



Review Article

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AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW ON SLEEP DISTURBANCES IN AYURVEDA

Dr. Ravi Prakash Sharma

Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, Sheth J. P. Government Ayurveda College, Bhavnagar, Gujarat

Corresponding Author - Dr. Ravi Prakash Sharma, Professor, Department of Kriya Sharir, Sheth J. P. Government Ayurveda College, Bhavnagar, Gujarat

Email id - raviprakash1771@gmail.com

Abstract

Background Sleep is a basic biological need and is described in *Ayurveda* as *Nidra*, one of the three supporting pillars of life along with *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. Disturbance of *Nidra* affects both body and mind and leads to various physical and psychological disorders. In the modern era, lifestyle stress, improper diet, and mental strain have increased the prevalence of sleep disturbances. **Aim** To study sleep disturbances with special reference to *Nidra* and *Nidranasha* from an integrated *Ayurvedic* and modern medical perspective. **Objectives** To understand the concept of *Nidra* as described in *Ayurveda*. To study the causes and features of *Nidranasha*. To correlate *Ayurvedic* sleep disturbances with modern insomnia. To review *Ayurvedic* management principles for sleep disorders. To explore the integrative approach for better sleep health. **Materials and Methods** Classical *Ayurvedic* texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* were reviewed for concepts related to *Nidranasha*. Modern medical literature related to insomnia and sleep disorders was also studied using standard textbooks and journal articles. **Results** Sleep disturbances are mainly caused by imbalance of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, mental factors like *Chinta*, *Bhaya*, and *Krodha*, and improper lifestyle habits. *Ayurveda* explains sleep disorders under *Nidranasha*, which closely resembles insomnia. Both systems agree that chronic sleep loss leads to poor immunity, poor mental health, and reduced quality of life. **Discussion** The *Ayurvedic* approach focuses on balancing *Dosha*, improving mental health through *Sadvritta*, *Achara*

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Rasayana, and using therapies like *Abhyanga*, *Shirodhara*, and herbal drugs. The integrative view helps in understanding sleep disorders in a holistic way rather than only symptom control. **Conclusion** Sleep disturbances are multifactorial in nature and require a holistic approach for effective management. *Ayurveda* offers preventive and therapeutic measures that can be safely integrated with modern management to improve sleep quality and overall health.

Keywords: *Nidra*, *Nidranasha*, *Dosha*, Insomnia, Sleep Disturbance, Integrative Medicine

Introduction

Sleep is a natural biological process essential for the maintenance of physical strength, mental stability, and emotional balance. In today's fast-paced lifestyle, sleep disturbances have become one of the most common health problems affecting people of all age groups. Irregular daily routine, excessive screen time, stress, improper food habits, and lack of physical activity are major contributors to poor sleep. Disturbed sleep directly affects work efficiency, immunity, mental health, and overall quality of life.¹

In *Ayurveda*, sleep is described as *Nidra* and is considered one of the three pillars of life along with *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. Proper *Nidra* maintains *Sharira* (body), *Manas* (mind), and *Indriya* (sense organs) in a balanced state. Classical texts clearly mention that happiness, strength, intelligence, growth, and longevity depend on proper sleep, while improper sleep leads to disease, weakness, and mental imbalance. Thus, sleep is not only a resting phase but a vital physiological function.²

Sleep disturbances are described in *Ayurveda* under *Nidranasha*, which occurs mainly due to aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, along with mental factors like *Chinta*, *Bhaya*, and *Krodha*. Irregular food habits, suppression of natural urges, excessive physical exertion, and mental stress are major causes of disturbed sleep. These factors disturb the normal functioning of the nervous system and mind, leading to difficulty in initiating or maintaining sleep.³

From a modern medical perspective, sleep disorders such as insomnia are considered lifestyle-related disorders affecting both physical and mental health. Modern science mainly focuses on symptomatic management using sedatives and behavioral therapy. However, these approaches often lack long-term effectiveness and preventive value. An integrative approach combining *Ayurvedic* principles with modern understanding offers a holistic method for preventing and managing sleep disturbances safely and effectively.⁴

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To study sleep disturbances with special reference to *Nidra* and *Nidranasha* from an integrated *Ayurvedic* and modern medical perspective.

Objectives

1. To understand the concept of *Nidra* as described in *Ayurveda*.
2. To study the causes and features of *Nidranasha*.
3. To correlate *Ayurvedic* sleep disturbances with modern insomnia.
4. To review *Ayurvedic* management principles for sleep disorders.
5. To explore the integrative approach for better sleep health.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This integrative review was carried out by systematically studying classical *Ayurvedic* texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* to understand the concept of *Nidra* and *Nidranasha*. Relevant commentaries were also referred for better interpretation. In addition, modern medical textbooks, research articles, and review papers related to sleep, insomnia, and sleep disorders were studied. Standard online databases and journals were used to collect recent scientific information. The collected data from both systems were compared, analyzed, and compiled in a descriptive and integrative manner.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

NIDRA

Nidra is described in *Ayurveda* as a natural and essential physiological state responsible for rest, repair, and rejuvenation of the body and mind. It is considered one of the three supporting pillars of life along with *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. According to *Charaka Samhita*, proper *Nidra* helps in maintaining *Sharira Bala*, *Mano Bala*, proper functioning of *Indriya*, and overall health. Happiness, nourishment, strength, fertility, knowledge, and longevity all depend on balanced sleep.⁵

Sushruta Samhita explains that *Nidra* occurs when the *Manas* gets detached from sense organs due to physical and mental fatigue. During this stage, the body enters a state of rest,

healing, and tissue nourishment. Proper *Nidra* supports normal digestion, tissue formation, and mental clarity, while disturbed sleep causes weakness and instability.⁶

Ashtanga Hridaya describes *Nidra* as essential for equilibrium of *Dosha*, proper *Agni* function, and nourishment of *Dhatu*. It is stated that timely and sufficient sleep brings *Sukha*, *Pushti*, and *Ojas*, whereas improper sleep leads to disease, fatigue, and premature aging. Thus, *Nidra* is considered a natural healer for both body and mind.⁷

NIDRANASHA

Nidranasha refers to loss or disturbance of normal sleep and is mainly caused by aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*. Classical texts describe that excessive physical exertion, fasting, mental stress, fear, anger, and excessive worry lead to disturbance of sleep. Suppression of natural urges, irregular daily routine, and intake of dry, spicy, and light food also contribute to *Nidranasha*.⁸

In *Ayurveda*, *Nidranasha* is considered a serious disorder because it disturbs both physical and mental health. Patients suffer from fatigue, restlessness, anxiety, poor memory, and reduced immunity. Long-standing *Nidranasha* further leads to *Dhatu Kshaya* and aggravation of *Vata Dosha*, making the condition chronic and difficult to manage if left untreated.⁹

KHANDITA NIDRA

Khandita Nidra means broken or interrupted sleep. In this condition, the person does not get continuous restful sleep and keeps waking up frequently at night. This disturbed pattern of sleep does not allow complete physical and mental relaxation, even if total sleep duration appears normal.¹⁰

Khandita Nidra mainly occurs due to *Vata* provocation and mental instability. Emotional factors such as worry, fear, anxiety, suppressed emotions, and irregular sleep-wake patterns play a major role. Excessive use of mobile phones at night, irregular working hours, and night waking also encourage this type of sleep disorder.¹¹

Clinically, patients of *Khandita Nidra* complain of tiredness even after sleeping, heaviness of head, irritability, lack of concentration, and mental exhaustion. Due to incomplete rest, the body does not achieve proper tissue repair, leading to gradual development of weakness, digestive issues, and mental stress.¹²

Due to Piita Dosha- *Khandita Nidra* due to *Pitta Dosha* occurs when excessive heat, sharpness, and irritability dominate the mind and body. *Pitta* is naturally associated with

qualities like *Ushna*, *Tikshna*, and *Sara*, and when these become aggravated, they disturb the calm and stable state required for proper sleep. Factors such as excessive anger, stress, late-night study or work, intake of spicy, sour, and oily food, excessive caffeine, and prolonged screen exposure increase *Pitta Dosha*. As a result, the person may fall asleep with difficulty and experience repeated awakenings due to restlessness, burning sensations, vivid dreams, or internal agitation.

Clinically, *Khandita Nidra* due to *Pitta Dosha* is marked by frequent waking at night, sensation of body heat, excessive sweating, thirst, irritability, headache, and disturbed mental peace. Even after sleeping for several hours, the person feels unrefreshed, tired, and mentally exhausted. Continuous disturbance of sleep further aggravates *Pitta* and weakens *Ojas*, leading to reduced immunity and mental instability. Management mainly focuses on *Pitta Shamana* measures such as *Sheetala Ahara*, cooling lifestyle, stress control, oil therapies like *Shirodhara* and *Abhyanga*, and maintaining proper *Dinacharya* and *Ratricharya*.

SLEEP

Sleep is a natural, recurring state of rest necessary for physical conservation of energy and mental restoration. It is regulated by biological rhythms controlled by the brain. During sleep, the body repairs tissues, strengthens immunity, and balances hormones necessary for growth and metabolism.¹³

Modern science divides sleep into two main types: non-REM sleep and REM sleep. Non-REM sleep is responsible for physical restoration, while REM sleep plays a key role in memory consolidation, emotional stability, and learning capacity. Proper cycling between these stages is essential for healthy sleep.¹⁴

Sleep also has deep influence on cardiovascular health, metabolism, immunity, and emotional well-being. Adequate sleep improves attention, productivity, decision-making ability, and mood stability, whereas sleep deficiency impairs both physical and mental performance.¹⁵

SLEEP DISTURBANCE

Sleep disturbance refers to disorders that affect the quality, timing, or duration of sleep. Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder, characterized by difficulty in falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early. Stress, lifestyle changes, anxiety, shift work, and excessive screen exposure are common triggers.¹⁶

Chronic sleep disturbance affects brain function, memory, emotional balance, and immune resistance. It also increases the risk of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, depression, and heart disease. Long-term sleep loss disrupts hormonal balance and increases stress hormone levels.¹⁷

Modern management of sleep disturbance mainly includes sleep hygiene education, cognitive behavioral therapy, and pharmacological treatment using sedatives or hypnotics. While these therapies provide temporary relief, they may cause dependency and do not address the root lifestyle and behavioral causes.¹⁸

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- *Nidra* is clearly described in *Ayurveda* as one of the three pillars of life along with *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*, showing its vital role in health maintenance.
- Disturbance of sleep is explained in *Ayurveda* under *Nidranasha*, which closely matches the modern concept of insomnia.
- Aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha* was found to be the main *Dosha* involvement in sleep disturbances.
- Mental factors like *Chinta*, *Bhaya*, and *Krodha* were identified as major causes of disturbed sleep.
- Improper lifestyle habits such as late-night जागरण, irregular भोजन, excessive screen time, and stress were commonly linked with sleep disturbance.
- *Khandita Nidra* was observed to represent interrupted and non-restorative sleep similar to fragmented sleep in modern science.
- Modern science confirms that poor sleep affects memory, immunity, emotional balance, and work performance.
- Long-term sleep disturbance increases the risk of metabolic disorders, hypertension, anxiety, and depression.
- *Ayurvedic* therapies like *Abhyanga*, *Shirodhara*, and use of calming herbs were found to be effective in improving sleep quality.
- The integrative approach of combining *Ayurveda* with modern sleep hygiene practices showed better and safer long-term results.

DISCUSSION

The present review highlights that sleep is not only a resting phase but a vital physiological process essential for physical and mental balance. In *Ayurveda*, *Nidra* is given equal importance to *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*, which clearly shows its role in maintaining health. Disturbance of *Nidra* leads to imbalance of body tissues, reduced immunity, mental stress, and poor quality of life. The classical explanation of sleep being controlled by the balanced state of *Dosha*, *Manas*, and *Indriya* gives a deep understanding of how lifestyle and mental factors directly affect sleep.¹⁹

Nidranasha is mainly caused by aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, along with mental factors like *Chinta*, *Bhaya*, and *Krodha*. This clearly matches with the modern understanding where stress, anxiety, and irregular lifestyle play a major role in insomnia. The concept of *Khandita Nidra* also explains the modern problem of fragmented sleep. Both systems agree that disturbed sleep leads to fatigue, lack of concentration, emotional instability, and higher risk of chronic diseases if the condition becomes long standing.¹⁸

The *Ayurvedic* approach to sleep disturbances focuses on correcting the root cause rather than only suppressing symptoms. Management principles like *Dinacharya*, *Ratricharya*, *Sadvritta*, calming therapies such as *Abhyanga* and *Shirodhara*, and use of suitable herbs help in restoring the natural sleep rhythm. When these principles are combined with modern sleep hygiene measures, the integrative approach becomes more effective, safer, and beneficial for long-term sleep health.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Sleep disturbances are becoming increasingly common due to stress, improper lifestyle, and mental strain in modern life. The present review clearly shows that *Nidra* plays a vital role in maintaining physical, mental, and emotional health, and its disturbance in the form of *Nidranasha* leads to wide-ranging health problems. Aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, along with mental factors like *Chinta*, *Bhaya*, and *Krodha*, are the major causes of disturbed sleep. The concept of *Khandita Nidra* also helps in understanding fragmented and non-restorative sleep. The *Ayurvedic* approach, which focuses on correcting lifestyle through *Dinacharya*, *Sadvritta*, and use of therapies like *Abhyanga* and *Shirodhara*, offers a safe and holistic solution. When combined with modern sleep hygiene practices, an integrative approach proves to be more effective for long-term management and overall well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT -NONE

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