

## AYURVEDIC APPROACH TO RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

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**ABSTRACT**

"Aamvata" in Ayurveda corresponds to Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) in modern medicine. This chronic autoimmune disease affects millions worldwide, causing joint pain, inflammation, and systemic complications. Ayurveda, the ancient system of holistic medicine, offers a unique perspective on Aamvata, focusing on the balance of doshas, the role of Aama (toxins), and personalized treatment. Ayurvedic management of Aamvata involves dietary modifications, detoxification therapies (Panchakarma), herbal remedies, yoga, and lifestyle adjustments. The emphasis is on restoring dosha balance, eliminating Aama, and reducing inflammation. Herbs like Guggulu and Ashwagandha, along with dietary guidelines, promote healing. This article provides an overview of Aamvata's understanding in Ayurveda and its holistic management. Ayurveda recognizes Vata dosha imbalance as a primary trigger for Aamvata. Aama, the result of impaired digestion, accumulates in the joints, triggering inflammation and immune responses. The pathophysiology of Aamvata follows a stepwise process, from dosha imbalance to joint damage and systemic effects.

**KEYWORDS:** *Aamvata, RA, Ayurveda.***INTRODUCTION**

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease that primarily affects the joints, leading to pain, inflammation, and joint deformities. It not only impacts physical health but also affects the overall quality of life. Ayurveda, one of the world's oldest systems of medicine, views health as a balance between the three doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Aamvata is a condition primarily associated with the vitiation of Vata dosha. According to Ayurvedic principles, when there is an imbalance in Vata dosha, it can lead to the accumulation of "Aama" (toxins) in the body, which, in turn, can manifest as Aamvata or Rheumatoid Arthritis.

**Clinical Features**

**Joint Pain and Swelling:** Aamvata primarily affects the joints, leading to pain, stiffness, and swelling. These symptoms often worsen in the morning or after periods of inactivity.

**Reduced Mobility:** As the disease progresses, patients may experience a reduction in joint mobility and flexibility.

**Fatigue:** Aamvata can cause fatigue and lethargy due to the chronic inflammation in the body.

**Digestive Issues:** Ayurveda places great importance on digestion. Aamvata can lead to digestive problems and irregular bowel movements.

**Mood Disturbances:** Patients may experience mood swings and mental stress due to the chronic nature of the disease.

**Pathophysiology Of Rheumatoid Arthritis<sup>[1]</sup>**

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic autoimmune disease characterized by inflammation of the synovial membranes that line the joints, leading to joint pain, swelling, stiffness, and potential joint damage. The pathophysiology of RA involves complex immune system dysfunction and inflammatory processes.

**Autoimmune Response:** The initial trigger for RA is still not fully understood, but it is believed to involve a combination of genetic, environmental, and hormonal factors. In individuals with a genetic predisposition, something in the environment (like an infection) may trigger the immune system to malfunction. The immune system mistakenly identifies the synovial membrane, which lines the joints, as a foreign invader and launches an autoimmune response against it.

**Inflammatory Cytokines:** Once the autoimmune response is triggered, immune cells, particularly T-cells and B-cells, become activated. These cells release pro-

inflammatory cytokines, such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-alpha), interleukin-1 (IL-1), and interleukin-6 (IL-6). These cytokines play a central role in the inflammatory cascade that characterizes RA.

**Synovial Inflammation:** The release of pro-inflammatory cytokines leads to synovial membrane inflammation. The synovium becomes thickened and hyperplastic, and it starts producing excessive synovial fluid. This fluid accumulates in the joint, causing swelling, pain, and stiffness.

**Pannus Formation:** As the inflammation persists, a destructive tissue called "pannus" forms. Pannus is an abnormal layer of proliferating synovial tissue that invades the cartilage and bone within the joint. Pannus can erode the cartilage, causing joint deformities and damage.

**Bone Erosion:** The chronic inflammation, coupled with the activity of enzymes like matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs), leads to the erosion of bone and cartilage within the affected joint. This contributes to the deformities and functional impairment observed in RA.

**Systemic Effects:** RA is not limited to joint inflammation; it can have systemic effects. Inflammation may affect other organs and tissues, leading to conditions such as rheumatoid nodules (subcutaneous lumps), vasculitis (inflammation of blood vessels), and lung involvement.

**Ongoing Immune Activation:** RA is characterized by chronic inflammation, and the immune system remains persistently activated. This ongoing inflammation can lead to long-term joint damage and systemic complications.

**Predisposition for Cardiovascular Disease:** Individuals with RA are at an increased risk of cardiovascular disease due to the chronic inflammation and systemic effects of the disease. Inflammation can affect blood vessel walls and contribute to atherosclerosis.

**Genetic Factors:** Genetic susceptibility plays a role in RA, with certain human leukocyte antigen (HLA) genes being associated with an increased risk. However, genetics alone do not determine the development of RA; environmental factors also contribute significantly.

**Hormonal Factors:** RA is more common in women, suggesting a hormonal influence. Changes in sex hormones, particularly estrogen, may play a role in the disease's onset and progression.

#### LAKSHANA OF AAMVATA

**Dosha Imbalance (Dosha Vaishamya):** The process begins with an imbalance in the Vata dosha, which is often triggered by factors like poor dietary habits, sedentary lifestyle, or external stressors. Vata dosha

governs the nervous system and movement in the body. Its imbalance can lead to a variety of health issues.

**Aama Formation (Aama Sanchaya):** When Vata is imbalanced, it can impair digestion, leading to the incomplete digestion of food (ama formation). Aama is considered a toxic, sticky substance that results from improperly digested food. It circulates in the body and accumulates in various tissues, including the joints.

**Aamvata Initiation (Aamvata Prakopa):** Aama eventually reaches the joints, where it aggravates Vata dosha and triggers an inflammatory response. This stage is marked by mild joint discomfort, occasional stiffness, and subtle inflammation.

**Localization of Aama (Aamvata Prasara):** Aama gradually accumulates in the synovial membrane (lining of the joints), leading to more pronounced inflammation. As Aama accumulates, it attracts more Vata, intensifying the symptoms.

**Pannus Formation (Aamvata Nidana):** In this stage, the body's immune system recognizes the accumulated Aama in the joints as a foreign invader. The immune response triggers the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines, leading to the formation of pannus. Pannus is an abnormal, proliferating tissue that invades the joint space, causing further inflammation and damage.

**Chronic Inflammation (Aamvata Stambha):** The chronic inflammation, coupled with the presence of pannus, leads to pain, swelling, and joint deformities. The joints may lose their normal function, and systemic symptoms like fatigue and mood disturbances can also occur.

**Systemic Involvement (Aamvata Vyapati):** In severe cases, Aamvata can affect other organs and tissues beyond the joints. This may result in complications such as rheumatoid nodules, vasculitis, or lung involvement.

**Complications (Aamvata Upadrava):** Long-term, untreated Aamvata can lead to irreversible joint damage, disability, and systemic complications like cardiovascular disease or lung issues.

#### Ayurvedic Management of Aamvata (RA)

Ayurveda adopts a comprehensive approach to manage Aamvata, focusing on addressing the root cause of the condition rather than merely alleviating symptoms. The key principles of Ayurvedic management for Aamvata include:

**Balancing Doshas:** The primary aim is to balance the Vata dosha through dietary and lifestyle modifications. This often involves consuming warm, nourishing foods, avoiding cold and raw foods, and maintaining a regular daily routine.

**Detoxification:** Ayurveda emphasizes the removal of Aama (toxins) from the body. Panchakarma therapies, including Virechana (therapeutic purgation) and Basti (medicated enema), are commonly employed to detoxify the system.

**Yoga and Pranayama:** Gentle yoga asanas and pranayama (breathing exercises) can help in managing pain, improving flexibility, and reducing stress.

**Dietary Modifications:** A diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods like ginger, garlic, and green leafy vegetables is recommended. Avoiding foods that exacerbate Vata imbalance, such as excess caffeine and spicy foods, is also important.

**Lifestyle Changes:** Maintaining a regular routine, getting adequate rest, and managing stress are crucial aspects of Ayurvedic treatment for Aamvata.

## MANAGEMENT<sup>[2]</sup>

Ayurvedic dietary principles play a significant role in managing Aamvata (Rheumatoid Arthritis). Ayurveda emphasizes that food is not only a source of nutrition but also a powerful tool for balancing the doshas, particularly Vata dosha, which is often implicated in Aamvata. Here are the key roles of Ayurvedic diet in managing Aamvata:

**Balancing Vata Dosha:** Aamvata is primarily associated with the vitiation of Vata dosha. An Ayurvedic diet aims to balance Vata dosha by incorporating foods that have qualities opposite to Vata, such as warmth, moisture, and heaviness. Warm and nourishing foods help calm the erratic and dry nature of Vata, reducing symptoms like joint pain and stiffness.

**Digestive Health:** Ayurveda places great importance on maintaining strong digestive fire (Agni). When Agni is weak, it can lead to the accumulation of Aama (toxins) in the body, exacerbating Aamvata. The Ayurvedic diet includes foods and spices that support digestion, such as ginger, cumin, and black pepper.

**Anti-Inflammatory Foods:** Inflammation is a key feature of Aamvata, and certain foods have natural anti-inflammatory properties. Turmeric, for example, contains curcumin, a potent anti-inflammatory compound. Including such foods in the diet can help reduce inflammation in the joints.

**Avoiding Vata-Aggravating Foods:** It's crucial to avoid foods that can aggravate Vata dosha. These include cold, raw, and dry foods, as well as foods that are too spicy or bitter. These qualities can worsen joint stiffness and pain.

**Nourishing and Lubricating Joints:** Aamvata can lead to dryness in the joints. An Ayurvedic diet includes foods that are hydrating and lubricating, such as ghee

(clarified butter), sesame oil, and foods with natural oils like avocados and nuts.

**Herbs:** Incorporating Ayurvedic herbs and spices with anti-inflammatory properties into the diet can be beneficial. These may include turmeric, ashwagandha, ginger, and boswellia.

**A Balanced Diet:** Ayurveda emphasizes a balanced diet that includes all six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, and astringent) in moderation. Each taste has a different effect on the doshas, and a balanced intake helps maintain overall equilibrium.

**Hydration:** Proper hydration is essential to prevent the buildup of toxins and maintain joint health. Warm herbal teas, like ginger tea, can be hydrating and soothing.

**Timing of Meals:** Ayurveda recommends regular meal times and avoiding irregular eating patterns. This helps in maintaining stable digestion and metabolism.

## Yoga asana In Aamvata<sup>[3]</sup>

Yoga asanas (postures) play a significant role in the management of Aamvata (Rheumatoid Arthritis) within the framework of Ayurveda. Yoga offers several benefits for individuals with Aamvata, as it helps improve joint flexibility, reduce pain, and promote overall well-being. However, it's crucial to practice yoga asanas under the guidance of a qualified yoga instructor who is familiar with your specific condition and limitations.

**Improved Joint Flexibility:** Regular practice of gentle yoga asanas can help improve joint flexibility and range of motion. This is especially important for individuals with Aamvata, as joint stiffness is a common symptom. Yoga poses gently stretch and strengthen the muscles surrounding the joints, promoting better mobility.

**Pain Management:** Yoga can provide natural pain relief for Aamvata by promoting the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Gentle asanas help reduce muscle tension and alleviate joint pain associated with inflammation.

**Stress Reduction:** Chronic pain and inflammation in Aamvata can lead to stress and anxiety. Yoga incorporates deep breathing techniques (pranayama) and meditation, which help calm the mind and reduce stress levels. Reduced stress can indirectly contribute to pain management and overall well-being.

**Enhanced Circulation:** Yoga poses often involve controlled stretching and relaxation, which can improve blood circulation to the affected joints. Better circulation helps deliver oxygen and nutrients to the joints and removes waste products, aiding in the healing process.

**Muscle Strengthening:** Weak muscles can contribute to joint instability and pain. Certain yoga asanas, when

performed mindfully, help strengthen the muscles around the joints, providing better support and stability.

**Improved Posture:** Maintaining good posture is essential for individuals with Aamvata to minimize joint strain. Yoga asanas promote awareness of body alignment and help correct poor posture habits.

**Balanced Energy Flow:** Ayurveda and yoga are closely related systems of holistic healing. Yoga aims to balance the flow of vital energy (prana) throughout the body. When prana flows harmoniously, it can promote overall health and healing.

**Mind-Body Connection:** Yoga emphasizes the mind-body connection, encouraging individuals to become more attuned to their bodies and their responses to movement. This increased awareness can help in managing pain and making informed lifestyle choices.

**Long-Term Benefits:** Consistent yoga practice can offer long-term benefits for individuals with Aamvata. It can help maintain joint health, reduce the risk of joint deformities, and improve overall quality of life

#### **Contraindication In Aamvata**

Individuals with Aamvata (Rheumatoid Arthritis) should exercise caution and be aware of certain contraindications to ensure their safety and well-being. These contraindications are guidelines that suggest when certain activities or treatments should be avoided or modified due to the nature of the disease.

**High-Impact Activities:** Avoid high-impact exercises and activities that put excessive stress on the joints, such as running or jumping. These activities can worsen joint pain and lead to further joint damage.

**Strenuous Strength Training:** While gentle muscle strengthening exercises can be beneficial, heavy weightlifting or strenuous resistance exercises may be contraindicated, especially if they cause joint pain or discomfort.

**Overuse of Affected Joints:** Be cautious about overusing affected joints. Repetitive movements or excessive stress on already inflamed joints can exacerbate symptoms. It's essential to strike a balance between exercise and rest.

**Extreme Hot or Cold Therapies:** Avoid extreme temperatures, such as ice baths or very hot saunas, which can trigger joint pain and stiffness. Instead, opt for moderate temperature therapies.

**Joint Manipulations:** Avoid forceful joint manipulations or adjustments. These can be painful and potentially harmful to inflamed joints.

**Fasting or Extreme Dietary Changes:** Extreme dietary practices like fasting or drastic changes in eating habits can disrupt digestion and potentially worsen Aama (toxins). It's important to maintain a balanced diet and consult with an Ayurvedic practitioner or nutritionist for dietary recommendations.

**High-Impact Sports:** Contact sports or activities with a high risk of joint injuries, such as football or rugby, should be avoided to prevent further joint damage.

**Excessive Stress:** High levels of physical or emotional stress can exacerbate RA symptoms. Managing stress through relaxation techniques, meditation, and mindfulness is crucial.

**Certain Medications:** Some medications, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or corticosteroids, may have contraindications or side effects. Consult with your healthcare provider regarding the appropriate use of medications and their potential interactions.

**Smoking and Alcohol:** Smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can worsen the symptoms of Aamvata. It is advisable to quit smoking and limit alcohol intake to promote better overall health.

**Inadequate Rest:** Ensure that you get adequate rest and sleep. Overexertion and lack of rest can worsen fatigue and joint pain.

**Inadequate Hydration:** Dehydration can exacerbate joint stiffness and discomfort. Stay adequately hydrated to support joint health.

**Self-Treatment:** Avoid self-diagnosis and self-treatment. Always consult with qualified healthcare providers, including rheumatologists and Ayurvedic practitioners, for a proper evaluation and treatment plan.

**Herbal Remedies:** Ayurvedic herbs are commonly used to manage RA symptoms and reduce inflammation. Some of the herbs used include<sup>[4]</sup>

**Guggulu:** Known for its anti-inflammatory properties, it helps reduce joint pain and stiffness

**Ashwagandha:** A powerful adaptogen that helps manage stress and inflammation.

**Turmeric:** Contains curcumin, a potent anti-inflammatory compound.

**Triphala:** A combination of three fruits that aids digestion and detoxification.

**Boswellia:** Known to reduce pain and inflammation.

**Massage and Oil Application:** Ayurvedic massages, especially with warm herbal oils, can help improve

circulation, reduce pain, and alleviate stiffness in joints. Self-massage with warm sesame oil can be beneficial<sup>[5]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Yoga asanas and pranayama improve joint flexibility, reduce pain, and manage stress, while meditation and mindfulness techniques support emotional well-being. Ayurvedic oils and massages enhance circulation and alleviate joint stiffness. Regular follow-up with Ayurvedic practitioners ensures individualized care and treatment adjustments.

The holistic approach of Ayurveda in managing Aamvata offers valuable insights and complementary therapies alongside conventional medicine, enhancing the quality of life for individuals living with RA.

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