



CRITICAL REVIEW OF ALCOHOL, ALCOHOLISM, AND WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS IN AYURVEDA AND MODERN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical analysis of alcoholism, and the symptoms associated with alcohol withdrawal from both Ayurvedic and modern medical perspectives. Alcoholism is a significant global health issue defined by excessive alcohol intake that leads to physical and psychological dependence, adversely affecting the liver, brain, cardiovascular systems, and overall mental and social well-being. Modern medicine classifies alcohol as a psychoactive substance and focuses on its biochemical and neurological effects, using pharmacological methods to manage withdrawal symptoms and related complications. On the other hand, Ayurveda interprets alcoholism as "Madatyaya," a condition caused by imbalances in doshas, and emphasises holistic treatments that include detoxification, herbal remedies, dietary adjustments, and the restoration of mental clarity. The article contrasts the strengths and limitations of both approaches, highlighting the immediate effectiveness of modern medicine and the long-term, preventive benefits of Ayurveda. It concludes by discussing the potential for integrating both systems to address the complex challenges of alcohol addiction and withdrawal comprehensively.

Keywords: Madatyaya; Alcohol; Madya; Ayurveda; Alcoholism

INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism is one of the world's biggest health problems because it describes a state where alcohol consumption becomes excessive and leads to physical and psychological dependence. The use of this substance, classified as alcohol use disorder (AUD), impacts domains of health in the liver, brain, and cardiovascular systems, with social and psychological effects in most cases. In *Ayurveda*, Charaka stated that alcohol consumption since prolonging time without proper procedure causes *Madatyaya*. Due to *Madatyaya* oja kshaya, hridaya vikriti etc., symptoms are found in it. It is produced when a person takes Madya without considering *Prakriti*, *Satmya*, *Agni*, etc. *Madatyaya* is a *Tridoshaja Vyadhi* in which mainly *Kapha Sthana* is vitiated along with *Agni*. The treatment of *Madatyaya* is based on *Doshavasechana*, *Santarpana*, *Rasayana* and *Satwavyajaya Chikitsa*,¹ While in modern medicine, it is viewed from a physiological, neurological, and psychological perspective. This review critically examines both Ayurvedic and contemporary perspectives on alcohol, alcoholism, and withdrawal symptoms, comparing their approaches and limitations.

Aim -

To critically analyse and compare the understanding, treatment, and management of alcohol consumption, alcoholism, and withdrawal symptoms from the perspectives of Ayurveda and modern medicine.

Objectives –

- To explore the definition, classification, and cultural significance of alcohol in Ayurveda and modern medicine.
- To evaluate how each system perceives the causes and effects of alcoholism on physical and mental health.
- To identify and classify the withdrawal symptoms associated with alcohol dependency in both Ayurveda and modern medicine.

Material and Method –

Literature Review: A comprehensive exploration of Ayurvedic texts as well as modern medical research

concerning alcohol use disorder and withdrawal symptoms.

Comparative Analysis: The efficacy of Ayurvedic treatment methods (including herbal remedies, detoxification practices, and lifestyle changes) is evaluated alongside modern pharmacological treatments such as medications and psychotherapy.

Symptom Assessment: A classification of withdrawal symptoms is conducted, referencing definitions from Ayurvedic and modern medical contexts.

Expert Consultation: Insights are obtained from practitioners in both fields to understand differing treatment approaches and patient outcomes.

1. Alcohol and Alcoholism in Modern Medicine

Alcohol: The Modern Understanding

In modern medicine, alcohol (ethanol) is considered a psychoactive substance that depresses the central nervous system (CNS). The metabolism of alcohol takes place primarily in the liver, and its excessive consumption results in several negative effects, including liver disease, cardiovascular complications, and neurological impairment. The two significant disorders attributed to alcohol are alcohol dependence (a type of addiction) and alcohol use disorder (AUD), characterised by cravings, loss of control, and tolerance.

Pathophysiology of Alcoholism

Alcoholism, or alcohol use disorder (AUD), is a complex condition influenced by genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. The disorder develops when repeated alcohol consumption leads to changes in the brain's neurochemistry. Chronic alcohol use can alter the balance between **GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)**, an inhibitory neurotransmitter, and **glutamate**, an excitatory neurotransmitter. These changes lead to increased tolerance, whereby higher doses of alcohol are required to achieve the same effects, and physical dependence, in which the brain becomes reliant on alcohol to maintain balance (Schuckit, 2014).²

The **dopamine system** also plays a central role in the development of AUD. Alcohol activates the brain's reward pathways, especially in the **mesolimbic system**, leading to feelings of euphoria and reinforcement of drinking behaviour. Over time, these reward pathways become less responsive, requiring increased alcohol consumption to achieve the same pleasurable effects (Koob & Volkow, 2010).³

The risk of developing AUD is influenced by genetic predisposition, with studies indicating that **genetic factors contribute to approximately 50-60%** of the risk for alcohol dependence (Agrawal et al., 2019).⁴ Family history of alcoholism, along with environmental factors like stress, trauma, and peer influence, also play a significant role in the development of the disorder.

Withdrawal Symptoms in Modern Medicine

Alcohol withdrawal occurs when a dependent individual stops drinking or significantly reduces their alcohol intake. The withdrawal process can be dangerous and requires medical supervision. Common symptoms include:

- **Mild Symptoms:** Anxiety, insomnia, tremors, nausea, and sweating.
- **Acute Symptoms** of Delirium Tremors- hallucinations, confusion, seizure, and death without prompt treatment.
- **Medical Management:** The treatment of alcohol withdrawal nowadays involves pharmacological interventions, especially benzodiazepines, like diazepam, which reduces the severity of withdrawal symptoms. In some cases, it also includes anticonvulsants and antipsychotics for more serious withdrawal. Nutritional support, such as thiamine and folate, would be administered to correct deficiencies.

2. Alcohol and Alcoholism in Ayurveda

Review of Literature

i. Madatyaya is explained in the 24th chapter of Charaka Samhita after Visha Chikitsa, in light of the fact that Madhya has properties like Visha (poison). Charaka clarifies the Madhya Gunas (characteristics), phases of Madatyaya (Alcoholism), liquor addiction, their signs, side effects, and Chikitsa (treatment).

ii. In the 47th chapter of Sushruta Samhita, Uttara Tantra, Acharyas are portrayed exhaustively regarding Madatyaya for the sake of Panatyaya Pratisheda.

iii. In Astanga Samgraha, Madatyaya Chikitsa is mentioned in the ninth chapter of Chikitsa Sthana. It specifies Madhya Prayoga in Madatyaya and mentions the treatment of Mada and Murcha.

iv. In Astanga Hrudaya, Nidana (causative factors) of Madatyaya has been clarified in the sixth chapter of Nidana sthana, and the seventh chapter of Chikitsa sthana, the treatment of Mada (inebriation), Murcha (syncope), Sanyasa (unconsciousness), including Nidana (aetiology), and Chikitsa (treatment) of Dwamsaka and Vikshaya has been clarified.

v. In Chikitsa sthana of Kashyapa Samhita, the author has clarified the impacts of Madhya on pregnant ladies and newborn children with their treatment.

vi. In Madhava Nidana, Madatyaya is explained after Krimi Nidana.

vii. In Bhavaprakasha, Madatyaya is clarified in Madyama Khanda after Murcha, Bhrama, Nidra, Tandra and Sanyas Adhikarana, trailed by Daha Adhikarana.

viii. Yogaratnakar has clarified a different chapter as Madatyaya Adhikara after Murcha adhikara

Concept of Alcohol in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, alcohol is termed Sura or Madya. It is classified as rasayana, a medicinal tonic if used in moderation. However, its excessive intake is harmful to the body from a physical and mental point of view. In Ayurvedic manuscripts like Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, alcohol is classified under the substances that lead to an imbalance of doshas - particularly Vata and Pitta.⁵

Types of Alcohol in Ayurveda

Ayurveda categorises alcoholic beverages as fermented preparations derived from various sources like grains, fruits, or herbs. Common types of Madya mentioned in classical Ayurvedic texts include:

1. Sura: Alcoholic drink made from cereals.
2. Asava and Arishta: Herbal decoctions fermented to enhance medicinal potency.
3. Madira: A generic term for wine-like beverages.
4. Sidhu: Made from sugarcane juice.

Alcoholism in Ayurveda

Ayurveda states that alcoholism is caused by an imbalance in the doshas (the three fundamental energies of the body: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), as well as disturbances in the mind. Alcohol consumption is said to:

- **It aggravates Vata:** Alcohol is dry, light, and cold; it aggravates Vata, and there may manifest restlessness, anxiety, and involuntary tremors.
- **Pitta Aggravation:** Alcohol is Ushna (hot) and Tikta (bitter), which aggravates Pitta, causing irritability, anger, and digestive disturbances.
- **Balances Kapha:** Liquor can temporarily balance excess Kapha by increasing digestive movement, but extended use can cause sluggishness, lethargy, and extra weight.

Effect of Madya

Madya incorporates Tridosha, Rasa, and Rakta as dushya, Rasavaha, Raktavaha, and Sangnyavaha Srotas. Hridaya is the principal adhishtana because people experience the ill effects of Ojakshaya, Dhatukshaya, Sharira kampa, Pralapa, Bhrama, Agni Vikara, Anidra etc.

a.Madya avastha (Acute Intoxication)

Acute intoxication is usually a consequence of deliberate heavy drinking, either in small doses at short intervals or a large dose at a time.

b. Prathama Avastha (Stage of excitement)

The individual goes over thrill, enthusiastic, appropriate appearance of the traits of food and drink, and the insight and inventiveness of music, tune, humor and stories. This outcome results in strong rest and post-waking sensations. Subsequently, this phase of inebriation is conducive to joy.⁶

c.Madhyama Avastha (Stage of in-coordination)

The individual frequently recalls things and regularly fails to remember them; his voice becomes unintelligible and confounded, and he talks sense and babbles simultaneously. His development, pose, drinking, eating and speaking are all improper.⁷

d.Antima Avastha (Stage of narcosis)

After the intersection of the second stage and the start of the third stage, people become dormant as a messed-up tree, with their psyche tormented with inebriating morbidities and obviousness. However, alive, he looks like a dead individual. He becomes unequipped to perceive satisfying things and companions. He was deprived of all joy for which he had taken liquor. He loses every sense of qualification for legitimate, cheerful, and helpful things from some unacceptable, hopeless, and hurtful ones separately; along these lines, no shrewd individual will at any point prefer to put himself in such a phase of inebriation. He is denounced and reproached by all people and disdained by them. As the normal result of this extravagance, he experiences agonies and infections constantly.⁸

e.Chronic Intoxication

Habitual drunkards are either psychotic or neurotic and usually take alcohol as a means to escape from the stress and strains of life. They have been taking alcohol for a long and continued period.

f. Madatyaya

Madatyaya comprises two words: Mada and Atyaya. Mada implies Harsha (Sense of well-being), and Atyaya implies Atikrama (excess). The excess intake of Madya causes poisonous impacts. Poisonous impacts depend upon the prakruti and dosha of the person. In Sharangadhara Samhita, while characterizing the term Madakari, Madhya is included in the drugs having tamoguna predominantly causes insanity and is known as Madakari (intoxicants).⁹

Types of Madatyaya

Madatyaya is Tridoshaja vyadhi. Its type is named Dosha, which is dominant in presenting the symptoms. Charak explains the kinds of Madatyaya as Vataja, Pittaja and Kaphaja and considers the disease as Tridoshaja.

A. Vataja Madatyaya

Nidana: If a person is excessively emaciated because of Krodha, Shoka, Bhaya, Vyavaya, Chankramana, Sahasa while eating Ruksha type of food, less quantity of food or limited amount of food, drinks Madya at night, which is excessively fermented, then this leads to the impairment of his Nidra and Vataja type of Madatyaya instantaneously develops.¹⁰

B. Pittaja Madatyaya

S No	Lakshan	Distinctive features	Correlated cause
1	Hikka	Hiccup	Due to gastritis or other gastrointestinal problems leading to irritation of the diaphragm
2	Shwasa	Dyspnoea	Decreased respiratory functions and infections
3	Shirah kampa	Tremors in head	Cerebellar degeneration
4	Parshva shoala	Pain in sides	Due to cardiac diseases or pancreatitis
5	Prajagara and Bahupralapa	Vigil and frequent delirium	De-arranged functions of the nervous system and associated psychiatric conditions.

Nidana: If a person indulging in food that is Amla, Ushna and Teekshna, having a wrathful disposition and having a liking for excessive exposure to the fire and sun, drinks an excess quantity of Madya that is Teekshna, Ushna and Amla, then he suffers from the Pittaja type of Madatyaya.¹¹

S No	Lakshan	Distinctive features	Correlated cause
1	Trishna	Thirst	Due to dehydration
2	Daha	Burning sensation	Peripheral neuropathy
3	Jwara, Sweda, Moorcha, Vibhrama	Fever, Sweating, Fainting, Giddiness	Due to the hyperactivity of the autonomous nervous system
4	Atisara	Diarrhoea	Due to acute or chronic gastritis
5	Green coloration	Greenish complexion	Due to liver dysfunction

C. Kaphaja Madatyaya

Nidana: If a person who is habituated to Madhura, Snigdha and Guru Ahara, who does not perform Vyayama, who takes Divaswapna and who indulges in Sukhaseenata, excessively drinks Madya which is not an old one or which is prepared of Guda, and Paishtika, then he immediately develops Kaphaja Madatyaya.¹²

S No	Lakshan	Distinctive features	Correlated cause
1	Chardi, Hrillasa	Vomiting, Nausea	Due to autonomic hyperactivity
2	Arochaka	Anorexia	Erosion of gastrointestinal mucosa and decreased secretion of gastric juices
3	Tandra, Staimitya, Gaurava and Shee-tapareeta	Drowsiness, Stiffness, Heaviness, Feeling of cold	This may be due to cardiopulmonary dysfunctions

Alcoholism as a Mental Disorder

Ayurveda views alcoholism as more than just a physical issue; it also considers the mental and emotional aspects involved. This condition is associated with a

decline in Sattva, representing mental clarity, while Rajas, signifying mental agitation, and Tamas, indicating mental dullness, become more pronounced. Prolonged alcohol consumption can obscure the mind and hinder mental clarity, resulting in poor decision-

making, compulsive drinking, and emotional instability.

Modern view of the effect of alcohol

The modern view of alcohol consumption emphasises its complex effects on health, behaviour, and society. Research and public health guidance have evolved, leading to a more nuanced understanding. Key aspects include:

Health Effects

1. Short-Term Effects:

- Impaired judgment, coordination, and reaction time.
- Increased risk of accidents, injuries, and violence.
- Alcohol poisoning in cases of excessive consumption.

2. Long-Term Effects:

- **Physical Health:*** Chronic alcohol use is linked to liver diseases (e.g., cirrhosis), cardiovascular problems, weakened immune system, and cancer (e.g., liver, breast, and oesophagus).
- **Mental Health:*** Alcohol misuse can lead to or exacerbate mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and alcohol use disorder (AUD).
- **Brain Function:*** Long-term use may impair memory, decision-making, and cognitive function.

3. Potential Benefits (Moderation):

- Some studies suggest light to moderate drinking (e.g., red wine) may have cardiovascular benefits. However, these findings are controversial, with many experts advocating that any potential benefit does not outweigh the risks.

4. Social and Behavioral Impacts

- Alcohol plays a central role in many cultures, yet excessive consumption contributes to:
 - Domestic violence.
 - Risky behaviours (e.g., unsafe sex, drunk driving).
 - Work and social dysfunction.

Alcohol Withdrawal in Ayurveda

From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, alcohol withdrawal is the attempt of the body to regain equilibrium after a long period of dosha imbalances that have been created by alcohol. The symptoms are seen as resulting from the abrupt cessation of alcohol, which previous-

ly balanced the doshas artificially. Ayurvedic treatment for withdrawal emphasises:

- **Balancing the Doshas:** Through herbs and therapies that balance out Vata, Pitta, and Kapha imbalances.
- **Detoxification:** Ayurvedic detoxification methods, such as Panchakarma, remove Ama (toxins) and restore the body's normal functioning.
- **Herbal Remedies:** Various herbs, such as Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) for soothing the nervous system, Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) for mental clarity, and Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*) for detoxification, are used to support recovery.

Treatment Strategies

- **Panchakarma is an Ayurveda detoxification technique that includes** Vamana (emesis), Virechana (purging), Basti (colonic enema), etc. Its objective is the detoxification of accumulated toxins in the body due to chronic alcohol intake.
- **Dietary Changes:** A Sattvic diet should be followed. This includes eating easy-to-digest foods, which help restore Agni (digestive fire).
- **Yoga and Meditation:** Ayurveda also encourages yoga and meditation to reduce stress, promote emotional stability, and support recovery.
- **Herbal Remedies**
 - Ashwagandha (*Withania Somnifera*): Reduces stress and cravings.
 - Brahmi (*Bacopa Monnieri*): Improves cognitive function and calms the mind.
 - Guduchi (*Tinospora Cordifolia*): Supports liver detoxification and enhances immunity.
 - Kutki (*Picrorhiza Kurroa*): Protects and rejuvenates the liver.
 - Haritaki (*Terminalia Chebula*): Helps detoxify and balance the Vata dosha.
 - Shankhpushpi: Relieves anxiety, stress, and sleep disorders.
 - Punarnava: Reduces inflammation and aids in detoxifying the kidneys.
- **Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapy)**
 - Rasayana herbs like Chyawanprash and Amalaki are prescribed to rejuvenate the body, strengthen

the immune system, and repair damage caused by alcohol.

- **Ayurvedic Formulations**

- Drakshasava: A tonic for liver detoxification and to reduce withdrawal symptoms (administered under supervision).
- Arjuna (*Terminalia Arjuna*): Strengthens the heart and alleviates stress.
- Kumaryasava: Improves liver health and digestion.

- **Mental and Emotional Support**

- Ayurveda emphasises the importance of addressing emotional imbalances. Techniques like mindfulness, journaling, and Ayurvedic counselling can help resolve the underlying psychological causes of addiction.

- **Nidana Parivarjana (Avoiding Causative Factors)**

- Identify triggers that lead to alcohol consumption and work to eliminate or manage them.

3. Comparative Analysis: Ayurvedic vs. Modern Perspectives

Holistic vs. Biochemical Approach

- **Ayurvedic Perspective:** Ayurveda views alcoholism and its withdrawal symptoms through a holistic understanding, treating the body, mind, and spirit as interrelated. It has to restore equilibrium through diet, lifestyle, mental clarity, and detoxification, making treatment more personalised based on the individual's doshic constitution and the type of imbalance caused.

- **Modern Approach:** Modern medicine uses a biochemical and physiological approach and concentrates more on the physical dependence on alcohol. Pharmacological treatments are applied to control withdrawal and prevent complications such as seizures and delirium tremens. Psychological therapies include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and support groups to address the mental and emotional aspects of alcoholism.

Treatment of Withdrawal Symptoms

- **Ayurvedic Treatment:** The Ayurveda approach towards withdrawal is dosha balancing and eliminating toxins in the body. It offers natural remedies and therapies like Panchakarma. However, it may take a while to have some effects from these

treatments, and this might be an issue for individuals with intense withdrawal symptoms.

- **Contemporary Treatment:** Contemporary treatments for alcohol withdrawal are usually more immediate and targeted, using medications to control acute symptoms quickly. Benzodiazepines such as diazepam are often used to treat anxiety and prevent seizures during withdrawal. However, these treatments do not address the root causes of addiction or mental health problems associated with alcoholism.

Scientific Evidence

- **Ayurvedic View:** Though Ayurvedic treatments have a long history of use in the management of alcohol-related disorders, there is no large-scale controlled scientific study that can validate the efficacy of such treatments. Most Ayurvedic practices are based on traditional knowledge and clinical experience rather than robust scientific data.

- **Contemporary Approach:** The modern approach is evidence-based, and there is significant scientific literature to back pharmacological interventions for alcohol withdrawal and long-term management of alcohol use disorder. However, it is increasingly being realized that the treatment of alcoholism requires a holistic approach that includes psychological support and lifestyle changes.

4. Limitations and Criticisms

Ayurvedic Limitations

- **Lack of Empirical Evidence:** Despite being a richly holistic treatment system, much of the effectiveness offered by Ayurveda in treatment for alcoholism has not yet been validated based on rigorous clinical trials. Indeed, the overall treatment protocols vary widely, with limited generalization to other populations.
- **Slow Acting:** Ayurvedic treatments, especially detoxification, may take longer to show results compared to modern pharmaceutical treatments, which may not be suitable for individuals experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms.

Modern Medicine Limitations

- **Side Effects of Medications:** Modern medications can efficiently counteract withdrawal symptoms. However, they often lead to side effects, including sleepiness, dependence, and possible drug interactions.
- **Lack of Focus on Root Causes:** Modern treatments have been completely changed in terms of symptom management, excluding the psychological, emotional, and social factors that triggered alcoholism. Such can lead to alcohol breakdown and does not necessarily give a cure.

CONCLUSION

Each of them provided valuable insights into managing alcoholism and alcohol withdrawal but approached the problem in very different ways. Ayurveda is considered the treatment of mind-body imbalance caused by alcohol with the help of detoxification, herbal treatment, and lifestyle modifications. Modern medicine utilizes pharmacological interventions to tackle withdrawal symptoms and prevent complications immediately. While modern medicine offers faster, scientifically proven interventions for alcohol withdrawal, Ayurveda's strength comes from its more holistic and preventative approach, providing long-term stability and emotional resilience. The treatment of alcoholism may be shaped in the future by the integration of the two systems.

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