming and a good vegetable to eat in winter. Certain dry fruits (dates), nuts and oilseeds (sesame seeds) are also warming. It is also a time of the year when you may want to eat more spices than in the summer months.

All animal foods fall into the warming category, including lean dairy, meat, fish and poultry. Whole-grain cereals, proteins and healthy fats too provide much-needed energy to keep warm. The most warming vegetables that are good for your body are root vegetables like carrot, potato, onions, garlic, radish, yams, sweet potatoes, beets, turnips, etc, and hearty winter greens like *palak*, *methi*, sarson, *muli*, *pudina*, etc.^[11]

Carrots: The beta-carotene in carrots is an excellent source of vitamin A and a powerful anti-oxidant.

White radish, onion and garlic (dry and spring varieties): Rich in isothiocyanates and indoles, phytochemicals that help prevent cancer. Their strong flavour helps to pep up the taste of food.

Leafy greens: *Methi*, *Palak*, Sarson etc are good source of beta-carotene and Vitamin C - both powerful antioxidants that help fight disease and build immunity. Others in this category are coriander, amaranth, celery, radish greens, etc.

Other vegetables: Green beans and peas: these are all high energy and high-protein vegetables.

Whole Grain Cereals and Pulses: High energy and protein foods provide the required fuel to combat the cold. That's why many Indian households make 'sheera'; 'halwa', 'paak' and 'ladoos'. Fresh green fresh whole grains, available in Gujarat, called 'ponkh' are considered a winter delicacy. Makai and bajra rotis have the warmth-giving quality.

Fresh and Dried Fruits: Papaya and pineapple are believed to provide warmth. Amla is loaded with Vitamin C, and is very good to step up your immunity. That's the reason why 'amla juice' and 'amla muraba' are available in plenty during winter. Potatoes help to provide much-needed energy.

Dates are warm in nature and are highly recommended in the winter months. Not only are they a good source of fibre, iron, magnesium, calcium and vitamins (C and B₃), they are also a good source of energy. Consume them as they are or as a barfi, pulp or added to milkshakes and smoothies.^[8]

Spices Mustard, asafoetida (hing), black pepper, fenugreek, *ajwain* and *suva* (dill) seeds are all warm spices to be used freely. Mustard, *ajwain* and *suva* seeds are a valuable remedy for winter coughs and flu, stimulating appetite and digestion and increasing blood circulation. Methi (dry or sprouted) is very beneficial in bone and joint problems that surface more in winter. Turmeric, especially the fresh light and golden yellow variety (resembles ginger), is a potent anti-microbial immunitybuilder.

Herbs and Seeds Keeping Healthy in winter. *Basil (tulsi)* is a herb that protects against colds and fever and helps strengthen immunity. Ginger, (fresh and dry varieties) is very warming. Sliced ginger with lime and salt is a common accompaniment with meals, while ginger can be added to tea, dals and vegetables. Dry ginger powder made into tiny ladoos with jaggery and ghee is excellent for combating winter chills.

Til ladoos and til chikki need no introduction to an Indian. The warmth-giving quality of til or sesame is also tapped when you sprinkle them on salads etc. Include proteins as well as carbohydrates in your diet. This will help balance serotonin, a calming brain chemical, and will not trigger low blood sugar-induced hunger pains. Staying up late, working at night, eating at irregular times, exposing the body to stress and fatigue, and sleeping during the day can all affect the digestive and body rhythms and thus compromise rather than strengthen the immune system. So this year, spend the cold season staying warm and healthy.^[12]

- **Routine should be followed during winter**

Ayurveda suggests waking up a bit later in the winter than you would in other seasons. Brush your teeth with *datwan* made from herbs of *Kashaya ras* and drink a cup of warm water to stimulate a bowel movement. Then treat yourself to *abyanga* (massage). Rub warmed *Til oil*

all over your entire body. We have to do exercise for increase circulation of body and quell *kapha* in the winter. Conclude the morning regimen with yoga, pranayama, and meditation.^[13] Do vigorous exercises. In the treatises, wrestling is recommended, but in its absence, aerobic exercises or other forms of physical exercise routine can be followed.

Ayurvedic Perspective of Winter Season

Hemant and *Shishir Ritu* constitute this winter season. *Shishira* marks the onset of *aadaana kaala* (*Aadaan* means taking away - the period of dehydration). Cold becomes severe and dryness intensifies further. Occasional clouds, wind and rainfall are also features of late winter. According to *Ayurved* during this period, the '*Sharir-bal*' or physical strength and '*jathragni-bal*' or digestive fire is at their maximum, by virtue of the Sun just coming out of its Southern cycle and moving into the Northern cycle. It is also the time when '*Vata*' *dosha* tends to get *aggravated*.^[14,15]

1. Properties of *Hemanta Ritu*

Winter is the healthiest season. According to Charak, because of the cold temperatures, the blood vessels nearer to the skin, contract. The heat of the body thus preserved, fires up the hunger and helps indigestion. Two ways benefit is that the body can intake more food and nutrients and on the other hand, as digestion power is strong, no toxins (*Aam ras*) due to improper digestion are formed.^[16]

➤ General condition

Mid-November to mid-January is considered as *Hemanta* (late autumn) *Ritu*. Blow of cold winds starts and chillness is felt. Predominant *Rasa* during this season is *Madhura* and the predominant *Mahabhutas* are *Prithivi and Vayu*. The strength of a person remains on highest grade and vitiated *Pitta Dosha* get specified. Activity of *Agni* is increased.^[17]

➤ Diet regimen

Aahar in winter – This is the time when we eat heavy food. (It is very important to note that everything is relative. If you are living on salad, you can start by little oily food. But we have not jump to deep fried food at once.) Also the food should be taken according to one's *Prakruti*. One should use unctuous, sweet, sour, and salty foods. Among cereals and pulses, new rice, flour preparations, green gram, *Masha*, etc., are mentioned to be used. Various meats, fats, milk and milkproducts, sugarcane products, *Shidhu* (fermented preparations),

Mid and various atmospheric phenomena, including temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric pressure.^[18]

All these environmental factors undergo a continuous change and at a time; no two moments are exactly alike in a given place. Thus with the rising Sun the temperature keeps on rising and gradually drops at night. The maximum and minimum temperature fluctuates daily but it is highest in summer and lowest in winter. Similarly, all these factors show diurnal as well as seasonal variations and these variations for a particular time are known as season.^[19]

Table. 1: Table summarizes the Pathya and Apathya Ahar during shishir and Hemant ritu.^[20]

Season	Wholesome	Unwholesome diet
Sisira Ritu	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), Wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), Tila (<i>Sesamum indicum</i>), etc., Milk and milk products, sugarcane (<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>) and its products-jaggery, etc., fats, edible oil, flour products, green vegetables, Sunthi (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>), Lashuna (<i>Allium sativum</i>), Haritaki (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>), Pippali (<i>Piper longum</i>), etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold drinks, Vata aggravating foods like Bengal gram/Chana (<i>Cicer arietinum</i>), etc. • Too much of foods having sour, bitter and astringent taste. • Light foods like puffed rice, etc.
Hemanta Ritu	Rice (<i>Oryza sativa</i>), wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i>), black gram (<i>Vigna mungo</i>), etc. Milk and milk products, sugar-cane (<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>) juice and its products, fats and oils, fermented preparations, Sunthi (<i>Zingiber officinale</i>), Lashuna (<i>Allium sativum</i>), Haritaki (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>), Pippali (<i>Piper longum</i>), fenugreek (<i>Trigonella foenum</i>), Tila (<i>Sesamum indicum</i>), etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold drinks, Vata aggravating foods, such as Bengal gram/Chana (<i>Cicer arietinum</i>), etc. • Light foods, such as puffed rice, etc.

2. Properties of Shishir RITU

➤ General condition

Mid-January to mid-March is considered as *Shishir Ritu*. Predominant Rasa during this season is *Tikta* and the predominant *Mashabhuta* are *Prithivi* and *Apa*. The strength of a person remains on highest grade and vitiated *Pitta Dosha* get specified. Activity of *Agni* is increased as *Hemant ritu*.^[21]

➤ Diet in Shishir Ritu

As the external atmosphere is cold, the body retains heat and attempts to preserve it. As a result, the digestive fire (*jatharagni*) becomes stronger and is able to metabolize heavy foods such as fats and dairy products like milk, cheese, butter, *ghee* etc. Kidney beans, black beans (*urad dal*), grains and products made from grains (wheat, rice) should be consumed. Sweet products made from sugarcane extracts like jaggery etc. Wheat and wheat products, new

grains such as rice, and other nutrition rich diet like dates, dry fruits, etc. are also recommended. People who are non vegetarian should eat meat which helps in providing good energy. Special herbal wines (not to be consumed for intoxication) and honey can be taken. One should particularly avoid taking cold foods and drinks and should drink warm water or ginger tea in winter.^[22]

➤ Life style in Shishir Ritu

There is a natural accumulation of kapha due to the cold and wet environment, so one should try to keep warm. Warm baths, sauna and living in a warm house are beneficial. Heavy, warm, dry clothes should be worn. The fabrics that are mentioned are: silk, leather, jute, thick cotton, wool etc. Regular body massage with oil according to individuals *prakruti* should be done. Head massage is also recommended. Massage not only generates heat, thereby providing respite from the cold, but it also keeps Vata dosha from getting aggravated.^[23]

Stream bath (*swedan*) should regularly be taken. After bath, apply 'lep' (anointment) of heat generating herbs like 'kesar' (saffron), 'aguru' (aloe wood). 'dhoop' (inundation of the room with smoke emanating from the embers of an herb) of aguru are beneficial Inhalation of the 'dhoop' from aguru keeps the respiratory passage clear, and removes *kapha*. Expose oneself to morning sun rays for natural sudation.^[24]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ayurveda makes the people understand about their body types and insist them to live according to this. As changes in the environment affect our body also, it is very important for our body to get familiar with these changes. If we are not doing so it will affect our body and mind leading to Dosha Vaishamya. In the latter stages, these imbalances will lead to various types of life style disorders. So for preventing these disorders, the best way is to understand Ritucarya which explains about the various dietary and behavioural regimens according to different seasons. By proper understanding and following these regimens, we can easily achieve our primary goal "Swasthasya Rakshanam". It also brings about Strength, Complexion and longevity without disturbing the equilibrium of the body and mind.

But there is lack of knowledge about preventive aspect. Ayurveda not only mentioned the preventive aspect but also mentioned how treatment should be given considering seasonal effect. This indicates that our acharya's were aware about the variations in physiological parameters in various seasons. Season is a major contributory factor in the various changes in

the nature as well as in human body also. As per *Ayurveda Ritucharya* (seasonal diet regimen & lifestyle) should be followed for prevention of diseases arises from variations in *tridosha* due to season. Growing public awareness about *ritucharya* with support of government and corporate wellness programs may help arrest the rapid increase in the incidence of such seasonal diseases &.

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