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## Review Article

### VYAYAMA – THE FOURTH UPASTHAMBHA

Mohammed Asif <sup>1\*</sup>, Siva Sahithi <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Consultant Physician, Technical Head, Manphar Ayurvedic drugs, Vijayawada, India

<sup>2</sup> Consultant Physician, Suprabath's Sukhayu Ayurveda Multispecialty Hospital, Kota, India

\*Corresponding Author Email: asifmohd2223@gmail.com

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#### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, is built on foundational pillars that ensure the maintenance of health and the prevention of disease. Among these, Trayopasthambha—the three supportive pillars of life—plays a crucial role in preserving the integrity of the body and maintaining a balanced state of doshas, dhatus, and agni. These three classical pillars are: Ahara (Diet), Nidra (Sleep) and Bramhacharya (Regulated Celibacy / Control of senses and sexual discipline). While these three upasthambas are indeed sufficient to sustain health, it is important to recognize that in the context of modern sedentary lifestyles and the increasing prevalence of non-communicable and autoimmune diseases, Vyayama, or exercise, emerges as a crucial candidate to be regarded as the fourth Upasthambha. This addition not only complements the classical triad but also plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining Swasthya, or holistic health. By taking these into consideration this article explores the classical concept of Trayopasthambha while emphasizing Vyayama as a vital supporting factor in today's context.

**Keywords:** Trayopasthambha, Ahara, Nidra, Bramhacharya, Vyayama, Agni, Auto immune diseases.

#### INTRODUCTION

Longevity is the desire of most human beings. Charaks has stated about the methods and means to fulfill longevity through eshanas<sup>1</sup>, or desires. One among them is the desire for longevity Pranaeshana that can be achieved by following a healthy lifestyle. Various diseases may arise if there is stress, unhealthy lifestyle, or through the effects of unhealthy season over the mind and the body.

Autoimmune disorders are conditions where the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own tissues. Examples include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and psoriasis. Ayurveda refers to such disorders broadly under the categories of "Agnimandya" (impaired metabolism), "Ama" (toxicity due to incomplete digestion/metabolism), and "Ojo Kshaya" (depletion of vitality and immunity).

Further, the factors in maintenance of good health are described in ayurveda.

"traya upastambha iti- aaharah, svapno, bramacharyamiti; ebhishtrihiryuktivuktairupastabdhamupastambhaih shariram bala varnopachayopachitam anuvartate "<sup>2</sup>(C.S.Su 11/35)

Three supporting pillars of life or upasthambas are food (ahara), sleep (swapna) and celibacy (bramhacharya). By following these well regulated lifestyle factors, the body is bestowed with strength, good complexion and proper growth and this continues throughout life. It supports in increasing the three forms of strength, immunity (bala)<sup>3</sup> – constitutional strength, immunity

(sahaja), seasonal strength, immunity (kalaja) and acquired immunity (yuktikrita).

Along with Trayopasthambha, Exercise, or "Vyayama", holds a vital place in Ayurveda as one of the key daily regimens (Dinacharya) for maintaining health, enhancing immunity (Bala), and preventing disease. When properly practiced, exercise helps balancing Doshas, improves Agni, eliminates Ama, and supports Dhatus Samya (tissue equilibrium).

#### ROLE OF EACH UPSTAMBHA IN HEALTH AND ILL HEALTH

##### 1. Ahara – The Foundation of Health

"aaharasambhavam vastu rogaschaaharasambhavaah hitahitavisheshaach visheshah sukhduhkhayoh" <sup>4</sup> (C.S.Su. 28/45)

- Ayurveda places Ahara at the top among all supportive pillars. Acharya Charaka presents an excellent concept about Ahara, stating that it not only shapes our bodies but also the illnesses that afflict us.
- If Sukha (happiness, health) is caused by the wholesome food (Hita Ahara), then Dukha (misery, unhealthy) is caused by the unwholesome food (Ahita Ahara).
- Food decides whether the human being can or cannot sustain the diseases of body and mind. Additionally, he says that among the things that maintain life, food, or ahara, is the best.
- Food is a major factor in Agni regulation and Dosha balance.
- In diseased conditions especially autoimmune diseases, a personalized Ahara can reduce inflammation (e.g., avoiding incompatible foods, processed food, excess sour and fermented items in skin disorders).

- Supports Gut health, which is linked to immune modulation (aligning with modern microbiome understanding).

## 2. Nidra – The Pillar of Mental and Physical Restoration

“nidravattam sukhham duhkham pushtih karshyam balabalam/ vrushata clibata gnyanamagnyanam jivitam na ch”<sup>5</sup>(C.S.Su. 21/36)

- In Ayurveda, Nidra is considered as nourishing to the mind as food is to the body.
- In human beings, happiness and sorrow, nutrition and emaciation, strength and weakness, fertility and infertility, knowledge and ignorance, and longevity and mortality depend upon proper and poor sleep.
- Untimely, excessive sleep and sleep deficiency take away both happiness and longevity from a person.
- Sleep is essential for rejuvenation, tissue repair, emotional stability, and intellectual clarity. Proper sleep enhances longevity, strength, complexion, fertility, and happiness.
- Insufficient or disturbed sleep leads to fatigue, poor immunity, anxiety, metabolic disorders, and accelerated aging.
- In a diseased condition adequate sleep helps in cellular repair, immune homeostasis, and reduces systemic inflammation.
- Poor sleep is linked with flare-ups in autoimmune conditions.
- Nidra calms Vata and helps mental resilience, reducing stress-triggered autoimmunity.

## 3. Brahmacharya – The Pillar of Vitality and Discipline

- Brahmacharya represents regulated behavior, moderation, and mindful control over sensory activities, especially sexual activity.
- Preservation of shukra dhatu (reproductive essence) is linked with vitality, immunity, mental clarity, and longevity.
- True Brahmacharya also includes ethical conduct, emotional balance, and disciplined lifestyle, all of which enhance physical and spiritual health.
- Excess indulgence can weaken Ojas (immunity essence).
- Regulation preserves vitality and supports endocrine balance, relevant in autoimmune thyroid disorders.

## VYAYAMA DESERVES A PLACE AMONG THE UPASTHAMHAS

Considering the 21st-century lifestyle—characterized by prolonged sitting, reduced physical activity, and high stress—the inclusion of Vyayama as a fourth upastambha is practical and essential. Exercise has become as important as diet and sleep in maintaining homeostasis.

Although classical texts list only three upastambhas, Vyayama (physical exercise) has gained prominence as an indispensable pillar in contemporary health maintenance. Its inclusion as the fourth upastambha is a conscious idea due to its crucial role in preventing and managing lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, insomnia, digestive issues, and musculoskeletal problems.

## PRINCIPLES OF VYAYAMA

“ardhashaktya nishevyastu balibhih snigdhabhojibhih shitkale vasante ch, mandamev tatonyada”<sup>6</sup>(A.Hr.Su 2/11)

### 1. Matra (Quantity)

Vyayama should be performed only to half of one's capacity (Ardha-shakti). Signs of optimal exercise include lightness, mild sweating, increased respiration, and a pleasant feeling of effort.

### 2. Kala (Time)

The ideal time for exercise is early morning when kapha is dominant.

### 3. Ritu (Season)

- During winter in hemantha, sisira ritu one can perform stronger exercise.
- In summer, exercise should be gentle.
- In rainy season, very mild and cautious exercise is recommended.

### 4. Contraindications

Excessive or inappropriate exercise can lead to fatigue, breathlessness, and depletion of dhatus, bleeding disorders, and worsening of Vata.

## BENEFITS OF VYAYAMA

### In A Healthy Individual

- Ayurveda describes Vyayama not merely as physical exertion but as a practice.  
“laghavam karmasamarthyam sthairyam duhkhasahishnuta dosha kshayogni vrudhisch vyayamadupajayate”<sup>7</sup> (C.S.Su 7/32)

Lightness, strength to work, stability, endurance towards distress and mitigation of dosha (especially kapha), and stimulation of agni (digestive power) is engendered by physical exercise.

- Ill effects of viruddha ahara are not seen in people who exercise regularly as they can easily digest even the incompatible food<sup>8</sup>.
- Laghu Sharira (lightness of the body)
- Medas-hara (reduction of excessive fat)
- Stamina and tolerance enhancement
- Improved digestion and metabolic fire (agni)
- Stabilization of Vata dosha
- Strength of musculoskeletal structures (mamsa, asthi, and snayu)
- Improved mental health and emotional balance

### In a diseased individual

- Moderate, regular exercise reduces systemic inflammation and modulates immune function.
- Enhances lymphatic drainage, aiding removal of Ama (toxins) from the system.
- Prevents obesity, which is a pro-inflammatory state exacerbating autoimmune disease.
- Increases muscle strength and joint flexibility, crucial in arthritis-related conditions.
- Exercise supports Vata, reducing stress and anxiety, which are autoimmune disease aggravators.

In today's era of physical inactivity, Vyayama serves as –

- A preventive tool against lifestyle disorders.
- A modulator of immune functions in autoimmune diseases.
- A means to support Agni (digestive/metabolic fire) and Srotas (channels), thus maintaining Dhatus balance.

Regular exercise nourishes both body and mind, enhances ojas indirectly, and promotes a balanced lifestyle. Hence, Vyayama completes the stability of health — making it a natural extension of the classical Trayopastambha.

### How Important Are These Four Pillars in Current Lifestyles

In the current lifestyle characterized by:

- Irregular, processed food habits.
- Sedentary work culture.

- High stress levels and mental health issues.
- Irregular sleep patterns.
- Environmental pollution and exposure to toxins.

These four Upastambhas collectively offer:

- Restoration of circadian rhythm (through regulated sleep and exercise).
- Enhancement of digestive fire and metabolic harmony.
- Emotional and mental resilience.
- Balanced immune function and prevention of inflammation.

**Table 1: Role of Four Upastambhas in Autoimmune Disease Management**

Upastambha	Role in Health	Relevance in Autoimmune Disorders	Practical Guidelines
1. Ahara (Food)	Nourishes Dhatus, maintains Agni, builds Ojas	Regulates inflammation, supports gut health, reduces Ama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balanced, fresh, seasonal diet</li> <li>- Avoid incompatible foods</li> <li>- Light, easily digestible meals</li> <li>- Warm water and spices for Agni</li> </ul>
2. Nidra (Sleep)	Restores energy, mental stability, supports immunity	Poor sleep triggers flare-ups; good sleep reduces systemic inflammation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular sleep timing</li> <li>- Avoid screens before bed</li> <li>- Relaxation rituals: warm bath, gentle breathing</li> </ul>
3. Brahmacharya (Regulated Sexual Conduct)	Preserves vitality, supports hormonal balance	Prevents depletion of Ojas, helps endocrine stability (thyroid, PCOS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regulate frequency based on strength and season</li> <li>- Avoid excess indulgence during flare-ups</li> </ul>
4. Vyayama (Exercise)	Enhances strength, circulation, lymphatic flow, Agni	Reduces chronic inflammation, improves mobility in arthritis, modulates immunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moderate, regular exercise (Yoga, walking, swimming)</li> <li>- Avoid overexertion</li> <li>- Exercise in the morning for 30–45 min</li> </ul>

## DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, Trayopastambha refers to the three supporting pillars of life that form the foundation for holistic health and well-being. Adhering to the principles of these three pillars is believed to help maintain a disease-free life and achieve a full lifespan.

The first pillar, Ahara, states that food choices should be in line with one's Prakriti (one's individual constitution), with Dosha Prakriti determining the most suitable diet. Maintaining good health requires a balanced consumption of the six flavors. The Doshas Vata, Pitta, and Kapha can be upset by an imbalance in the consumption of these flavors, which can lead to illness.

Nidra, the second pillar, highlights the value of getting enough natural sleep to restore vigor and power. However, getting too little or too little sleep can cause a number of illnesses.

For a healthy existence and spiritual freedom, brahmacharya, the third pillar involves sticking to daily and seasonal routines, acting morally, and engaging in rejuvenating activities. As a result, Brahmacharya is essential to maintaining the fundamental pillars and other elements of daily existence.

### Vyayama as the Fourth Upastambha

In today's fast-paced world, where many individuals spend long hours sitting at desks and engaging in minimal physical activity, the significance of regular exercise cannot be overstated. Engaging in Vyayama helps counteract the adverse effects of a sedentary lifestyle, such as obesity, cardiovascular issues, and other chronic health conditions. By incorporating physical activity into daily routines, people can enhance their overall well-being and vitality, ensuring a more balanced life.

Furthermore, exercise contributes to better mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, which are often exacerbated by modern living. It fosters emotional resilience and improves cognitive function, making it an indispensable element for maintaining both physical and mental health. By viewing Vyayama as the fourth Upastambha, we emphasize its essential

role in creating a comprehensive approach to health that addresses the challenges of contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

The classical Trayopastambha of Ayurveda—Ahara, Nidra, and Brahmacharya continue to be fundamental elements for sustaining health and longevity. These three pillars emphasize the importance of proper nutrition, restful sleep, and maintaining a lifestyle of self-discipline and restraint as crucial for overall well-being. However, with the dramatic shifts in lifestyle that have occurred in the modern world, Vyayama emerges as an essential fourth pillar of this age-old wisdom. This component is indispensable for balancing metabolism, strengthening the body, and preventing a variety of chronic diseases that have become prevalent in today's society.

Recognizing Vyayama as the fourth upastambha not only underscores the significance of physical activity but also highlights the dynamic nature of Ayurveda as a holistic system that can evolve with the changing needs of society while still remaining rooted in its timeless principles. Together, these 'Chaturtha Upastambhas' Ahara, Nidra, Brahmacharya, and Vyayama offer a comprehensive pathway toward achieving holistic well-being, inner harmony, and vibrant vitality. By integrating all these aspects into daily life, individuals can foster a deeper connection to their physical and mental health, ensuring a more balanced and fulfilling existence in an increasingly complex world.

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