



THE CONCEPT OF SROTAS IN AYURVEDA STRUCTURE, FUNCTION, AND CLINICAL RELEVANCE

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, Srotas are essential physiological channels that manage the movement of various substances throughout the body. They are vital for maintaining homeostasis, aiding nutrition, and eliminating waste. Detailed in traditional Ayurvedic literature, these complex channels transport essential bodily elements, including Prana (life energy), Rasa (plasma), Rakta (blood), and other significant components. Each Srotas has a designated origin, route, and opening, all contributing to the body's overall physiological harmony. A thorough understanding of the Srotas system is crucial for accurate Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment, as health issues can occur when these channels are blocked, excessively active, or misaligned. Dysfunction of the Srotas can result in various health problems, including metabolic disorders, circulatory complications, and digestive issues. Ayurvedic treatment strategies, such as Panchakarma, herbal remedies, and lifestyle changes, focus on preserving the integrity and functionality of these channels. This article delves into the structural and functional characteristics of Srotas, their categorisation, and their importance in both health and disease contexts. Furthermore, it discusses the clinical significance of Srotas in developing diseases and their involvement in diagnostic and therapeutic approaches, offering insights into Ayurveda's comprehensive strategy for promoting health and wellness.

Keywords: Srotas, Channel, Sharira marga, Clinical relevance of srotas.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the time-honoured science dedicated to health and well-being, highlights the significance of Srotas, the channels within the body that are crucial for sustaining physiological balance. 'Srotas' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Sru,' which translates to 'to flow.' These channels function as pathways for the movement of nutrients, the elimination of waste products, and the transmission of biological signals, all of which are vital for the body to operate effectively. Srotas play a key role in upholding the physiological harmony of Doshas (functional bio-elements), Dhatus (tissues), and Malas (waste products).¹

Traditional Ayurvedic literature, notably the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, provides comprehensive insights into the significance of Srotas in terms of both wellness and illness. Each specific Srotas is characterised by a distinct configuration, source, and route through which particular substances flow. Any disturbances within these channels may lead to health issues, thereby requiring specific therapeutic strategies. Ayurvedic methodologies emphasise the importance of cleansing, revitalising, and preserving the health of these pathways to avert the advancement of ailments.² The concept of Srotas extends beyond mere gross anatomical structures; it also includes microcirculation, neural pathways, and biochemical transport processes. Investigating Srotas yields valuable knowledge about various systemic functions, including digestion, circulation, respiration, metabolism, and excretion. In Ayurveda, recognising and addressing dysfunctions within Srotas leads to preventive and curative health strategies.³

Recent research developments draw connections between the Ayurvedic notion of Srotas and the physiological and biochemical processes acknowledged in modern medicine. This comprehensive integration offers an expanded view of disease mechanisms and improves therapeutic results. Consequently, the idea of Srotas functions as a link between ancient knowledge and current medical in-

sights, rendering it a crucial component of Ayurvedic practice.⁴

Structure of Srotas

Srotas are complex channels found in both macroscopic and microscopic dimensions. According to the Charaka Samhita, these hollow pathways enable the movement of different substances within the body. They are categorised according to their anatomical location, origin, and purpose. Structurally, srotas resemble blood vessels, lymphatic systems, ducts, and cellular transport mechanisms, as understood in contemporary science.⁵

Classification of Srotas

According to Ayurveda, Srotas are classified into three primary categories:

- Bahya Srotas (External Channels): These include respiratory passages, sweat glands, and excretory ducts.
- Abhyantara Srotas (Internal Channels): These include digestive, circulatory, and nervous channels.
- Madhyama Srotas (Intermediate Channels) link external and internal pathways, ensuring proper physiological exchange.

Every Srotas possesses its own Moola, or root, Marga, meaning path, and Mukha, which refers to the opening. For instance, the Pranavaha Srotas—these respiratory channels emanate from the heart and lungs. They weave through the trachea and bronchi before finally opening up at the nostrils.

Function of Srotas

The primary function of Srotas is to transport essential nutrients and eliminate waste. Key functions include:

- Pranavaha Srotas: Regulate respiration and oxygenation.
- Annavaha Srotas: Control digestion and nutrient absorption.
- Rasavaha Srotas: Circulate plasma and lymph.
- Raktavaha Srotas: Transport oxygen and nourishment via blood.

- Mamsavaha Srotas: Distribute muscle tissues and repair mechanisms.
- Medovaha Srotas: Regulate fat metabolism.
- Asthivaha Srotas: Support bone nourishment and integrity.
- Majjavaha Srotas: Maintain nervous function and bone marrow circulation.
- Shukravaha Srotas: Control reproductive function and vitality.
- Mutravaha Srotas: Manage urinary excretion.
- Purishavaha Srotas: Regulate faecal elimination.
- Swedavaha Srotas: Facilitate sweating and thermoregulation.

Clinical Relevance of Srotas

In Ayurvedic diagnostics, evaluating Srotas is essential for identifying the underlying causes of illnesses. The condition of Srotas is examined in terms of their openness, blockage, and operational efficiency. Dysfunction within these channels can result in systemic imbalances and contribute to various health issues. The primary pathological conditions related to Srotas include:

Srotorodha (Obstruction of Channels): This accumulates toxins (Ama) and contributes to diseases such as atherosclerosis, renal calculi, and digestive blockages.

Atipravrutti (Excessive Flow): This condition manifests as conditions like diarrhoea, polyuria, and excessive sweating, and it is often linked to imbalances in Pitta and Vata Doshas.

Sanga (Blockage due to Stagnation): Causes circulatory issues, metabolic disorders, and impaired digestion, leading to chronic ailments such as diabetes and obesity.

Vimarga Gamana (Diversion of Flow): Results in conditions like varicose veins, fistulas, and ectopic manifestations of bodily fluids.

Modern Correlation and Research

Recently, researchers have delved into the relationship between Ayurvedic Srotas and various physiological systems, including the cardiovascular network, lymphatic drainage, and the gastrointestinal tract. Their findings suggest that Ayurvedic detoxification methods, particularly Panchakarma, can sub-

stantially positively influence metabolic and circulatory health, reinforcing their role in managing chronic illnesses. Investigations have revealed that certain practices, like Abhyanga—an oil massage designed for therapeutic purposes—and Swedana, which involves induced sweating, can improve microcirculation and promote lymphatic drainage. This aligns with contemporary views on detoxification and waste elimination from the body.⁶

In the realm of health, the interconnectedness between stress, emotional well-being, and the integrity of Srotas has emerged as a significant area of focus. Scholars in psychosomatic medicine have uncovered similarities with Ayurvedic traditions, revealing how mental stress often leads to various physical ailments, including blockages within the body's systems, metabolic disruptions, and even cardiovascular issues. Interestingly, practices like meditation, Pranayama—an art of regulating breath—and yoga, foundational to Ayurveda, have proven effective in enhancing circulation and nurturing overall systemic health. This narrative illuminates the profound impact of mental and emotional states on our physical well-being and highlights the importance of holistic practices in achieving harmony within the body.⁷

Research into herbal remedies traditionally employed for Srotas-related conditions has uncovered their pharmacological benefits. Guggulu, for instance, has demonstrated lipid-lowering and anti-inflammatory effects, which support its function in promoting the health of Raktavaha and Medovaha Srotas. Likewise, Triphala has been acknowledged for its beneficial effects on digestion and detoxification, emphasising its relevance in addressing disorders associated with Annavaha and Purishavaha Srotas.⁸

Additional interdisciplinary research that combines Ayurveda with contemporary medical sciences is essential to confirm and build upon these findings. Advanced imaging technologies and biomolecular studies will enable a more thorough understanding of the physiological mechanisms of Srotas and their significance in disease prevention and treatment.⁹

Role of Srotas in Ayurvedic Treatment

The management of Srotas-related disorders involves:

- Shodhana (Purification Therapies): Includes Panchakarma therapies like Vamana (emesis), Virechana (purgation), and Basti (enema) to cleanse obstructed Srotas.
- Shamana (Palliative Treatments): Utilize herbal formulations like Trikatu, Guggulu, and Triphala to restore normal flow.
- Rasayana Therapy: Rejuvenative treatments to strengthen and maintain Srotas integrity.

DISCUSSION

The notion of Srotas offers an insightful view of health and illness by connecting different physiological functions through complex channels. Ayurvedic experts have historically underscored the significance of preserving the integrity of these channels to promote overall well-being. Compared to contemporary medical practices, Srotas can be likened to anatomical and physiological systems like blood vessels, lymphatics, and the nervous system. This relationship underscores the profound understanding of systemic functions found in ancient Ayurvedic teachings.¹⁰ In the realm of health and well-being, research and clinical observations reveal a compelling narrative: interventions rooted in Srotas, such as detoxification and rejuvenation therapies, hold the potential to enhance metabolic function and enrich tissue nourishment markedly. As the principles of Ayurveda find their place within the sphere of integrative medicine, the spotlight shines on Srotas-related treatments. These approaches have begun to yield hopeful outcomes in the battle against chronic diseases, encompassing a range of issues from cardiovascular concerns to metabolic challenges and digestive disorders.¹¹ While the idea of Srotas holds great importance, it is clear that more scientific validation is needed through research that spans various disciplines. By examining the biochemical and physiological similarities between Srotas and contemporary medical notions, we can better understand how Ayurvedic practices function. Moreover, conducting clinical studies that assess

the effectiveness of therapies grounded in Srotas could play a key role in integrating these ancient methods into modern healthcare practices.¹²

CONCLUSION

Srotas are a crucial component of Ayurvedic physiology, supporting circulation and metabolic processes. When Srotas are compromised, it can result in various health issues, underscoring their significance in diagnosing and treating diseases. Ayurvedic practices that emphasise the care and purification of Srotas are beneficial for promoting overall wellness. Additional studies that combine Ayurvedic concepts with modern medical insights are essential for deepening our comprehension of Srotas and their implications in present-day healthcare. By merging ancient knowledge with contemporary scientific progress, Ayurveda's holistic methodology continues to provide essential perspectives on disease prevention and health enhancement.

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