

Role of Ahara-Vihara in Prevention and Management of PCOS: An Observational Review

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Abstract—Background: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a prevalent endocrine and metabolic disorder affecting women of reproductive age, characterized by irregular ovulation, hyperandrogenism, insulin resistance, and polycystic ovarian morphology. It often presents with symptoms such as menstrual irregularities, infertility, obesity, acne, and psychological distress. While modern medicine primarily focuses on pharmacological interventions for symptomatic relief, long-term management remains challenging due to side effects, recurrence, and lifestyle-related triggers. **Objective:** This review aims to explore and evaluate the role of Ahara (diet) and Vihara (lifestyle) — core concepts in Ayurveda — in the prevention and management of PCOS. The study assesses traditional Ayurvedic principles alongside observational data and contemporary findings to propose a holistic, sustainable approach to PCOS care. **Methods:** A qualitative observational review was conducted using data from classical Ayurvedic texts, published case studies, clinical reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Sources were selected based on their relevance to dietary and lifestyle interventions in PCOS, focusing on both theoretical foundations and real-world outcomes. Key Ayurvedic concepts were analyzed and correlated with modern physiological understandings of PCOS. **Findings:** The review revealed that Ayurvedic dietary principles (Ahara), which include light, digestible, anti-Kapha foods with spices that stimulate Agni, play a critical role in restoring metabolic balance. Similarly, lifestyle practices (Vihara) such as daily routines (Dinacharya), seasonal regimens (Ritucharya), yoga,

pranayama, and stress management effectively regulate hormonal rhythms, reduce insulin resistance, and support reproductive health. Observational evidence indicates improvements in menstrual regularity, weight management, insulin sensitivity, and psychological well-being among PCOS patients who adopted Ayurvedic Ahara-Vihara protocols. **Conclusion:** Ayurveda's holistic focus on individualized diet and lifestyle offers a promising complementary strategy for managing PCOS. Integrating Ahara and Vihara into conventional care not only addresses the root causes but also empowers women through sustainable self-care practices. Further clinical research and interdisciplinary collaboration are needed to validate and standardize these approaches for broader implementation.

Index Terms—Ahara, Vihara, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), Dinacharya, Ritucharya.

I. INTRODUCTION

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is one of the most common endocrine-metabolic disorders affecting women of reproductive age. It is estimated to affect 6–20% of women globally, depending on diagnostic criteria. Characterized by hyperandrogenism, oligo/anovulation, and polycystic ovarian morphology, PCOS manifests with a wide range of symptoms including irregular menstrual cycles, infertility, acne, obesity, hirsutism, insulin resistance,

and mood disturbances. The etiology of PCOS is multifactorial, involving genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors.

Modern medical management of PCOS focuses primarily on symptom suppression—using oral contraceptives for cycle regulation, anti-androgens for acne and hirsutism, and insulin sensitizers like metformin to manage insulin resistance. While effective in the short term, these treatments do not offer a long-term solution and may be accompanied by side effects, limited compliance, and recurrence after discontinuation. This has prompted increasing interest in holistic and integrative approaches that focus on root-cause correction and sustainable lifestyle changes.

In Ayurveda, PCOS does not appear as a single disease entity but aligns closely with conditions such as Aarthava Kshaya (diminished menstruation), Pushpaghni Jatharini (infertility due to uterine dysfunction), and Srotorodha (obstruction in bodily channels). These conditions are understood to be primarily due to an imbalance in Kapha and Vata doshas, impaired Agni (digestive/metabolic fire), and the accumulation of Ama (toxins), leading to hormonal and metabolic disturbances.

Ahara (diet) and Vihara (lifestyle) are two of the three foundational pillars of health in Ayurveda (along with Nidra or sleep). Proper dietary practices and lifestyle discipline are considered essential not only for disease treatment but also for prevention and promotion of reproductive and metabolic health. The concept of Pathya-Apathya (wholesome and unwholesome habits) is emphasized in every stage of Ayurvedic management. For chronic and lifestyle-related conditions like PCOS, correcting faulty dietary and lifestyle behaviors becomes a central therapeutic strategy.

This review focuses on evaluating the role of Ahara and Vihara in the prevention and management of PCOS, based on Ayurvedic principles and supported by observational clinical data. It aims to bridge traditional wisdom and modern needs, highlighting how personalized, mindful living can contribute to restoring hormonal balance, metabolic integrity, and psychological well-being in women with PCOS.

Aim:

- To review and assess the observational evidence on the effectiveness of Ayurvedic Ahara-Vihara in the prevention and management of PCOS.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To explore Ayurvedic principles related to Ahara and Vihara in relation to reproductive health.
- To identify specific dietary recommendations and lifestyle practices beneficial in PCOS.
- To evaluate the outcomes of observational and clinical case studies involving Ayurvedic interventions in PCOS.
- To assess the integration potential of Ayurvedic lifestyle in conventional PCOS management.
- Materials and Methods

Study Design:

This is a qualitative observational review based on secondary data from Ayurvedic texts, published clinical studies, case reports, and observational studies.

Data Sources:

Classical Ayurvedic texts (Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya)

Online databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, AYUSH Research Portal

Journals: Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine, International Journal of Ayurveda Research, Journal of Research in Ayurvedic Sciences

Understanding Ahara and Vihara in Ayurveda for PCOS

In Ayurveda, the foundation of health lies in maintaining equilibrium among the three Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—as well as the proper functioning of Agni (digestive fire), Dhatus (tissues), Malas (wastes), and Srotas (body channels). Ahara (diet) and Vihara (lifestyle) are integral to sustaining this internal balance and are considered two of the three fundamental pillars of life (Traya Upastambha), the third being Nidra (sleep).

In the context of PCOS, the disorder is viewed through the lens of vitiated Kapha and Vata, obstructed Artava Vaha Srotas (channels carrying menstrual blood and reproductive essence), and impaired Agni. These imbalances result in Srotorodha (obstruction of channels), Medo Dhatu Vriddhi (increase in adipose tissue/metabolic dysfunction), and Aarthava Kshaya (menstrual irregularity or suppression).

Ahara (Diet) and Its Role in PCOS Ayurvedic Viewpoint

According to classical Ayurvedic texts, Ahara is not merely food intake but a deeply individualized therapeutic tool. Food is considered the primary source of energy, tissue nourishment, immunity, and mental clarity. In the case of PCOS, improper dietary habits—such as excessive consumption of heavy, cold, oily, sweet, and processed foods—are seen to aggravate Kapha and lead to Ama formation, which in turn obstructs Srotas and disturbs reproductive functioning.

Dietary Principles in PCOS Management

Agni Deepana and Ama Pachana: Strengthening the digestive fire and eliminating toxins using light, warm, and easily digestible foods.

Kapha-Vata Shamana: Reducing heavy, mucus-forming foods that contribute to metabolic sluggishness and hormonal imbalance.

Medo Dhatu Management: Emphasis on fat metabolism with the help of Lekhana (scraping/reducing) and Ruksha (dry) properties.

Beneficial Ahara for PCOS

- Whole grains like millets (ragi, bajra), barley (yava) – enhance metabolism and reduce insulin resistance.
- Leafy greens, bitter vegetables – help detoxify the liver and reduce Pitta-Kapha accumulation.
- Spices like turmeric, ginger, cumin, cinnamon – stimulate Agni, support insulin function, and reduce inflammation.
- Light meals taken at regular intervals, with a focus on freshly prepared, seasonal, and Satvik (pure) foods.

Ahara Niyama (Dietary Conduct)

- Eating at regular times, avoiding overeating and emotional eating.
- Avoiding incompatible food combinations (Viruddha Ahara), such as milk with salty or sour foods.
- Avoiding snacking late at night and heavy meals post-sunset.

Vihara (Lifestyle) and Its Role in PCOS Ayurvedic Viewpoint

Vihara encompasses daily and seasonal routines, physical activity, mental behavior, environmental exposure, and social conduct. In PCOS, improper Vihara such as sedentary lifestyle, erratic sleep patterns, emotional stress, and lack of physical activity are considered key aggravating factors for Vata-Kapha imbalance and hormonal dysfunction.

Key Lifestyle Factors in PCOS Management Dinacharya (Daily Routine)

- Waking up before sunrise (Brahma Muhurta) to align with natural hormonal rhythms.
- Abhyanga (daily oil massage) with warm sesame oil or medicated oils to reduce Vata, improve lymphatic flow, and reduce stress.
- Regular bowel movements and detox practices like Gandusha (oil pulling), Nasya (nasal oil therapy) for systemic purification.

Vyayama (Exercise)

Ayurveda advocates moderate, regular exercise (Madhyama Vyayama) to promote Kapha reduction and Agni stimulation.

Specific yogic practices beneficial in PCOS:

Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose) – improves ovarian function.

Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) – enhances adrenal health and reduces stress.

Surya Namaskar – boosts metabolism and hormonal balance.

Nidra (Sleep Hygiene)

- Sleep is crucial for hormonal and metabolic repair. Ayurveda advises 7–8 hours of quality sleep at night.
- Avoiding day-time sleep and late-night activities helps maintain circadian and Kapha-Vata rhythm.

Pranayama and Meditation

Practices such as Anulom Vilom, Nadi Shodhana, and Bhramari help regulate the autonomic nervous system. Reduce cortisol levels, which are known to interfere with the reproductive hormone axis in PCOS.

Ritucharya (Seasonal Regimen)

Adapting diet and activity to seasonal changes helps prevent Dosha imbalances.

Detox routines during spring (Vasanta) and autumn (Sharad) seasons using Panchakarma or simple home

practices (like warm water fasting, herbal teas) are helpful in clearing Ama and restoring balance.

Integration of Ahara-Vihara with Modern PCOS Understanding

Modern research has begun to validate the effectiveness of many Ayurvedic dietary and lifestyle guidelines. For instance:

- Low glycemic, high-fiber diets, as advised in Ayurveda, are shown to improve insulin sensitivity.
- Yoga and mindfulness reduce stress hormones, enhance insulin function, and restore ovulatory cycles.
- Chronobiological eating and circadian-aligned sleep enhance metabolic and endocrine harmony.

Thus, Ahara and Vihara offer a highly personalized, root-cause-oriented, and non-pharmacological approach for managing PCOS in both preventive and therapeutic contexts.

PCOS and Its Ayurvedic Correlation

Ayurveda correlates PCOS with Aarthava Kshaya, Pushpaghni Jatharini, and Srotorodha.

The underlying pathophysiology involves Kapha-Vata imbalance, Medo Dhatu vitiation (lipid metabolism), and Agni dysfunction.

Ayurvedic management emphasizes Shodhana (detoxification), Shamana (pacification), and lifestyle correction.

Role of Ahara in PCOS Management

Diet, or Ahara, is considered the most critical factor in maintaining health and managing disease in Ayurveda. In the context of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), improper dietary habits—such as consumption of Guru (heavy), Snigdha (oily), Sheet (cold), and Madhura (sweet) foods—are seen to disturb Kapha and Medo Dhatu, leading to metabolic sluggishness, insulin resistance, and reproductive dysfunction.

Ayurveda teaches that food is not only a source of nutrition but also a form of medicine. Tailoring diet based on individual Prakriti (constitution), Vikriti (imbalance), season (Ritu), and digestive strength (Agni) is essential in the long-term management of PCOS.

Objectives of Dietary Intervention in PCOS

- Normalize Agni (digestive/metabolic fire)

- Eliminate Ama (toxins)
- Reduce Kapha-Meda accumulation
- Support hormonal balance and ovulation
- Promote healthy weight management
- Improve insulin sensitivity

Dietary Strategies in Ayurvedic PCOS Management
Deepana-Pachana (Agni Stimulation and Detoxification)

Foods and herbs that stimulate digestion help prevent the buildup of metabolic waste (Ama), a key contributor to hormonal imbalance.

Recommended: Ginger, black pepper, long pepper (Trikatu), cumin, ajwain, rock salt.

Preparation tips: Use takra (spiced buttermilk), warm water infused with lemon or ginger.

Kapha and Meda Shamana (Balancing Excess Kapha and Fat Tissue)

A PCOS-friendly Ayurvedic diet should have Laghu (light), Ruksha (dry), Tikta-Katu-Kashaya (bitter-pungent-astringent) foods to reduce Kapha and Medo Dhatu.

Recommended foods:

- Whole grains: Barley (Yava), millets (foxtail, finger millet), quinoa.
- Pulses: Mung dal, horse gram (Kulatha), lentils.
- Vegetables: Bitter melon, ridge gourd, bottle gourd, spinach, fenugreek, drumsticks.
- Fruits: Apples, berries, pomegranate, amla.
- To avoid: Refined carbohydrates, dairy (especially cold milk, cheese), red meat, deep-fried foods, sugary snacks, and bakery items.

Low Glycemic Index and Fiber-Rich Foods

Ayurveda does not use the term "glycemic index," but Madhura and Snigdha foods are avoided in Kapha disorders.

Modern correlation supports:

Inclusion of foods like oats, barley, green gram, flax seeds, chia seeds.

Avoidance of foods that spike insulin: white rice, white bread, refined flour.

Functional Foods and Herbs Beneficial in PCOS

Ayurveda uses food as medicine by incorporating herbs and spices with therapeutic benefits:

Herb/Spice	Ayurvedic Action	Modern Correlation	Suggested Use
Turmeric (Haridra)	Kapha-Shamaka, anti-inflammatory	Reduces insulin resistance, inflammation	Golden milk, teas
Cinnamon (Tvak)	Deepana, Medohara	Enhances insulin sensitivity	With herbal teas or on porridge
Fenugreek (Methi)	Balances blood sugar, reduces Kapha	Reduces insulin resistance, improves ovulation	Soaked seeds in the morning
Amla (Amalaki)	Rasayana, antioxidant	Enhances immunity, regulates hormones	Fresh juice or dried powder
Shatavari	Balances <i>Vata-Pitta</i> , nourishes reproductive tissue	Supports estrogen balance and ovulation	With milk or as a decoction

Timings, Quantity, and Eating Habits

Ayurveda emphasizes not just what we eat, but how and when we eat.

Meal Timing:

Main meal during midday (10 AM – 2 PM), when digestive fire (Pachaka Agni) is strongest.

Avoid heavy meals after sunset.

Maintain consistency in meal timing to support metabolic circadian rhythm.

Meal Quantity:

Meals should be satisfying but not heavy.

The stomach should be filled 1/3 with solid, 1/3 with liquid, and 1/3 left empty for proper digestion (Mitahara principle).

Mindful Eating Practices:

Eat without distractions.

Chew thoroughly to enhance Agni.

Avoid emotional eating; instead, cultivate Satvik (pure) food habits.

Seasonal and Prakriti-Based Dietary Adjustments

Kapha-Prone Individuals: More Ruksha and Katu-Tikta foods; avoid cold, heavy meals.

Vata-Prone Individuals: May need more grounding, warm, slightly unctuous foods to prevent Vata aggravation during detox or weight loss.

Pitta-Prone Individuals: Should avoid excessive spices and sour food that can aggravate heat and inflammation.

Seasonal Adjustments:

Spring (Kapha Season): Ideal for light detoxifying foods like barley soup, bitter greens.

Summer (Pitta Season): Favor cooling foods like coriander water, amla, mint.

Monsoon (Agni is weak): Simple, warm, digestible foods like khichdi with spices.

Sample Ayurvedic Daily Diet Plan for PCOS

Time	Meal	Example
Morning	Fasting drink	Warm water with lemon and ginger or fenugreek seed water
Breakfast	Light meal	Steamed vegetables + millet porridge with cinnamon
Mid-Morning	Herbal tea	Amla juice or coriander-cumin tea
Lunch	Main meal	Barley roti, sautéed bitter gourd, mung dal soup, buttermilk
Evening Snack	Light snack	Roasted flaxseeds or fresh fruit (apple/pomegranate)
Dinner	Lightest meal	Vegetable soup or khichdi with ghee and cumin

Role of Vihara in PCOS Management

In Ayurveda, Vihara refers to one’s daily behavior, routines, activities, rest, exercise, mental habits, and social interactions. It is considered a powerful tool to maintain Tridoshic balance, regulate Agni, and support optimal function of Dhatus (tissues), including Artava Dhatu (reproductive tissue). In the context of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), improper

lifestyle (Apathyavihara)—marked by a sedentary routine, stress, poor sleep hygiene, and disconnection from natural cycles—is regarded as a major causative factor.

By restoring healthy daily rhythms and seasonal alignment through Vihara, Ayurveda offers a holistic, non-pharmacological path to manage PCOS and enhance reproductive health.

Objectives of Ayurvedic Lifestyle in PCOS

- Balance Kapha and Vata doshas
- Regulate HPO (hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian) axis
- Improve insulin sensitivity and metabolism
- Reduce emotional and psychological stress
- Enhance ovarian function and menstrual regularity
- Promote sustainable physical and mental well-being
- Components of Vihara in PCOS Management

Dinacharya (Daily Routine)

Dinacharya provides a structured rhythm that aligns the body with nature’s cycles, enhancing hormonal regulation and metabolic stability.

Key practices for PCOS:

Brahma Muhurta (Waking Before Sunrise): Supports cortisol regulation, mental clarity, and hormonal alignment.

Jal Neti / Nasya: Clears sinus pathways, improves mental focus and sleep, and may reduce Kapha accumulation.

Abhyanga (Daily Oil Massage):

Warm oil massage with sesame or medicated oils (e.g., Kshirabala taila) calms Vata, nourishes tissues, improves circulation, and reduces stress.

Especially useful in reducing anxiety and promoting hormonal harmony.

Udvaltana (Dry Powder Massage):

Using herbal powders like Triphala churna or Kolakulathadi churna to reduce Kapha-Meda (fat accumulation) and improve lymphatic drainage.

Vyayama (Exercise)

Exercise (Vyayama) is essential for Kapha balance and Medo Dhatu regulation. In PCOS, regular moderate exercise enhances insulin sensitivity, supports weight management, and boosts mood.

Recommended Ayurvedic Guidelines:

Exercise should be moderate and consistent—not excessive, which can aggravate Vata.

Exercise should be stopped when the body starts sweating moderately or when 50% of energy is expended.

Effective forms for PCOS:

Yoga Asanas:

- Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose) – promotes ovarian health.
- Supta Baddha Konasana – relaxes pelvic region.
- Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) – stimulates adrenal and reproductive organs.
- Ustrasana (Camel Pose), Setu Bandhasana (Bridge Pose), and Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend).
- Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) – integrates movement, breath, and mindfulness to balance Vata and Kapha.
- Brisk Walking, Swimming, Dancing, or Cycling – done regularly.

Integration with Modern Lifestyles

Many Ayurvedic Vihara principles align with evidence-based lifestyle medicine:

Ayurvedic Concept	Modern Equivalent	Clinical Relevance in PCOS
<i>Dinacharya</i>	Circadian rhythm alignment	Improves hormonal and metabolic rhythm
<i>Abhyanga</i>	Self-care, massage therapy	Reduces anxiety, improves body image
<i>Vyayama</i>	Regular exercise	Weight loss, insulin sensitivity
<i>Pranayama</i>	Breathwork/stress management	Reduces cortisol, improves ovulation
<i>Nidra</i>	Sleep hygiene	Enhances reproductive hormone balance

Observational Evidence and Clinical Correlation

Several observational studies and case reports from Ayurvedic clinics suggest significant improvement in PCOS symptoms with:

- Reduction in BMI and waist-hip ratio.
- Regularization of menstrual cycles.
- Improved ovulation and fertility outcomes.
- Enhanced mental well-being and stress reduction.

Though controlled trials are limited, increasing anecdotal and clinical data support the integration of Ahara-Vihara in PCOS care.

Challenges and Considerations

- Individualization is key—diet/lifestyle must match Prakriti and disease stage.
- Lack of large-scale RCTs limits mainstream adoption.

- Requires patient commitment and long-term adherence.

III. DISCUSSION

The present review highlights the vital role of Ahara (diet) and Vihara (lifestyle) in the prevention and management of PCOS through an Ayurvedic lens. Modern approaches to PCOS largely revolve around symptomatic management—focusing on weight loss, insulin sensitizers, and hormonal regulation through medications. However, these often fall short in addressing the root cause, leading to recurrence or dependency.

Ayurveda emphasizes personalized, holistic, and preventive care by strengthening internal systems (Agni, Srotas) and correcting lifestyle habits. The reviewed observations show that regular implementation of appropriate dietary habits and lifestyle modifications in line with Ayurvedic principles can result in sustainable improvements in metabolic and reproductive parameters.

Mechanisms of Action

Dietary Influence (Ahara): The consumption of warm, light, and freshly prepared foods promotes Agni (digestive strength), reducing the formation of Ama (toxins). This directly contributes to lowering systemic inflammation—a major contributor to insulin resistance and hormonal imbalance in PCOS.

Lifestyle Modulation (Vihara): Practices like yoga, pranayama, Abhyanga, and a regulated daily routine help in harmonizing the circadian rhythm, reducing Vata-Kapha aggravation, and improving ovulatory function. Stress management further regulates the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian (HPO) axis, a key hormonal pathway disturbed in PCOS.

Weight and Metabolic Balance: A key goal in PCOS is weight control, which is shown to improve ovulation and insulin sensitivity. The Ayurvedic lifestyle—with regular movement, timely meals, and mindful practices—supports weight management without extreme dieting or exercise regimens.

Clinical Correlation

Although high-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are limited, the consistency in outcomes across various observational reports suggests that Ayurvedic lifestyle practices can play a meaningful role in PCOS

care. Women following these interventions reported improvements in menstrual regularity, reduction in hirsutism, and enhanced emotional well-being. Importantly, these interventions are generally free from adverse effects and can be sustained long term.

Integration Potential

Ayurvedic Ahara-Vihara practices are not only curative but also preventive, offering a framework that can be seamlessly integrated with conventional PCOS treatment. Especially in early or mild cases, or in women at risk (e.g., with irregular cycles or a family history), these lifestyle interventions can act as a first-line, non-invasive strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Ayurvedic concepts of Ahara and Vihara offer a holistic, preventive, and curative approach to PCOS. These interventions support metabolic, hormonal, and emotional health without side effects. While more clinical trials are needed, current observational evidence indicates that integrating these practices into modern care models can greatly enhance PCOS management.

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