



Mind-Body Healing - The Ayurvedic Perspective on Mental Health in Post-Surgical Recovery

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DOI:10.21760/jaims.10.8.18

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Surgical recovery is not merely a physical process; it encompasses profound psychological and emotional dimensions. Despite advancements in operative and perioperative care, mental health remains under-addressed in post-surgical outcomes. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, offers a comprehensive and holistic framework that integrates mind-body healing, emphasizing that emotional well-being is pivotal to physical recovery. The Ayurvedic concept of health includes equilibrium among Doshas, Agni, Dhatus, Malas, and mental faculties, along with stability of the soul and consciousness. Mental disturbances - such as anxiety, grief, and fear can diminish Ojas, the vital essence of life, thereby impairing immune response and delaying healing. This article highlights the significance of incorporating Ayurvedic principles in post-operative care, focusing on Daivavyapashraya (spiritual), Yuktivyapashraya (rational/pharmacological), and Satvavajaya (psychotherapeutic) chikitsa. Additionally, supportive regimens like Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Yoga, and Achara Rasayana foster a sattvic lifestyle conducive to mental resilience. Seasonal awareness through Ritucharya further ensures Doshic balance and stable moods during recovery. Integration of Ayurveda-based psychological support complemented by modern interventions such as CBT and mindfulness can significantly enhance recovery outcomes, reduce hospital stay, and improve quality of life. This article advocates for greater recognition of mental health in surgical protocols and the integration of traditional wisdom with contemporary medical practice.

Keywords: Postoperative care, mental health, recovery, anxiety, Ayurveda, integrative medicine

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How to Cite this Article

Poojary JT, Sajith M, Bhat M, Mind-Body Healing - The Ayurvedic Perspective on Mental Health in Post-Surgical Recovery. J Ayu Int Med Sci. 2025;10(8):100-105.
Available From
<https://jaims.in/jaims/article/view/4581/>

To Browse



Manuscript Received
2025-06-21

Review Round 1
2025-06-28

Review Round 2
2025-07-08

Review Round 3
2025-07-18

Accepted
2025-07-27

Conflict of Interest
None

Funding
Nil

Ethical Approval
Not required

Plagiarism X-checker
12.36

Note



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Introduction

Surgical recovery is a complex process influenced by physical, emotional, and psychological factors especially in emergency surgeries. While advancements in surgical techniques have improved physical recovery, the mental health dimension remains underemphasized. Anxiety, depression, and stress are commonly observed but inadequately addressed. This article aims to underscore the importance of mental health in postoperative outcomes and advocate for integrated management.

A healthy surgery requires medical as well as mental support. Preoperative counselling is thus helpful in enhancing the motivation of the patient. However, the crucial part is the recovery phase that is followed. A healthy mind and fast paced recovery have a strong positive correlation. Patients may feel dependent and experience hopelessness, which requires empathetic communication and assistance from their support network. In the short-term, patients may experience immediate side effects from the anaesthesia and surgical procedure itself, such as nausea, vomiting, infection, blood loss, and significant pain and discomfort. Over the longer-term, patients may develop numbness, scarring, chronic pain syndromes, and even temporary loss of mobility as a result of the surgery. These physical effects can be challenging to manage and can significantly impact a patient's quality of life during the recovery process.[1]

Ayurveda and Mental Health

Ayurveda, traditional system of Indian medicine, emphasizes holistic approach to health, recognizing intricate interplay between body, mind, and spirit in both disease causation and healing. In context of surgical care, mental health is increasingly recognized as critical determinant of recovery, resonating with Ayurvedic insights into role of psychological harmony in restoring physical well-being. In *Ayurveda*, healthy individual is one whose *Doshas*, *Agni*, *Dhatu*s, and *Malas* are in state of balance, and whose sensory organs, mind, and consciousness function harmoniously and with stability.[2] Any imbalance among these will cause disease. In *Agnya Dravyas* highlighting importance of mental wellbeing *Acharya Charaka* states, "*Vishado Rogavardhananam*", meaning that grief or despair is considered most prominent factor in aggravating disease conditions.[3]

Ojas is regarded in *Ayurveda* as a vital essence of life that can be correlated with the concept of immunity, serving as the foundation of strength, disease resistance, and overall well-being. The relationship between *Manas* and *Ojas* is highly relevant in the context of *Manas Roga*, as both *Ojas* and *Manas* are situated in the heart. *Ojas* is diminished by mental disturbances such as anger and grief, leading to fear, anxiety, and impaired functioning of mental faculties.[4]

The individual may lose enthusiasm, and in cases of severe *Ojas* depletion, symptoms like fainting, confusion, delirium, and even death can occur. When *Ojas* is reduced from the body, certain psychological symptoms such as laziness, stupor, and excessive sleep may arise. Conversely, an increase in *Ojas* supports the proper functioning of the mind.[5]

In the fifth chapter of *Sutrasthana Agropaharaniya Adhyaya* *Acharya Sushruta* emphasizes the importance of mental well-being in the *Pashchatkarma* (post-operative management), highlighting that the patient's mind must be protected and stabilized during recovery; he further advocates in *Rakshakarma* (protective measures)- '*Satvamindro abhirakshatu*', "*Manurmanyate matim tathaa*", which means let lord *Indra* and *Manu* protect your mind. In *Vranitopasana* he says till the patient attains *sthairya* they should not yield to emotions such as *Harsha*(joy), *Krodha*(anger) and *Bhaya*(fear).[6]

In *Ayurveda*, the treatment of mental illness is broadly categorized into three approaches:

1. *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa*
2. *Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa*
3. *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*

Discussion

The intricate relationship between mental health and physical recovery is increasingly acknowledged in modern medicine, and *Ayurveda* offers a profound holistic framework that integrates mind and body healing, particularly in the context of post-surgical recovery. Central to *Ayurvedic* thought is the concept that the mind (*Manas*) and vital essence (*Ojas*) reside in the heart and are fundamentally interconnected, influencing both emotional well-being and physiological resilience.

This interdependence underscores the importance of addressing psychological factors alongside physical treatment to optimize healing outcomes.

The Link Between Mental Health and Recovery:

Poor mental health can:

- Increase pain sensitivity
- Delay wound healing
- Impair compliance with rehabilitation
- Prolong hospitalization and increase readmissions

Studies have shown that mental well-being significantly impacts immune function, inflammation, and hormonal balance, all of which are critical to surgical recovery.

Phases and Influences in Postoperative Recovery:[7]

Postoperative recovery is typically categorized into three phases:

- 1. Immediate Phase** - Occurs during hospitalization; involves critical monitoring and initial healing.
- 2. Intermediate Phase** - Focuses on transitioning to home care, managing pain, mobility, and basic functional needs.
- 3. Long-Term Phase** - Entails sustained rehabilitation and reintegration into normal life activities.

Influencing Factors

- **Physical:** Age, sex, comorbidities, surgical complexity
- **Psychological:** Baseline mental health, social support, coping mechanisms
- Health literacy, Prolonged hospital stays

Psychological Complications Post-Surgery

Common conditions include:

- Anxiety and depression
- PTSD
- Adjustment disorders
- Social withdrawal

These conditions are known to hinder functional recovery, reduce quality of life, and escalate healthcare expenditures.

Ayurvedic approaches to Mental Health in Post-Operative Recovery

Ayurveda offers a multifaceted approach to managing mental health, particularly relevant in the delicate phase of post-operative recovery.

1. Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa (Spiritual and Religious Therapies)[8]

This modality is designed to instill confidence and dispel negative or pessimistic tendencies by invoking spiritual strength and protection. It includes practices such as *Mantra* (chanting of hymns), *Aushadha* (sacred herbs), *Manimangala* (auspicious offerings), *Bali* (ritual sacrifices), *Upadhana*, *Homa* (sacred fire rituals), *Niyama* (spiritual observances), *Prayashchitta* (acts of atonement), *Upavasa* (fasting), *Pranipata* (reverence), *Yatragamana* (pilgrimage), and other religious rites. These interventions provide emotional anchoring and a sense of protection, helping to reduce anxiety, fear, and emotional vulnerability, which are common during the post-operative period.

2. Yuktivyapashraya Chikitsa (Rational and Pharmacological Therapies)[9]

This therapeutic category is based on the principles of *Shodhana* (purification) and *Shamana* (pacification), utilizing various medicinal formulations to restore mental balance. These include:

- Single herbs (*Medhya Rasayanas*): *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monnieri*), *Mandukaparni* (*Centella asiatica*), *Ashwagandha* (*Withania smonifera*), *Jatamamsi* (*Nardostachys Jatamamsi*), *Shankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluracalis*) known for their neuroprotective and adaptogenic properties.
- Medicated Ghee preparations (*Ghritas*): *Panchagavya Ghrita*, *Brahmi Ghrita*, *Mahakalyanaka Ghrita* - which nourish the brain and support cognitive functions.
- Herbo-mineral formulations: *Brahmi Vati*, *Vata Kulantaka Rasa*, *Smriti Sagar Rasa*, *Yogendra Rasa*, *Manasamitra Vatakam* - used for stabilizing mood, enhancing memory, and reducing mental agitation.

These interventions are critical in addressing post-surgical mental disturbances such as restlessness, depression, insomnia,

Or emotional instability, supporting the patient's cognitive and emotional resilience.

3. *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* (Psychotherapeutic Interventions)[10]

Aimed at achieving mastery over the mind, this approach helps the patient reconnect with the higher self by cultivating spiritual awareness and emotional discipline. Its techniques include:

- *Jnana* (spiritual knowledge),
- *Vijnana* (education and understanding of one's condition),
- *Dhairya* (encouragement and moral support),
- *Smriti* (memory and insight reinforcement),
- *Samadhi* (withdrawal from excessive material engagement).

These methods help reduce psychological stress, support emotional clarity, and foster mental calmness an essential foundation for physical recovery post-surgery.

4. *Yoga Therapy*[11]

Based on the principal *Yoga "Moksha Pravartaka"* (*Yoga* as the path to liberation), *Yoga* therapy seeks to enhance *Sattva* (clarity), and reduce *Rajas* (agitation) and *Tamas* (inertia). This shift leads to *Karmakshaya* (cessation of karmic disturbances) and promotes profound mental stillness and recovery. In the post-operative setting, gentle *Yoga* practices can aid in reducing stress, improving sleep, and supporting psychosomatic balance.

5. *SwasthaVritta and Achara Rasayana* (Code of Conduct for Well-being)[12]

A non-pharmacological approach that emphasizes ethical living, personal hygiene, abstaining from anger, alcohol, and overindulgence, maintaining regular sleep, consuming wholesome food, and exercising self-control. This behavioural discipline contributes significantly to both mental and physical health, ensuring a smooth post-operative recovery.

6. *Dinacharya* (Daily Routine)[13]

The practice of beginning the day with self-awareness rising with the sun, cleansing the body, and performing spiritual practices helps individuals reconnect with themselves and their surroundings. Proper selection of food based on appetite and metabolism, and aligning daily activities like eating,

Resting, and recreation with natural rhythms, prevents psychological imbalances. Post-surgical patients benefit from this structured routine, which promotes emotional stability and supports the healing process.

7. *Ritucharya* (Seasonal regimen)[14]

Each season exerts specific influences on *Doshas*, metabolism, immunity, and mental stability. For instance, in *Varsha Ritu* (monsoon), *Vata* tends to vitiate - potentially delaying wound healing and increasing anxiety or restlessness. In contrast, *Sharad Ritu* (autumn) may aggravate *Pitta*, leading to inflammation, irritability, or mood disturbances. Hence, aligning post-operative care with seasonal guidelines can help in preventing such imbalances.

Observing *Ritucharya* during recovery supports:

- **Improved digestion and metabolism**, aiding assimilation of medicines and nourishment.
- **Balanced *Doshas***, preventing complications such as delayed wound healing or secondary infections.
- **Mental stability**, as seasonal regimens include guidance on sleep, activity, and emotional discipline.
- **Enhanced *Ojas***, by promoting sattvic lifestyle practices and minimizing seasonal stress on immunity and cognition.

In the mental health context, seasonal disturbances often manifest as mood changes, fatigue, or emotional reactivity. *Ritucharya* helps stabilize the mind by maintaining routine, suitable diet, and regulating activities, thereby supporting a calm and adaptive mental state essential for post-surgical healing.

Role of Healthcare Professionals

- **Assessment:** Early screening for psychiatric symptoms using validated tools
- **Intervention:** Implementation of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) or any suitable ayurveda therapies like *Pranayama*, *Mantrochharana* etc
- **Collaboration:** Training and sensitization of surgical staff to recognize and appropriately manage psychological symptoms.

Integration Example:

Case Report

A 45-year-old male patient undergoes emergency laparotomy for intestinal obstruction. Postoperatively, he develops symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, and low mood, affecting his compliance with physiotherapy and wound care, thereby delaying recovery.

Integrated Management Plan:**1. Modern Medicine Interventions:**

- Psychiatric evaluation - mild postoperative anxiety and adjustment disorder.
- Can Initiate Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions have focused on coping strategies and motivation.
- Anxiolytics if needed

2. Ayurvedic Interventions:

- *Medhya Rasayana*: Prescribed *Brahmi Ghrita* or *Ashwagandha Churna* with milk for anxiolytic, adaptogenic effects.
- *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*: Daily 15-minute sessions of *Dhairya* (counselling) and *Smriti*-based recall therapy where patient reflects on past recovery successes and personal strengths.
- *Ritucharya* and *Dinacharya*: Seasonal dietary and behavioural modifications assuming the recovery occurred during *Sharad Ritu* (autumn) —a time when *Pitta* aggravation is common. Cooling diet (*Shitala Ahara/Vihara*), regulated sleep-wake cycles, and *Padabhyanga* can be done.

Conclusion

Post-surgical recovery is a transformative phase involving not just physical repair but also psychological restoration. Mental health challenges such as anxiety, fear, depression, and emotional instability are common yet frequently overlooked. *Ayurveda*, with its time-tested principles, offers a rich and multidimensional approach to healing that addresses the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of the patient. Central to this is the concept of *Ojas*, whose preservation is essential for resilience, immunity, and clarity of mind. Through therapeutic strategies like *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*, use of *Medhya Rasayanas*, and implementation of *Dinacharya*,

Ritucharya, and *Achara Rasayana*, *Ayurveda* creates a structured, harmonious environment conducive to holistic recovery. These methods not only restore physiological balance but also provide emotional grounding and spiritual orientation, which modern medicine often lacks. Recognizing and treating mental imbalances as part of routine postoperative care can lead to faster recovery, fewer complications, and a better overall prognosis. Therefore, integrating *Ayurvedic* principles into mainstream post-surgical care, alongside psychological screening and counselling, can bridge existing gaps in healthcare. This synergy between ancient wisdom and modern science offers a truly comprehensive and compassionate model of healing, where both the body and the mind are nurtured equally.

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