



# Ayurvedic Perspective on Nidra: Classification, Function and Health Implications

Dr. Divya Khinchi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PG Department of Kriya Sharir, Madan Mohan Malviya Government Ayurved College, Udaipur.

<sup>2</sup>Principal and HOD, Pg Department of Kriya Sharir, Madan Mohan Malviya Government Ayurved College, Udaipur.

Corresponding Author: Dr. Divya Khinchi

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** *Nidra* (sleep) is regarded in *Ayurveda* as one of the three essential pillars of life (*Trayopastambha*), along with *Ahara* (diet) and *Brahmacharya* (balanced conduct). It plays a vital role in maintaining physical health, mental stability, and emotional balance. According to *Ayurvedic* principles, *Nidra* is not merely the absence of wakefulness but a natural, restorative state governed by the body's internal rhythms and the predominance of *Kapha Dosha*. Proper sleep supports tissue nourishment, cognitive function, immunity and longevity.

**Objective:** To explore the *Ayurvedic* concept of *Nidra* (sleep), including its classification, physiological functions, and implications on health, and to evaluate its relevance in the context of modern sleep science.

**Methodology:** A descriptive and interpretive approach was employed, synthesizing classical *Ayurvedic* texts such as *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* with contemporary physiological. It also includes a review of modern biomedical literature to identify correlations between traditional *Ayurvedic* views on sleep and contemporary scientific understanding. *Ayurvedic* principles of *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and their impact on *Nidra* are analyzed in relation to sleep disorders.

**Results and Discussion:** From the *Ayurvedic* viewpoint, *Nidra* (sleep) is a fundamental biological process essential for maintaining the balance of the three *Dosha*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—and ensuring overall physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

**Conclusion:** *Ayurveda* presents integrative understanding of *Nidra*, highlighting its central role in sustaining physical, mental, and emotional health. Its classifications and treatment principles offer promising complementary insights into managing modern sleep disorders. Integration of *Ayurvedic* principles with evidence-based practices could enhance holistic approaches to sleep health and disease prevention.

**KEYWORDS:** *Nidra*, *Trayopastambha*, *Brahmacharya*, *Tridosha*

## INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda*, the ancient science of life, emphasizes a holistic approach to health by maintaining a dynamic balance between the body (*sharira*), mind (*mana*), and spirit (*atma*). Among the foundational principles laid down by classical *Ayurvedic* texts, the concept of *Trayopastambha* the three pillars of life holds great significance. These pillars are *Ahara* (wholesome diet), *Nidra* (adequate sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (regulated lifestyle or controlled sensual pleasures). Together, they sustain life, vitality, and overall well-being.

Among these, *Nidra* is regarded as a natural physiological process essential for survival and rejuvenation. It is described not merely as a passive state of rest, but as a crucial biological necessity that supports both mental and physical health. In *Ayurveda*, *Nidra* is said to influence a wide range of physiological processes including digestion, immunity, tissue formation (*dhatu poshana*), and mental clarity (*medha*). Its quality and quantity directly affect a person's *bala* (strength), *varna* (complexion), *sukha* (happiness), and *ayu* (longevity).

The *Ayurvedic* sages, thousands of years ago, identified sleep disturbances and imbalances as key contributors to disease, long before modern sleep medicine recognized their significance. They elaborated on different types of sleep, their causes, and the pathological and physiological implications of both excess and deficient sleep.

In today's fast-paced, digitally driven society, where sleep disorders and insomnia have become increasingly prevalent, revisiting and integrating *Ayurvedic* insights on *Nidra* offers valuable tools for both prevention and therapy. Understanding sleep from an *Ayurvedic* perspective allows for a personalized and natural approach to restoring balance and achieving optimal health.

This article delves into the *Ayurvedic* understanding of *Nidra*, exploring its classification, physiological functions, and the health implications of its imbalance, while also offering traditional management strategies to maintain healthy sleep.

#### **Aim:**

To explore the *Ayurvedic* concept of *Nidra* including its classification, physiological and psychological functions, and health implications, while evaluating its relevance in the context of modern health and lifestyle disorders.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To study the classical *Ayurvedic* texts (such as *Charaka Samhita* and *Ashtanga Sangraha*) for the traditional understanding and classification of *Nidra*.
2. To analyze the physiological and psychological functions of *Nidra* as described in *Ayurveda*.
3. To identify the types of *Nidra* and their underlying causes based on *dosha* imbalances (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*).
4. To examine the health implications of proper and improper sleep (*Nidra* and *Anidra*) from an *Ayurvedic* perspective.
5. To correlate *Ayurvedic* principles of *Nidra* with modern sleep science, highlighting similarities and integrative potential.
6. To explore *Ayurvedic* lifestyle interventions (e.g., *dinacharya*, diet, *yoga nidra*) for maintaining healthy sleep patterns.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The aim is to understand and interpret *Nidra* (sleep) from an *Ayurvedic* perspective, including its classification, functions, and health implications.

1. Classical *Ayurvedic* Texts: *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Ashtanga Sangraha*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Bhavaprakasha Nighantu*
2. Commentaries and translations by renowned *Ayurvedic* scholars were also referred to for clarity and interpretation.
3. Modern scientific research articles and peer-reviewed journals.

## DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, *Nidra* (sleep) is considered one of the three pillars of life (*Trayopastambha*), alongside *Ahara* (diet) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated sexual activity/lifestyle). Classical *Ayurvedic* texts emphasize that balanced sleep is essential for maintaining physical, mental, and emotional health. The present study aimed to explore the ancient *Ayurvedic* understanding of *Nidra* and assess its relevance in today's context of increasing sleep-related disorders.

### 1. Classification of *Nidra* (Types of Sleep)<sup>1</sup>

*Charaka Samhita* (*Sutrasthana*, Chapter 21) classifies sleep into several types based on their cause:

#### 1. Based on Cause (*Hetu*)

##### a. *Swabhavika Nidra* (Natural Sleep)

- Sleep that occurs naturally during the night due to the body's circadian rhythm and mental relaxation.
- Healthy and rejuvenating.

##### b. *Vishama Nidra* (Abnormal Sleep)

- Caused by imbalance of doshas, especially *Vata*.
- Irregular, disturbed, or insufficient sleep.

##### c. *Agantuki Nidra* (Exogenous Sleep)

- Induced by external causes like drugs, alcohol, or trauma.
- Artificial and generally not restorative.

##### d. *Tamasi Nidra* (Sleep due to Tamas)

- Arises from tamasic dominance (lethargy, darkness of mind).
- Often excessive, leads to heaviness and dullness.

##### e. *Vyadhi-anubandhini Nidra* (Sleep due to Disease)

- Sleep caused or influenced by illness.
- Common in chronic fatigue, fever, or depression.

##### f. *Manasika Shrama-janya Nidra* (Sleep due to Mental Exhaustion)

- Occurs after significant mental work or emotional strain.

##### g. *Sharirika Shrama-janya Nidra* (Sleep due to Physical Exhaustion)

- Happens after heavy physical activity.

#### 2. Based on *Dosha* Influence

- *Kapha*-dominant sleep: Natural, sound, and restorative. *Kapha* promotes heaviness and stability.
- *Vata*-related sleep: Often disturbed or light due to dryness and movement.
- *Pitta*-related sleep: Interrupted due to heat, irritability, and intensity.

### Function of *Nidra* in *Ayurveda*<sup>2</sup>

Sleep performs key physiological and psychological roles. According to classical texts, proper sleep contributes to:

Function	Ayurvedic Explanation
<i>Sharira Dhriti</i>	Maintenance and nourishment of body tissues
<i>Bala</i>	Provides strength (immunity) and physical resilience
<i>Vrishata</i>	Supports reproductive health and sexual vigor
<i>Medha &amp; Smriti</i>	Enhances intellect and memory
<i>Ayu</i>	Promotes longevity
<i>Sukha &amp; Arogya</i>	Gives happiness and health

### 1. *Dhātu Pushti* (Tissue Nourishment and Repair)

Sleep facilitates rejuvenation of body tissues (*dhātu*).

During sleep, anabolism (tissue-building processes) predominates.

Especially supports *mamsa* (muscle) and *shukra* (reproductive tissue) formation.

### 2. *Sharira Dharana* (Bodily Maintenance)

Sleep maintains structural and functional integrity of the body.

It supports posture, physical strength, and organ function.

Acts as a restorative force to counteract wear and tear.

### 3. *Bala* (Strength and Immunity)

Adequate sleep enhances *Ojas*, the vital essence responsible for immunity and vitality.

Increases *Vyadhikshamatva* (disease resistance).

Promotes stamina and physical endurance.

### 4. *Vrishata* (Reproductive Health)

Sleep nourishes the *shukra dhatu* (reproductive tissue).

Enhances libido, fertility, and overall reproductive efficiency.

Related to emotional bonding and intimacy.

### 5. *Medha & Smriti* (Intellect and Memory)

Sleep restores mental clarity, concentration (*Dhi*), and memory (*Smriti*).

Supports proper function of *mana* (mind) and *buddhi* (intellect).

Prevents mental fatigue and enhances learning and cognitive function.

### 6. *Ayu* (Longevity)

Sleep is essential for maintaining life span and delaying aging (*jara*).

Rejuvenates cellular function and supports longevity-promoting processes (*rasayana*).

### 7. *Sukha* (Happiness and Emotional Well-being)

Brings calmness, contentment, and mental balance.

Reduces anxiety, anger, and irritability.

Promotes mental *sattva* (clarity and harmony).

### 8. *Arogya* (Health)

*Nidra* is foundational for both physical and mental health.

Maintains balance of *dosha*, regulates digestion, and stabilizes metabolism.

Insufficient or excessive sleep can disrupt *Agni* (digestive fire) and *doshic* balance.

### 9. *Srotas Shuddhi* (Channel Clarity)

During sleep, body channels (*srotas*) undergo a cleansing and balancing process.

Particularly important for *manovaha srotas* (mind channels) and *pranavaha srotas* (respiratory channels).

**Ayurvedic Concept:** *Nidra* as a Natural *Tamasik* Process

*Nidra* is considered a *Tamasik* activity, governed by the *Tamas* guna (quality of inertia and rest).

However, when balanced and appropriate, *Tamas* brings grounding, stability, and recovery.

Excess *Tamas* (e.g. oversleeping) leads to laziness, confusion, dullness.

*Ayurveda* emphasizes *Ratri Nidra* (sleep at night), as natural sleep is governed by *Kapha dosha* (evening) and *Tamas* guna increasing post-sunset.

## Health Implications of *Nidra* (Sleep) Disturbance

### 1. *Nidranasha* (Insomnia or sleep deprivation)

- Often due to *Vata* or *Pitta* aggravation. Symptoms include:
- Fatigue
- Anxiety and restlessness

- Impaired memory and concentration
- Early aging
- Dryness and body ache

## 2. Atinidra (Excessive Sleep)

- Often due to *Kapha* aggravation or *Tamasik* lifestyle. Effects include:
- Sluggishness
- Depression
- Poor digestion
- Obesity
- Metabolic disorders

## Ayurvedic Recommendations for Healthy Nidra

Practice	Explanation
<i>Dinacharya</i> & <i>Ritucharya</i>	Following daily and seasonal routines stabilizes the <i>doshas</i>
<i>Abhyanga</i> (Oil massage)	Especially helpful for <i>Vata</i> types to calm the nervous system
<i>Padabhyanga</i> (Foot massage)	Induces calm and supports deep sleep
<i>Nasya</i> (Nasal oiling)	Clears head channels, supports mental clarity and sleep
Avoiding heavy meals at night	Helps prevent sleep disturbances due to indigestion
Drinking warm milk or herbal teas	Like <i>Ashwagandha</i> , <i>Brahmi</i> , or <i>Jatamansi</i>

## 3. Irregular or Poor Quality Sleep

- Causes *dosha* fluctuations and impairs circadian rhythm.
- Leads to *Chinta* (worry), *Bhaya* (fear), *Krodha* (anger).
- Results in improper tissue formation (*Dhatu-kshaya*).
- Can contribute to autoimmune conditions, hormonal imbalances, and neurological issues.

## Dosha-Specific Sleep Imbalance Implications

Dosha	Sleep Pattern	Health Effects
<i>Vata</i>	Difficulty falling/staying asleep	Anxiety, dryness, tremors, fatigue
<i>Pitta</i>	Light, interrupted sleep	Anger, irritability, acid reflux, burning sensations
<i>Kapha</i>	Oversleeping, deep heavy sleep	Obesity, sluggishness, mental dullness, metabolic disorders

## Ayurvedic View on Balanced Sleep: Health Benefits

- When *Nidra* is taken in appropriate time, duration, and quality, it leads to:
- Balanced *doshas*
- Strong immunity (*Ojas*)

- Proper *dhatu* formation
- Mental clarity and emotional stability
- Optimal digestion and metabolism
- Longevity (*Ayu*)

### Health Implications of *Nidra* Imbalance

Sleep Deprivation (*Alpa Nidra*): Leads to nervous system disorders, digestive issues, and weakened immunity due to *Vata-Pitta* aggravation .

Excessive Sleep (*Atidruta Nidra*): Aggravates *Kapha*, causing obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disorders.

Irregular Sleep (*Viparit Nidra*): Disturbs circadian rhythms leading to hormonal imbalance, insomnia, and mental health disorders.

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