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## Ritucharya: A review of its effectiveness in adopting seasonal regimens for optimum health and well-being

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### Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized India as a country with a high prevalence of lifestyle disorders, particularly non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are rapidly increasing due to changes in nutrition and lifestyle. In order to promote optimum health and avoid disease, Ayurveda, a traditional Indian system of medical science, highlights the need to maintain harmony within mind, body, and spirit. Ritucharya is an Ayurvedic practice that aims to balance the seasons and reduce Dosha, the root cause of all ailments. The main goal of Ritucharya is to promote environmental harmony by aligning our bodies with the natural rhythms of the seasons. Ritucharya comprises several food and lifestyle regimens stated in Ayurvedic literature. These regimens are effective in preventing lifestyle disorders by maintaining a balance between mind, body, and overall well-being. By understanding and following the right diet and lifestyle practices for each season, a person can improve their health and appearance. This means that by eating the right foods and taking care of themselves in the right way for each season, a person can become stronger. However, there is still much to be done in this field. Further research is needed to explore the potential benefits of Ritucharya on human health. Additionally, more studies are needed to determine the most effective ways to implement these regimens into modern lifestyles. The study explores the application of Ayurvedic texts in food and lifestyle practices, promoting environmental harmony and contrasting ancient medicine's six seasons with Ayurveda's four seasons.

**Keywords:** Ayurveda, seasonal regimen, Varsha Ritu, physical strength, diet

### Introduction

Ayurveda is an ancient science of life that emphasizes maintaining and promoting health, preventing diseases, and curing diseases through various therapeutic measures. According to Ayurveda, there are two main aims: "Swasthya Swasthya Rakshana" which means preserving the health of healthy persons, and "Aaturasya Vikara Prasamanam" which means curing the diseases of the diseased. "Swasthya Swasthya Rakshana" means that Ayurveda aims to maintain the health of healthy people. It emphasizes the importance of eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly. Ayurveda also uses natural remedies like herbs and oils to help prevent illnesses. "Aaturasya Vikara Prasamanam" means that Ayurveda aims to cure diseases in those who are sick. It uses various therapeutic measures like herbal medicines, massages, and dietary changes to help treat various ailments [1].

This traditional Indian system of medicine which has been around for over 5,000 years, is based on the idea that the body, mind, and spirit are all connected [2]. Thus, the primary goal is not simply to treat diseases but also to protect persons from the various sufferings of life that they must encounter on a daily basis [3].

A collection of medical illnesses known as lifestyle diseases are mostly brought on by poor lifestyle decisions and outside influences. These illnesses take time to manifest gradually, and they are frequently challenging to treat. They are distinguished by a gradual beginning, which implies that indications appear until the disease has proceeded to an advanced phase [4]. The WHO predicts that India will have the greatest lifestyle difficulties in the near future. According to a study conducted in collaboration with Max Hospital and the All India Institute of Medical

Sciences, the prevalence of non-communicable illnesses is on the rise, particularly among young urban populations. Sedentary lifestyles, as well as increased intake of fatty foods and alcohol, are blamed by doctors for these health conditions [5].

To keep the body in a state of harmony and balance, this practice entails dietary and lifestyle changes depending on the changing seasons [6].

Seasonal changes can cause a disturbance in the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) in the human body, especially if the human body struggles to adjust to environmental changes. The result of this imbalance, identified as Dosha Vaishamyā, makes people more susceptible to several health issues [7].

As mentioned in the Tasyashiteeya Adhyaya chapter of the Charaka Samhita, proper actions and understanding the suitable diet and lifestyle for each season can contribute to improving an individual's vitality and complexion. Ayurveda advises various food and lifestyle habits based on the season to assist in preserving balance and encouraging good health. For instance, since stews and soups are made from a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables, it is recommended to eat warm meals like these during the winter. Additionally, it discourages people from consuming frozen, processed, and food that has been preserved because they may be harmful to their health [8].

By following the regimens recommended for each season, according to an ancient Indian physician named Acharya Charak, one might increase physical strength and luster [9]. Indeed, nature has provided us with a variety of seasons, each of which has its distinctive features and hues. All three main doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) in the human body can be impacted by seasonal fluctuations in temperature, humidity, and other variables [10].

The period known as "Kala" might have an impact on our bodies, according to Ayurveda. Our health may suffer if we don't maintain the proper routines at that time for each season,

there are certain diets, ways of living, and daily schedules [11]. The six seasons of the year are Shishira, Vasant, Grishma, Varsha, Sharad, and Hemant. Shishira, Vasant, and Grishma are three of these six seasons that are referred to as Uttarayana or Adana Kala as the sun goes to Uttaradisha (North) at these times [12]. Therefore, studying Kala (Season) about its different impacts on Prakriti (Genetic makeup) is crucial [13]. To be healthy, Ayurveda advises us to adjust our diet and lifestyle to the changing seasons. It is more than just treating illness; it is a way of life. According to Ayurveda, daily routines, dietary choices, and lifestyle should be adjusted according to the seasons.

### Ritucharya

Ritucharya is a traditional Ayurvedic practice that emphasizes the significance of adhering to a set regimen or discipline in harmony with the seasons. The name "Ritucharya" is a combination of the Sanskrit terms "Ritu," which is called as a season, and "Charya," which means discipline or regularity. To preserve balance and advance good health, the practice entails adjusting your food and way of life following the season [14]. Ritucharya is the Hindu concept of managing one's diet and daily activities carefully to match the flow of the seasons. Maintaining good health and avoiding seasonal diseases or issues is possible by adhering to these behaviors [15].

### The Ayurvedic Guide to Seasonal Living (Ritucharya)

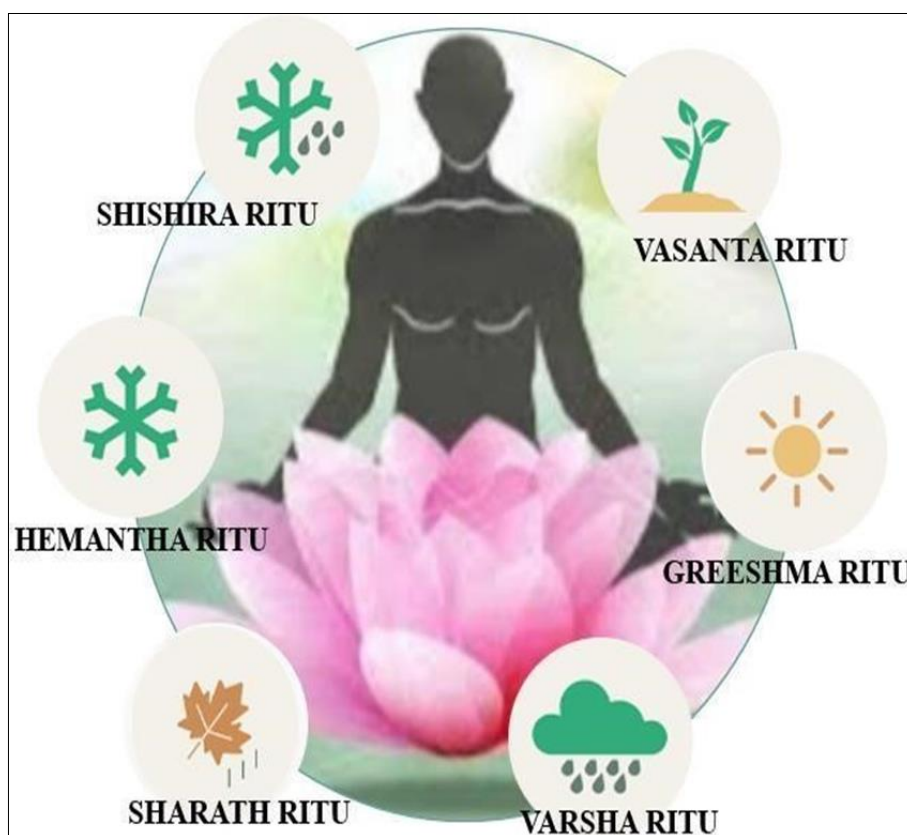


Fig 1: Ritucharya: A seasonal routine for well-being

### KALA (Time is referred to as "Kala" in Sanskrit) Aadaana Kaala (Uttarayana) (Northern Solstice)

The six months of the year during which the sun is facing north is known as Aadaana Kaala (Uttarayana) (Northern Solstice). The wind and sun are fierce at this time, which is

also referred to as take-off time. Dehydration and weakness are caused by the sun's energy drain on humans and the cooling influence of the earth. It gets hot and dry out there. Strength is weakened because of this crippling time [16].

During Uttar Ayana in the Indian subcontinent, the seasons

that change are Vasanta (Spring), Shishira (Winter), and Grishma (Summer). When it comes to temperature and dryness of the weather, the time frame might be likened to mid-January to mid-July. Overall, it has a detrimental impact on the ecosystem, which includes humans. The strength of Katu (Pungent), Kashaya (Astringent), and Tikta (Bitter) tastes within the Rasas (Tastes) increases as the sun moves north from the Tropic of Capricorn to the Tropic of Cancer. Modern science says that this is comparable to how the earth slowly revolves around the sun until it reaches the summer solstice on June 21st each year, when the sun's rays directly strike the North Pole's 30-degree axis [17].

### Visarga Kaala (Dakshinayana) (Southern Solstice)

The six months of the year known as Visarga Kaala are whenever the sun is facing either north or south. It is often referred to as the giving season. People may access energy from the sun and the moon as it is at its strongest at this time. During Dakshinayana on the Indian subcontinent, the changing seasons include Hemanta (Late autumn), Sarata (Fall), and Varsha (Monsoon), all of which contribute to a

refreshing atmosphere by cooling the earth and improving the strength of living things. When cool sets in, similar to mid-July to mid-January, anabolic activity outweighs degenerative metabolism in the environment. A person's strength increases at this time due to the unctuousness that settles in the air and the predominance of the Amla (Sour), Lavana (Salty), and Madhura (Sweet) Rasas. It is also known by the name Visarga Kala. This is analogous to the Earth's continuous orbit around the sun, which results in the yearly winter solstice happening on December 21, when the sun's rays directly touch the South Pole's 30-degree longitude [19].

### Health status in Adana and Visarga Kala

When Visarga Kala, or Varsha Ritu, and Adana Kala, or Grishma Ritu, begin and conclude respectively, human power is at its lowest. Sharad and Vasanta Ritu, or Visruga and Adana Kala, respectively, represent the intermediate points where human power lies. Individuals often experience a period of vigorous physical well-being once Visarga Kala (Hemantha Ritu) completes and Adana Kala, or Shishira Ritu, begins [20].

**Table 1:** Adana and Visarga Kala: A Thorough Analysis of the Variations

Kala	Seasons	Dominant Energy	Effect on Body
Adana Kala	Late Winter (Shishira), Spring (Vasanta), Summer (Grishma)	Sun	Reduces strength and energy, increases dryness in the body
Visarga Kala	Rainy (Varsha), Autumn (Sharad), Early Winter (Hemanta)	Moon	Enhances watery ingredients and strength of living beings

### Seasonality and Dietary requirements

For different health benefits, ensuring a sustainable diet includes prioritizing seasonal and local foods, specifically fruits and vegetables. This strategy promotes the consumption of produce that corresponds to the natural seasons in your location, such as eating winter oranges, fall pears, summer tomatoes, spring asparagus, and other seasonal foods. While seasonal eating is an important component of long-term sustainability, it is also important to recognize that there are other eating habits that may be more difficult to change but may provide more substantial environmental and health benefits [21, 22].

Encouraging seasonal eating is believed by some to enhance people's understanding of the natural growth cycles of food

and its sources, fostering a reconnection with the origins of their meals [23].

### Classification of Six Seasons (Shadritus)

According to traditional medicine, the yearly cycle is split into two parts known as Ayana, which is determined by the direction of the sun's travel. There are three Ritus (seasons) in each half, Uttarayana (the north solstice) and Dakshinayana (the south solstice). The name "Ritu," which is derived from Sanskrit, refers to the concept of rhythmic rotation or "to move along." Which is the sequence of distinctive existing forms in which nature displays itself, in short, the seasons. A year is split into six seasons, which are as follows:

**Table 2:** Classification of Seasons according to Ayurveda

Ritu	Months (Indian)	Months (Western)	State of strength	Features
Shishir Ritu	Magha and Phalguna	Mid-January -Mid-March	Maximum	Winter
Vasanta Ritu	Chaitra and Vaishakha	Mid-March -Mid-May	Medium	Spring
Grishma Ritu	Jeyshta and Ashada	Mid-May - Mid-July	Lowest	Summer
Varsha Ritu	Shravana and Bhadrapada	Mid-July - Mid-September	Lowest	Monsoon
Sharth Ritu	Ashvina and Kartika	Mid-September -Mid-November	Medium	Autumn
Hemanta Ritu	Margashira and Pausha	Mid-November -Mid-July	Maximum	Late Autumn

These seasonal shifts are most noticeable in the Indian subcontinent [24].



**Fig 2:** The Six Prominent Ayurvedic Tastes

### **Guidelines for Shishira (Late Winter's) Health Regimen**

#### **General Condition**

From about the middle of January to the middle of March. According to Ayurveda, the Sharir Bal (Physical strength) and Jathragni Bal (Digestive fire) are at their highest point throughout the

This is caused by the sun entering its northern cycle after exiting its southern cycle. It is the period of the day when Vata Dosha tends to become agitated. This is the perfect time to strengthen our bodies, increase our stamina, and lay the groundwork for a strong immune system for the next spring. Tikta Rasa (A bitter taste), predominates throughout this season, while Aakasha Mahabhuta, an ether element, is the predominant Rasa (Taste) [25].

#### **Diet Regimen**

1. According to Ayurveda, it is suggested to avoid Laghu (Light) and Shita (cold) meals [26].
2. Instead, one should consume food like Amla (sour) flavor [27].
3. Include wheat/gram flour products, grains and pulses, fresh rice, maize, and similar meals in your diet.
4. Food items like Haritaki (Terminalia chebula fruits), garlic, Pippali (Piper longum fruits), ginger, and sugarcane products should be taken.
5. Ensure to have dairy products as well as milk in your diet.
6. Foods having spicy, bitter, or astringent flavors should be avoided.
7. Limit your intake of light and cold meals.

#### **Way of Living**

Avoiding Vata-aggravated lifestyle practices including being exposed to the wind, going on long walks, and sleeping late at night is crucial for maintaining balance and promoting good health. If these behaviors are not followed it may result in physical imbalances and health issues [28].

### **Guidelines for Vasanta (Spring) Health Regimen**

#### **General Condition**

The usual timeline is from the middle of March until the middle of May. According to the Indian medical practice

known as Ayurveda, the strength of an individual remains in the medium range during the wintertime (Shishira Ritu), Kapha Dosha gets degraded, and Agni (digestive fire) remains in the low range [29].

During this season, the day is longer than the nights, and illnesses like the common cold, asthma, and flu may spread. The primary tastes are astringent (Kaya Rasa), and the essential elements are earth (Prithvi) and air (Vayu). The intense heat of the sun liquefies the stored Kapha Dosha in this ritu, which can disrupt digestion and cause respiratory difficulties [30].

#### **Diet Regimen**

1. Accept freely the food characterized by Pungent (Katu), Bitter (Tikta), and Astringent (Kashaya) flavors. Honey can also be included in the diet.
2. Cereals such as Yava (Hordeum vulgare), Vari, old wheat, and jawar should be consumed.
3. Include pulses in your diet such as moong (Mung beans), masura (Lentils), chana (chickpeas), as well as matki (Moth beans).
4. Cook with mustard, Kardai (Safflower), and til (Sesame) oil.
5. Milk products such as buttermilk can be consumed.
6. Vegetables such as karela (Bitter melon), brinjal, radish, pumpkin, drumstick, dry vegetables, and Suran (Yam) should be included in the diet.
7. Roasted mutton of goat and chicken can be consumed as non-vegetarian options.
8. Fruits such as lemon, betel nut, pomegranate, and jambul should be eaten.
9. Avoid meals that are difficult to digest, such as Guru (Heavy), Sheeta (Cold temperatures), Snigdha (Dense), and Madhura (Sweet).
10. Consumption of fresh grains, curd, and cold drinks is prohibited.

#### **Way of Living**

During this season, it is recommended to use warm water for bathing. Exposing oneself to the sun, consuming oily foods, ghee, oily and cool foods, heavy, sweet, sour, and salty food items, and day sleep is strictly prohibited.

## Guidelines for Grishma (summer) health regimen

### General condition

Grishma, which means "summer season," refers to the time period from the middle of May to the middle of July. During this season, the environment is marked by intense heat and potentially harmful winds. A person's vitality decreases, and there is an accumulation of Vata Dosha, while the imbalanced Kapha Dosha is pacified.

Throughout this season, man's Agni Bala (Digestive power) is significantly mild or lower. Additionally, during this season, the environment is hot and dry, especially during the day. The sun lowers the dampness in the environment and facilitates the trapping of heat in the earth's atmosphere. This can cause sweating, thirst, and hunger.

Throughout the summer, it is recommended to eat easily digestible foods. Steamed white rice (similar to full moon rice) may be eaten with Moong daal khichadi and green vegetables like cucumber, Tinday (Ivy Gourd), and Pumpkin.

### Diet Regimen

1. Consider low-calorie, low-fat coconut water that is high in natural sugars, proteins, and antioxidants.
2. Include goods made from Saktu (roasted barley flour) in your diet.
3. Rasala (Well-churned curd with sugar and pepper) should be consumed.
4. Enjoy the delightful Shadava, a fruit juice crafted from various fruits like banana, sweet orange, and pomegranate, as a tasty beverage.
5. Include grains such as wheat and Sath Sali rice. and jawar.
6. Use pulses in your diet, such as moong (Mung beans), matar (Peas), and Masura (Lentils).
7. Dairy products such as ghee, curd, buttermilk, and milk should be consumed.
8. Consume vegetables in your diet such as karela (bitter melon), white onion, Chuka (Green sorrel), cucumber, Tondali (Ivy gourd), and methi (Fenugreek).
9. Incorporation of non-vegetarian alternatives like goat meat and plain Jangal Mansa Rasa.
10. Have watermelon, which is unripe, bananas, kharbuja (Sweet melon), jambul, Amalaki/Amla (*Emblica officinalis*) grapes, pomegranate, lemon and other fruits should be eaten. All cold beverages made from fruit juices sugarcane juice, mixed with sugar and lemon, and cold water preserved in earthen pots with Wala and Musta (Herb popularly referred to as nut plant) are included.
11. Honey can also be consumed.

### Way of Living

During summer, it's important to stay cool and avoid excessive exercise or hard work. One can stay in cool places to beat the heat and enjoy the cooled moon rays with a breeze during the night.

## Guidelines for Varsha Ritu (Monsoon) Health Regimen

### General condition

The rainy season lasts typically from around the middle of July until around the middle of September. According to Ayurveda, pH levels of soil, water, and surroundings rise during particular seasons, creating Pitta accumulation and Vata development in the human body. As a result, the body's

metabolic rate, strength, immunity, and digestion all suffer. During Varsha ritu, there is an exacerbation of Vata dosha and an accumulation of Pitta dosha. This is the primary cause of different ailments that develop during the season of rainfall. To balance Vata dosha Prakopa, Rutata Jal (lukewarm water) is advised. The diet and way of life need to be such that they aid in the balance of Vata and Pitta doshas.

### Diet regimen

Throughout this season, it is recommended that you have ginger with rock salt before meals, combine whey or buttermilk with ginger, and choose dishes or drinks that contain honey.

1. To keep Agni in check, consume light, fresh dishes produced from old barley, wheat, and rice.
2. Include cow ghee, green gram (Moong dal), lentils, rice, and wheat in your regular diet.
3. Consider eating a tiny piece of ginger with rock salt before each meal.
4. Include acidic and salty vegetable soups with onions and other vegetables in your diet.
5. Spices including ginger, pepper, coriander seeds, fennel seeds (Hing), garlic, Jeera powder, and turmeric might help with digestion and immunity.
6. Due to heavy rains, a sour, salty, and oily diet is preferred during cooler days.
7. Favor a salty, sour, and oily diet during heavy rain and colder days.
8. To assure germ elimination Kindly drink boiling and cooled water within 24 hours.
9. Benefit from using ginger and green gram in your regular diet.
10. Avoid raw meals and salads in favor of heated items.
11. Increase your hydration intake to avoid slowed metabolism.
12. Avoid eating stale food.
13. During the rainy season, avoid eating green vegetables.
14. Avoid red meat, curds, and other meals that take longer to digest.
15. Instead of curds, try buttermilk.
16. Consume Haritaki/Harad (*Terminalia chebula*) with rock salt to improve your health during the monsoon.

### Contradiction of Varsha Ritu

Ayurveda defines "Mantha" as a hulled but unmilled cereal grain also known as groat. Following Ayurvedic principles, it is advised to avoid ingesting Mantha when it is severely diluted during the rainy season. It is also recommended to avoid heavy meals, such as beef, and to keep away from the riverside.

### Way of Living

It is advised to bathe in heated water and massage therapy the body with oil during this season. It is recommended to avoid getting wet in the rain, napping throughout the day, excessive exercising, hard labor, wind, and staying on the riverside.

During the rainy season, avoid napping and fasting to improve digestion and metabolism. Fasting weekly or fortnightly can improve digestive fire. Keep spaces clean, warm, dry feet, and dry surfaces to protect against infections. Change into dry attire quickly if wet, as immunity is low during monsoon.

To prevent malaria and other ailments, use mosquito repellent, stay clean, avoid polluted water, and avoid bathing

in rivers. Mixing churna and rock salt with fresh water during monsoon is recommended.

### **Dosha aggravation and buildup during the Rainy Season**

**Vata:** Vata dosha, according to Ayurveda, builds during the summer's dry or drying heat and becomes worsened during the rainy (Monsoon) season. This can result in impaired digestion, acidic atmospheric conditions, and earth-emitted steam/heat.

**Pitta:** According to Ayurveda, the environment gets acidic during the rainy season, which might lead to a buildup of Pitta dosha. This can result in decreased digestion and other health problems. As the temperature returns after the cooling time of the rainy season in autumn, the Pitta dosha buildup may be exacerbated.

### **Guidelines for Sharad (autumn) Health Regimen**

#### **General condition**

Sharad Ritu lasts from September's middle to around the middle of November. The rainy season, according to Ayurveda, can create an epidemic of Pitta dosha, that may result in a high temperature, dysentery, vomiting, diarrhea, and malaria. During this season, the digestive aspect of bile is lost, and it becomes inventive. In Ayurveda, fall is known as the "Mother of Diseases".

The Ritusandhi period is a transitional period between two times a year when the weather improves, and the body needs cleansing and detoxification. Fasting is no longer needed during the Hindu Navratras and the Muslim Ramzan.

The medical reasoning is that a person's body needs to adjust to new standards during this period.

The temperature is on its way up as the fire component rises, so this causes Pitta to begin to rise.

In this season, the Sunbeams brilliantly through intermittent clouds in a clear sky, but the earth remains wet. During this period, one's strength stays moderate, there is an urge for the distorted Vata and Pitta Doshas, and Agni activity increases.

Agni grows throughout this season. Pitta Dosha Prakopa is induced by the heat of the sun in the fall season. As a result, Ahar-Vihar, which is known for its Prakopa, should be avoided.

#### **Diet Regimen**

Eating only when you're truly hungry is recommended. This can help improve your digestion and make your meals more enjoyable.

Consume cereals such as rice, wheat, jawar, and Java that are more than one year old.

1. Include pulses in your diet such as Tur (Yellow pigeon peas), masura (Lentils), chana (Chickpeas), moong, and beans.
2. Meat from wild animals, such as goats and chicken, can be included in your diet.
3. Include stream fish in your nutritional selections.
4. For cooking, use ghee that has been medicated with bitter ingredients.
5. Avoid sugar and curds by drinking milk products like buttermilk and plain milk.
6. Fruits such as Kushmanda (White gourd melon), apples, Amalaki, Kismish, grapes, bananas, and chiku are recommended.
7. Vegetables like dudhi (Bottle gourd), cucumber, sweet

potato, karela (Bitter melon), cabbage, methi (Fenugreek), and Tandulja should be included in your diet.

#### **Way of Living**

Stay up during the day, don't eat too much, and don't stay in the sun too long. Use sunlight to clean your drinking water and take showers in the daytime; take nighttime showers under the moonlight.

### **Guidelines for Hemanta (early winter) Health Regimen**

#### **General condition**

Hemanta Ritu, or late autumn, falls between mid-November and mid-January. The predominant flavor in this season is sweetness (Madhura), and an individual's energy is at its peak, while the unbalanced Pitta Dosha is pacified. Agni's actions have increased.

In the course of this season, the temperature of the atmosphere begins to fall. As a result, the frigid wind then starts to blow, causing Vata and Kapha Dosa to be out of balance.

#### **Diet Regimen**

1. Include a range of foods to ensure a well-rounded diet.
2. Consume meals that have rich, salty, sweet, and sour tastes.
3. Include rice, wheat, and jawar cereals in your diet.
4. Diversify your diet by including pulses like Kulitha (Horse gram), Udid (Black gram), and watana (Pea).
5. Cook using oils such as groundnuts, animal fats, the ones from sesame seeds, and coconut.
6. Milk, ghee, curds, butter, buttermilk, and cheese are all acceptable milk products.
7. Include veggies like sweet potato, potato, onion, Ivy gourd, cabbage, bottle gourd, drumsticks, and so on.
8. For a healthy diet, choose sweet fruits such as mangoes, grapes, figs, bananas, and so on.
9. Consider drinks such as warm water, cereal wine, and fruit juices, as well as their preparations.
10. To maintain a balanced diet, avoid Vata-aggravating foods such as cold, bright, and dry meals.
11. Refrain from consuming cold drinks for better balance and well-being.

#### **Way of Living**

Physical exercise, having head and body massages, using warm water, sunbathing, and wearing proper attire are all advised activities. It is advised to avoid napping throughout the day as well as being exposed to strong and chilly winds. Ayurveda emphasizes the significance of leading a healthy lifestyle. It suggests adopting daily habits (Dinacharya) and following seasonal routines (Ritucharya) to achieve and sustain well-being. To be healthy, Ayurveda advises us to adjust our diet and lifestyle to the changing seasons. It is more than just treating illness; it is a way of life. Following Ayurveda is viewed as a sensible and efficient strategy to care for our total well-being and maintain a healthy lifestyle. "Following the prescribed regimen may effectively reduce the impact of seasonal variations on health, providing a comprehensive approach to disease prevention." The knowledge of Ritucharya and its strict commitment to the Ritu helps in maintaining the Tridosha and Agni's equilibrium and living free of sickness and disease.

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