



**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES**  
[ISSN: 0975-4725; CODEN(USA): IJPS00]  
Journal Homepage: <https://www.ijpsjournal.com>



## Review Article

# Dinacharya Practices for Mental Health and Stress Management

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## ARTICLE INFO

Published: 01 Oct 2025

### Keywords:

Dinacharya, Ahaara, Vihar,  
Mental health

### DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.17240899

## ABSTRACT

Stress-related disorders have become a global health challenge due to urbanization, occupational pressures, and disrupted lifestyle habits. Ayurveda, the traditional science of life, advocates Dinacharya (daily regimen) as a preventive and promotive measure for maintaining both physical and psychological health. Dinacharya aligns the human body and mind with natural circadian rhythms, balances doshas, and enhances mental resilience. This article explores classical Ayurvedic references, scientific perspectives, and practical applications of Dinacharya in mental health and stress management.

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health disorders, especially stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia, are rising at an alarming rate. Lack of a fixed routine is one of the major reasons for stress, which is a silent precursor to many psychosomatic disorders, including hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Ayurveda views health (*Swasthya*) as a balance of *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), *agni* (digestive fire), *dhatus* (tissues), *mala* (excretory functions), and equilibrium of the *atma*, *mana*, and *indriyas* (spirit, mind, and senses). To achieve this, classical texts emphasize the importance of *Dinacharya*, a set of daily activities that preserve rhythm, discipline, and harmony.

## Concept Of Dinacharya

The term *Dinacharya* derives from “*Din*” (day) and “*Acharya*” (discipline or routine). It represents daily regimens recommended by *Acharyas* like *Charaka* and *Vagbhata* for health promotion and disease prevention.

## According to Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2/1:

“fnus] fnus p;k]Z fnuL;k ok p;kZ fnup;kZA pj.ka p;kZA

mHk;yksdfgrekgjfgkjpsf"Vrfevr ;kor~ izfrfnus ;RdrZO;e~AA”

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**Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



— The daily regimen (*Dinacharya*) refers to the rules of conduct and practices that should be followed every day. It includes habits related to food (*Ahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*) that are beneficial for both worlds –

This world (*Ihaloka hita*) – health, strength, longevity the next world

(*Paraloka hita*) – virtue, spiritual upliftment.

Thus, *Dinacharya* means all those practices and activities which one should perform every day, regularly, for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

## **DINACHARYA AND MENTAL HEALTH**

***Dinacharya* directly impacts mental health by:**

1. Regulating the circadian rhythm (biological clock).
2. Balancing *Vata dosha*, which, when aggravated, causes anxiety, fear, and restlessness.
3. Enhancing *Sattva guna* (clarity, calmness), while reducing *Rajas* (hyperactivity, agitation) and *Tamas* (lethargy, dullness).
4. Reducing stress hormone levels (cortisol) through relaxation practices like *abhyanga*, *pranayama*, and meditation.
5. Providing a sense of discipline, stability, and predictability in daily life.

## **MAJOR DINACHARYA PRACTICES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT**

### **1. BRAHMA MUHURTA JAGARANA (WAKING UP EARLY)**

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes before sunrise.

**Classical reference:** *Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2/1.*

#### **Benefits:**

- Environment at this time is *sattvic*, calm, and conducive for meditation and mental clarity
  - Synchronizes body with natural circadian rhythms
  - Reduces heaviness, laziness, and mental clutter
- ### **2. SHAUCHA AND SNANA (CLEANSING AND BATHING)**
- Morning evacuation (*Mala Visarjana*) ensures physical and psychological lightness
  - Bathing improves blood circulation, refreshes the mind, and alleviates fatigue
  - Warm water bath pacifies *Vata* and promotes relaxation

### **3. ABHYANGA (OIL MASSAGE)**

**Reference:** *Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2/8-9.*

Daily oil massage with sesame, coconut, or medicated oils (like *Brahmi* oil) calms the nervous system.

#### **Benefits:**

- Reduces stress and fatigue
- Improves sleep quality
- Enhances tactile stimulation, which reduces cortisol levels

### **4. VYAYAMA (EXERCISE AND YOGA)**



Moderate exercise enhances strength and mental stability. Yoga postures (*Asanas*) like *Shavasana*, *Sukhasana*, *Balasana*, and *Vajrasana* are particularly beneficial for stress relief. Modern studies confirm yoga improves neurotransmitter balance (serotonin, dopamine) and reduces anxiety.

## 5. **PRANAYAMA** (BREATHING EXERCISES)

**Types:** *Anuloma-Viloma*, *Bhramari*, *Nadi Shodhana*, *Sheetali*.

### **Benefits:**

- Balances the autonomic nervous system
- Reduces stress hormones
- Improves oxygenation and calms the mind

**Scientific evidence:** *Pranayama* practices have been shown to reduce heart rate variability abnormalities and improve stress adaptation.

## 6. **DHYANA** (MEDITATION)

Meditation stabilizes mental activity, reduces racing thoughts, and enhances emotional resilience.

**Evidence:** Mindfulness meditation lowers cortisol and enhances hippocampal activity, improving memory and focus.

Ayurveda recommends daily meditation in *Brahma Muhurta* for maximum benefit.

## 7. **AHARA** (DIETARY DISCIPLINE)

*Satvic Ahara* (pure, wholesome diet) supports mental clarity.

**Recommended foods:** milk, ghee, fresh fruits, green vegetables, whole grains, and nuts.

**Avoid:** Excessive caffeine, processed foods, fried and spicy items that provoke *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

Timely meals regulate blood sugar and prevent mood fluctuations.

## 8. **NIDRA** (SLEEP REGULATION)

Proper sleep is one of the “three pillars of health” (*Trayopastambha*).

### **Guidelines:**

- Sleep early, wake up early
- Ensure 6–8 hours of restful sleep
- Avoid daytime sleep except in summer or in debilitated conditions

**Benefits:** Adequate sleep rejuvenates brain cells, improves memory, and reduces irritability.

## 9. **SADVRITTA** (CODE OF CONDUCT)

- Ethical living, positive thoughts, compassion, truthfulness, and self-control are essential for mental health
- Controlling excessive emotions (anger, greed, fear) prevents stress-related imbalance
- Social bonding and compassion practices improve emotional well-being

## SCIENTIFIC CORRELATION

**Modern science validates Ayurvedic *Dinacharya* practices:**

- Morning routines align with circadian rhythm, reducing mood disorders



- *Abhyanga* (massage) activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress
- Yoga and *pranayama* improve neuroplasticity and resilience against depression and anxiety
- Meditation improves prefrontal cortex activity, enhancing focus and emotional control
- Balanced diet and sleep are proven regulators of neurotransmitters like serotonin and melatonin

## DISCUSSION

Stress and mental health disorders have multifactorial origins—biological, psychological, and social. *Dinacharya* addresses all these dimensions:

**Biological:** Balancing *doshas*, improving digestion, promoting restful sleep.

**Psychological:** Cultivating *sattva guna*, mindfulness, and stress resilience.

**Social:** Encouraging ethical conduct and harmonious living.

Thus, *Dinacharya* can be seen as a preventive psychosomatic therapy that reduces susceptibility to modern stress-related disorders.

## CONCLUSION

*Dinacharya*, the Ayurvedic daily regimen, is a timeless prescription for holistic well-being. By incorporating early rising, cleansing, oil massage, yoga, *pranayama*, meditation, timely meals, proper sleep, and ethical conduct, one can effectively manage stress and preserve mental health.

In an era where mental health disorders are increasing exponentially, Ayurveda's *Dinacharya* serves as a natural, non-pharmacological, and sustainable strategy for building resilience and harmony in life.

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**HOW TO CITE:** Dr. Swati Katyayen\*, Dr. Sudesh Kumar Bhambu, Dinacharya Practices for Mental Health and Stress Management, *Int. J. of Pharm. Sci.*, 2025, Vol 3, Issue 10, 68-72 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17240899>