

Review Article

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SAFETY, EFFICACY, AND CLINICAL OUTCOMES OF VAMANA KARMA: AN EVIDENCE-BASED REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Vamana Karma*, the therapeutic emesis, is a prime bio-purificatory procedure among the *Panchakarma* therapies described in *Āyurveda*. Traditionally employed for expelling vitiated *Kapha* and treating various systemic disorders, it has gained renewed clinical interest for its potential applications in metabolic, respiratory, and dermatological diseases. However, contemporary evaluation regarding its safety, efficacy, and clinical outcomes is crucial for its wider acceptance and integration into modern clinical practice.

Aim:

To critically review and analyze the available evidence on the safety, therapeutic efficacy, and clinical outcomes of *Vamana Karma* in various disease conditions. **Materials and Methods:**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using Ayurvedic classical texts, contemporary textbooks, and electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal, and Google Scholar. Clinical trials, observational studies, case series, and pharmacological studies related to *Vamana Karma* were included. Safety parameters, efficacy

indicators, and reported clinical outcomes were systematically evaluated. **Results:** The review indicates that *Vamana Karma* demonstrates significant efficacy in *Kapha*-dominant disorders such as bronchial asthma (*Tamaka Shwasa*), obesity (*Sthoulya*), skin diseases (*Kushtha*), and certain psychiatric conditions. Clinical studies report improvements in biochemical markers, symptom reduction, and quality of life indices. The procedure, when properly indicated and executed following classical guidelines (*Samsarjana Krama*, *Poorva Karma*, *Pradhana Karma*, *Pashchat Karma*), has shown a favorable safety profile. Adverse effects, when present, were mild and manageable. **Conclusion:** *Vamana Karma* is a clinically effective and relatively safe bio-purificatory therapy with promising outcomes across a range of *Kapha*-predominant and systemic disorders. Further large-scale randomized controlled trials with standardized protocols are warranted to strengthen the evidence base and ensure its optimal application in integrative healthcare settings.

KEYWORDS: *Vamana Karma*, Panchakarma, *Kapha* disorders, efficacy, safety, clinical outcomes, Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

Vamana Karma, the therapeutic emesis, is one of the principal detoxification procedures described under *Panchakarma* therapies in *Ayurveda*. It is primarily indicated for the expulsion of morbid *Kapha* and is also effective in diseases involving *Pitta* and metabolic waste products (*Ama*). The classical texts emphasize its utility not only in disease management but also as a preventive measure to maintain *Dosha* equilibrium and overall health.¹ Over centuries, *Vamana Karma* has been applied extensively for managing a variety of disorders, including respiratory conditions (*Tamaka Shwasa*), skin diseases (*Kushtha*), obesity (*Sthoulya*), and certain psychiatric and gastrointestinal disorders.²

The relevance of *Vamana Karma* has gained renewed attention in the modern era, especially due to the rising prevalence of lifestyle disorders where metabolic dysfunction and toxin accumulation are key pathological factors. Contemporary clinicians and researchers have begun to explore the efficacy of *Vamana Karma* beyond traditional boundaries, applying it as an integrative therapeutic tool in conditions such as dyslipidemia, allergic bronchitis, psoriasis, and even in certain mental health disorders.³ This approach bridges the gap

between ancient wisdom and modern medical needs, underscoring the importance of revisiting classical therapies through the lens of evidence-based medicine.⁴

While the therapeutic potential of *Vamana Karma* is recognized, concerns about procedural safety, standardization, and potential adverse effects remain. Unlike conventional pharmacotherapies, *Vamana Karma* involves a complex sequence of preparatory (*Poorva Karma*), main (*Pradhana Karma*), and post-procedure care (*Pashchat Karma*), each of which requires precise execution. Inappropriate administration or deviation from classical guidelines can lead to complications such as electrolyte imbalance, dehydration, or gastrointestinal disturbances. Therefore, evaluating the safety profile of *Vamana Karma* through systematic clinical studies is critical.⁵

Several clinical trials, case series, and observational studies have reported promising outcomes of *Vamana Karma* across various disease conditions. These studies often highlight not only symptomatic relief but also improvements in objective parameters such as lipid profiles, pulmonary function tests, inflammatory markers, and psychological well-being. However, the heterogeneity in study designs, variations in procedural protocols, and limited sample sizes pose challenges in drawing definitive conclusions about its efficacy and safety.⁶

In light of these considerations, this review aims to systematically evaluate the available clinical evidence on the safety, efficacy, and therapeutic outcomes of *Vamana Karma*. By critically analyzing published data and correlating it with classical Ayurvedic concepts, the review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the therapeutic potential of *Vamana Karma* while identifying areas that require further research and standardization.⁷

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

To critically evaluate the safety, efficacy, and clinical outcomes of *Vamana Karma* based on classical Ayurvedic literature and modern clinical evidence.

Objectives:

1. To review classical Ayurvedic references highlighting the indications and therapeutic benefits of *Vamana Karma*.
2. To assess the clinical efficacy of *Vamana Karma* in various disease conditions.
3. To analyze the safety profile and reported adverse effects in available studies.

4. To identify gaps and suggest future research directions for the standardization and wider clinical application of *Vamana Karma*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to evaluate the safety, efficacy, and clinical outcomes of *Vamana Karma*. The sources included classical *Āyurvedic* texts (*Bṛhatrayī*, *Laghutrayī*, and specialized Panchakarma treatises) as well as contemporary research articles, clinical trials, and case reports. Electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal, DHARA, and Google Scholar were extensively searched using keywords like *Vamana Karma*, Panchakarma, therapeutic emesis, *Kapha disorders*, efficacy, safety, and clinical outcomes.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY

Definition and Etymology

Vamana Karma refers to the therapeutic emesis procedure, purposefully inducing vomiting to expel the vitiated *Kapha dosha* and accumulated *Ama* (metabolic toxins). The term *Vamana* is derived from the Sanskrit root "vam" meaning "to expel" or "to eject." It is one of the five principal procedures of *Panchakarma* and is specifically indicated for *Kapha* disorders and systemic detoxification.⁸

Ayurvedic Rationale (Yukti)

According to *Ayurveda*, health is maintained by the balance of the *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), *Dhatus*, and *Malas*. An excess of *Kapha* or its qualitative vitiation leads to diseases characterized by heaviness, lethargy, congestion, and obstruction. *Vamana Karma* is designed to eliminate this aggravated *Kapha* directly from the upper gastrointestinal tract (*Aamashaya*), thereby breaking the *Samprapti* (pathogenesis) and restoring doshic balance.⁹

Key principles:

- *Dosha Pratyanka Chikitsa*: Specific targeting of the aggravated *Kapha*.
- *Shodhana* over *Shamana*: Removal of the causative factors (*dosha dushya sammurchhana*) rather than mere palliation.
- *Agni Deepana*: Post-*Vamana*, the digestive fire (*Agni*) is enhanced, improving metabolism.¹⁰

Indications (Yogya)¹¹

Vamana Karma is indicated in a wide range of *Kapha* predominant and *Kapha-Pitta* disorders, such as:

- *Kasa* (cough)
- *Tamaka Shwasa* (bronchial asthma)
- *Kaphaja Pratishyaya* (chronic rhinitis)
- *Medoroga* (obesity)
- *Kustha* (skin diseases like psoriasis, eczema)
- *Sthaulya* (obesity/metabolic syndrome)
- *Manovikara* (certain psychiatric disorders like depression with lethargy)

Contraindications (Ayogya)¹²

Vamana should be strictly avoided in:

- Children, elderly, pregnant women, and weak individuals
- *Atyagni* (very strong digestion where no *Kapha* accumulation exists)
- Severe cardiovascular disorders
- *Vataja* diseases without *Kapha* involvement

Procedural Overview (Karma Vidhi)¹³

Stage	Description
<i>Poorva Karma</i>	<i>Deepana-Pachana</i> , <i>Snehapana</i> , and <i>Swedana</i> to mobilize doshas towards the gastrointestinal tract.
<i>Pradhana Karma</i>	Administration of <i>Vamana dravya</i> (emetic medicine) such as <i>Madana Phala</i> , <i>Yashtimadhu</i> , or <i>Ikshvaku</i> followed by inducing emesis.
<i>Pashchat Karma</i>	Post-operative care including <i>Samsarjana Krama</i> (graduated diet regimen), rest, and monitoring for complications.

PROCEDURAL DETAILS OF VAMANA KARMA

1. POORVA KARMA (PREPARATORY PHASE)

The preparatory phase is designed to **mobilize the vitiated Doshas**, especially *Kapha*, towards the *Aamashaya* (stomach) to facilitate their effective expulsion during *Vamana*. *Poorva Karma* involves three essential steps:

a) Deepana-Pachana (Enhancing Digestive and Metabolic Fire)

- Purpose: To kindle the *Agni* and digest any remaining *Ama* (toxins).
- Common drugs: *Trikatu Churna* (*Shunthi*, *Pippali*, *Maricha*), *Chitraka*, *Mustaka*, or proprietary formulations.
- Duration: 3–5 days depending on the digestive strength and the presence of *Ama*.
- **Rationale:** Ensures that only *Doshas* are expelled during *Vamana* and not undigested food or excessive *Ama*, which can lead to complications.¹⁴

b) Snehapana (Internal Oleation)

- Purpose: To loosen and liquefy *Doshas*, enhancing their mobilization towards the GI tract.
- Sneha used: *Ghrita*, *Taila*, or medicated ghee like *Tikta Ghrita*, *Triphala Ghrita* based on disease condition.
- Administration: **Vardhamana Krama** (increasing doses) or **Sama Krama** (fixed doses).
- Duration: Typically 3–7 days, adjusted to signs of proper oleation (*Samyak Snigdha Lakshana*) such as softened body, improved digestion, and clear belching.¹⁵

c) Swedana (Sudation Therapy)

- Purpose: To dilate the body channels (*Srotas*) and further liquefy the *Doshas* to facilitate their movement towards the stomach.
- Methods:
 - *Sarvanga Swedana* (whole-body sudation using steam).
 - *Bashpa Sweda* (steam bath) or *Patra Pinda Sweda* depending on the patient's strength and disease condition.
- Duration: Until appropriate *Swedana* signs are observed (lightness, sweating, and flexibility of body parts).¹⁶

2. PRADHANA KARMA (MAIN PROCEDURE)

This is the **core therapeutic phase**, where *Vamana dravya* (emetic medicine) is administered to induce emesis.

a) Vamana Dravya Administration

- Classical drugs used:
 - *Madana Phala (Randia dumetorum)* – most preferred, mild and safe.
 - *Yashtimadhu (Glycyrrhiza glabra)* – used in specific cases or for mild emesis.
 - *Ikshvaku (Lagenaria siceraria)* – useful in stronger emetic action.
 - Decoctions, pastes, or medicated milk preparations can also be used.¹⁷

b) Procedure

- After observing *Samyak Sneha* and *Sweda* lakshanas, the patient is given a light meal the evening before.
- On the day of *Vamana*, early morning (when *Kapha* is naturally dominant), the patient is seated comfortably.
- *Vamana Dravya* is administered in appropriate dosage, sometimes along with large quantities of warm milk or *Yashtimadhu Phanta* to facilitate vomiting.
- Controlled emesis is induced, monitored for *Samyak Vamana Lakshana* (signs of proper emesis), such as clarity of vomitus, lightness of body, and relief in symptoms.¹⁸

c) Monitoring

- Careful observation is maintained throughout to assess:
 - Quantity and quality of expelled material.
 - Patient's vitals and energy levels.
 - Signs of completion (*Pravritta Kapha Lakshana*) and signs of over- or under-emesis.¹⁹

3. PASHCHAT KARMA (POST-OPERATIVE CARE)

The post-procedure phase focuses on **gradual restoration of digestive power** and **prevention of complications**.

a) Samsarjana Krama (Graduated Diet Regimen)

- **Rationale:** Post-*Vamana*, the digestive fire (*Agni*) becomes weak and must be gradually rekindled.
- **Diet progression:**
 - Day 1–2: *Manda* (thin rice gruel).
 - Day 3–4: *Peya* (thicker rice gruel).
 - Day 5–6: *Vilepi* (semi-solid rice preparation).
 - Day 7 onwards: Light, digestible solid foods.
- Duration: 3 to 7 days based on the intensity of *Vamana* and the patient's digestive capacity.²⁰

b) Rest and Lifestyle Modification

- Adequate rest is advised.
- Avoidance of exposure to wind, cold, strenuous activities, and mental stress.
- Gradual return to daily routine.²¹

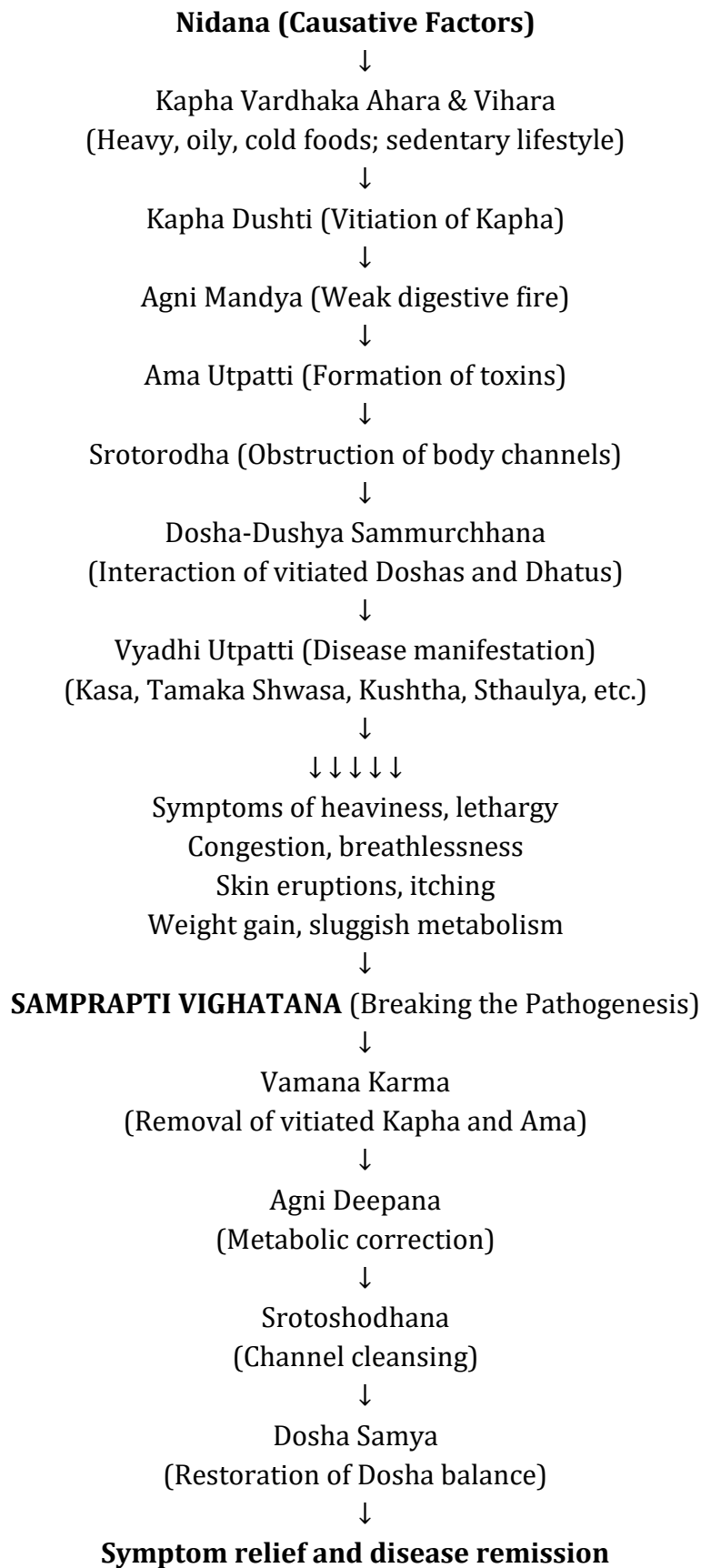
c) Monitoring and Management of Complications

- Minor symptoms like fatigue or throat soreness are managed with soothing measures.
- If any major complications occur (rare when procedure is properly done), appropriate *Ayurvedic* or modern interventions are applied.²²

Mechanism of Action (Samprapti Vighatana)

- **Dosha Expulsion:** Removes vitiated *Kapha* and *Pitta* from the upper GI tract, reducing the *Dosha load*.
- **Agni Deepana:** Enhances the function of *Jatharagni* and metabolic processes.
- **Ama Nirharana:** Eliminates *Ama*, breaking the *Avarana* (obstruction) and correcting metabolic pathways.
- **Strotoshodhana:** Clears the *Strotas* (microchannels) improving tissue nourishment and function.²³

SAMPRAPTI FLOW CHART²⁴



Modern Correlation:

Vamana Karma can be compared to medically induced emesis and certain detoxification protocols. It is known to influence the autonomic nervous system, gastrointestinal motility, metabolism, and immunomodulation. Some studies suggest it may also reset neurohormonal feedback mechanisms contributing to metabolic and immune regulation.²⁵

Pharmacological Insights

Classical *Vamana dravyas* exhibit pharmacodynamic actions such as:

- *Tikshna* (penetrating)
- *Ushna* (hot potency)
- *Bhedana* (breaking down accumulations)
- *Chhedana* (removing obstructions)

These help liquefy and mobilize *Kapha* for effective expulsion.²⁶

Benefits and Clinical Outcomes

- Rapid symptom relief in *Kapha*-dominant disorders
- Long-term prevention of disease recurrence
- Improved digestion and metabolism
- Enhanced immunity and psychological well-being
- Weight management in obesity and metabolic syndromes²⁷

Safety Considerations

When performed by skilled professionals adhering to classical protocols, *Vamana Karma* is generally safe. Mild, self-limiting adverse effects like fatigue, throat irritation, or mild dehydration may occur. Proper patient selection, pre-procedure assessment, and post-procedure monitoring are essential to minimize risks.²⁸

CLINICAL OUTCOMES**SYMPTOMATIC RELIEF**

- **Respiratory disorders** (*Tamaka Shwasa, Kasa*): Significant reduction in breathlessness, cough frequency, and chest congestion.

- **Skin diseases** (*Kushtha*, psoriasis, eczema): Decrease in itching, scaling, erythema, and lesion size.
- **Metabolic disorders** (*Sthaulya*, obesity, prediabetes): Notable weight loss, reduction in BMI, and improved energy levels.²⁹

BIOCHEMICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

- **Lipid profile:** Reduction in serum cholesterol, triglycerides, and LDL levels; increase in HDL.
- **Blood sugar:** Improved fasting and postprandial blood glucose levels in obese and prediabetic patients.
- **Pulmonary function:** Enhanced lung capacity and peak expiratory flow rate (PEFR) in asthmatic individuals.
- **Inflammatory markers:** Decrease in CRP, ESR, and other systemic inflammatory indicators.³⁰

GASTROINTESTINAL AND METABOLIC BENEFITS

- **Agni Deepana:** Enhancement of digestive capacity, reduction in bloating, heaviness, and indigestion.
- **Ama Nirharana:** Reduction in metabolic toxins, improving nutrient absorption and metabolism.
- **Weight management:** Sustained weight reduction and improved metabolic rate after proper follow-up care.³¹

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVEMENTS

- **Mental clarity:** Reduction in heaviness, mental dullness, and lethargy.
- **Mood:** Improved mood stability, reduction in anxiety and depressive symptoms (especially in Kapha-dominant psychological conditions).
- **Overall quality of life (QOL):** Enhanced physical, emotional, and social well-being reported in many studies.³²

PREVENTIVE OUTCOMES

- Prevention of disease recurrence in chronic Kapha disorders when seasonal *Vamana Karma* is practiced (*Kapha Ritucharya*).

- Improved immunity and resilience against respiratory infections and allergic conditions.
- Delayed progression of lifestyle disorders (*Medoroga*, metabolic syndrome).³³

DISCUSSION

The present review underscores *Vamana Karma* as a cornerstone therapeutic intervention in *Ayurveda* for managing *Kapha*-predominant disorders. Classical texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* have elaborately described its indications, benefits, and procedural guidelines. The reviewed clinical studies reaffirm that, when executed following classical protocols, *Vamana Karma* yields substantial symptomatic relief in diseases like *Tamaka Shwasa*, *Kasa*, *Kustha*, *Sthaulya*, and certain psychiatric conditions. The significant reduction in symptoms such as cough, breathlessness, skin lesions, heaviness, and lethargy aligns with the *Ayurvedic* concept of *Kapha Shodhana* and *Samprapti Vighatana* (breaking the disease pathology).³⁴

From a biochemical and physiological standpoint, the clinical outcomes of *Vamana Karma* also demonstrate tangible improvements. Several studies reported notable reductions in lipid profiles, blood sugar levels, inflammatory markers, and enhanced pulmonary function. These findings suggest that the procedure may exert metabolic, immunomodulatory, and anti-inflammatory effects. Additionally, the post-*Vamana* improvement in *Agni* (digestive power) and metabolism observed in patients corresponds to the classical description of *Agni Deepana* and *Ama Nirharana*. This highlights the therapeutic potential of *Vamana Karma* not only in symptomatic management but also in correcting underlying pathophysiological mechanisms.³⁵

Safety remains a critical consideration in therapeutic emesis. The majority of the reviewed studies confirmed that *Vamana Karma*, when administered by trained professionals adhering to classical guidelines (*Poorva Karma*, *Pradhana Karma*, and *Pashchat Karma*), is generally safe. Minor adverse effects such as transient fatigue and throat irritation were reported but were manageable and self-limiting. The proper selection of patients, rigorous pre-procedure assessment, appropriate dose of *Vamana Dravya*, and strict post-procedure care (*Samsarjana Karma*) are essential factors contributing to favorable safety outcomes.³⁶

CONCLUSION

Vamana Karma offers a unique integrative approach combining detoxification, metabolic correction, and symptomatic relief. The evidence supports its efficacy and safety across a range of *Kapha* and *Kapha-Pitta* disorders. However, variability in study design, procedural standardization, and sample sizes highlight the need for larger, well-designed randomized controlled trials. Future research should focus on mechanistic studies to elucidate the pharmacological and physiological effects of *Vamana Karma* in modern biomedical terms, which would further strengthen its application in integrative healthcare models.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST –NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT –NONE

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