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# Cure of Depression through Ayurveda

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## ABSTRACT

Depression is a mental health disorder that remains widespread yet profoundly underestimated. Many people feel anxiety and pressure from society, and over time, they may adapt to those struggles -normalising them instead of seeking help. Living with such emotional pain becomes the norm, even though mental health issues deserve acknowledgement, care, and compassion.

An excess of mental stress is one of the foremost cause of it, which leads to anxiety or melancholy. The stress is our body's natural reaction to a situation that makes us feel endangered. Moreover, a variety of physiologic imbalances and environmental factors can combine to cause depression. Since our mental and external environments constantly reflect one another, it's more likely a combination.

It's time to acknowledge this depression as a serious medical condition that requires professional assistance.

'*Vishada* and *Avsada*' – The ancient terms for stress are closely related to depression in Ayurveda. It provides a comprehensive and all-natural remedy for depression.

Ayurveda believes that there are 3 primary pillars of life, which are mind, body and soul. Similarly, there are 3 folds of treatment, to treat an individual, i.e., spiritual, rational and psychic therapy, which are being advocated to treat physical illness as well as mental illness like depression, epilepsy and insomnia, etc. This treatment involves balancing the *Sharirik* and *Mansik Dosha* of the person, along with meditation, spiritual knowledge, and enhancing memory and patience.

Simultaneously, spiritual activities are also employed to balance the *Tamas* and *Rajas*, which come under the *Physic Dosha*. The numerous references of depression and its management as described in the *Ayurvedic* literature are compiled in this paper.

**Key Words** *Depression, Vishada, Avsada*

Received 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025 Accepted 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025 Published 10<sup>th</sup> November 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental sentiments of human existence are called emotions. Mental illness may be indicated when a person's emotions, thoughts, or behaviours consistently cause distress or disrupt daily functioning. It's natural to feel sad or down sometimes, but if it persists day after day, it may indicate depression. A collection of mental

illnesses known as depression has a complex neurobiology, intricate genetics, and many etiologies. It is a type of psychiatric disorder that is persistent in nature. Any stressful life event is regarded as the first indication of stress, and depression is sometimes misunderstood as a stress-related illness. An individual suffering from depression may find it difficult to be

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productive, enjoyable, and intimate. Sleep problems, such as decreased slow wave sleep (SWS), increased rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, and shorter REM sleep latency, are common in the majority of patients with depression. Biological and environmental factors also have an impact on depression.

Globally, depression is a common illness, with an estimated 350 million people affected, according to the WHO. It accounts for a significant portion of the global burden of disease. It is estimated that 1 million people die each year from depression-related causes<sup>1</sup>. Recognising the seriousness of mental health issues, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has introduced “The Mental Health Action Plan” and celebrates “World Mental Health Day” on October 10 of every year.

Depression is closely related to two Ayurvedic illnesses – *Vishada* and *Avsada*.

*Acharya Dalhan* says it's a disorder that starts with the fear of failing and ends with the mind and soul not being able to function properly. Factors like *Mansik dosha*, *Gyanendriya*, *Karmendriya*, *Agni*, *Ojas*, *Satva*, *Bala*, *Dhatu*, *Strotas*, and *Sharir dosha* can cause depression. Life is supported by three fundamental pillars: the mind, body and soul. Thus, maintaining equilibrium among all these interconnected elements of life is essential for a healthy, radiant existence and any imbalance in one of them might cause a healthy life to be disrupted.

*Ayurveda* regards the mind as the master of the body. This perspective is reflected in concepts

such as the psychological interpretation of the universe's evolution, the principles of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (both bodily and mental), and the recognition of psychosomatic factors in the origin and expression of different diseases. These foundations emphasize the vital role of the mind–body relationship in understanding health and disease.

## ETIOLOGY

According to *Ayurveda*, *Acharya Charaka* in *Sharira Sthana* Chapter One identifies *Upadha* (unfulfilled desires) as a major cause of both physical and psychological pain and disturbances. He emphasizes that avoiding *Upadha* helps prevent such disorders, as the non-fulfillment of desires is considered the root cause of many mental and physical ailments.

The etiology of depression is complex and involves environmental, psychological, genetic, and biological variables. Over the last ten years, research has made clear connections between depression and neurotransmitter imbalances, dysregulated inflammatory pathways, disruptions in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, increased oxidative and nitrosative damage, neurodegeneration, and mitochondrial disruption.

## PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF STRESS

In the modern era, numerous studies on both humans and animals have been conducted to discover a variety of anomalies that play a major role in the pathophysiology of depression. A close interaction has been observed between genes and psychosocial stress (e.g., Low social support, childhood sexual abuse), decreased

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monoamine (serotonin and noradrenaline) neurotransmission, low concentration of Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), altered cytokines, dysregulation of the Hypothalamic Pituitary Axis (HPA axis,) structural and functional changes in the brain.

The ability to make decisions is impeded by stress and its associated emotions. Due to the involvement of multiple systems, i.e., neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and immunological, stress and the Hypothalamic Pituitary Axis (HPA axis) play a crucial role in the pathophysiology of depression. Cortisol and Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone (CRH) need to be considered<sup>2</sup>. Convergent evidence suggests that CRH is a key player in the pathophysiology of depression. In some depressed subjects, the level of CRH is increased in the cerebrospinal fluid.

Post-mortem studies reported that depression is associated with an increased number of CRH-secreting neurons in the limbic brain areas, reflecting a compensatory response to increased CRH concentration<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, CRH causes many physiological and behavioral changes, such as poor appetite, disturbed sleep patterns, decreased libido, and psychomotor changes, which resemble the major symptoms of depression.

### AYURVEDIC PSYCHOLOGY

In the *Satyuga*, people were adhered to *Dharma* (ethics) and *Yajna* (worship) as per the rules. They were as divine as saints and as pious as Gods. They were devoid of rage, grief, envy,

fear, laziness, greed, mental illnesses, irregular sleep patterns, and a propensity to collect objects<sup>4</sup>.

At the end of *Satyuga*, some rich people got heaviness in their bodies due to overindulgence, which led to fatigue. Fatigue leads to laziness and the accumulation of materialistic things. All of these things led to greed<sup>5</sup>.

During the *Tretayuga* (ages of mankind), greed led to malice, which led to false statements, and false statements led to anger, sorrow, grief, worry, anxiety, depression, and many other mental disorders<sup>6</sup>.

*Acharya Charaka* said that improper use of the mind is one of the causes of psychiatric problems. Thinking is a mental concept. These aberrant mental circumstances are produced by the incorrect use of the mind. The appropriate use of the mind produces mental stability, that is, when the mind or mental faculties are applied appropriately, normal mental circumstances are maintained, and when they are not, abnormal situations predominate.

The three mental conditions, such as *Shad Ripu* (six foes), are said to be the primary causes of mental health issues. They are *Kama* (right or wrong desires), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Moha* (personal attachments), *Mada* (ego), and *Matsa* (envy or jealousy). The word *Kama* is primarily used for sexual desires, but its real meaning is all types of desires. Among the six factors mentioned above, *Kama*, or desire and its unfulfilled state, is the most important factor of *mano-rogas*. *Acharya Charak* states in the first  
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chapter of *Sharir Sthana*, the primary causative element for pain (physical and mental disease) in the body is *Upadha* (desire). Physical and mental disturbances of all kinds are eliminated by avoiding *Upadha* (desires) of any kind<sup>7</sup>. *Acharya* compares *Upadha* and the web of a cob (silkworm). "A silkworm makes suicidal threads for itself." Similar to this, an uneducated individual, constrained by material suffering, indulges himself in the activities that are harmful to him and has the desires that can bring him close to suicide.

### MANAGEMENT IN AYURVEDA

According to Ayurvedic texts, a person is considered to be in good health, or *Swastha*, when there is a balance of the body's mental and physical elements (*Samadosha*), the body's energies (*Samagnischa*), and the tissues in the organs (*Samadhatu*), along with appropriate waste removal (*Malakriya*), a joyful soul (*Prasannatma*), a happy, functioning mind (*Prasanna-manaha*), and the five senses (*Sama-indriya*). Ayurveda operates under the theory that imbalances in one or more of the above-mentioned variables are the cause of all illnesses, i.e., mental or physical. Practitioners contend that only a comprehensive approach can result in effective therapy. It is this approach that leads psychiatrists to believe that Ayurveda may hold the possibilities of a complementary, not only alternative treatment, for mental health issues. Ayurveda involves the health of both body and mind for healthy living, so the treatment of depression includes treatment for both the *Sharir*

and the *Mana*. Ayurveda uses a comprehensive approach to treat all ailments, including depression. The general cure for all mental diseases, according to *Charaka*, is "***Manaso Gyana Vigyana Dhairya Smriti Samadhibhihi***," which means that spiritual practices, scriptural knowledge, patience, memory, and meditation are used to balance the psychic *Dosha* of *Tamsa* and *Raja*<sup>8</sup>. Thus, to eliminate *Vishada*, *Acharya Charaka* recommended psychotherapy.

Treatments for mental illnesses that involve both pharmaceutical and non-pharmacological interventions are equally significant.

### Non-Pharmacological Administration

The following is the non-pharmacological treatment of depression:

#### 1. **Spiritual Therapy (*Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*)**<sup>9</sup>

It consists of the invocation of *Mantra*, *Aushadha* (medicines), *Manimangala* (wearing of jewels and roots), *Homa*, *Niyama*, *Prayascita* (atonement), *Upavasa* (fasting), *Pranipata*, and *Yatragaman* (voyage). These techniques boost and encourage the person's self-esteem.

2. ***Chikitsa Satvavajaya***<sup>10</sup> - 'Avajaya' is to assume control of or to inhibit, *Sattava* is the mind. It signifies that after realizing the true nature of one's soul and reaching the pinnacle of spiritual enlightenment, one should remain firmly grounded in oneself.

3. ***Nidanparivarjana*** - To identify the contributing causes, a thorough patient history should be obtained. These elements and their effects have to be explained to the patient. Then

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the patient must be inspired to rule out and avoid the triggers and causes.

**4. Naisthikichikista**<sup>11</sup> "Naisthiki ya vinopadham," or the complete eradication of suffering attained by moving away from cravings, which are the source of all suffering. Salvation is the only thing possible when suffering is completely eradicated. Only by eradicating cravings one can reach this stage. When such cravings are rejected, one is free from attachment to or hate toward the world, eliminating the chance that any new suffering would arise.

**5. "Yoga moksho pravartak"**<sup>12</sup> - It implies that achieving *Moksha* through yoga is one way to achieve it. *Moksha* implies absolute detachment of the soul from all mental as well as physical contacts. An increase in *Satva* and a decrease in *Raja* and *Tama* lead to *Karmakshaya* (loss of deeds) and help in attaining *Moksha*.

**6. -Trasan**<sup>13</sup>- Patient should be shown amazing sights, informed of the death of a loved one, and threatened by people in terrifying shapes, as well as tamed wild animals like elephants and non-poisonous animals.

### Pharmacological Management:

There are three forms of *Chikitsa* (treatment) in Ayurveda: Spiritual therapy (*Daivavyapashraya*), reasoning-based therapy (*Yuktivyapashraya*), and psychic therapy (*Satvavajaya Chikitsa*). Among these, *Yuktivyapashraya* is to be treated with medications.

Three different kinds of *Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa*<sup>14</sup>

(*Antarparimaarjan*, *Bahirparimaarjan*, *Shastapraninidhana*)

**1. Antarparimarjana** (cleaning inside)

a. *Samshodhana*, or purification, refers to the process of eliminating vitiated doshas from the body through *Panchakarma* therapy.

b. *Samshaman* (Alleviation): This refers to the array of medications and dietary practices that are employed to mitigate the imbalanced *dosha*. As an example, *Saraswat ghrít*, *Kalyanak ghrít*, and *Medhya rasayana* in the case of depression.

**2. Bahirparimarjana-** The external cleaning method.

It involves processes such as *Shiro dhara*, *Lepa* (liniment), *Parisheka* (fermentation), *Snehan* (oileation) and *Swedana* (sudation).

**3 Shastrapranidhana** (Surgical or Para-Surgical Procedures): Bloodletting has been recommended for several mental problems. These threefold therapies are useful for treating mental problems (such as insanity, epilepsy, depression, etc.), even though they are primarily suited to physical diseases also

## DISCUSSION

An enormous public health problem is depression, which is one of the world's primary causes of sickness and death. Psychological factors that contribute to stress and depression in today's world include stress at home and work, the need to keep up with others, to meet

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deadlines, ongoing fear of failing or falling behind, and unfulfilled ambitions to achieve fitness.

According to *Ayurveda*, many diseases, either *Sharirik* (physical) or *Mansik* (mental), occur due to the unfulfillment of *Updha* (Desire). The six mental foes (*Shad Ripu*)—*Kama* (desire), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Moha* (attachment), *Mada* (ego), and *Matsarya* (jealousy)—are considered primary causes of mental health disturbances. Depression can also result from physical disabilities such as paralysis, visible bodily sores, and chronic illnesses like *kustha* and others. In *Ayurvedic* scriptures, similar reasons are identified.

According to *Ayurveda*, the *Sharira* (body) and *Satva* (mind) are tied to one another and work according to each other's patterns. The connection between immunity and depression has been elucidated by *Acharya Charaka*. According to him, the primary cause of the disease's progression is *Vishada* or depression. This is known as "*Vishado rogavardhananam*"<sup>15</sup>. The greatest way to do this is through an *Ayurvedic* psychological approach. A positive and healthy mind helps recover from physical illness quickly and maintains a healthy body.

Stress is often caused by dietary issues, such as consuming incompatible, polluted, or unpleasant food, in addition to psychological factors. In modern Science, stress originates from an interplay of biological (HPA axis dysfunction, genetic and neurochemical factors), psychological (personality traits, coping style,

past trauma), and social (occupational, financial, and relational pressures) determinants.

*Acharya Charaka* prescribes knowledge, wisdom, patience, memory, and meditation to balance *Rajas* and *Tamas*, recommending psychotherapy for *Vishada*. Along with psychotherapy, various types of medicinal interventions are also described in our *Ayurvedic* literature to cure mental illnesses.

Psychological treatments are the first-line therapy for depression, with medications added in moderate to severe cases but not needed in mild forms. These therapies teach new coping and thinking skills through talk therapy (in person or online), self-help, or digital tools. Effective methods include behavioural activation, cognitive behavioural therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, and problem-solving therapy. Inactive individuals are more prone to anxiety and depression. Patients should be encouraged to practice exercise, *Yogasana*, and *Pranayama*. *Kumbhaka*—deep inhalation, retention, and slow exhalation—helps calm the mind and positively influences brain activity.

## CONCLUSION

In addition to nutritional and lifestyle recommendations, *Ayurveda* also suggests *yogasana* and herbal remedies. It is an alternative therapy method that not only addresses the underlying medical and psychological issues but also modifies the patient's lifestyle to ward off more ailments. *Ayurveda* mentions that mental

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well-being is a crucial component of its notion of health. It is a comprehensive science that studies the interdependent relationships between the mind, body, spirit, and senses and how they function. Patients with depression feel better after receiving therapy, psychological counselling, or both, as depression may need long-term care. Worldwide, plant-based medical systems have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in treating a wide range of ailments. Depression is a severe psychological condition that has a multifactorial aetiopathogenesis. *Ayurvedic* psychological approaches such as *Daivavyapasrya*, *Satvavjaya*, and *Yukti vyapashraya chikitsa* can be the most effective in managing this disorder.

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