

Role of Ghrita or Ghrita Kalpas in Preventive and Curative Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Ghrita is considered one of the most valuable contributions of Indian tradition to health and medicine. Ayurveda describes Ghrita as a unique therapeutic substance possessing both nutritional and medicinal properties. It has the remarkable ability to assimilate the qualities of the drugs processed with it, thereby enhancing their efficacy. Due to its lipophilic nature, Ghrita acts as an effective carrier for drug delivery at the cellular level, facilitating penetration into structures such as mitochondria, microsomes, and nuclear membranes. Ghrita is also recognized for its antioxidant properties and as a rich source of Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. In Ayurvedic therapeutics, it plays a significant role in the management of Maanasika Rogas (neuro-psychological disorders) as well as various somatic diseases. In recent years, however, the use of ghee in daily diet has declined because of widespread misconceptions regarding its association with elevated cholesterol levels, cardiovascular disorders, and other health problems. Such concerns have created hesitation among the public regarding the regular consumption of Ghrita. This has necessitated a scientific re-evaluation of the therapeutic and nutritional importance of Ghrita and Ghrita Kalpas. The present work aims to explore and clarify the role of Ghrita Kalpas in the promotion of health and the management of disease, with special reference to neuro-psycho-somatic disorders. The study also attempts to dispel prevailing myths surrounding ghee by presenting supportive Ayurvedic concepts and available scientific evidence regarding its safety, efficacy, and therapeutic potential.

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KEYWORDS: Ghrita, Ghrita kalpas, Preventive, Curative, Neuro-Psycho-Somatic Disorders.



INTRODUCTION

Ghrita, one of the four types of Sneha Dravyas described in Ayurveda, is considered a unique and invaluable contribution of ancient Indian wisdom to the field of health and medicine. Indian scholars were pioneers in identifying and exploring the nutritional as well as therapeutic significance of Ghrita. The term Ghrita (ghee) is derived from the Sanskrit root "Ghru," meaning brightness, radiance, or lustre. Ghee is an anhydrous milk fat devoid of lactose and other milk solids. In Ayurvedic literature, it is referred to by several synonyms such as Pavitra, Amruta, Ayush, Tejas, and Sarpi, which reflect its immense medicinal and rejuvenating properties.

Ghrita is regarded as a health-promoting elixir due to its exceptional ability to absorb and carry the properties of medicinal substances processed with it,

a quality described in Ayurveda as "Samskarasya Anuvartanat¹." Because of this unique characteristic, Ghrita occupies a superior position among other Sneha substances such as Taila (oil), Vasa (muscle fat), and Majja (bone marrow). Its lipophilic nature facilitates efficient drug delivery at the cellular level, including penetration into the mitochondria, microsomes, and nuclear membrane. Ghrita is also recognized as a potent antioxidant and a rich source of Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. Owing to these properties, it serves as an effective therapeutic medium in the management of Maanasika Rogas (neuropsychological disorders) as well as various somatic diseases.

Despite its classical importance and therapeutic value, the consumption of ghee in routine dietary practices

has considerably declined in recent years. Many individuals avoid ghee because of misconceptions that it contributes to obesity, elevated cholesterol levels, and cardiovascular diseases. Such apprehensions have created confusion regarding the actual health benefits and safety of Ghrita. These concerns have necessitated a scientific and Ayurvedic re-evaluation of Ghrita and Ghrita Kalpas to distinguish myths from facts and to establish their true therapeutic significance with supportive scientific evidence.

The present work aims to explore the role of Ghrita Kalpas in maintaining health and managing disease conditions, with special reference to neuro-psycho-somatic disorders. It also attempts to compile classical Ayurvedic references along with modern scientific findings to highlight the pharmacological, nutritional, and therapeutic importance of Ghrita.

TYPES OF GHRITA²

Based on Source

According to Ayurvedic literature, Ghee is classified into eight types based on its source:

Go (Cow) Ghrita

Mahisha (Buffalo) Ghrita

Aja (Goat) Ghrita

Avika (Sheep) Ghrita

Ushtra (Camel) Ghrita

Hasti (Elephant) Ghrita

Ashwa (Mare's) Ghrita

Manusha (Human) Ghrita

Based on Duration of Preservation³

Based on age and duration of storage, Ghrita is classified into four categories:

Purana Ghrita – Ghee aged from 1 to 10 years, considered beneficial in chronic disorders.

Prapurana Ghrita – 10 - 100 years Well-aged ghee possessing enhanced therapeutic properties.

Kumbha Sarpi – 100 – 111 years Ghee preserved for more than 10 years.

Maha Ghrita – 111 years above Extremely old ghee, highly valued for its therapeutic utility in severe and chronic diseases.

GHEE CHEMISTRY⁴

Ghee is a complex lipid-based substance composed of various bioactive constituents that contribute to its nutritional and therapeutic value. It contains glycerides, free fatty acids, phospholipids, sterols,

sterol esters, and fat-soluble vitamins such as Vitamins A, D, E, and K. In addition, ghee is rich in tocopherols, carbonyl compounds, hydrocarbons, carotenoids, charred casein, and trace minerals including calcium, phosphorus, iron, and copper. These components collectively make ghee a highly valuable dietary and medicinal substance.

PHARMACODYNAMICS OF GHEE ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA⁵

According to Ayurvedic principles, Ghrita possesses the following pharmacodynamic properties:

Rasa (Taste): Madhura (sweet)

Vipaka (post-digestive effect): Madhura

Guna (Qualities): Guru (heavy), Snigdha (unctuous), and Yogavahi (enhances the properties and delivery of associated drugs)

Veerya (Potency): Sheeta (cooling in nature)

Effect on Doshas

Ghrita is predominantly considered a Vata-Pitta Shamaka, meaning it helps in pacifying aggravated Vata and Pitta Doshas.

Therapeutic Actions (Karma)

Ayurveda attributes numerous therapeutic properties to Ghrita, including:

Medhya – Enhances intellect and cognitive functions

Rasayana – Acts as a rejuvenator and promotes longevity

Chakshushya – Beneficial for eye health

Balya – Improves strength and vitality

Varnya – Enhances complexion and skin health

Swarya – Improves voice quality

Vrishya – Acts as an aphrodisiac and promotes reproductive health

Garbhasthapanam – Supports and stabilizes pregnancy

Deepana – Stimulates digestive fire

Dahaprashamana – Relieves burning sensations

Hridya – Beneficial for cardiac health

Snehana – Provides lubrication and oleation to body tissues

Anulomana – Facilitates proper movement of Vata and bowel functions

Vishaghna – Possesses detoxifying and anti-toxic properties

Table 1 Showing Chemical Composition of Ghee

Type of Ghee	Moisture Content	Fat Content	Vitamin A Content
Cow Ghee	0.5%	99.5 g	2000 IU
Buffalo Ghee	Trace amount	100 g	2000 IU

CHEMICAL COMPOSITION AND PHARMACO-THERAPEUTIC VALUES OF GHEE OBTAINED FROM DIFFERENT MAMMALS⁶

Different types of milk-derived ghee possess distinct nutritional compositions and therapeutic properties according to Ayurvedic literature. Variations in fat, protein, lactose, ash content, and total solids contribute to their unique pharmacological and medicinal actions.

Table 2 Showing Chemical Composition And Pharmaco-Therapeutic Values Of Ghee

Mammal Type	Fat (%)	Protein (%)	Total Solids (%)	Solids-not-Fat (%)	Lactose (%)	Ash (%)	Therapeutic Properties and Uses
Human	3.75	1.63	12.57	8.82	6.98	0.21	Beneficial for eye disorders; alleviates Pitta and Rakta disorders
Cow	4.14	3.58	13.39	9.25	4.96	0.71	Considered the श्रेष्ठ (superior) Ghrita; acts as Chakshushya, Rasayana, and pacifies Vata and Pitta
Buffalo	7.38	3.60	17.24	9.86	5.48	0.78	Nourishing, strength-promoting, and useful in Pitta-Rakta disorders
Goat	4.25	3.52	19.29	11.39	4.81	0.90	Beneficial in respiratory disorders such as Kasa and Shwasa; also acts as Balya and Chakshushya
Sheep	7.90	5.23	13.00	7.75	4.27	0.86	Pacifies Pitta, Rakta, and Vata; considered Vrishya (aphrodisiac)
Camel	5.38	2.98	12.39	7.01	3.26	0.70	Useful in Ashmari (urinary calculi), Sharkara, eye disorders, and promotes bone strength
Mare	1.59	2.69	10.96	9.37	6.14	0.51	Helpful in Shosha, Krimi, Visha, Kushta, and Gulma disorders
Ass	2.53	2.01	10.97	8.44	6.07	0.41	Easily digestible, Vishahara, Sarvarogahara, and useful in Ashmari and Sharkara

Table 3 Showing Bioactive Constituents of Ghee and Their Pharmacological Actions⁷

Bioactive Constituent	Pharmacological Actions
Conjugated Linoleic Acid (CLA)	Exhibits anti-cancer properties, helps prevent arthritis, enhances immune response, and supports muscle strength and firmness
Sphingomyelin	Acts as a tumour-inhibiting agent
Butyric Acid and Other Lipid Components	Helps in reducing and preventing tumour development
Vitamin A and Beta-Carotene (Antioxidants)	Possess antioxidant and anti-cancer activities, help prevent atherosclerosis, and slow down the ageing process
Trans Fatty Acids (naturally occurring in ghee)	Show protective effects against atherosclerosis
Omega-6 (n-6) and Omega-3 (n-3) Fatty Acids	Provide cardio-protective effects including anti-atherogenic, anti-hypertensive, anti-thrombotic, anti-allergic, and anti-arrhythmic actions; also helpful in reducing migraine symptoms, premature labour, and menstrual discomfort

Factors Essential for Preparing Potent and High-Quality Ghrita (Sneha) Kalpas^{8,9}

The following factors should be carefully considered for the preparation of effective and therapeutically superior Ghrita (Sneha) Kalpas:

- A. Proper method of preparation
- B. Appropriate selection and proportion of ingredients
- C. Processing techniques employed during preparation
- D. Quality and quantity of raw materials used
- E. Application of the concept of Murchana (purificatory processing of Sneha)
- F. Assessment of Sneha Siddhi Lakshanas (signs of proper completion of processing)
- G. Types of Sneha Paka and their therapeutic indications
- H. Duration required for completion of Sneha Paka
- I. Standardization methods for Ghrita preparations
- J. Shelf life of Ghrita Kalpas (generally considered as 2 years from April 2010)

Routes of Administration of Ghrita Kalpas for Preventive and Curative Purposes

Ghrita preparations can be administered through various routes depending upon the disease condition and therapeutic requirement:

- A. Paana (oral administration)
- B. Lepa (external application)
- C. Nasya (nasal administration)
- D. Netra Kalpana (ophthalmic applications)
- E. Parisheka (therapeutic pouring)
- F. Anuvasana Basti (unctuous enema therapy) etc.

DISCUSSION

Ghrita (medicated ghee) occupies a unique and revered position in Ayurveda as both a nutritional and therapeutic substance. Described as one of the best Sneha Dravyas, Ghrita possesses the ability to enhance digestion, nourish body tissues, improve memory and intellect, and act as a carrier for medicinal herbs. Ayurvedic classics extensively describe various Ghrita Kalpas for the prevention of diseases, promotion of longevity, and treatment of a wide range of disorders, particularly those involving Vata and Pitta doshas. In the contemporary era, growing scientific evidence regarding the antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, neuroprotective, and bioavailability-enhancing properties of Ghrita has renewed interest in its role in preventive and curative

healthcare. Therefore, understanding the therapeutic significance of Ghrita and Ghrita Kalpas is essential for integrating traditional Ayurvedic wisdom with modern healthcare approaches.

Ghrita Kalpas as Preventive Therapy:

Ghee serves as an important source of essential fatty acids such as linoleic acid and arachidonic acid, which cannot be synthesized adequately by the human body. Deficiency of these fatty acids may result in dryness of the skin in infants and may also affect the reproductive health of both males and females.

Ghee is also rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been scientifically recognized for their significant role in the development of the retinal, nervous, and psychomotor systems. These nutrients are especially beneficial during pregnancy and lactation.

Ayurvedic Acharyas have emphasized the importance of Ghrita consumption in Garbhini Charya (antenatal care) and during the postnatal period by recommending Ghritanna Sevana (intake of food prepared with ghee) for pregnant and lactating women.

Hypo-cholesterolemic Effect of Ghrita¹⁰

It is commonly believed that regular consumption of ghee contributes to obesity and elevated cholesterol levels. To evaluate the validity of this assumption, an experimental study was conducted by Matam Vijayakumar et al. (2000).

In this study, six-week-old male Wistar rats weighing approximately 146 ± 5.12 g were administered diets supplemented with 2.5% and 5% ghee, both unheated and oxidized, over a period of eight weeks. Food and water were provided ad libitum throughout the experimental duration.

For preparation of oxidized ghee, the sample was heated in a stainless-steel container using an electric oven at 120°C for 50 hours until a peroxide value of 25.0 ± 1.0 meq oxygen/kg fat was attained.

The findings demonstrated a reduction in total serum cholesterol levels in rats receiving both 2.5% and 5% ghee supplementation. Rats fed with 2.5% unheated ghee exhibited a 10% reduction in serum cholesterol, whereas those receiving heated ghee showed a 13% reduction. At the 5% supplementation level, unheated ghee reduced serum cholesterol by 16%, while heated ghee produced a 25% reduction when compared with animals fed groundnut oil.

Heating of ghee increases the formation of Cholesterol Oxidation Products (COPs), which have been reported to possess anti-atherogenic and hypocholesterolemic properties.

Further, Matam Vijayakumar et al. (1999) also reported anti-inflammatory activity along with reduction in serum cholesterol and triglyceride levels in psoriatic patients treated with Pancha Tikta Ghrita.

Ghrita/Ghrita Kalpas as Curative Therapy

Ghrita preparations are widely utilized in the management of various neuro-psycho-somatic disorders through multiple routes of administration such as:

- Oral administration (Paana)
- Nasal therapy (Nasya)
- External application (Abhyanga and Lepa)
- Rectal administration (Anuvasana Basti)
- Ophthalmic procedures (Netra Tarpana)

Role of Ghrita in Neurological Disorders

Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, along with vitamin B12, are considered beneficial for the regeneration and maintenance of brain and nerve cells. Since ghee contains these important nutrients, it is believed to support the management of degenerative conditions affecting the brain and nervous system.

Dr. Tejal et al¹¹ from the Institute for Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (IPGT & RA), Jamnagar, observed encouraging therapeutic outcomes in dementia patients treated with Vachadi Ghrita Nasya in combination with Medhya Vati.

Dr. Ratna R. Patel¹² from the Institute for Post Graduate Teaching and Research in Ayurveda (IPGT & RA), Jamnagar, conducted a study on the efficacy of Medhya Ghrita in the management of tension headache (Vataja Shirashula). The study compared the effects of oral administration and nasal administration (Nasya) in two separate groups. Both routes showed beneficial results in reducing symptoms of tension headache; however, the nasal route demonstrated comparatively superior effectiveness.

Similarly, Dr. Suraj et al¹³ assessed the therapeutic efficacy of Dashamula Ghrita administered through the nasal route in patients suffering from migraine headache. The study reported an overall improvement rate of 63%. The percentage of relief observed in individual symptoms was as follows:

- A. Reduction in frequency of headache attacks – 68.3%
- B. Reduction in duration of headache – 83.7%
- C. Relief from nausea – 92%
- D. Relief from vomiting – 87.5%
- E. Reduction in photophobia – 75%
- F. Relief from eye pain – 83.3%

G. Reduction in phonophobia – 80%

H. Relief from paraesthesia – 83%

I. Improvement in Pittadushti – 55%

J. Improvement in Raktavaha Srotodushti – 57%

Ghrita/Ghrita Kalpas in Somatic Disorders

Both plain and medicated Ghrita preparations are extensively used in Ayurveda for Shodhana (purificatory therapy) as well as Shamana (pacifying therapy). Classical Ayurvedic literature describes more than 300 medicated Ghrita formulations indicated for various diseases. Many of these formulations, including plain ghee, have been clinically evaluated for their therapeutic efficacy.

Dr. Mandip Kaur¹⁴ of IPGT & RA, Jamnagar, studied the effect of pure ghee in the management of eczema. In this clinical trial, pure ghee was administered to 32 patients for seven days in gradually increasing doses. The treatment commenced with 30 ml per day given in the morning on an empty stomach, and the dose was progressively increased up to 250 ml on the seventh day.

The study demonstrated significant symptomatic relief, particularly in dryness of skin, which showed an improvement of 79.7%. Other observed improvements included reduction in discharge by 77.3%, local burning sensation by 76.1%, itching by 54.5%, and thickening of skin by 19.8%.

N.G.K. Pillai et al. (1996)¹⁵ and Vipul P. Kanani from IPGT & RA, Jamnagar, also evaluated the therapeutic efficacy of Aragvadhadi Shatapaka (Avartha) Ghrita in the management of psoriasis and reported encouraging clinical outcomes.

Ghrita and Coronary Heart Disease

A widespread belief exists that consumption of fatty foods, particularly ghee, increases blood cholesterol levels and may lead to cardiovascular disorders such as angina, thrombosis, and coronary heart disease. However, research studies conducted by Kansal (2002) and Latha (2002)¹⁶ suggested that elevated cholesterol levels in the body are not solely due to dietary intake of ghee or fats.

According to these studies, the human body synthesizes a much larger quantity of cholesterol internally than what is absorbed from food. Although diets rich in cholesterol may produce hypercholesterolemia and arteriosclerosis in experimental animals, the same observations cannot be directly applied to humans because cholesterol metabolism varies significantly among different species.

Experimental animals generally possess lower serum cholesterol levels and absorb a greater proportion of cholesterol from dietary sources. Humans absorb only about 10–14% of dietary cholesterol, whereas cholesterol absorption in monkeys, dogs, and rabbits ranges between 50–80%, 40–75%, and up to 90% respectively. On the basis of body weight, the cholesterol absorption capacity in humans is estimated to be nearly 1% of that observed in these experimental animals.

Therefore, moderate consumption of ghee may not necessarily pose a significant risk for cardiovascular disorders when included as part of a balanced diet.

Ghrita for Topical Application

In the management of Visarpa (Erysipelas), Ghrita is commonly employed as Shata Dhouta Ghrita or Sahasra Dhouta Ghrita for external application.

To prepare these formulations, cow's ghee is placed in a bronze vessel along with cold water or Panchavalkala Kashaya. The mixture is continuously rubbed using a flat-bottomed bronze utensil. During the process, when the water or decoction becomes slightly warm, it is discarded. This procedure is known as one Dhavana (washing cycle).

The same method is repeated 100 times for Shata Dhouta Ghrita and 1000 times for Sahasra Dhouta Ghrita, each time using fresh water or Panchavalkala Kashaya. Repeated processing converts the ghrita into a smooth emulsion-like preparation.

This emulsified form of Ghrita is considered therapeutically beneficial in relieving the clinical manifestations of Visarpa, particularly burning sensation, inflammation, redness, and irritation of the skin.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion on Ghrita and Ghrita Kalpas, it can be concluded that Ghrita occupies a significant place in Ayurveda for the maintenance and promotion of health as well as for the prevention and management of various diseases.

Both plain and medicated Ghrita preparations have been extensively described in Ayurvedic classics for their utility in antenatal and postnatal care, paediatric and geriatric healthcare, neurological disorders, systemic diseases, gynaecological conditions, and different stages of Panchakarma therapy. Their therapeutic applicability in disorders affecting various organs, particularly the brain and nervous system, has also been emphasized in classical Ayurvedic literature.

Several concepts and therapeutic claims put forward by the ancient Acharyas have been scientifically

investigated by modern researchers and many of these observations have been validated through experimental and clinical studies, demonstrating their relevance even in the present era.

Thus, judicious and appropriate use of Ghrita may be considered highly beneficial for preserving health and enhancing quality of life.

“Proper and rational use of ghee may be regarded as an elixir for healthy living.”

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