

Understanding *Nidra* and *Nidranasha*: A Comprehensive Ayurvedic Review

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ABSTRACT

The concept of health (*Swasthya*) in Ayurveda is grounded on the three pillars (*Upastambha*): *Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (self-restraint), collectively referred to as the "Tripod of Life." Of these, *Nidra* plays a significant role in maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Sleep disruptions (*Nidranasha*) can result from poor lifestyle choices, mental stress, dietary changes, or psychological factors, leading to adverse effects on the body and mind. This study explores the etymology, definitions, physiology, types, and pathophysiology of *Nidra* and *Nidranasha*, as described in Ayurvedic texts, while highlighting its management strategies. Ayurvedic classics emphasize that balanced *Ahara*, restful *Nidra*, and disciplined living sustain life and promote overall wellness.

Keywords: *Nidra*, *Nidranasha*, *Ayurveda*

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Nidra,' signifying sleep, refers to a fundamental physiological process naturally experienced by all living beings, typically at night. It plays a crucial role in rejuvenating both the body and mind after the fatigue of daily activities. The concept of *Swasthya* (health) in Ayurveda is founded on three pillars, known as the *Upastambha*: *Ahara* (food), *Swapna* (*Nidra*, or sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (self-restraint)ⁱ. These are collectively referred to as the "Tripod of Life." Ayurveda is not merely a system of medicine; it is a holistic approach to life that emphasizes physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Among these, sleep (*Nidra*) plays a vital role in promoting happiness and good health. A restful sleep results from a relaxed physical and mental state. According to the *Charaka Samhita*, sleep occurs when the *mana* (mind)

and the *indriyas* (senses) are fatigued and detach themselves from their respective objectsⁱⁱ. Sleep disruptions can arise from poor lifestyle choices, mental stress, dietary changes, or psychological tension, ultimately leading to disturbed *Nidra*.

The *Charaka Samhita* underscores the significance of sleep, categorizing it as one of the primary pillars of life. It elaborates on its benefits, drawbacks, classifications, and management strategies. The text describes the advantages of *Nidra* as follows:ⁱⁱⁱ

- Sukhakar: Brings happiness.
- Pushtikar: Promotes nourishment.
- Balyakar: Enhances strength.
- Vrishya: Functions as an aphrodisiac.
- Dnyanakar: Aids in learning.
- Jeevankar: Sustains life.

Ayurveda thus emphasizes that a balanced lifestyle incorporating proper food, restful

sleep, and disciplined living forms the foundation of a healthy and fulfilling life.

Etymological Derivation of the Word 'Nidra'

- According to *Vachaspatyam*, the term "Nidra" is derived from "Ni" + "Dra" (नी + द्र), where it signifies a state of unconsciousness or inactivity of the being.
- The word is always used in the feminine gender.
- In the *Upanishads* and Ayurvedic literature, Nidra is acknowledged as one of the fundamental functions of living organisms.

Definitions of Nidra

1. Charaka: Nidra occurs when the *mana* (mind) and *atman* (soul) become exhausted or inactive, and the sensory and motor organs withdraw from their activities.^{iv}
2. Sushruta: Sleep arises when the *Hridaya* (the seat of consciousness, or Chetana) is enveloped by *Tamas* (a quality of inertia or darkness).^v
3. Ashtanga Sangraha (Vagbhata): Sleep takes place when the *Manovaha Srotas* (channels of the mind) accumulate *Shleshma* (Kapha or mucus), and the mind detaches from the sensory organs due to fatigue.^{vi}

Synonyms of Nidra

In *Amarkosha*, four synonyms are mentioned:

1. Shayanam
2. Svapah
3. Svapnah
4. Samvesh

In *Vaidyaka Shabda Sindhu*, three synonyms are available:

1. Sambhashah
2. Suptih
3. Svapanam

In *Charaka Samhita*, the term *Bhutadhatri* is used as a synonym. In *Sushruta Samhita*, the term *Vaishnavi Maya* is used.

Types of Nidra

Acharya Charaka classified Nidra based on its causes:^{vii}

1. Tamobhava - Caused by Tamoguna.
2. Shleshmasamudbhava - Caused by vitiated Kapha.
3. Manah-sharirshramasaambhava - Caused by mental and physical exertion.
4. Agantuki - Indicative of a bad prognosis, often leading to imminent death.
5. Vyadhyanuvartini - Caused as a complication of other diseases like Sannipataja Jwara.
6. Ratri-swabhavaprabhava - Caused by the natural influence of the night.

Acharya Dalhana classified Nidra into three types based on *Sushruta Samhita*:^{viii}

1. Tamsik - Caused when Sangyavaha Srotas are filled with Shleshma and dominated by Tamoguna.
2. Swabhaviki - Naturally occurring sleep experienced daily by all living beings.
3. Vaikariki - Caused by disturbances in Mana and Sharira. If Nidra occurs in such conditions, it is classified as Vaikariki Nidra.

Acharya Vagbhat classified Nidra into seven types:^{ix}

1. Kalaswabhawaj - Produced at the accustomed time, e.g., during nights.
2. Amayaja - Caused due to the effects of diseases.
3. By fatigue of Mana - Occurs when the mind is exhausted.
4. By fatigue of Sharira - Occurs when the body is exhausted.
5. Shleshmaprabhavaj - Caused due to predominance of Kapha.
6. Agantuka - Caused by external factors, e.g., traumatic events.
7. Tamobhava - Caused by the predominance of Tamoguna.

Physiology of Nidra^{x xi}

Nidra (sleep) occurs when *Mana* becomes exhausted. This phenomenon can be understood as follows:

- According to Howell, sleep is caused by cerebral ischemia.

- The cerebral cortex, which serves as the seat of higher centers like the pre- and post-central gyri and the association areas, is correlated with mental activities described in Ayurveda.
- Due to the reduction in cerebral blood supply, *Mana* becomes *Klanta* (fatigued), which subsequently leads to sleep (*Nidra*).
- Further, during sleep:
- *Indriyas* (both *Jnanendriya* and *Karmendriya*) become inactive.
- This inactivity occurs due to their detachment from the respective sense organs or their specific actions/work

Importance of Nidra^{xii}

In Ayurveda, *Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) are considered the three vital factors essential for the maintenance of life. These factors are compared to the three legs of a sub-support system and are termed the three *Upastambhas*. The inclusion of *Nidra* in the *Upastambhas* highlights its significance.

As per Ayurveda, the importance of *Nidra* is described as follows:

- It creates happiness in life.
- It maintains the consistency of the body.
- It enhances strength.
- It increases the power of the brain and mind.
- Lastly, it sustains life itself.

Etymological Derivation of Nidranasha

The term *Nidranasha* is composed of two words: *Nidra* and *Nasha*.

- **Nidra:** Derived from "नि + द्रा + भावे घञ्," it signifies a state where the mind (*Mana*) and intellect (*Buddhi*) are at rest.
- **Nasha:** Derived from "नाश = नश + भावे घञ्," it denotes destruction or loss.

Based on this, *Nidranasha* can be broadly defined as the loss of sleep or a derangement in the quality and quantity of sleep.

Synonyms of Nidranasha

Different Acharyas have mentioned several synonyms for *Nidranasha*:

1. *Anidra*
2. *Alpanidra*
3. *Asvapna*
4. *Jagarana*
5. *Nidranasha*
6. *Nidravighata*
7. *Nidradaurbalya*
8. *Nidrabhresha*
9. *Nidrakshaya*

Nidana (Causes) of Nidranasha^{xiii}

Although direct references to the causative factors of *Nidranasha* are limited, certain causes have been inferred based on Ayurvedic texts. In *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Ashtanga Sangraha*, the Acharyas explain the *Chikitsa* (treatment) for *Atinidra*. They state that if any *Atiyoga* (excessive usage) occurs in these *Chikitsa* procedures, it may lead to *Nidranasha*. These excessive treatments (*Atiyoga*) are:

- *Atiyoga of Vamana*
- *Atiyoga of Virechana*
- *Atiyoga of Nasya Karma*
- *Atiyoga of Rakta Mokshana*
- *Atiyoga of Dhoomapana*

Other causative factors (*Nidana*) include:

- *Ati Chinta* (excessive worry)
- *Ati Krodha* (excessive anger)
- *Ati Bhaya* (excessive fear)
- *Ati Vyayama* (excessive exercise)
- *Ati Upavasa* (excessive fasting)
- *Asukhashayaa* (uncomfortable sleeping arrangements).

Additional Causes Mentioned by Acharya Sushruta:

- *Vata Vriddhi*
- *Pitta Vriddhi*
- *Manastapa* (mental distress)
- *Dhatukshaya* (depletion of bodily tissues)
- *Abhigata* (trauma).

Further Causes as per Ashtanga Sangraha:

- *Lobha* (greed)
- *Harsha* (extreme happiness)
- *Vyatha* (sorrow)

- *Ati Maithuna* (excessive intercourse)
- *Ati Kshudha* (excessive hunger)
- *Rukshanna Sevana* (intake of dry food)
- *Anjana* (application of collyrium).

Categorization of Causes:

The causative factors can be categorized as follows:

1. Aharaja Nidana – Such as *Rukshanna Sevana* (intake of dry food).
2. Viharaja Nidana – Such as *Vyayama* (excessive exercise), *Upavasa* (fasting), and *Asukhashayya* (uncomfortable sleeping arrangements).

3. Manasika Nidana – Such as *Bhaya* (fear), *Chinta* (worry), and *Krodha* (anger).

Purvarupa (Preliminary Symptoms) of Nidranasha

Purvarupa of *Nidranasha* has not been directly mentioned in Ayurvedic classics. However, *Charaka* has included *Nidranasha* under the 80 *Nanatmaja Vata Vikara*. Based on this, *Avyakta Lakshana* (indistinct symptoms) associated with Vata disorders may be considered as the *Purvarupa* of *Nidranasha*.

Rupa

Rupa (Symptoms)	Charaka Samhita ^{xiv}	Sushruta Samhita ^{xv}	Ashtanga Hridaya ^{xvi}	Ashtanga Sangraha ^{xvii}
Jrumbha	+	+	+	+
Angamarda	+	+	+	+
Tandra	+	+	+	+
Shiroroga	+		+	
Shirogurava		+	+	+
Akshigaurava	+	+		
Jadya			+	+
Glani			+	+
Bhrama			+	+
Apakti			+	+

Samprapti

As described in *Ashtanga Sangraha*, increased *Vayu* due to *Nidranasha* causes *Kaphakshaya*. The decreased and dried *Kapha* adheres to the walls of the *Dhamanis*, causing *Strotorodha* (blockage of channels). This results in extreme exhaustion, keeping the patient's eyes wide open with watery secretion. This condition is *Sadhya* (curable) within three days, after which it becomes *Asadhya* (incurable).

Samprapti Ghatak:

- Dosha: Vata, Pitta (Vridhhi), Kapha (Kshaya).
- Dushya: Rasa.
- Agni: Jatharagni.
- Srotasa: Manovaha, Rasavaha.
- Strotodushti Prakara: Atipravritti (excess flow).
- Adhithana (Site of origin): Hridaya.

- Udbhavasthana (Primary site): Hridaya.
- Upadrava (Complications):

Pathya-Apathya (Dietary and Lifestyle Recommendations)

Pathya:

Pathya refers to a wholesome regimen that supports the body's health and pleases the mind. By following principles and modifying activities through proper *Ahara* (diet) and *Vihara* (lifestyle) management, one can achieve sound and normal sleep.

Apathya:

Unwholesome practices (Apathya) that affect the body and mind adversely should be avoided. The causative factors of *Nidranasha* can be categorized as *Apathya* since they aggravate the condition.

Chikitsa (Treatment) of Nidranasha^{xviii}

The treatment (*Chikitsa*) of any disease involves eliminating its causative factors. For *Nidranasha*, measures with *Vatashamaka* (Vata-pacifying), *Vedanashamaka* (pain-reducing), and *Roganivaraka* (disease-curing) effects, as well as those calming mental activities, are recommended.

The management approaches in Ayurvedic texts are classified as:

1. Bahya Upachara (External Treatments).
2. Manasika Upachara (Mental Treatments).
3. Ahara Upachara (Dietary Treatments).
4. Anya Upachara (Other Measures).

1. Bahya Upachara:

External treatments include:

- *Abhyanga* (massage), *Utsadana*, *Samvahana*, *Akshi-tarpana*, *Shiro-lepa*, *Karna-purana*, *Shiro-basti*, *Shiro-dhara*, and *Moordhni Taila*.

2. Manasika Upachara:

Mental treatments include:

- Engaging in activities that please the mind, such as experiencing *Manonukula Vishaya*, *Manonukula Shabda*, and *Manonukula Gandha* (favorable sensory inputs).

3. Ahara Upachara:

Dietary treatments include:

- *Gramya Mamsa Rasa*, *Anupa Mamsa Rasa*, *Jaleeya Mamsa Rasa*, *Mahisha Ksheera*, and *Piyusha*.

4. Anya Upachara:

Additional measures include practices like:

- Maintaining a consistent bedtime.
- Avoiding tea, coffee, alcohol, or smoking before sleep.
- Refraining from working or reading late into the night.
- Calming the mind and avoiding excessive thoughts or tension before bed.
- Listening to soft music or favorite songs to induce sleep.
- Meditating for 5-10 minutes before bed.
- Offering prayers or practicing gratitude before sleeping.

- Washing hands, feet, and face before sleep.
- Avoiding *Divaswapna* (daytime sleep).
- Ensuring proper evacuation of stool and urine before bed.
- Avoiding mosquito bites and ensuring a private, disturbance-free sleeping environment.

DISCUSSION

Ahara, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya* are fundamental to maintaining life and are interlinked for achieving a balanced and healthy state. Among them, *Nidra* is indispensable for restoring energy, promoting mental and physical health, and sustaining life itself. In Ayurvedic literature, *Nidra* is characterized as a state of physical and mental relaxation resulting from the withdrawal of the *Mana* and *Indriyas* from their activities. Acharyas like Charaka and Sushruta underline the physiological significance of *Nidra* in maintaining balance among the *Doshas* (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and enhancing strength (*Balya*), nourishment (*Pushtikar*), and longevity (*Jeevankar*).

The condition of *Nidranasha* (disrupted or insufficient sleep) arises from various causes, including aggravation of *Vata* and *Pitta* and depletion of *Kapha*. Other contributory factors include excessive mental exertion (*Ati Chinta*), emotional disturbances (*Bhaya* and *Krodha*), physical strain (*Ati Vyayama*), and improper dietary habits (*Aharaja Nidana*). The interplay of these factors leads to pathophysiological changes like *Strotorodha* (blockage of channels) and extreme exhaustion, manifesting as symptoms such as *Jrumbha*, *Angamarda*, and *Tandra*.

Ayurvedic texts provide a comprehensive approach to managing *Nidranasha* through dietary (*Ahara Upachara*), mental (*Manasika Upachara*), external (*Bahya Upachara*), and lifestyle (*Anya Upachara*) interventions. These include therapies like *Abhyanga* (massage), *Shirodhara* (oil pouring on the forehead), intake of *Pushtikar Ahara* (nourishing foods), and practices like meditation and prayer. Collectively, these

interventions aim to calm the mind, balance the *Doshas*, and induce natural and restful sleep.

CONCLUSION

In Ayurveda, *Nidra* is considered a pillar of life, integral to physical and mental well-being. A balanced state of sleep ensures nourishment, strength, happiness, and cognitive function, while its disturbance (*Nidranasha*) can adversely affect overall health. Understanding the etiology, symptoms, and pathogenesis of *Nidranasha* enables effective intervention through Ayurvedic principles. By addressing lifestyle habits, dietary modifications, and therapeutic interventions, Ayurveda offers a holistic and sustainable approach to restoring the natural rhythm of sleep and promoting optimal health. Emphasizing the synergy of *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya* ensures a foundation for a balanced and fulfilling life.

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