

# VICHARCHIKA (ATOPIC DERMATITIS): AN INTEGRATIVE ANALYSIS THROUGH AYURVEDIC AND MODERN DERMATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract

Skin diseases have always been a challenge — both for the patient living with them and the physician trying to treat them. One such condition is *Vicharchika*, which has been described in Ayurvedic texts for centuries. When you look at its features carefully, it is strikingly similar to what modern medicine calls Atopic Dermatitis (AD) — a chronic, recurring skin condition that affects millions of people worldwide.

In Ayurveda, *Vicharchika* is considered to occur due to the imbalance of *Kapha*, *Pitta*, and *Rakta dhatu* (blood), which affects the skin and leads to symptoms such as intense itching, dark discoloration, oozing lesions, and dryness of the skin. Modern medicine explains the same disease through a combination of faulty genes, a weakened skin barrier, and an overactive immune system.

This paper looks at both explanations side by side — The aim is not to compare Ayurveda and modern medicine by proving one superior to the other, but to understand how each system explains the cause, progression, symptoms, and treatment of the disease. By

looking at both perspectives together, a more complete and patient-centered approach can be achieved. Ayurveda is strong in addressing root causes and long-term healing. Modern medicine helps in giving quick relief and controlling symptoms effectively. When combined with Ayurveda, both approaches may work together to provide better overall care and long-term benefits.

**Keywords:** *Vicharchika*, Atopic Dermatitis, *Kushtha*, Ayurveda, *Kapha*, *Pitta*, *Rakta Dushti*, Skin Inflammation

## 1. Introduction

Skin is the largest organ of the body and often reflects our overall health. When the skin becomes red, itchy, dry, or starts oozing, it usually means that something inside the body is also disturbed, not just the skin alone. More often, it reflects something deeper going on inside the body.

Atopic Dermatitis is one of the most common long-term skin conditions seen today. It is especially common in children, though many adults struggle with it too. The constant itching, disturbed sleep, and visible skin

changes can seriously affect a person's confidence and quality of life.

Interestingly, Ayurveda described a very similar condition — called *Vicharchika* — thousands of years ago. It is listed under *Kshudra Kushtha* (minor skin disorders) and is marked by intense itching, eruptions, oozing, and darkening of the skin. Classical texts explain this as the result of disturbed *Kapha* and *Pitta*, combined with impurities in the blood (*Rakta*), blocking the body's natural channels.

Looking at this condition through both lenses — ancient and modern — helps us see it more completely. That is exactly what this paper sets out to do.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This is a review-based study. Information was gathered from Ayurvedic classical texts as well as modern medical books and research articles.

### Ayurvedic Sources Used:

- Charaka Samhita
- Sushruta Samhita
- Ashtanga Hridayam
- Madhava Nidanam

### Modern Medical Sources Used:

- Fitzpatrick's Dermatology
- Rook's Textbook of Dermatology
- Dermatology and Sexually Transmitted Diseases by Neena Khanna
- Research articles from PubMed (2000–2024)

All sources that discussed causes, symptoms, or treatment of either Atopic Dermatitis or *Vicharchika* were

included. The information was then arranged under five themes: causes, disease progression, symptoms, treatment, and a comparison between both systems.

## 3. The Ayurvedic View of Vicharchika

### 3.1 What Causes It?

Ayurveda takes a very holistic view of disease. According to classical texts, *Vicharchika* can develop due to several everyday habits and lifestyle choices:

- Eating foods that don't go well together — for example, fish with milk
- Eating again before the previous meal is properly digested
- Consuming too many heavy, oily, or fermented foods
- Sleeping during the daytime excessively
- Living with prolonged stress, sadness, or anxiety
- Suppressing natural urges of the body
- Exposure to microbial organisms (referred to as *Krimi*)

All of these factors disturb *Kapha*, *Pitta*, and *Rakta*, and block the body's channels (*srotas*), eventually pushing the problem to the skin.

### 3.2 How the Disease Progresses

Ayurveda describes disease as something that does not appear overnight. It moves through six stages — a concept called *Shat Kriyakala*:

- *Sanchaya* — *Kapha* and *Pitta* start building up quietly due to poor diet and lifestyle
- *Prakopa* — These doshas become aggravated and restless in their usual sites

- Prasara — They begin spreading through the body, carried along with vitiated blood
- Sthana Samsraya — They settle in the skin, muscle tissue, and blood
- Vyakti — Symptoms appear: itching, eruptions, oozing
- Bheda — The disease becomes deep-rooted and chronic if not treated

This step-by-step model is actually quite useful because it tells us that early identification and treatment can stop the disease before it becomes difficult to manage.

### 3.3 Symptoms

As described in the *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*:

- Kandu — Severe itching, usually worse at night
- Pidaka — Small, fluid-filled bumps or eruptions on the skin
- Bahusrava — Oozing or discharge from the affected areas
- Shyava Varna — The skin turns dark or reddish-brown
- Rukshata — Dryness and roughness of the skin
- Daha — A burning feeling in the affected areas

### 3.4 How Ayurveda Treats It

#### A. Shodhana — Cleaning the Body from Within

- Virechana (therapeutic purgation) — the main treatment, especially when Pitta is the dominant dosha
- Vamana (therapeutic emesis) — used when Kapha is more prominent

- Raktamokshana (controlled bloodletting) — used when blood vitiation is the main concern

#### B. Internal Medicines

- Khadirarishta
- Mahamanjishthadi Kashayam
- Gandhaka Rasayana
- Arogyavardhini Vati
- Trikatu Churna

#### C. External Treatments

- Medicated oils: Nalpamaradi Tailam, Karanja Taila
- Herbal wash: Panchavalkala Kwatha (decoction)
- Herbal pastes: Neem, Turmeric, Lodhra applied directly to the skin

#### D. Diet and Lifestyle Changes

- Avoid spicy, fermented, oily, and incompatible foods
- Eat light, easily digestible meals with bitter vegetables
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule and practice stress-reducing activities like yoga

## 4. The Modern Medical View of Atopic Dermatitis

### 4.1 What Causes It?

- A mutation in the filaggrin (FLG) gene — this weakens the skin barrier and makes it easier for allergens to enter

- An overactive immune response — the body's defence system goes into overdrive, producing excessive inflammation
- Environmental allergens — dust mites, pollen, pet dander, and mould
- Staphylococcus aureus bacteria — this common skin bacteria colonizes affected skin and makes things worse
- Psychological stress — known to trigger or worsen flare-ups
- Topical steroids — low-potency ones for acute flare-ups to bring down inflammation quickly
- Calcineurin inhibitors (tacrolimus, pimecrolimus) — steroid-free options for sensitive skin areas
- Phototherapy — narrowband UVB light treatment for moderate cases
- Systemic medicines — cyclosporine or methotrexate for severe, resistant cases
- Dupilumab (biologic) — a breakthrough injection that targets IL-4 and IL-13, giving long-term relief
- JAK inhibitors (upadacitinib, abrocitinib) — newer pills for severe cases not responding to other treatments
- Lifestyle advice — avoiding known allergens, managing stress, and getting proper sleep

## 4.2 How the Disease Develops

When the skin barrier is weak, allergens and bacteria enter the skin easily. The immune system reacts by producing large amounts of IgE antibodies and inflammatory chemicals like IL-4 and IL-13. This causes intense itching, and the person scratches — which damages the skin further, allows more bacteria in, and creates a vicious cycle that is hard to break.

## 4.3 Symptoms

- Intense itching, especially at night
- Red, inflamed patches of skin
- Small blisters that may ooze fluid
- Dry, scaly, thickened skin over time
- Dark patches in chronically affected areas
- Commonly seen on the face, neck, hands, and skin folds like the inner elbow and behind the knee

## 4.4 Treatment Options

- Moisturizers — used every day to keep the skin barrier intact and reduce dryness

## 5. Comparing Both Systems

When you place the two systems side by side, the similarities are quite surprising — especially considering how different their origins are.

**On causes:** Ayurveda points to dosha imbalance, wrong diet, and emotional stress. Modern medicine points to gene mutations, immune dysfunction, and allergens. But both agree that stress, diet, and the body's internal state all play a role.

**On how the disease develops:** The Ayurvedic idea of blocked body channels and impure blood is actually quite close to the modern concept of a broken skin barrier and an overactive immune system — both describe the body failing to contain and regulate itself.

**On symptoms:** Both systems describe the same core features: nighttime itching, oozing eruptions, skin darkening, and dryness. The language is different but they are clearly talking about the same thing.

**On treatment:** Ayurveda purifies the body from within and uses herbs. Modern medicine suppresses inflammation and repairs the skin barrier. Both approaches have real value.

**On diet:** Ayurveda makes diet a core part of treatment. Modern medicine acknowledges certain food allergens as triggers — so diet matters in both systems, just addressed differently.

**On stress:** Ayurveda listed grief and anxiety as direct causes thousands of years ago. Modern medicine has now confirmed through research that psychological stress worsens the disease through neuroimmune pathways.

**On prognosis:** Ayurveda considers the condition curable with proper treatment and lifestyle changes. Modern medicine sees it as a chronic condition requiring long-term management — though newer biologics have significantly improved outcomes.

## 6. Discussion

The deeper you look, the more you see how well the two systems align. Take the three *doshas* in Ayurveda: *Kapha* causes oozing and heaviness — very similar to the Th2 immune overactivation and IgE-mediated allergy seen in AD. *Pitta* causes burning and redness — matching the mast cell-driven inflammation documented in modern studies. And *Vata* causes dryness and roughness — exactly what happens when the filaggrin gene is mutated and the skin barrier breaks down.

The Ayurvedic idea of *Ama* — toxins formed by poor digestion accumulating in the body — is also interesting in light of modern research showing that gut health and intestinal permeability play a role in atopic disease. And the concept of *Rakta Dushti* (impure blood) corresponds well to the elevated IgE and inflammatory markers found in the bloodstream of AD patients.

Modern medicine works fast. A steroid cream can calm a flare in days. But long-term steroid use has real downsides — skin thinning, hormonal effects, and diminishing returns over time. Ayurvedic herbs like Neem, Turmeric, Manjishtha, and Khadira have been studied and shown to have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and immune-regulating properties. Using them for long-term maintenance while reserving modern medicines for acute flares could genuinely reduce the overall treatment burden for patients.

## 7. Conclusion

*Vicharchika* and Atopic Dermatitis are two names for what is clearly the same condition — described by two different medical traditions separated by centuries and geography. The fact that they arrive at such similar conclusions about symptoms, causes, and even treatment rationale tells us something important: both systems are observing real patterns in the human body.

Rather than seeing Ayurveda and modern medicine as opposites, we should see them as complementary. A patient with chronic Atopic Dermatitis could benefit greatly from a combined approach — Ayurvedic purification and herbal support for long-term balance, and modern targeted therapy for rapid control during sudden worsening.

What is needed now is more rigorous clinical research — well-designed trials that test these combined approaches and give us the evidence to support integrative care with confidence.

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