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Stay healthy this monsoon with Ayurvedic lifestyle modifications

Dr. Umapati C. Baragi,¹ Dr. Jyoti M. Ganer,² Dr. Pramod C. Baragi³

¹Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of Basic Principles, Faculty of Ayurved (Main Campus), Uttarakhand Ayurved University, Dehradun, ²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Agada Tantra, Uttaranchal Ayurved College, Dehradun, ³Professor & Head, Department of Rasashastra & Bhaishajya Kalpana, BLDEA'S AVS Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya Hospital & Research Centre, Vijayapur, Karnataka, INDIA.

ABSTRACT

Ritucharya is the term for the dietary and lifestyle regimens that are based on Earth's seasons. The belief is that illness can be prevented if diet and lifestyle reflect the changes in weather conditions. *Ritucharya* is the ancient Ayurvedic practice and is comprised of two words, "Ritu" which means season and "Charya" which means regimen or discipline. *Ritucharya* consists of lifestyle and Ayurvedic diet routine to cope with the bodily and mental impacts caused by seasonal changes as recommended by Ayurveda. *Varsha Ritu* (Monsoon) brings about vivid changes not only in the nature but also in the body. Our body is more susceptible to health issues during rainy season, because monsoon reduces the digestive fire in our body. Our body constantly gets affected with indigestion problems, viral fever, malaise etc. so we must keep our body resistant against such diseases. Hence this review article discusses the lifestyle modifications needed to preserve then body from diseases originating in *Varsha Ritu*.

Key words: Monsoon, *Varsha Ritu*, *Ritucharya*, Ayurvedic lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

The first water droplets of the monsoon make us joyous and relieved. This season can be a remedy from the rashes we got due to prickly heat during the summer season. Monsoon brings about vivid changes not only in the nature but also in the body. Our body is more susceptible to health issues during rainy season, because monsoon reduces the digestive fire in our body.^[1] Our body constantly gets affected with

indigestion problems, viral fever, malaise etc. so we must keep our body resistant against such diseases.



The atmosphere is although cool due to rainfall but the humidity increases and causes aggravation of *Doshas* (humors) in the body. Monsoon season is categorized as *Varsha Ritu* in Ayurveda.^[2] According to Ayurveda, *Varsha Ritucharya* (regimen) is the recommended routine and lifestyle modifications to

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Umapati C. Baragi

Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of Basic Principles, Faculty of Ayurved (Main Campus), Uttarakhand Ayurved University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.

E-mail: umapati.baragi@gmail.com

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be followed, to get rid off the imbalances in the body during the Monsoon. This in turn will help to boost immunity and maintain good health.

During this season, aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosh* is considered as the root cause of various diseases and conditions. The food, lifestyle and care should help in balancing the vitiated *Vata* and *Pitta Dosh*s and maintain a healthy body constitution.^[3]

Due to poor strength of *Agni* (digestive fire), *Dosh*s start vitiating one another, primarily the *Vata Dosh*a and secondarily *Pitta* and *Kapha Dosh*a which may cause many ailments. Various methods to balance the *Dosh*s along with effective measures to be adopted has been described in Ayurveda.^[4]

SHADRITUS (SIX SEASONS)

The year according to Ayurveda is divided into two *Kaalas*;

1. **Aadaana Kaala (Uttarayana) (Northern Solastice)**
2. **Visarga Kaala (Dakshinayana) (Southern Solastice)**

This division is done according to the position of the Sun. *Aadaana* means taking away and *Visarga* means giving.

In *Aadaana Kaala*, the sun and wind are powerful. The sun takes away the strength of the people and the cooling qualities of the earth. It is the debialiting period. Strength is weakened.^[4]

In *Visarga Kaala*, the sun releases the strength to the people. The moon is more powerful, the earth becomes cooled due to the clouds, rain and cold wind.^[5]

A year consists of six *Ritus* (seasons). Each *Ritu* is two *Masas* (months) long. Three *Ritus* (one semester) form a *Kaala*.

The six *Ritus* and their properties can be summarized in the following table;^[6]

Semester (Kaala)	Season (Ritu)	Month (Maasa)	Properties of the season
Adana Kaala (Northern Solastice / celestial sphere)	Shishira	Magha, Phalguna (Mid January to Mid March)	Cold & dewy season
	Vasanta	Chaitra, Vaishakha (Mid March to mid May)	Spring
	Grishma	Jyestha, Ashadha (Mid May to Mid July)	Summer
Visharga Kaala (Southern Solastice / celestial sphere)	Varsha	Sravana, Bhadrapada (Mid July to Mid September)	Rainy Season (Monsoon)
	Sharada	Ashvina, Kartika (Mid September to mid November)	Autumn season
	Hemanta	Margsheersha, Pausha (Mid November to Mid January)	Winter season

Aggravation and accumulation of Doshas during Monsoon

Vata : Accumulates during the dry or dehydrating heat of the summer. It becomes aggravated during the rainy (Monsoon) season which causes weakened digestion, acidic atmospheric conditions and steam/heat emitted from the earth.

Pitta : Accumulates during the rainy season due to the acidic conditions of the atmosphere and a weakened digestion. It is aggravated during autumn when the heat returns. This occurs after the cooling spell of the rainy season.^[6]

Regimen during Monsoon

Ayurveda describes aggravation (vitiation) of *Vata* and accumulation of *Pitta* in *Varsha Ritu* (Rainy/monsoon season). This is the major cause of various diseases occurring during the rainy season. The food and lifestyle should thus be such which helps in balancing *Vata* and *Pitta*.^[7]

Diet during monsoon^[8]

Water available in the reservoirs during monsoon is dirty and comparatively heavy to digest and the metabolism is sluggish during this period. An individual is likely to experience loss of appetite. Hence following changes in diet and life style is advisable during the monsoon.

1. Consume light and fresh foods prepared from old grains of barley, wheat and rice to preserve Agni.
2. Include cow's ghee, lentils, green gram (moong dal), rice and wheat in daily diet.
3. Consume small piece of ginger with rock salt before every meal.
4. Use sour and salted soups of vegetables, onion and other vegetables.
5. Use spices such as pepper, ginger, asafoetida (*hing*), garlic, *jeera* powder, coriander and turmeric for enhancing your digestive capability. These help to improve your immunity too.
6. During cooler days due to heavy rains, sour, salty and oily diet is preferred.
7. To ensure removal of germs, drink only boiled and cooled water. Water should be consumed within 24 hours of boiling, honey can be added in water before consumption.
8. Addition of ginger and green gram in daily diet is beneficial.
9. Eating of warm food and avoiding uncooked foods and salads is better.
10. Drinking of excess of fluids to prevent further slowing down of metabolism is advisable.
11. Avoidance of consuming stale food is beneficial.
12. Consumption of leafy vegetables need to be avoided during monsoon.
13. Avoidance of curds, red meat and any food stuff, which takes longer time to digest is good during the monsoon. One may have buttermilk instead of curds.
14. Consumption of *Haritaki* / *Harad* (*Terminalia chebula*) with rock salt in monsoon season is beneficial to health.

Life style during monsoon

Consumption of healthy diet only may not provide desired results unless it is supported by lifestyle beneficial for monsoon. Following are the tips for the important changes in lifestyle of rainy / monsoon season.

1. Avoiding sleep in daytime is good as it hampers digestion and slows down the metabolism rate.
2. Fasting is especially recommended in the monsoon season, particularly for people fond of socialising and erratic eating. You can gain a lot of health benefits simply by observing a weekly or fortnightly fast during monsoon. It helps to improve your digestive fire.
3. Over exertion and over exposure to sun specially in afternoon has to be avoided.
4. Keep the surrounding dry and clean and not to allow water to get accumulated around.
5. Keep body warm, to protect any attack from viruses as and when body temperature goes down.
6. Avoid entering into air-conditioned room with wet hair and damp clothes.
7. Avoid walking in dirty water.
8. Feet are required to be kept dry.
9. Avoid getting wet in the rains. However, if it happens, change to dry clothes as soon as possible is necessary in order to avoid exposure from infections, as immunity is naturally low during monsoon.

10. Use of Fumigative disinfectant like loban and dry neem leaves for drying cloths and killing insects / bacteria is recommended.
11. Best season for conducting *Panchkarma*, one can undergo *Vamana*, *Virechana* and *Asthapana Basthi* for keeping healthy throughout the year.
12. Use of perfumes is advocated in this season.

DISCUSSION

It is recommended that one's eating habits should depend primarily on one's *Dosha*, with a secondary consideration of the season, as life on the earth is controlled by the movement of the Sun. Life events would suggest that time, seasons and the *Tridoshas* are governed, in the final analysis by the sun, wind and the moon. During *Varsha Ritu* the digestion falls and *Vata* related disorders also assail in the body. Therefore a quiet and leisurely lifestyle is ideal in the monsoon season. This involves abstention from drinking cold water and river water, day sleep, physical exertion, exposure to strong sun and sexual intercourse. When the days are cool with rain and wind, drinks mixed with honey, sour and salty food taste and fatty additives are useful for vata related troubles. To retain digestive power, special foods such as old barley, wheat, rice should be included. Drinks could be small quantities of wine of various kinds, rainwater or water from well or tanks, that has been heated and cooled. Living in a dry place protected from rain, one should regularly apply oil to the body, bathe, wear simple, clean clothes and garlands of flowers. When all these regimens are done, an individual will come to a perfect adjustment through the long use of a given lifestyle, which is known as *Okasatmya*. This too makes for wholesomeness because it embraces personal idiosyncracies as well as local circumstances (including climate).

CONCLUSION

This holistic rejuvenation process consisting of a special diet, lifestyle changes and effective use of *Panchakarma* therapies prevent the body from different health issues arising during rainy season. By following these you would be able to enjoy monsoon without fearing its adverse impact.

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