

AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE OF ANXIETY AND VATAJ UNMAD AND ITS INTEGRATED TREATMENT

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21785822>



How to cite this Article: Anuradha Gunvant Gawande (2026). Ayurvedic Perspective Of Anxiety And Vataj Unmad And Its Integrated Treatment. European Journal of Pharmaceutical and Medical Research, 13(8), 401–403.
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Article Received on 05/07/2026

Article Revised on 25/07/2026

Article Published on 01/08/2026

ABSTRACT

Vataja Unmada is a pathological condition that possesses symptoms similar to those present in many other types of mental illnesses. The major symptoms associated with *Vataja Unmada* include abnormal behaviors; cognitive impairment; impaired psychomotor function; poor orientation; impaired emotional regulation and impaired memory, etc. The underlying causes of *Vataja Unmada* are dry, cold, or inconsistent eating patterns; eating incompatible food combinations; lack of sleep; too much exercise; not acting on natural urges; and psychological stressors such as fear, sorrow, anger, shock, and/or emotional trauma. Due to similar symptoms, *Vataja Unmada* has been compared to modern neuropsychiatric disorder like anxiety. The causes and symptoms of *Vataja Unmada* are considered similar to that of severe anxiety. The modern day scenario increases instances of such cases thus it becomes essential to explore key aspects related to these conditions. Present article summarizes Ayurvedic perspective of anxiety and *Vataja Unmad* along with its treatment options.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Anxiety, Vataj Unmad, Buddhi, Smriti.

INTRODUCTION

Vataja Unmada is an Ayurvedic psychiatric disorder caused by an increased amount of *Vata*; resulting in mental disruptions including loss of cognition, psychological dysfunction, and behavioral issues. Additionally, individuals with this disorder will exhibit signs or symptoms related to anxiety, agitation, emotional instability, and unpredictable behavior such as laughing, crying, singing, or dancing inappropriately and speaking irrationally.^[1-4] The effects of *Vataja Unmada* can also be seen in impaired *Buddhi*, *Smriti* and *Samjna*, causing restless body movement with involuntary jerking motions, wandering attention, and disorganized thought processes. Ayurveda suggested many treatment options including internal therapies and detoxification measures. *Snehana* helps to calm and balance aggravated *Vata* and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* help to improve emotional resilience and cognitive function.^[4-6]

Ayurvedic View of Vataja Unmada

Ayurveda identifies three basic *Dosha* that govern the body are *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*; these are the core governing forces of all bodily functions and when they

become vitiated, they also contribute to the emergence of disease. *Vata* is the primary regulator of all functions of nervous system and the musculoskeletal system, as well as mental activities. In addition to controlling all of these functions, *Vata* has the unique ability to travel rapidly throughout the body because of its continuously changing characteristics; therefore, it can aggravate the other *Doshas* and contributes to the development of many disorders.^[3-5]

Etiological and Pathological Considerations

Vataja Unmada is a mental disorder that falls into the category of *Doshaja Unmada*; it is conspicuously discussed throughout the major classics of Ayurveda and is caused by the aggravation of *Vata*.

As per *Charaka Samhita* following factors can lead to *Vata* aggravation.

- ✚ Excessive consumption of *Ruksha* and *Sheeta Ahara*
- ✚ Prolonged fasting
- ✚ Excessive *Vamana* and *Virechana*
- ✚ *Dhatu kshaya*
- ✚ Extreme psychological stress

Vata rises up the body, through the heart and brain, leading to damage to certain higher functions of the mind like *Buddhi* and *Smriti* and ultimately resulting in a state of severe anxiety which turned to *Unmada*.^[6-8]

Ancient and Modern Correlation

The classical Ayurvedic texts describe an important feature of *Vataja Unmada* as *Parisaranam Ajasram*. The *Charaka Samhita* uses *Parisaranam Ajasram*, while the Sanskrit term *Bhramati* from the *Sushruta Samhita* refers to the same concept; and the *Ashtanga Sangraha* uses *Paryatanam ajasram* for this type of activity. Thus, these terms refer to purposeless or excessive pacing, moving or exhibiting psychomotor agitation.

From a modern psychiatric perspective, these behaviors are similar to psychomotor agitation or severe form of anxiety; key characteristic of schizophrenia. The classical Ayurvedic definition of *Parisaranam Ajasram* provides significant clinical similarities to modern neuropsychiatric disorders which further confirm the relevance of *Vataja Unmada*.^[7-9]

The signs and symptoms associated with *Vataja Unmada* can be grouped into two main categories: first, the psychological; and second, the physiological. *Vataja Unmada* shares many of the same signs and symptoms as a number of other contemporaneous disorders, many of which are now characterized as neurodegenerative and/or neuropsychiatric disorders. Examples include dementia, extrapyramidal movement disorders and severe anxiety. Additionally, some of the signs and symptoms of *Vataja Unmada* are similar to those associated with various psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and psychosis associated with thyroid disorders.

Ayurvedic Perspective of Anxiety

Ayurveda primarily associates anxiety with an imbalance of *Vata Dosha*, which controls both the nervous system and all mental functions. Anxiety arises when *Vata* is aggravated through *Manovaha Srotas* and becomes vitiated. The aggravation of *Vata* is brought about by factors such as too much or not enough stress, irregular lifestyle habits, inadequate sleep, and excessive sensory stimulation. When *Vata* become aggravated one experience symptoms such as excessive worrying, fear, insomnia, palpitations, tension in one's body, or emotional instability. In Ayurveda, anxiety additionally has an increased presence of *Rajas Guna* and a decreased amount of *Ojas*.^[6-8]

Management of *Vataja Unmada* and Anxiety

Unmada can be treated with three main approaches in Ayurveda as depicted in **Figure 1**. *Daiva Vyapashraya Chikitsa*, *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* and *Yukti Vyapashraya Chikitsa* are major approaches that can relieve mental or emotional stress. Within these methods, both *Shodhana* and *Shamana* are elements of *Yukti Vyapashraya Chikitsa*.

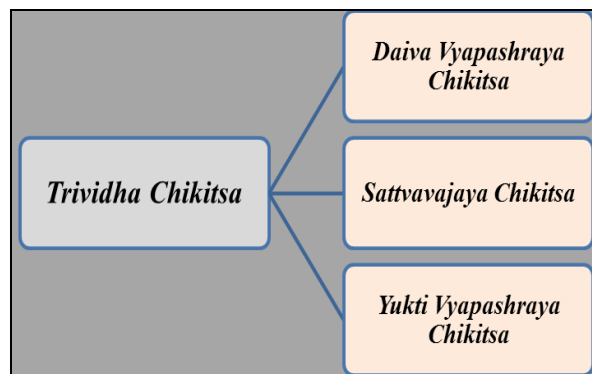


Figure 1: Trividha Chikitsa for mental illness.

Vataja Unmada is classically treated using *Snehana* and *Swedana* along with appropriate *Shodhana* techniques like *Vamana* and *Virechana*. *Vataja Unmada* may also be treated using *Snehapana*, *Mridu Shodhana*, *Niruha Basti* with *Sneha*, *Shiro Virechana*, *Dhooma*, *Abhyanga*, *Utsadana* and *Sarpi Pana*. Various medicated products are recommended to improve mental health; these include *Maha Kalyanaka Ghrita*, *Lashunadi Ghrita*, *Hingvadi Ghrita* and *Maha Paishachika Ghrita*, etc.

The goal of treating Anxiety in Ayurveda is to restore balance of *Vata* using multiple modalities such as diet, lifestyle modifications, use of herbs and detoxification therapies. To calm both mind and body during the treatment of anxiety, *Sattvic* foods should be consumed while avoiding stimulants, sugars that have been refined and cold/dry foods. To maintain stability within one's nervous system, it is important for an individual to have a daily routine, including regular times for meals, as well as proper quality of sleep. *Yoga*, meditation, and *Pranayama* help to promote emotional balance while reducing mental stress. For this purpose, Ayurvedic practitioners often use herbal preparations such as *Brahmi*, *Ashwagandha*, *Jatamansi*, etc. These drugs possess neuroprotective, anxiolytic and adaptogenic properties. Therapies such as *Panchakarma* recommended for relaxation, reducing stress and producing mental calmness.^[8-10]

CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic texts describe *Vataja Unmada* as a kind of *Unmada* that is caused by an increase of *Vata*. They also indicate that it can be linked to inadequate nourishment of the body due to depletion of body tissues. According to Ayurveda, *Vataja Unmada* is a clinical condition that can be treated with *Snehapana*, which is the administration of medicated ghee or oils, as one of the major aspects of treatment due to its action of pacifying *Vata*, as well as having a nourishing effect, and also having a possibility of being neuroprotective, in conjunction with *Panchakarma* treatments and other internal therapies. Anxiety according to Ayurveda may be caused by imbalance in the *Vata dosha*. When *Vata* is out of balance, it can produce feelings of anxiety, fear and mental instability. The goal of treatment for anxiety from Ayurvedic perspective is to restore balance of *Vata*.

using *Medhya Rasayana* which helps to increase the *Sattvic* qualities of the body/mind. Additionally therapies such as *Abhyanga* and *Shirodhara* contributed greatly to calm the mind and nervous system.

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