EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF BIOMEDICAL AND PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES
http://www.ejbps.com

ISSN 2349-8870
Coden USA: EJBPBO
Volume: 13
Issue: 11
Year: 2026

AYURVEDIC APPROCH TO ALLERGIC RHINITIS W.S.R. TO PRATISAHYAY- A REVIEW ARTICLE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23828094

How to cite this Article: Javed Khan*[1], Ashwani Kumar Chaturvedi[2]. (2026) Ayurvedic Approch To Allergic Rhinitis w.s.r. to Pratisahyay- A Review Article. European Journal of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, 13(11), 91–95.
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Article Received on 05/10/2026 **Article Revised on 25/10/2026** **Article Published on 01/11/2026**

ABSTRACT

Allergic rhinitis is a common inflammatory disorder of the nasal mucosa characterized by sneezing, nasal itching, watery nasal discharge, and nasal congestion following exposure to allergens such as pollen, house dust mites, animal dander, and mold. It can significantly affect sleep, concentration, productivity, and quality of life. Although modern medicine explains allergic rhinitis through immunoglobulin E (IgE)-mediated hypersensitivity and inflammation, Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to understanding similar symptom patterns through the concepts of Pratishyaya, Vata-Kapha dosha, and disturbances in the body's homeostasis. Ayurvedic management emphasizes avoidance of causative factors, dietary and lifestyle modifications, selected herbal formulations, and appropriate nasal therapies. This article reviews the clinical features, pathophysiology, Ayurvedic interpretation, and integrative management of allergic rhinitis while highlighting the importance of evidence-based clinical practice.

KEYWORDS: Allergic rhinitis, Ayurveda, Pratishyaya, Vata-Kapha, Nasya, Dinacharya, Ritu Charya.

1. INTRODUCTION

Allergic rhinitis is an IgE-mediated inflammatory condition of the nasal mucosa that develops in response to exposure to environmental allergens. It is one of the most prevalent allergic disorders worldwide and affects individuals across different age groups.

The condition may be seasonal, occurring during specific pollen seasons, or perennial, persisting throughout the year because of continuous exposure to allergens such as house dust mites, mold, and animal dander.

Common symptoms include repetitive sneezing, nasal itching, rhinorrhea, and nasal obstruction. Some patients also experience itching and watering of the eyes, postnasal drip, headache, disturbed sleep, and reduced concentration.

In Ayurveda, the clinical presentation of allergic rhinitis may be understood in relation to Pratishyaya, particularly patterns involving Vata and Kapha dosha. However, allergic rhinitis is a modern biomedical diagnosis and does not have a single, exact equivalent in classical Ayurvedic nosology.

An integrative approach can help combine modern diagnostic methods with appropriate Ayurvedic principles, provided that treatment decisions are guided by clinical evidence and patient safety.

2. Modern Understanding of Allergic Rhinitis

2.1 Definition

Allergic rhinitis is an inflammatory disorder of the nasal mucosa caused by an immune-mediated response to inhaled allergens in sensitized individuals.

2.2 Etiological Factors

Common allergens and contributing factors include

- House dust mites
- Grass, tree, and weed pollens
- Animal dander
- Indoor and outdoor molds
- Occupational allergens
- Tobacco smoke, air pollution, and strong odors, which may aggravate nasal symptoms even when they are not allergens themselves

Genetic predisposition, coexisting allergic diseases, and

environmental exposure can influence disease development and severity.

2.3 Pathophysiology

Allergic rhinitis involves an inappropriate immune response to otherwise harmless environmental substances.

A. Sensitization phase: During initial exposure, allergens stimulate an immune response that can lead to the production of allergen-specific IgE antibodies. These antibodies bind to mast cells in the nasal mucosa.

B. Allergic reaction phase: On subsequent exposure, the allergen activates sensitized mast cells, resulting in the release of histamine and other inflammatory mediators. These substances produce sneezing, itching, watery nasal discharge, and congestion.

A later inflammatory response involving eosinophils and other immune cells may contribute to persistent nasal symptoms.

2.4 Clinical Classification

According to the ARIA framework, allergic rhinitis can be classified according to symptom frequency and severity.

Based on Duration

- Intermittent: Symptoms occur on fewer than four days per week or for fewer than four consecutive weeks.
- Persistent: Symptoms occur on more than four days per week and for more than four consecutive weeks.

Based on Severity

- Mild: Symptoms do not significantly disturb sleep, daily activities, or work and study.
- Moderate to severe: Symptoms interfere with sleep, daily activities, work, study, or overall quality of life.

3. Ayurvedic Perspective

3.1 Correlation with Pratishyaya

In Ayurveda, Pratishyaya is a disorder described in the context of diseases affecting the nose and nasal passages. Depending on the clinical presentation, certain features of allergic rhinitis may resemble those described in Vataja and Kaphaja Pratishyaya.

The symptoms of sneezing and watery nasal discharge may be interpreted through the involvement of Vata, while heaviness, excessive secretions, and nasal obstruction may be considered in relation to Kapha.

This is a conceptual correlation rather than a direct equivalence between two diagnostic systems. Patients should therefore be assessed using both appropriate biomedical criteria and a careful Ayurvedic clinical examination.

3.2 Role of Vata and Kapha Dosha

Vata Dosha

Vata is associated with movement and the regulation of physiological processes. In an Ayurvedic interpretation, prominent sneezing, irritation, and episodic watery discharge may be considered features suggestive of Vata involvement.

Kapha Dosha

Kapha is associated with stability, cohesion, and lubrication. Excessive mucus, heaviness, and a feeling of nasal blockage may be interpreted as Kapha-related features.

The relative involvement of these doshas may vary between patients and over time.

3.3 Agni and Ama

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of Agni, or digestive and metabolic function, in maintaining health. The concept of Ama is used in Ayurvedic theory to describe incompletely processed material associated with disturbed physiological functioning. Some Ayurvedic approaches consider dietary habits, digestion, and individual constitution when assessing recurrent respiratory symptoms.

However, Ama does not have an established one-to-one biomedical equivalent, and there is insufficient evidence to conclude that it causes IgE-mediated allergic rhinitis.

3.4 Nidana Panchaka

The Ayurvedic diagnostic framework of Nidana Panchaka may be applied to the broader assessment of nasal complaints.

1. Nidana (Causative factors): Exposure to dust, smoke, environmental irritants, or other individual triggers may be considered during history-taking. Dietary and lifestyle factors may also be assessed according to Ayurvedic principles.

2. Purvarupa (Prodromal features): Mild nasal irritation, occasional sneezing, or a sensation of nasal discomfort may precede a symptomatic episode, although these features are not specific to allergic rhinitis.

3. Rupa (Clinical features): Repeated sneezing, nasal itching, watery discharge, and nasal obstruction are characteristic features of allergic rhinitis.

4. Upashaya-Anupashaya (Relieving and aggravating factors): Symptoms may improve when exposure to a particular allergen is reduced and worsen during exposure. This information is useful in both modern and Ayurvedic clinical assessment.

5. Samprapti (Pathogenesis): From the Ayurvedic perspective, the presentation may be interpreted through

doshic disturbance and involvement of the nasal passages. Modern medicine, meanwhile, explains the disease through allergen sensitization and inflammatory immune responses.

These frameworks can complement clinical understanding but should not be treated as interchangeable explanations.

4. Ayurvedic Management of Allergic Rhinitis

The Ayurvedic approach generally emphasizes individualized treatment, avoidance of aggravating factors, lifestyle modification, and selected therapeutic interventions. Treatment should be prescribed by a qualified Ayurvedic physician after evaluating the patient's age, symptoms, medical history, concurrent medications, and disease severity.

4.1 Nidana Parivarjana

Nidana Parivarjana, or avoidance of causative factors, is an important Ayurvedic principle that aligns with modern allergen avoidance. Practical measures include:

- Identifying and reducing exposure to relevant allergens.
- Keeping indoor spaces clean and minimizing dust accumulation.
- Washing bedding regularly when dust-mite allergy is suspected.
- Avoiding tobacco smoke and other known nasal irritants.
- Keeping windows closed when relevant pollen levels are high.
- Using appropriate protective equipment when occupational exposure cannot be avoided.

Avoidance measures should be tailored to the actual trigger rather than imposing unnecessary restrictions.

4.2 Ahara (Dietary Management)

Ayurveda emphasizes dietary choices based on an individual's constitution, digestion, and clinical presentation. A balanced diet containing vegetables, fruits, whole grains, adequate protein, and sufficient fluids supports general health.

Patients may benefit from observing whether specific foods consistently worsen their symptoms. However, routine elimination of dairy products, curd, cold foods, or other food groups is not supported as a universal treatment for allergic rhinitis.

Food restrictions should be based on a demonstrated intolerance or allergy rather than assumptions about Kapha aggravation.

4.3 Vihara (Lifestyle Management)

Lifestyle measures may support symptom control and general well-being.

- Maintaining regular sleep and physical activity.
- Avoiding exposure to smoke and irritating aerosols.
- Maintaining appropriate indoor ventilation and cleanliness.
- Practising relaxation techniques when stress affects symptom perception or quality of life.
- Maintaining good hand hygiene and avoiding unnecessary contact with respiratory irritants. These measures complement, rather than replace, appropriate medical treatment.

4.4 Nasya Karma

Nasya Karma is an Ayurvedic therapeutic procedure involving administration of substances through the nasal route. Different Nasya procedures use different substances and techniques. They should not be considered interchangeable with saline nasal irrigation or with modern intranasal corticosteroid sprays.

The evidence supporting specific Ayurvedic Nasya treatments for allergic rhinitis remains limited. Their safety depends on the substance, preparation, route, dose, and method of administration.

Important safety considerations:

- Do not instil unsterile oils, herbal preparations, or other homemade substances into the nose.
- Oil-based nasal preparations may carry a risk of aspiration and, rarely, lipoid pneumonia.
- Nasal procedures should be undertaken only after appropriate clinical assessment by a qualified practitioner.
- Saline nasal irrigation, when appropriate, should use sterile, distilled, or previously boiled and cooled water with a properly cleaned device.

The benefits and risks of a specific Nasya procedure should be discussed openly with the patient.

4.5 Ayurvedic Herbal Formulations

Several herbs and formulations are traditionally used in Ayurveda for respiratory complaints. Examples include:

- Haridra (Curcuma longa)
- Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)
- Tulasi (Ocimum tenuiflorum)
- Vasa (Adhatoda vasica)

These examples reflect traditional use and should not be interpreted as established treatments for allergic rhinitis. Although some preliminary research has explored the anti-inflammatory or immunomodulatory properties of selected herbs, the quality and quantity of clinical evidence vary considerably. Reliable evidence is insufficient to recommend these herbs or their combinations as substitutes for established allergic-rhinitis treatments.

Potential concerns include product contamination, inconsistent composition, herb-drug interactions, and adverse effects. Guduchi, for example, has been associated with reports of liver injury.

Therefore, herbal preparations should be used only after appropriate professional evaluation, with particular caution in patients who are pregnant, breastfeeding, have liver or kidney disease, or take other medicines.

4.6 Rasayana and Preventive Approaches

Ayurveda describes Rasayana as a group of approaches intended to support health and well-being. A nutritious diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and appropriate daily routines may contribute to general health. However, the claim that a particular Rasayana preparation prevents or cures allergic rhinitis requires stronger clinical evidence.

No herbal or Ayurvedic formulation should be promoted as a guaranteed cure or as a proven method of permanently eliminating allergic sensitization.

5. Role of Modern Medicine in an Integrative Approach

5.1 Diagnosis

Diagnosis is generally based on clinical history and examination. Allergy testing, including skin-prick testing or serum allergen-specific IgE testing, may be useful when the diagnosis is uncertain, symptoms are persistent, or identifying a specific allergen would change management.

Other conditions, such as nonallergic rhinitis, chronic rhinosinusitis, nasal polyps, and certain structural abnormalities, should be considered when clinically appropriate.

5.2 Pharmacological Management

Evidence-based treatment options include

Intranasal corticosteroids

These are among the most effective treatments for persistent or moderate-to-severe allergic rhinitis, particularly when nasal congestion is prominent.

Second-Generation Antihistamines

Oral antihistamines can help relieve sneezing, itching, and watery nasal discharge. Intranasal antihistamines are another option for selected patients.

Saline Nasal Irrigation

Saline irrigation may help remove mucus and allergens and improve symptoms in some patients.

Other Treatments

Additional medicines may be appropriate depending on symptom severity, age, comorbidities, and treatment response.

Allergen Immunotherapy

For selected patients with clinically relevant, confirmed allergen sensitization, subcutaneous or sublingual allergen immunotherapy may be considered under specialist supervision. It can reduce symptoms and medication requirements in appropriately selected individuals.

The choice of treatment should be individualized, and patients should receive guidance on correct medication use and potential adverse effects.

5.3 Integrating Ayurveda with Conventional Treatment

An integrative approach may incorporate appropriate Ayurvedic dietary and lifestyle practices alongside evidence-based treatment. The following principles are important:

1. Establish an appropriate diagnosis before initiating treatment.
2. Identify and reduce relevant allergen exposure.
3. Use proven treatments when symptoms warrant them.
4. Assess Ayurvedic interventions individually for safety and evidence.
5. Review potential interactions between herbal products and prescribed medicines.
6. Monitor symptom severity, sleep quality, medication requirements, and adverse effects.
7. Avoid delaying specialist referral when symptoms are severe, persistent, or atypical.

Ayurvedic therapies should complement established care rather than replace effective treatment without clinical justification.

6. Prevention and Patient Education

Patient education plays a central role in the long-term management of allergic rhinitis. Patients should be encouraged to:

- Recognize their personal triggers.
- Maintain an appropriate home environment.
- Use prescribed nasal sprays correctly and consistently.
- Avoid unnecessary self-medication.
- Seek medical assessment for persistent symptoms.
- Maintain a symptom diary when seasonal patterns or specific triggers are suspected.

Urgent medical assessment is necessary when nasal symptoms are accompanied by difficulty breathing, swelling of the tongue or throat, or other signs of a severe allergic reaction. Persistent unilateral nasal obstruction, recurrent nosebleeds, or unusual nasal discharge also warrant medical evaluation.

7. DISCUSSION

Allergic rhinitis is a multifactorial inflammatory disease that can substantially affect quality of life. Modern medicine provides a well-established understanding of its immunological mechanisms and a range of effective treatments.

Ayurveda offers a broader framework for individualized assessment through concepts such as Pratishyaya, Vata-Kapha involvement, Nidana Parivarjana, and lifestyle regulation. These concepts may help structure

discussions about symptom patterns, daily routines, and patient preferences.

Nevertheless, traditional explanations should not be confused with established immunological mechanisms. Similarly, traditional use of a herb or procedure does not establish its clinical efficacy.

More well-designed randomized controlled trials are needed to determine the effectiveness, optimal dosage, long-term safety, and comparative benefits of specific Ayurvedic interventions for allergic rhinitis.

8. CONCLUSION

Allergic rhinitis is a common allergic disorder characterized by sneezing, nasal itching, watery discharge, and nasal congestion. Ayurveda provides a traditional framework for understanding similar nasal complaints through Pratishyaya and the concepts of Vata and Kapha dosha.

Nidana Parivarjana, appropriate lifestyle measures, individualized dietary advice, and carefully evaluated Ayurvedic interventions may be considered as components of a broader management plan. However, the clinical evidence for many specific Ayurvedic therapies remains limited, and their safety must be assessed individually.

The most appropriate approach combines accurate diagnosis, allergen management, evidence-based medical treatment, and responsible consideration of complementary therapies. Further high-quality research is required to establish the role of specific Ayurvedic interventions in the treatment of allergic rhinitis.

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