SattvaStack

dinacharya · the daily regimen

The Field Guide to a Vedic Day

One hundred practices, arranged by the hour. For each: how to do it, why, the verse it comes from, the study behind it, and an honest reading of how strong the evidence is.

sattvastack.com · Free to print and share · September 2026

How to use this guide

Do not try to do a hundred things. Five of these, marked **The Stack**, are the anchors we ask every member to keep: rise before the sun, ten minutes of daylight, sit still for ten minutes, an early light dinner, and bed by ten. Start there. Add two or three more for the part of your life you most want to change, and give the set twenty-one days before you judge it.

Each practice carries two sources. The classical one is where the guidance comes from, usually Ashtanga Hridaya or Charaka Samhita, sometimes the Gita or the yoga texts. The modern one is the best study we could find, with its size and its limits. Where there is no study we say so, and where the tradition and the trials disagree we say that too.

Well supported
Consistent trials or large cohorts.

Supported
Good trials, fewer of them.

Limited evidence
Small or low-certainty studies.

Traditional
Classical guidance, little modern testing, low risk.

Nothing here is medical advice. It is lifestyle guidance rooted in a tradition and checked against research. If you are pregnant, on medication, or living with a condition, take the food and fasting practices to your doctor first.

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PART 1

Before dawn and the first hour

Everything the texts ask for before the sun is up: the wake time, the body's housekeeping, light and stillness.

Rise before the sun

1

Up at the same time, every day, before sunrise

THE STACK Before sunrise · Well supported · Morning, Evening, Sleep

How. Pick one wake time you can keep seven days a week and set it 30 to 60 minutes before sunrise. Feet on the floor before you touch the phone.

Why. The texts open the day here because the mind is quiet and the body is light. What modern research adds is that a regular wake time matters more than a long sleep: in a study of 60,000 adults, how regular people's sleep was predicted their health better than how long they slept.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2.1: a healthy person rises in the brahma muhurta, the last stretch of night before dawn.

Modern. Windred et al., Sleep, 2023: sleep regularity is a stronger predictor of mortality risk than sleep duration (60,977 UK Biobank participants).

Windred 2023, Sleep · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Empty the bowels before anything else

2

Water, then the bathroom, before tea or the phone

First thing · Traditional · Morning, Diet

How. A glass of warm water on waking, then sit, unhurried, without a phone. The body has a reflex for this in the first half hour; give it the chance. Do not strain.

Why. The classical morning begins with elimination, before anything is eaten. Regularity here is downstream of everything else in the library: an early dinner, a fixed wake time, water and a walk. Modern medicine has no trial to add and no argument with it.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2.1 to 2.2: on rising, attend to the calls of nature; the whole regimen that follows assumes an emptied body.

Modern. No trial to cite. The morning gastrocolic reflex is textbook physiology; the practice is low risk and free.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

No lie-ins at the weekend

3

Same wake time on Sunday as on Tuesday

Saturday and Sunday · Supported · Sleep, Morning

How. Keep the weekday wake time within half an hour at the weekend. If you are short of sleep, go to bed earlier on Friday rather than sleeping later on Saturday.

Why. A late weekend is a short flight east every Monday. Chronobiologists call the gap between the two schedules social jetlag, and in a survey of 65,000 people every hour of it went with a higher chance of being overweight.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.1 does not have weekends; the rising time is the same every day of the year.

Modern. Roenneberg et al., Current Biology, 2012: in a European database of 65,000 people, social jetlag was associated with higher body mass independent of sleep duration.

Roenneberg 2012, Current Biology · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Scrape the tongue

4

Seven strokes before your first sip

First thing, before water · Limited evidence · Morning, Diet

How. Before drinking anything, draw a copper or steel scraper from the back of the tongue to the tip five to seven times, rinsing between. Twenty seconds.

Why. The coating that builds overnight is bacteria and debris. Clearing it wakes taste, freshens breath and, in the classical view, sharpens the appetite for the day's first meal.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.75: the deposit at the root of the tongue obstructs the breath and causes foul smell; it should be scraped.

Modern. A Cochrane review found scrapers reduce the sulphur compounds behind bad breath better than brushing, though the trials were small and short.

Cochrane 2006, tongue scraping · Charaka Su. 5

Warm water first

5

A glass, warm, before tea or coffee

After scraping the tongue · Traditional · Morning, Diet

How. One glass of warm water, sipped, before anything else. Coffee or tea can follow if you like; just not first.

Why. The body has gone eight hours without fluid. Warm water starts digestion gently and makes the morning bowel movement the texts insist on far more likely.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.1 puts elimination right after waking; later Ayurvedic texts call the practice of morning water ushapana.

Modern. There is no strong trial evidence for warm water specifically; it is low risk, cheap and widely kept.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Brush with a neem or miswak twig

6

A chewed twig, once a day, alongside the toothbrush

After the tongue · Limited evidence · Morning

How. Chew the end of a neem, babul or miswak twig until it frays, then brush gums and teeth with it for two minutes. Once a day is enough; keep the toothbrush and paste for the rest.

Why. Charaka names the twigs to use and asks that they be bitter, pungent or astringent. The trials are small but consistent: used properly, the twig controls plaque about as well as a brush and does a little better for the gums.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.71 to 5.74: clean the teeth twice a day with a twig of arka, nyagrodha, khadira, karanja or similar, astringent, pungent or bitter, without hurting the gums.

Modern. Systematic review and meta-analysis, Journal of Ethnopharmacology, 2021: miswak was comparable to a toothbrush for plaque and somewhat better for gingivitis across five pooled trials.

Miswak meta-analysis, 2021 · Charaka Su. 5

Open the window on waking

7

Fresh air through the bedroom, ten minutes

As you get up · Limited evidence · Morning, Sleep

How. Throw the bedroom window open as you rise and leave it while you do the rest of your morning. In cold weather, ten minutes is enough. Better still, leave it cracked overnight.

Why. Airing the house is in every grandmother's dinacharya if not the texts. The study is Danish and small: students who slept with the window open, and so with far less carbon dioxide in the room, slept better and thought more clearly the next day.

Classical. Not a verse; a household habit across India. The classical bedroom is described as clean, ventilated and free of strong smells.

Modern. Strom-Tejsen et al., Indoor Air, 2016: with the window open (660 ppm CO_2 versus 2,585 ppm), measured sleep quality, next-day sleepiness and a logic test all improved in 14 students.

Strom-Tejsen 2016, Indoor Air

Say your sankalpa

8

Your vow, out loud, before the day starts

At the end of your morning practice · Traditional · Purpose, Mind, Morning

How. Say the vow you set at the start of these 21 days, once, aloud or under the breath, before you open anything on the phone. Ten seconds.

Why. The vow you set at the start is the direction for these 21 days. Saying it each morning keeps the days pointed somewhere once the routine turns ordinary.

Classical. The sankalpa is the traditional opening of any vrata, a period of committed practice; the intention is stated before the practice begins.

Modern. No trial to cite; this is a matter of attention, not physiology.

Hold oil in the mouth

9

A spoon of sesame oil, swished five minutes, spat out

After the tongue, before the bath · Limited evidence · Morning, Diet

How. A tablespoon of sesame or coconut oil, swished slowly for five to ten minutes while you do something else, then spat into the bin, not the sink. Rinse.

Why. The texts list it beside the tongue scraper for the mouth, jaw and voice. Modern trials find it helps gum health, though a medicated mouthwash still clears plaque better.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.6 places gandusha in the morning sequence; chapter 22 describes it in detail.

Modern. Systematic reviews (Heliyon 2020; Int J Dent Hygiene 2024): oil pulling improves gum health compared with no rinse, with low certainty; chlorhexidine remains better against plaque.

Heliyon 2020 review · Jong 2024 meta-analysis

Make the bed, clear the room

10

Shaucha: two minutes of order before the day

Before leaving the bedroom · Limited evidence · Morning, Mind, Focus

How. Straighten the bed, open the curtains, put yesterday's clothes away. Two minutes. The room you wake in tomorrow is the one you leave today.

Why. Shaucha, cleanliness of body and surroundings, is the first of the yoga observances. A study of home life found that people who described their homes as cluttered and unfinished had the flat daily cortisol curve that goes with chronic stress.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 2.32 lists shaucha, purity, first among the niyamas; Charaka's sadvritta asks for a clean home and clean clothes.

Modern. Saxbe and Repetti, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 2010: among 60 working parents, those who described their homes as cluttered had flatter diurnal cortisol slopes and more depressed mood across the day.

Saxbe & Repetti 2010 · Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

An hour of silence

11

Mauna: no speech, no messages, one hour a day

The first hour, or the last · Traditional · Mind, Digital, Evening, Morning

How. Choose an hour, the first of the day or the last, and do not speak, type or read messages in it. Tell the household. Do ordinary things in it: cook, walk, sit.

Why. Mauna, kept silence, is the oldest discipline of speech in the tradition, prescribed for a day a week in the ashrams. No trial has tested it. An hour without output is the cheapest rest the mind gets, and the practice makes the rest of the day's speech more deliberate.

Classical. Charaka's sadvritta asks for measured, timely, truthful speech; the Gita 17.16 lists silence among the austerities of the mind.

Modern. No trial to cite.

Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta · Bhagavad Gita 17.16

Keep a vow for a season 12

One thing given up, or taken up, for forty days

For a fixed period, announced · Limited evidence · Purpose, Mind, Seasonal

How. Choose one thing for forty days: no sugar, no phone after eight, a walk at dawn. Say it out loud to someone who will ask. Mark the days. When it ends, decide whether to keep it.

Why. The vrata is the tradition's form for behaviour change: a bounded, announced commitment. Behavioural economists rediscovered it as the commitment device, and the evidence is that a promise with a deadline and a witness is kept far more often than an intention.

Classical. The vrata, a vowed observance with a fixed span and rules, runs through the Puranas and the household calendar; Yoga Sutras 2.1 on tapas, disciplined effort, as the first limb of practice.

Modern. Rogers, Milkman and Volpp, JAMA, 2014: a review of commitment devices, voluntary arrangements that bind future behaviour, found they improve adherence to health goals across weight loss, exercise and smoking.

Rogers 2014, JAMA

Ten minutes of daylight 13

Outside, early, eyes open to the sky

THE STACK Within an hour of waking · Well supported · Morning, Sleep, Focus, Mind

How. Step outside within an hour of waking, no sunglasses, and stay ten minutes. A balcony or a walk to buy milk counts. Cloudy is fine; it is still far brighter than indoors.

Why. Morning light is the strongest signal your body clock receives. It pulls sleepiness earlier in the evening, so the early night you want becomes easier instead of a fight.

Classical. Rising with the sun is the hinge of the whole regimen in Ashtanga Hridaya 2; the texts assume you meet the dawn, not a ceiling.

Modern. In 700 UK adults, brighter days and dimmer nights went with earlier, more settled sleep (PNAS, 2023); a single half hour of bright morning light shifts the clock earlier (Sleep Medicine, 2015).

PNAS 2023, light and sleep timing · Morning bright light phase advance

Sit still, ten minutes 14

Slow breath or a mantra, same seat, same time

THE STACK After the bath, before the phone · Supported · Mind, Focus, Purpose, Morning

How. Same seat, same time, ten minutes. Breathe slowly, around six breaths a minute (in for five, out for five), or repeat a mantra you have been given. When the mind wanders, come back; that is the practice.

Why. Ten minutes is enough to change the day, and eight weeks of it changes the mind you bring to everything else. Slow breathing is the fastest reliable way to settle the nervous system.

Classical. Sadvritta, the conduct section of Ashtanga Hridaya 2, asks for control of body, speech and mind each day; dhyana and japa are its daily tools.

Modern. A meta-analysis of 223 studies: slow breathing near six breaths a minute raises vagal heart-rate variability (Neurosci Biobehav Rev, 2022). Thirteen minutes of daily meditation for eight weeks improved attention, memory and mood in beginners (Behav Brain Res, 2019).

Laborde 2022, slow breathing meta-analysis · Basso 2019, brief daily meditation

Twelve rounds of sun salutation 15

Surya namaskar: the whole body, twelve minutes

Facing the sunrise, before the bath · Limited evidence · Movement, Morning, Mind

How. Twelve rounds, slowly, breathing with each move. Start with four if twelve is too many. Face east, and let the breath set the pace rather than the clock.

Why. The salutation is a complete morning practice in one sequence: stretch, strength, breath and a bow to the sun. Small trials show what you would expect from twelve minutes of daily whole-body movement: better endurance, strength and lung capacity.

Classical. Not in the medical texts; surya namaskar is a yoga practice with roots in the Vedic hymns to the sun. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.10 asks for daily exercise to half your strength, which twelve rounds roughly is.

Modern. Bhutkar et al., Asian Journal of Sports Medicine, 2011, and a 2026 systematic review: six months of daily sun salutation improved muscle strength, endurance and cardiorespiratory measures in students; trials are small and mostly uncontrolled.

Systematic review, Healthcare, 2026 · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Oil the body 16

Warm sesame oil, five minutes, before the bath

Before bathing · Limited evidence · Morning, Mind, Sleep, Movement

How. Warm a little sesame oil (coconut in hot weather), work it into the scalp, ears and soles at minimum, the whole body when there is time. Sit five minutes, then bathe. Short version on weekdays, full version on Sunday.

Why. Abhyanga is the practice people notice fastest: calmer, warmer, better sleep. It is also the one that looks strangest from outside, which is why it is worth understanding before you start.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.8: daily oiling delays ageing, relieves fatigue and vata, improves vision, nourishes the tissues, brings sleep and good skin. Charaka 5.81 to 92 names head and feet in particular.

Modern. Small studies only: a pilot trial of a one-hour abhyanga lowered heart rate, blood pressure and reported stress; a 15-day self-massage study reported a 16 percent drop in stress scores.

Basler 2011, J Altern Complement Med · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Alternate nostril breathing 17

Five minutes, before you sit still

Before sitting, or before bed · Supported · Mind, Morning, Sleep, Focus

How. Thumb closes the right nostril, breathe in through the left. Ring finger closes the left, breathe out through the right, in through the right, then switch. Slow, quiet, no strain. Ten rounds.

Why. Nadi shodhana is the classical way to settle the breath before meditation. It is also one of the most studied practices in yoga, and the results are consistent: a lower resting heart rate, lower blood pressure in people running high, and a steadier nervous system.

Classical. Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2.7 to 2.10: breathe in through the left nostril, hold, breathe out through the right, and reverse; practised this way the channels are purified in three months.

Modern. A systematic review of 44 randomised trials found consistently lower resting heart rate and systolic pressure and improved heart-rate variability; a 2023 trial in hypertensive patients confirmed the shift toward vagal tone.

Systematic review of 44 trials · 2023 RCT in hypertension

Chant at sunrise 18

The Gayatri, or Om, eleven times, facing the light

As the sun comes up · Limited evidence · Mind, Morning, Purpose

How. Stand or sit facing the sunrise. Chant the Gayatri mantra, or simply Om, eleven times, slowly, out loud. If you have no mantra, hum a long note on the out-breath.

Why. Sandhya, the practice at the joints of the day, is the oldest daily observance in the tradition. What the scanner adds is odd and specific: chanting Om quietened the brain regions that run worry and threat, in a way that saying a control sound did not.

Classical. Sandhyavandana at dawn is prescribed across the Dharmashastra; Ashtanga Hridaya 2 places worship in the morning sequence after the bath.

Modern. Kalyani et al., International Journal of Yoga, 2011 (pilot fMRI): chanting Om deactivated the amygdala, orbitofrontal and anterior cingulate regions, resembling the pattern of vagus nerve stimulation; twelve subjects.

Kalyani 2011, Int J Yoga · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Om, nine times 19

One long syllable on each out-breath

Opening or closing your sitting · Limited evidence · Mind, Morning, Evening

How. Sit, breathe in, and sound Om for the whole out-breath, low and steady, nine times. Feel it in the chest and the skull. Then sit in the silence it leaves.

Why. Om opens and closes every practice in the tradition. The scanner and the microphone both found something: chanting it quietened the brain's threat and worry centres, and the humming exhale raises nitric oxide in the nose. Nine breaths is two minutes.

Classical. Mandukya Upanishad: Om is all this; Yoga Sutras 1.27 to 1.28: the syllable is the name of the highest, and its repetition with attention to its meaning removes obstacles.

Modern. Kalyani et al., International Journal of Yoga, 2011: Om chanting deactivated limbic regions on fMRI. Weitzberg and Lundberg, 2002: humming raised nasal nitric oxide fifteen-fold.

Kalyani 2011, Int J Yoga · Weitzberg & Lundberg 2002

A mala of japa 20

One mantra, 108 beads, once a day

After sitting still · Limited evidence · Mind, Morning, Purpose

How. A mala of 108 beads in the right hand. One mantra per bead, quietly or in the mind, at a steady pace. Ten minutes. The same mantra for at least a season.

Why. Japa is the tradition's most portable practice: a mantra and a string of beads. What repetition does to the brain has now been measured: even a meaningless phrase, repeated, switches off the network that runs self-talk and rumination, which is why it calms.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 1.28 and the Gita 10.25: of sacrifices, I am japa; repetition with attention is the practice of the syllable.

Modern. Berkovich-Ohana et al., Brain and Behavior, 2015: silent repetitive speech in non-meditators produced widespread cortical deactivation including the default mode network, the proposed basis of the mantra's calming effect.

Berkovich-Ohana 2015

Learn a verse by heart each week

21

One shloka, memorised, said each morning

After sitting, before the day · Limited evidence · Self-Study, Mind, Morning

How. Choose one verse a week from a text you are reading. Write it on a card, read it aloud each morning, and by Friday say it without the card. Keep the cards.

Why. Svadhyaya in the old sense is recitation: the texts were carried by memory for a thousand years before they were written. Speaking a line aloud fixes it in memory better than reading it silently, an effect so reliable that psychologists gave it a name.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 2.44: from svadhyaya comes union with the chosen deity; the Taittiriya Upanishad's instruction to the student is study and teach, study and teach.

Modern. MacLeod et al., Journal of Experimental Psychology, 2010: words read aloud were remembered substantially better than words read silently, the production effect, replicated across eight experiments.

MacLeod 2010, production effect

Lift something heavy, twice a week

22

Bodyweight or weights, thirty to sixty minutes a week in total

Two sessions a week · Well supported · Movement

How. Two sessions of twenty to thirty minutes: squats, push-ups, rows, a carry. Bodyweight is enough to start; add weight when it is easy. Stop two reps short of failure.

Why. The texts ask for exercise to half your strength every day, and count strength itself, bala, as a sign of health. The modern data are clear and modest: an hour a week of strength work goes with 10 to 20 percent lower risk of dying, and more than that adds nothing.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2.10 to 2.12: exercise brings lightness, capacity for work, firm limbs and strong digestion; do it to half your strength.

Modern. Momma et al., British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2022 (meta-analysis of 16 cohorts): 30 to 60 minutes a week of muscle-strengthening activity was associated with 10 to 20 percent lower all-cause, cardiovascular and cancer mortality, independent of aerobic exercise.

Momma 2022, BJSM · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Move to half your strength

23

Twenty minutes, until the breath quickens

After oiling, before the bath · Well supported · Movement, Morning, Focus, Mind

How. Twenty to thirty minutes of whatever you will actually do: sun salutations, a brisk walk, bodyweight work. Stop when the breath is quick and there is a light sweat, not when you are wrecked.

Why. Vagbhata's rule of half strength is the opposite of most fitness advice, and it is why the habit survives: you finish wanting more, so you come back tomorrow.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.10 to 12: exercise brings lightness, capacity for work, strong digestion and a steady body; do it to half your strength, especially in winter and spring.

Modern. The general case for daily moderate exercise is among the best established in medicine; the specific half-strength rule is a training principle, not a trial finding.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Last tea before two

24

No caffeine in the six hours before bed

Mornings only · Supported · Sleep, Diet, Evening

How. Have your tea or coffee in the morning and finish by early afternoon. If you want something warm later, make it caffeine free. Count chocolate and cola too.

Why. Caffeine stays in the blood far longer than the lift lasts. In the one controlled trial that measured it, a strong coffee six hours before bed took about an hour off the night's sleep, and the sleepers did not notice.

Classical. Not in the texts; tea reached India in the 1800s. The principle is older: the evening kapha hours are for winding down, and nothing stimulating belongs in them.

Modern. Drake et al., Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine, 2013: 400 mg of caffeine taken six hours before bed reduced measured sleep by roughly an hour in twelve healthy adults, without their reporting it.

Drake 2013, J Clin Sleep Med

Fifteen minutes of asana

25

A short, daily sequence for the spine and hips

Morning, before the bath · Supported · Movement, Mind, Morning

How. A fixed short sequence, the same every day: cat and cow, a forward bend, a twist, a backbend, a hip opener, and rest. Fifteen minutes. Learn it from a teacher once, then keep it.

Why. Asana is the yoga tradition's daily maintenance of the body. The honest reading of the trials: for back pain, the commonest complaint of desk life, yoga works about as well as other exercise and better than nothing.

Classical. Hatha Yoga Pradipika 1.17: asana brings steadiness, health and lightness of limb; the Yoga Sutras 2.46 define it as steady and comfortable.

Modern. Wieland et al., Cochrane Review, 2017 (12 trials, 1,080 people): yoga improved back function and pain compared with no exercise at three to six months; no clear difference from other exercise.

Wieland 2017, Cochrane

Play a game with other people

26

Badminton, tennis, football: once a week, with friends

Once a week · Supported · Movement, Purpose, Mind

How. Find a game you can play with people, and play it once a week: badminton at the club, football on Sunday, a tennis partner. The company is the point as much as the exercise.

Why. Vyayama in the texts includes games; the Sanskrit for play, krida, is part of the healthy day. A 25-year Danish study found the sports with the biggest gains in life expectancy were the ones you cannot play alone: tennis first, then badminton and football, well ahead of the gym.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2.10 asks for daily exercise; the epics and the later dharma texts count games and sport among the pleasures proper to a householder.

Modern. Schnohr et al., Mayo Clinic Proceedings, 2018 (8,577 people, 25 years): tennis went with 9.7 extra years of life, badminton 6.2, football 4.7, against 1.5 for health-club activities.

Schnohr 2018, Copenhagen City Heart Study

One screen-free day a week 27

Sunday without the phone, from waking to bed

One day a week · Supported · Digital, Mind, Purpose

How. Pick a day. The phone goes in a drawer at bedtime the night before and comes out the next morning. Tell people. Plan something with your hands or with other people.

Why. The tradition sets aside days: ekadashi for the stomach, the festival for the community. A day for the mind is the modern equivalent. A German trial that cut social media by half an hour a day found lower depression and higher life satisfaction that held six months later; a whole day off is the same medicine, taken weekly.

Classical. Pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses, Yoga Sutras 2.54; the vrata, a vowed period of restraint, is the tradition's form for it.

Modern. Brailovskaia et al., Journal of Public Health, 2022 (642 adults, randomised): reducing social media by 30 minutes a day for two weeks lowered depressive symptoms and raised life satisfaction, with effects persisting at six months.

Brailovskaia 2022

Turn the screen grey 28

Greyscale mode, all day, every day

All day · Limited evidence · Digital, Focus, Mind

How. Set the phone's display to greyscale in accessibility settings and add the shortcut to toggle it. Leave it on. Colour is what the apps use to pull you back.

Why. Pratyahara by settings menu. The apps are built in colour because colour rewards; in grey they are dull. In the one controlled test, students on a grey phone for a week used it about forty minutes a day less.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 2.54, pratyahara: the senses withdraw from their objects. Charaka Su. 8 asks that the senses not be over-used on their objects.

Modern. Holte and Ferraro, Social Science Journal, 2020 (161 students): a week of greyscale reduced objectively measured screen time by about 38 minutes a day, with a drop in social media use.

Holte & Ferraro 2020

Finish the shower cold 29

Thirty seconds of cold at the end

After oiling and exercise · Limited evidence · Morning, Movement, Mind

How. Shower as usual, then turn the water fully cold for the last thirty to ninety seconds, body first, head last or not at all. Breathe slowly through it.

Why. The bath closes the classical morning: it lifts fatigue and appetite and readies you for work. The one large trial of a cold finish found people took fewer sick days, though they were not actually ill less often; most of them kept the habit for the jolt of energy it gives.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2.16: bathing improves appetite, vigour, strength and lifespan, and removes fatigue, sweat and dirt. Cold water suits the body; hot water on the head harms the eyes and hair.

Modern. Buijze et al., PLoS ONE, 2016 (3,018 adults, randomised): a 30 to 90 second cold finish for a month cut self-reported sickness absence by 29 percent, without reducing days of illness.

Buijze 2016, PLoS ONE · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

A drop of oil in each nostril

30

Nasya: a drop, not a pour, after the bath

After the bath, before breakfast · Traditional · Morning

How. Tilt the head back, put one drop of warm sesame oil or ghee in each nostril, sniff gently, rest a minute. Skip it if you have a cold, and never overdo it: a drop is the dose.

Why. Nasya is the classical care of the head: the texts credit it with clear senses, an easy neck and good hair. Modern evidence for oil specifically is absent, so we keep it as tradition, small, and pleasant in dry weather and air conditioning.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 2.6 and 20: daily nasya keeps the eyes, nose and ears clear and the hair dark and strong.

Modern. No trials of oil nasya in healthy people. Saline nasal rinsing has reasonable evidence for congestion; oil has none either way. Excess oil inhaled is a known, rare hazard, hence a single drop.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Oil the scalp

31

Warm oil worked into the scalp, four minutes, twice a week

Before the bath, on bath days · Limited evidence · Morning, Mind

How. Warm a spoon of sesame or coconut oil and work it into the scalp with the fingertips for four minutes, then wash it out or leave it an hour. Twice a week is plenty.

Why. Charaka puts the head first in the oiling sequence and promises no headache, no grey, no hair loss, and sound sleep. The one modern study is tiny, but it found what the texts said: thicker hair after six months of daily scalp massage.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.81 to 5.83: oil applied to the head daily prevents headache, baldness and greying, strengthens the skull and brings good sleep and a bright face.

Modern. Koyama et al., Eplasty, 2016: nine men doing four minutes of standardised scalp massage a day for 24 weeks measured thicker hair shafts; no new follicles, no controls.

Koyama 2016, Eplasty · Charaka Su. 5

Barefoot on the earth

32

Ten minutes on grass or soil, most days

With the morning light · Traditional · Movement, Mind, Morning

How. Take the shoes off on grass, soil or sand for ten minutes, ideally while you get your morning light. Walk slowly; feel the ground.

Why. The tradition removes shoes for every sacred and domestic threshold and prizes contact with the earth. The 'grounding' research is small and poorly controlled, so we make no claim beyond the obvious: bare feet work harder and the walk is slower and more attentive.

Classical. Charaka's sadvritta asks that one not walk on unclean ground and keep the feet cared for; the daily worship in Ashtanga Hridaya 2 is done unshod.

Modern. No credible trial. The claimed electrical benefits of 'earthing' rest on small, industry-linked studies. Foot strength from barefoot walking has modest support.

Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

Speak less, and kindly

33

Mita bhashana: fewer words, none of them harsh

All day · Traditional · Mind, Purpose

How. Before speaking, ask whether it is true, whether it is kind, and whether it is needed. Say less than you could. Never raise the voice at home.

Why. The code of conduct is more about speech than anything else: timely, truthful, measured, pleasant. No trial measures it. It is the practice with the widest effect on the people around you.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8: speak at the proper time, briefly, truthfully, sweetly and beneficially; the Gita 17.15 on speech that causes no distress.

Modern. No trial to cite.

Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta · Bhagavad Gita 17.15

PART 2

The morning

Movement, the bath, breakfast and the start of work. The day's strength is here.

Breakfast bigger than dinner 34

Front-load the day's food

After practice, when hunger arrives · Supported · Diet, Morning, Sleep

How. Eat a proper breakfast after your morning practice: cooked, warm, enough to hold you to lunch. Make dinner the smallest meal of the three.

Why. The texts say digestion is strongest when the sun is high and weakest at night, so the day's food should taper. A twelve-week trial that simply swapped the sizes of breakfast and dinner, with identical calories, found the big-breakfast group lost more than twice the weight and improved their blood fats.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5 and Vimanasthana 1: eat according to the strength of the digestive fire, which follows the sun; the night meal is the lightest.

Modern. Jakubowicz et al., Obesity, 2013: 93 women on 1,400 kcal a day; a 700 kcal breakfast and 200 kcal dinner produced 8 kg of weight loss against 3.3 kg for the reverse, with lower triglycerides and insulin.

Jakubowicz 2013, Obesity · Charaka Su. 5

Walk anything under two kilometres 35

Feet before car, whenever the errand is close

Through the day · Well supported · Movement, Purpose

How. Make a rule: any trip under two kilometres is on foot, or a bicycle if you have one. The market, the school, the station. Leave ten minutes earlier and go.

Why. The texts praise the walk that does not tire; the modern data praise the walk that replaces the car. In a quarter of a million British commuters, walking to work went with less heart disease and cycling with 40 percent lower mortality.

Classical. Sushruta Samhita, Chikitsasthana 24: walking that does not fatigue lengthens life, brings strength and sharpens the senses.

Modern. Celis-Morales et al., BMJ, 2017 (UK Biobank, 263,450 people): active commuting by bicycle was associated with 41 percent lower all-cause mortality; walking with lower cardiovascular risk.

Celis-Morales 2017, BMJ · Sushruta Chikitsa 24

A lighter day each fortnight 36

Ekadashi: fruit, milk and water, one day in fourteen

On the eleventh lunar day, or any fixed weekday · Supported · Diet, Mind, Seasonal

How. Twice a month, eat only fruit, milk and light cooked food, or nothing at all until evening if you are used to it. Not for pregnancy, diabetes on medication, or anyone underweight.

Why. The fortnightly fast is the tradition's rest for the gut and the will. Modern trials of intermittent fasting find it works about as well as eating less every day, no better, and its real value may be the practice of choosing not to.

Classical. Ekadashi upavasa, the fast on the eleventh day of each half of the lunar month, is prescribed in the Puranas; Charaka lists langhana, lightening, as a treatment for heaviness and sluggish digestion.

Modern. Trepanowski et al., JAMA Internal Medicine, 2017 (100 adults, one year): alternate-day fasting produced the same weight loss as daily calorie restriction, with more drop-outs. Fasting works; it is not magic.

Trepanowski 2017, JAMA Intern Med

Sit on the floor 37

Meals, reading and rest cross-legged, and get up without hands

Whenever you sit for long · Supported · Movement, Diet, Mind

How. Eat at least one meal a day sitting on the floor. Read there in the evening. Getting up and down without using your hands is the exercise; do it a dozen times a day without noticing.

Why. The classical seat is the floor: for eating, study and practice. Getting down to it and up from it turns out to be one of the better predictors of how long you will live, because it measures strength, balance and flexibility at once.

Classical. Sukhasana, the easy seat, is the posture for meals and practice throughout the texts; chairs are absent.

Modern. Brito et al., European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, 2014 (2,002 adults aged 51 to 80): every point lost on the sit-and-rise test went with 21 percent higher mortality over six years.

Brito 2014, sitting-rising test

Give something every day 38

Dana: a coin, a meal, an hour, before you spend on yourself

Once a day · Limited evidence · Purpose, Mind

How. Give something small every day, before your own first purchase: a coin to the person at the corner, the first roti to a stray, an hour a week to someone who needs it. Do not keep score.

Why. Dana, giving, is one of the three duties in the Upanishad's last lesson and is built into the classical morning. The psychology is encouraging but not settled: the original experiment found people who spent on others were happier than those who spent on themselves; a larger replication found no difference.

Classical. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 5.2: the three da's, damyata, datta, dayadhvam: restrain, give, be compassionate. Charaka's sadvritta asks for charity to the needy.

Modern. Dunn, Aknin and Norton, Science, 2008: people randomly assigned to spend on others reported more happiness than those who spent on themselves. A 2022 pre-registered replication with 133 people did not reproduce the effect.

Dunn 2008, Science · 2022 replication

Sit down to eat

39

Never standing, never walking, never at the desk

Every meal · Traditional · Diet, Mind

How. Every meal at a table or on the floor, seated, with the food in front of you. Nothing eaten standing at the counter or walking to the car.

Why. The rules of eating begin with the place: seated, calm, equipped. It is the simplest fence against the grazing that fills a modern day, and it makes the other food practices possible.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24: food is to be taken in a proper place, sitting, with all the accessories, in a calm state of mind.

Modern. No direct trial. The distracted-eating research on the screen card is the nearest evidence; sitting down is the precondition for attention.

Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Mark the change of season

40

A lighter week and a reset at each turn of the year

The first week of each season · Traditional · Seasonal, Diet, Purpose

How. At each change of season, take a lighter week: simpler food, earlier nights, the seasonal practices adjusted. If you have access to an Ayurvedic physician, this is when they would see you.

Why. The texts treat the joints between seasons, ritusandhi, as the weak points of the year, when illness arrives and the regimen should shift gradually rather than all at once. The seasonal cleanse belongs to a physician; the lighter week belongs to you.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3.58 to 3.59: at the junction of two seasons, give up the regimen of the old season and adopt the new one gradually, over a fortnight, or disease follows.

Modern. No trial. Seasonal patterns in illness are documented; the prescription remains tradition.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 3, seasons

One thing at a time

41

Finish, or pause deliberately, before starting the next

Working hours · Supported · Focus, Mind

How. One task open at a time. One browser tab if you can. When you must switch, write a line about where you were, close the first task, then open the second.

Why. The Gita's many-branched mind is the multitasker's. The cost of switching has been measured for decades: every change of task costs time and accuracy, and the heaviest media multitaskers are the worst at filtering distraction, not the best.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 2.41: the resolute intellect is one-pointed; the thoughts of the irresolute are many-branched and endless.

Modern. Rubinstein, Meyer and Evans, 2001: switching tasks carries a measurable time cost that grows with task complexity. Ophir et al., PNAS, 2009: heavy media multitaskers were more distractible, though later replications were mixed.

APA summary of task-switching research · Bhagavad Gita 2.41

Real work before messages

42

The first ninety minutes at the desk belong to you

The start of the working day · Limited evidence · Focus, Digital, Morning

How. Do the day's most important piece of work before opening email or chat. Ninety minutes, one task, notifications off. The inbox is still there at ten.

Why. Charaka's order is practice first, then the work of one's station; the mind is clearest before it has been spent on other people's requests. Interruption research finds that people who are interrupted work faster to compensate and pay for it in stress and frustration.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5 and 8: after the morning regimen, one attends to one's duties with a settled mind; the texts place the day's important work in the forenoon.

Modern. Mark, Gudith and Klocke, CHI, 2008: interrupted workers completed tasks in less time but reported significantly more stress, frustration, time pressure and effort.

Mark 2008, cost of interrupted work · Charaka Su. 5

One block of real work

43

Sixty to ninety minutes, one task, phone in another room

Late morning, before messages · Traditional · Focus, Digital, Purpose

How. Before opening email or chat, do the one piece of work that matters for sixty to ninety minutes. Phone in another room, one tab, a written line saying what done looks like.

Why. The morning practices earn you a clear head; this is what it is for. Most people find one honest block does more than the scattered eight hours that used to follow it.

Classical. Charaka's daily order is practice first, then the work of one's station; the texts do not separate a settled body from useful work.

Modern. This is a working method rather than a trial finding; we make no research claim for it beyond the attention research behind the other practices.

Notifications, three times a day

44

Alerts off; check at set hours

Working hours · Limited evidence · Focus, Digital

How. Turn off every notification except calls from people you live with. Check messages at three fixed times, say ten, one and five. Tell the people who need to know.

Why. The Gita's word for the scattered mind is many-branched. Each alert adds a branch. A field trial found that batching alerts into three deliveries a day left people calmer and more attentive, while switching them off entirely made them anxious about what they were missing.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 2.41: the resolute mind is one-pointed; the minds of the irresolute are many-branched and endless.

Modern. Fitz et al., Computers in Human Behavior, 2019 (randomised field experiment, 237 people): notifications batched three times a day improved attention, mood and sense of control and reduced stress; turning them off completely increased anxiety.

Fitz 2019, Computers in Human Behavior

One screen at a time

45

No phone while the television is on; no television while you work

All day · Limited evidence · Digital, Focus, Evening

How. If you are watching something, watch it; the phone is in another room. If you are working, the second monitor shows work, not a feed. One screen, one thing.

Why. Two screens is the modern shape of the many-branched mind. The original Stanford study found heavy media multitaskers were worse at ignoring distraction, not better; some later studies disagreed, but none found a benefit.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 2.41 on the one-pointed mind; Charaka Su. 8 on not overloading the senses.

Modern. Ophir, Nass and Wagner, PNAS, 2009: heavy media multitaskers performed worse on filtering irrelevant information and task switching. Replications have been mixed; the meta-analysis finds a small effect in the same direction.

Ophir 2009, PNAS · Bhagavad Gita 2.41

Do the task, drop the result

46

Nishkama karma: full effort, no bargaining with the outcome

Whenever the work is hard · Traditional · Purpose, Mind, Focus

How. Before a hard task, say what you will do and how well, and say nothing about what it should get you. Do it fully. When it is done, note that it is done, and move on before you check the reaction.

Why. This is the Gita's central instruction and the tradition's answer to anxiety about results. No trial can test a philosophy, and we will not pretend one does. What it produces in practice is work that is easier to start and easier to finish.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 2.47: your right is to the action alone, never to its fruits; let not the fruit be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.

Modern. No trial. The self-determination literature on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation points the same way, but the verse says it better.

Bhagavad Gita 2.47

Work by a window

47

Daylight on the desk, not just the screen

Working hours · Limited evidence · Focus, Sleep, Morning

How. Put the desk where daylight reaches it. If you cannot, take the first hour of work outside or by the brightest window in the building, and get out at lunch.

Why. The classical working day was lit by the sun. A study of office workers found those with a window slept three quarters of an hour longer at night and reported more vitality than those without; daylight by day is half of the sleep story.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya 2 assumes work done by daylight after the morning regimen; the texts have no night shift.

Modern. Boubekri et al., Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine, 2014 (49 office workers): those near windows had more daytime light, slept 46 minutes longer and scored better on sleep quality and vitality.

Boubekri 2014, JCSM

Notes by hand

48

A pen and a notebook for anything you want to keep

Whenever you take notes · Limited evidence · Self-Study, Focus

How. Take notes on paper, in your own words, and rewrite the important ones at the end of the week. Type only what must be shared.

Why. The tradition's students wrote on palm leaf and, before that, held everything in the head; both forced condensing. The famous study found longhand note-takers understood lectures better because they could not transcribe; a careful replication found a smaller effect in the same direction.

Classical. Svadhyaya as the daily duty of the student; the manuscript tradition of copying a text by hand as a form of study.

Modern. Mueller and Oppenheimer, Psychological Science, 2014: longhand note-takers answered conceptual questions better than laptop users. Morehead et al., 2019 replication: a small, non-significant advantage for longhand.

Mueller & Oppenheimer 2014 · Morehead 2019 replication

Keep company that lifts you

49

Satsanga: one meeting a week with people who live well

Once a week · Supported · Purpose, Mind

How. Once a week, spend an evening with people who keep the hours you are trying to keep. A study circle, a walking group, a temple, a friend who is up at five. Let the rest of the week follow.

Why. Satsanga is the tradition's word for the fact that you become the people around you. The modern demonstration came from thirty years of Framingham records: habits, including weight, spread through friendships like a contagion, and the closer the friend, the stronger the pull.

Classical. Adi Shankara's Bhaja Govindam: from good company comes detachment, from detachment freedom; the Gita 3.21 on people following the example of the best among them.

Modern. Christakis and Fowler, New England Journal of Medicine, 2007 (12,067 people over 32 years): a person's chance of becoming obese rose 57 percent if a close friend did, showing behaviour spreading through social ties.

Christakis & Fowler 2007, NEJM · Bhagavad Gita 3.21

Wait for real hunger

50

No snack until the last meal has gone

Between meals · Supported · Diet, Focus

How. Two or three meals, nothing in between except water or plain tea. If you think you are hungry at four, drink a glass of water and wait twenty minutes. Real hunger stays.

Why. Ayurveda's most repeated rule of eating is to eat only when the last meal has digested. The modern reading is that gaps between meals let the body switch fuel and rest the gut, and that most grazing is habit or boredom rather than need.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24 (jirne ashniyat): eat only after the previous meal is digested. Food taken on top of undigested food disturbs all three doshas at once.

Modern. de Cabo and Mattson, New England Journal of Medicine, 2019 (review): regular fasting windows trigger a metabolic switch with benefits for weight, insulin sensitivity and blood pressure that go beyond the calories saved.

de Cabo & Mattson 2019, NEJM · Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Stand up every hour

51

Two minutes on your feet for every hour in a chair

Working hours · Supported · Movement, Focus

How. Every hour, stand, walk to the window or the water, stretch the hips, come back. Two minutes. Set a quiet timer until it is a habit.

Why. The classical day had no chair to sit in for eight hours, so the texts never needed the rule. The trials are the walk-after-meals research applied to the desk: short standing and walking breaks blunt the blood-sugar rise and the stiffness of sitting.

Classical. Not in the texts. Charaka's advice against sitting or lying long after food, and Sushruta's on walking, are the nearest.

Modern. Buffey et al., Sports Medicine, 2022 (meta-analysis): breaking up sitting with light walking or standing lowered post-meal glucose and insulin compared with sitting continuously.

Buffey 2022, Sports Medicine

One thing for someone else

52

A weekly act nobody asked you for

Once a week · Limited evidence · Purpose, Mind

How. Pick one small act a week that helps someone and gains you nothing: an hour of your skill, a meal cooked, a visit made. Do it without announcing it.

Why. The Gita's answer to a life that feels flat is work done for the welfare of the world rather than for the result. The observational evidence is warm and the trial evidence is thin, so we say so; we keep it because a day with someone else in it is a better day.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 3.19 to 3.20: act without attachment, for the welfare of the world, as Janaka and the others reached perfection by action alone.

Modern. Jenkinson et al., BMC Public Health, 2013 (systematic review): cohort studies link volunteering to less depression, higher life satisfaction and 22 percent lower mortality; the few randomised trials did not confirm it.

Jenkinson 2013, BMC Public Health

Sit with a teacher

53

One hour a week with someone who knows more than you

Once a week · Traditional · Self-Study, Purpose

How. Find one person, in your field or in the tradition, who has lived longer with the thing you are learning, and spend an hour a week with them. Ask questions; do not perform.

Why. The whole tradition passed from teacher to student in person; the texts are notes from those conversations. Nobody has run a trial on it and nobody needs to. Learning from a living person keeps you honest in a way a book cannot.

Classical. Bhagavad Gita 4.34: learn by prostration, enquiry and service from those who have seen the truth; Charaka's sadvritta asks that teachers and elders be honoured.

Modern. No trial. The mentoring literature in education and medicine is consistent but observational.

Bhagavad Gita 4.34 · Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

Time with an elder

54

An hour a week with someone thirty years older

Once a week · Traditional · Purpose, Mind

How. Visit, call or sit with a parent, grandparent or neighbour a generation or two older, for an hour a week. Ask about their day, then their life. Do not fix anything.

Why. Honouring elders is the first line of the code of conduct and the last thing modern life makes room for. The evidence for the elder is strong, loneliness being what it is; the evidence for you is the perspective, which no trial measures.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8: one should honour the elderly, teachers and the accomplished; the Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11: let your mother, father and teacher be as gods to you.

Modern. No trial on the visitor. The loneliness and mortality literature on the visited is large and consistent.

Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

PART 3

Midday and the afternoon

The main meal, the walk after it, and the working hours.

Ginger before the meal 55

A slice of fresh ginger with rock salt, ten minutes before lunch

Just before lunch · Limited evidence · Diet

How. A thin slice of fresh ginger with a few grains of rock salt and a squeeze of lime, chewed ten minutes before lunch. Skip it in high summer or if you run hot.

Why. This is the classical appetiser, given to wake the digestive fire. A small crossover trial confirmed the mechanism: ginger empties the stomach faster. It did not relieve symptoms of indigestion, so take it for the appetite, not as a remedy.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5 and the later handbooks: ginger with rock salt before meals kindles agni, clears the tongue and throat and improves the taste of food.

Modern. Hu et al., World Journal of Gastroenterology, 2011 (11 patients, double-blind crossover): 1.2 g of ginger sped gastric emptying from 16 to 12 minutes; no change in symptoms or gut hormones.

Hu 2011, World J Gastroenterol · Charaka Su. 5

Freshly cooked, warm food 56

Made today, eaten warm, from ingredients you can name

Lunch and dinner · Well supported · Diet

How. Cook once or twice a day and eat it warm. Nothing from a packet with more than five ingredients, nothing reheated from three days ago. Leftovers from lunch at dinner are fine.

Why. Warm and fresh is the first rule of eating in Charaka. The strongest modern food trial we know of did not test warmth; it tested the opposite of fresh. Fed ultra-processed food, people ate 500 calories more a day than on unprocessed food matched for everything else.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24: eat food that is warm, unctuous and freshly prepared; it kindles digestion, is digested quickly and clears the wind.

Modern. Hall et al., Cell Metabolism, 2019 (inpatient randomised crossover, 20 adults): on the ultra-processed diet people ate about 500 kcal a day more and gained weight in two weeks; the reverse on unprocessed food.

Hall 2019, Cell Metabolism · Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Stop at two-thirds full

57

Half food, a quarter water, a quarter space

Every meal · Supported · Diet

How. Serve less than you think you want. Eat slowly, and stop when you could eat a little more but do not need to. The classical picture is a stomach half full of food, a quarter of water and a quarter empty.

Why. Matra, the right measure, is the heart of the rules of eating. The largest controlled test of eating a little less in healthy people ran for two years: a 12 percent cut in calories lowered blood pressure, cholesterol and inflammation in adults who were not overweight to begin with.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.3 to 5.8: fill half the stomach with solid food, a quarter with liquid, and leave a quarter for the movement of air.

Modern. Kraus et al., Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology, 2019 (CALERIE, 218 adults, randomised): two years of moderate calorie restriction improved multiple cardiometabolic risk factors in healthy, non-obese people.

Kraus 2019, CALERIE · Charaka Su. 5

Main meal at midday

58

The biggest plate when digestion is strongest

Midday, the pitta hours · Supported · Diet, Focus, Sleep

How. Make lunch the largest meal, eaten sitting down without a screen, and stop when the stomach is about two-thirds full. Breakfast light, dinner lighter.

Why. Agni, digestive fire, peaks with the sun. Eating most when it is strongest and least when it is weakest is the single dietary rule the texts repeat most, and modern time-restricted-eating trials keep landing in the same place.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.3 to 8: eat the quantity that digests in time, heavy foods to a third or half of capacity, and the next meal only after the last is digested.

Modern. Sutton et al., Cell Metabolism, 2018: men with prediabetes eating all meals between about 8am and 2pm improved insulin sensitivity and blood pressure in five weeks, without losing weight.

Sutton 2018, Cell Metabolism · Charaka Su. 5

Eat without a screen

59

The plate, the food, and nobody else's feed

Every meal · Well supported · Diet, Digital, Mind

How. Phone face down in another room, laptop shut, television off. Sit, look at the food, and eat. If you eat with people, talk to them.

Why. Charaka's rules of eating ask for attention on the meal. The research is unusually clear: people who eat distracted eat more at that meal, and considerably more later in the day, because the body barely registers a meal it did not notice.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24: food is to be taken in a proper place, with concentration of mind, without talking and laughing, and with due regard to oneself.

Modern. Robinson et al., American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2013 (meta-analysis of 24 studies): eating while distracted moderately increased intake at that meal and increased later intake by more (standardised effect 0.76).

Robinson 2013, AJCN · Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Social media, half an hour

60

Ten minutes an app, then it's closed

One window, not the whole day · Supported · Digital, Mind, Focus

How. Set a ten-minute daily limit on each social app in your phone's settings and keep to it. Open them once, in the afternoon, never in the first hour or the last.

Why. Pratyahara, the drawing in of the senses, is the classical answer to a mind fed from outside all day. The modern test is small but direct: students cut to half an hour a day were measurably less lonely and less low within three weeks.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 2.54: pratyahara is the senses withdrawing from their objects and following the mind inward. Ashtanga Hridaya's sadvritta asks for restraint of the senses each day.

Modern. Hunt et al., Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 2018: 143 students limited to ten minutes per platform per day for three weeks showed significant drops in loneliness and depression compared with usual use.

Hunt 2018, J Soc Clin Psych

Eat slowly, chew properly

61

Put the spoon down between mouthfuls

Every meal · Supported · Diet, Mind

How. Chew each mouthful until it is soft, and set the spoon down while you do. A meal should take at least fifteen minutes. Stop at comfortable, not full.

Why. The texts warn that food bolted down is neither tasted nor digested well. Modern trials agree in a plain way: eat slower and you eat less, without feeling hungrier afterwards.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24: eat neither too fast nor too slow. Taken too fast, food goes the wrong way and its taste and faults go unnoticed; taken too slow, it turns cold and digests unevenly.

Modern. Robinson et al., American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2014 (meta-analysis of 22 studies): a slower eating rate meant lower energy intake at the meal, with no difference in hunger.

Robinson 2014, AJCN · Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

All six tastes on the plate

62

Sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, astringent, every day

Lunch and dinner · Supported · Diet

How. Look at the plate: grain and vegetable, something sour, a pinch of salt, a spice, a bitter green, a pulse or a piece of fruit with grip. If two tastes are missing all week, add them.

Why. The six tastes are Ayurveda's way of saying eat everything, in balance. Modern nutrition arrives at the same place through variety: across twenty cohorts, people with the most diverse diets had a fifth lower risk of dying over the follow-up.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.5: a meal should contain all six tastes, since each nourishes and each, taken alone, aggravates.

Modern. Meta-analysis of 20 longitudinal studies, Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition, 2022: higher dietary diversity was associated with 22 percent lower all-cause mortality.

Dietary diversity meta-analysis, 2022 · Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Eat what the season grows

63

Local, in season, and different in June and December

Through the year · Traditional · Diet, Seasonal

How. Buy what is cheap and plentiful in the market this month and build the meals around it. Heavier, oilier food in winter; lighter, cooler, wetter food in summer; warm and dry in the rains.

Why. Ritucharya, the seasonal regimen, is the second chapter of the daily texts: the same food is not right all year. Modern nutrition has no trial of seasonality as such; it does keep finding that variety and unprocessed food are what matter, and a seasonal kitchen delivers both by default.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3: sweet, sour and salty in winter and the rains; sweet, cold and liquid in summer; bitter, astringent and light in spring and autumn.

Modern. No direct trial. See the diversity meta-analysis on the six-tastes card and the ultra-processed trial on the fresh-food card.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 3, seasons

Never eat angry

64

If you are upset, wait; the meal will keep

Every meal · Traditional · Diet, Mind

How. If you sit down angry, anxious or in tears, get up, walk for five minutes, breathe, and come back. Eat only when the mind has settled enough to taste the food.

Why. Charaka lists grief, anger and fear as reasons not to eat. Modern gut physiology agrees that a stressed body diverts blood from digestion, and eating in distress is the reliable route to eating badly.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana 1.24 and 2.9: food taken while grieving, angry, greedy or afraid, or while the mind is elsewhere, is not properly digested.

Modern. No single trial; the stress-digestion physiology is textbook, and emotional eating is one of the best-documented drivers of over-eating in the behavioural literature.

Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

A spoon of ghee a day

65

On the rice or the roti, not fried in

With lunch · Traditional · Diet, Seasonal

How. A teaspoon of good ghee on the hot food at lunch. More in winter, less in summer, none if your doctor has told you to watch saturated fat.

Why. Ghee is the most praised food in the texts, for digestion, memory and the eyes. Modern evidence is mixed and mostly about saturated fat in general; a teaspoon a day on an otherwise plant-heavy plate is within any guideline. We keep it as tradition and say so.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 27: of all fats, ghee is best; it improves memory, intellect, digestion and lifespan. Ashtanga Hridaya 3 increases it in winter.

Modern. No trial of ghee as a daily practice in healthy adults. Saturated fat guidance suggests keeping it modest; a teaspoon is about 4 g.

Charaka Su. 5 · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 3, seasons

Warm water with meals, not cold

66

Sips, warm, between mouthfuls; no iced drinks

Every meal · Traditional · Diet

How. A cup of warm or room-temperature water beside the plate, sipped between mouthfuls. No ice, no cold drinks with food, and no large glass immediately after.

Why. The texts are particular about water at meals: a little, warm, during; not a lot, cold, after. There is no trial to point to. It is cheap, harmless and, for most people who try it, noticeably kinder to the stomach.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 27 and Vimanasthana 1: water taken during the meal keeps the body even; a great deal after it makes for heaviness. Cold drinks douse the digestive fire.

Modern. No trial to cite. Physiology offers no strong reason either way; we keep it as tradition.

Charaka Vimana 1, rules of eating

Mind the combinations

67

No milk with fish or sour fruit; no honey heated

Every meal · Traditional · Diet

How. Keep milk away from fish, meat, sour fruit and salt in the same meal. Do not cook honey. Do not eat fruit straight after a heavy meal. Simple pairings, simply cooked.

Why. Viruddha ahara, incompatible food, has a whole chapter in Charaka. Modern nutrition has not tested the pairings and does not support most of them, so this is tradition kept for its side effect: meals that are simpler and less processed.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 26.81 to 26.103: a long list of combinations held to be incompatible by nature, quantity, time, cooking or place; milk with fish is the classic.

Modern. No trial evidence for the specific combinations. Heating honey does produce hydroxymethylfurfural, which is the one pairing with a chemical basis.

Charaka Su. 5

Eat with your hands

68

Fingers, not a fork, when the food allows

Lunch and dinner · Traditional · Diet, Mind

How. Wash your hands, then eat rice, roti and vegetables with the right hand. Small mouthfuls, mixed on the plate. The slowing down is part of the point.

Why. Eating with the hand is the classical Indian meal and, in the tradition's account, the first act of digestion: the fingers feel the temperature and texture before the mouth does. No trial exists. It slows the meal, and slower eating is well supported.

Classical. The texts assume food eaten by hand from a clean plate after washing; sadvritta asks for washed hands and feet before every meal.

Modern. No study. The eating-rate meta-analysis on the slow-eating card is the nearest evidence.

Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

Heavier food in winter, lighter in summer

69

Ghee and grains in the cold; fruit, rice and cool water in the heat

Adjust at each change of season · Traditional · Diet, Seasonal

How. In winter, add ghee, nuts, sesame, root vegetables and warm sweet dishes. In summer, cut them back: rice, fruit, coconut water, cucumber, buttermilk. Notice the season changing and change the plate within the fortnight.

Why. Ritucharya holds that appetite is strongest in winter and weakest in summer, and that the food should follow. It matches ordinary experience and the seasonal shift in energy needs; no modern trial has tested it directly.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3.3 to 3.28: in the cold season the digestive fire is strong and heavy food is proper; in summer it is weak and food should be sweet, cold and liquid.

Modern. No direct trial. Seasonal variation in appetite and energy expenditure is documented; the dietary prescriptions remain tradition.

Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 3, seasons

Buttermilk with lunch

70

Takra: thin, spiced, a small glass after the meal

After lunch · Limited evidence · Diet

How. Whisk a spoon of curd into a glass of water with cumin, a little salt and a curry leaf. Drink it after lunch, not at night. Skip it in a cold or a cough.

Why. Buttermilk is praised in the texts above curd itself: light, digestible and good for the gut. The modern cohorts point the same way for fermented dairy: regular yogurt eaters have a somewhat lower risk of type 2 diabetes.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 5 and 6: takra is light, appetising and good for the bowel; the texts say a person who takes buttermilk daily is not troubled by disease.

Modern. Meta-analysis of 14 prospective cohorts (459,790 people), BMC Medicine, 2014: one serving of yogurt a day was associated with 18 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes; total dairy had no association.

Yogurt and diabetes meta-analysis, 2014

A hundred steps after eating

71

Five slow minutes on your feet after lunch and dinner

Right after meals · Well supported · Diet, Movement, Sleep

How. After lunch and after dinner, walk slowly for five to ten minutes. Indoors is fine. Shatapavali, a hundred steps, is the old name.

Why. It is the cheapest metabolic habit there is. Muscles pull sugar out of the blood while they move, so the after-meal rise is lower and the afternoon slump smaller.

Classical. Shatapavali, the hundred steps after a meal, is folk dinacharya across India; the texts advise against lying down straight after food.

Modern. Buffey et al., Sports Medicine, 2022 (meta-analysis): light walking breaks after meals reduced blood glucose by about 17 percent compared with sitting.

Buffey 2022, Sports Medicine

If you nap, keep it short

72

Twenty minutes, sitting up, before three

Early afternoon, if at all · Supported · Sleep, Focus

How. Skip the nap if you can. If you cannot, sit in a chair rather than lie down, set twenty minutes, and be done before three so it does not eat into the night.

Why. The texts forbid daytime sleep for the healthy except in the hottest season, and allow a short doze sitting up. Modern cohorts draw the same line: naps under half an hour look harmless or helpful, naps over an hour keep company with heart disease and diabetes.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 7: sleeping by day is for the exhausted, the sick and the summer months; for others it breeds heaviness and disease. A brief nap taken sitting does no harm.

Modern. Yamada et al., Sleep, 2015 (meta-analysis of prospective cohorts): naps under 30 minutes went with lower cardiovascular risk; naps over an hour with an 82 percent higher risk and higher all-cause mortality.

Yamada 2015, Sleep · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 7

A walk somewhere green

73

Thirty minutes among trees, phone in the pocket

Late afternoon · Supported · Movement, Mind, Purpose, Evening

How. Find the nearest park, river path or tree-lined street and walk it without headphones. Thirty minutes is enough; ninety is better on a day off. Look up more than down.

Why. The texts prize the walk that does not tire you. What a Stanford experiment added is that where you walk matters: a walk in nature quietened the brooding, self-critical loop in the mind, and the same walk beside traffic did not.

Classical. Sushruta Samhita, Chikitsasthana 24: walking that does not fatigue lengthens life, brings strength and digestive fire, and sharpens the senses. The classical day ends with an unhurried walk after the evening meal.

Modern. Bratman et al., PNAS, 2015: a 90-minute walk in a natural setting reduced self-reported rumination and activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex; the same walk in an urban setting had no effect.

Bratman 2015, PNAS · Sushruta Chikitsa 24

PART 4

The evening

Dinner, the lamp, the wind-down. The night is decided here.

Cook at home, most nights

74

Six dinners a week from your own kitchen

Before the early dinner · Supported · Diet, Purpose

How. Cook dinner at home at least six nights in seven. Simple is fine: dal, rice, one vegetable, done in thirty minutes. Batch the dal for two days.

Why. The classical kitchen was the home kitchen; the texts assume it. In a survey of 9,500 American adults, people who cooked dinner at home most nights ate fewer calories, less sugar and less fat, whether or not they were trying to lose weight.

Classical. Charaka's rules of eating assume food prepared in one's own household with attention to the eater; restaurant food has no place in the regimen.

Modern. Wolfson and Bleich, Public Health Nutrition, 2015: adults cooking dinner at home six or seven times a week consumed fewer calories, less sugar and less fat than those cooking once or less.

Wolfson & Bleich 2015

A hard stop to the working day

75

Work ends at a fixed hour, and the laptop closes

The end of the day · Well supported · Focus, Evening, Sleep

How. Choose the hour and keep it. Write tomorrow's first task, shut the laptop, put the work phone away. The lamp at dusk can be the signal.

Why. The texts divide the day into watches and give the evening to rest; a working day without an end is not in them. The modern data are stark: people working 55 hours a week or more had a third higher risk of stroke than those working 40.

Classical. Ratricharya: the evening is for winding down, light food and rest; Ashtanga Hridaya 7 counts sleep as a pillar of life and late work as its enemy.

Modern. Kivimaki et al., Lancet, 2015 (603,838 people): working 55 or more hours a week was associated with 33 percent higher risk of stroke and 13 percent higher risk of coronary heart disease than a 35 to 40 hour week.

Kivimaki 2015, Lancet · Ratricharya, night regimen

Yoga nidra, eleven minutes

76

Lie still and follow the voice through the body

After work, or before bed · Supported · Sleep, Mind, Evening

How. Lie on your back, a recorded yoga nidra playing, and follow the attention around the body without moving. Eleven minutes. Not a nap, though you may drift.

Why. Yoga nidra is the tradition's guided rest, deeper than sleep in its own account. In the largest study so far, eleven minutes a day for a month lowered stress and improved sleep against a waiting list, with small but real effects.

Classical. The practice descends from the tantric nyasa, moving awareness through the body, and from the yoga of conscious sleep described in the Mandukya tradition.

Modern. Moszeik et al., Current Psychology, 2020: 341 people practising an 11-minute yoga nidra daily for 30 days reported lower stress, better sleep and higher wellbeing than 430 controls; effects small.

Moszeik 2020, Current Psychology

Ten minutes flat on the floor

77

Shavasana after work, before the evening starts

The moment you finish work · Supported · Mind, Evening, Focus

How. Lie on your back on the floor, arms a little away from the body, eyes closed, and do nothing for ten minutes. Not the bed, not the sofa. Then get up and begin the evening.

Why. Shavasana ends every asana practice for a reason: it is where the body learns to switch off. Herbert Benson gave the state a modern name, the relaxation response, and showed it lowers heart rate, breathing and blood pressure on cue.

Classical. Hatha Yoga Pradipika 1.32: lying flat like a corpse removes fatigue and gives rest to the mind.

Modern. Benson, Beary and Carol, Psychiatry, 1974: a simple relaxation practice produced measurable falls in oxygen consumption, respiratory rate and blood lactate, the physiological opposite of the stress response.

Benson 1974, Psychiatry

A worry hour, and only then

78

Write the worry down, and deal with it at five

A fixed half hour in the late afternoon · Limited evidence · Mind, Focus, Sleep

How. When a worry arrives during the day, write it on a card and go back to what you were doing. At five, sit with the cards for twenty minutes: decide, plan or drop each one. Outside that window, worry is postponed, not forbidden.

Why. The texts do not have a worry hour; they have the instruction not to let the mind wander where it is not wanted. The modern technique is forty years old and still works: giving worry a time and place cut daily worrying by a third in the first trials.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8: the mind is to be restrained from unwholesome objects; the Gita 6.26 says wherever the mind wanders, bring it back.

Modern. Borkovec et al., Behaviour Research and Therapy, 1983: four weeks of scheduled worry periods reduced daily worry significantly compared with untreated worriers; the method is now a standard part of treatment for anxiety.

Borkovec 1983 · Bhagavad Gita 6.26

Clear the desk before you leave

79

Two minutes of order at the end of the day

At the hard stop · Traditional · Focus, Evening, Mind

How. Papers filed or binned, cup washed, tomorrow's one task on a card in the middle of the desk. Two minutes. Tomorrow starts clean.

Why. Shaucha again: order in the surroundings, order in the mind. The evidence is the clutter study on the bedroom card and forty years of behavioural advice that the best time to set up tomorrow is tonight.

Classical. Yoga Sutras 2.32, shaucha; Charaka's sadvritta on a clean and orderly home and workplace.

Modern. No direct trial. See Saxbe and Repetti, 2010, on cluttered homes and cortisol.

Saxbe & Repetti 2010 · Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

Teach it to someone

80

Explain this week's reading to one person, out loud

Once a week, over dinner or a walk · Limited evidence · Self-Study, Purpose, Mind

How. Once a week, tell someone what you read and what you made of it, in five minutes, without notes. Read next week's chapter knowing you will have to.

Why. Study and teach is the Upanishad's whole instruction to the graduating student. The modern finding is that even expecting to teach changes how you read: people who thought they would have to explain a passage remembered it better and more coherently than those who expected a test.

Classical. Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11: svadhyaya-pravachanabhyam na pramaditavyam, do not neglect study and teaching.

Modern. Nestojko et al., Memory and Cognition, 2014: participants told they would teach a passage recalled it more completely and in better order than those told they would be tested, though nobody actually taught.

Nestojko 2014

Early, light dinner

81

Done by seven, three hours before bed

THE STACK Before dark, or as close as life allows · Supported · Diet, Sleep, Evening

How. Eat the evening meal by about seven, warm and simple, smaller than lunch. Nothing after except water or a herbal tea. If seven is impossible, aim for three clear hours before sleep.

Why. A late heavy dinner is the commonest reason people in this programme sleep badly and wake heavy. Moving it earlier is usually the change they feel first.

Classical. The classical texts place the night meal in the first watch after sunset and make it the lightest of the day; several forbid eating after dark altogether.

Modern. A randomised crossover trial (Nutrients, 2021): dinner at 6pm rather than 9pm lowered 24-hour blood glucose and improved fat metabolism the next morning.

Nakamura 2021, early dinner trial · Ratricharya, night regimen

Light a lamp at dusk 82

Sandhya deepa: one flame, one pause, as the day turns

As the light goes · Traditional · Evening, Mind, Purpose

How. Light a single lamp or candle as the sun sets, sit or stand with it a minute, and let it mark the end of the working day. Dim the electric lights after it.

Why. The lamp at dusk is the oldest boundary between work and rest in the Indian home. It also happens to be the right kind of light for the evening: low, warm and far from the eyes.

Classical. Sandhya, the evening observance, is prescribed alongside the morning one; the household lamp at dusk is universal custom.

Modern. No trial. The screen-light research on the dim card is the modern case for warm, low light after dark.

Watch the sun go down 83

Sandhya: five minutes facing west, doing nothing

Sunset · Limited evidence · Mind, Evening, Purpose

How. Find where you can see the western sky and stand there for the last five minutes of the sun. No phone. Notice the size of it.

Why. The joints of the day, dawn and dusk, are the tradition's fixed appointments with something larger than the schedule. A small trial of weekly 'awe walks' found older adults who were told to look for vastness ended up less distressed and, in their own photographs, smiling more.

Classical. Sandhya is prescribed at sunrise, noon and sunset across the Dharmashastra; the evening one closes the working day.

Modern. Sturm et al., Emotion, 2020 (60 adults over 75, randomised): eight weekly 15-minute awe walks increased positive emotion and decreased daily distress compared with ordinary walks.

Sturm 2020, awe walks

Dinner together, no phones 84

One meal a day with the household, screens away

The early dinner · Supported · Purpose, Diet, Digital, Evening

How. The household eats the early dinner together at the table, phones in a basket by the door. Five nights a week is the target. Talk about the day.

Why. The family meal is the smallest satsanga, the company that shapes you. For children and teenagers the evidence is large and consistent: frequent family meals go with better mood, less risky behaviour and healthier eating; for adults it is the same meal from the other side.

Classical. Charaka's rules of eating assume a shared household meal; sadvritta asks for respect and kindness at the table; satsanga, good company, runs through the Gita and the Upanishads.

Modern. Harrison et al., Canadian Family Physician, 2015 (systematic review of 14 studies): frequent family meals were associated with lower rates of depression, substance use and disordered eating in young people.

Harrison 2015, family meals · Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

A warm bath ninety minutes before bed 85

Warm the skin, cool the core

An hour or two before bed · Supported · Sleep, Evening

How. A warm bath or shower, ten minutes, an hour or two before bed. Not right before: the point is the cooling afterwards. Warm feet especially.

Why. The evening bath is in the night regimen. The physiology is neat: warming the skin sends heat out of the core, and a falling core temperature is the body's cue for sleep. A meta-analysis found the sweet spot at ninety minutes before bed.

Classical. Ratricharya includes washing before bed; Ashtanga Hridaya 2.16 keeps hot water off the head but welcomes it for the body.

Modern. Haghayegh et al., Sleep Medicine Reviews, 2019 (meta-analysis of 13 studies): a warm bath or shower at 40 to 42 degrees, one to two hours before bed, improved sleep quality and efficiency and cut time to fall asleep by about ten minutes.

Haghayegh 2019, Sleep Med Rev · Ratricharya, night regimen

Read twenty minutes 86

Paper, one text, the same one all week

After dinner, in the dim hour · Traditional · Self-Study, Purpose, Evening, Mind

How. Twenty minutes with one book, on paper, in the screen-free hour. The same text for the whole week; a verse or a chapter, read slowly, beats a feed.

Why. Svadhyaya, self-study, is the practice the texts give to the mind. It also fills the evening hour that screens used to take, which is why it belongs here and not at noon.

Classical. Svadhyaya is one of the daily observances of the yoga tradition and part of the conduct Ashtanga Hridaya 2 asks for each day.

Modern. No specific trial; reading on paper avoids the screen-light effect on sleep documented above.

Gaze at a flame 87

Trataka: a candle at arm's length, five minutes, no blinking

After dark, before the lights go down · Limited evidence · Mind, Focus, Evening

How. A candle at eye level, an arm away, in a dark room. Gaze at the flame without blinking until the eyes water, close them, and hold the after-image. Five minutes. Not for anyone with glaucoma or epilepsy.

Why. Trataka is one of the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga, given for the eyes and for concentration. A month of it improved working memory in a small randomised trial of older adults; a nice result, not a large one.

Classical. Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2.31 to 2.32: gaze steadily at a small object until tears come; it removes eye disease and sloth and, kept secret, is the key to concentration.

Modern. Talwadkar et al., International Journal of Yoga, 2014 (60 older adults, randomised): 26 days of trataka improved digit-span scores compared with waiting-list controls.

Talwadkar 2014, Int J Yoga

Warm milk with nutmeg

88

A small cup, warm, an hour before bed

An hour before bed · Limited evidence · Sleep, Evening, Diet

How. Warm a small cup of milk with a pinch of nutmeg or turmeric. Sip it slowly, an hour before bed, not as a meal. Skip it if milk does not suit you.

Why. Milk at night is the traditional sleep aid across India, and the texts count milk as sattvic and nourishing. The modern evidence is thin: milk carries a little melatonin and tryptophan, and one small trial in a care home found night-milk improved sleep. Keep it for the ritual as much as the chemistry.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 27, treats cow's milk as the best of the nourishing foods; the night regimen allows warm milk as the only thing after dinner.

Modern. Valtonen et al., Nordic Journal of Psychiatry, 2005: melatonin-rich night milk improved morning activity and sleep in institutionalised elderly people; a small, specific study.

Valtonen 2005

PART 5

Night

The last hour and the bed.

Lights down after dinner 89

Dim lamps, no screens, the last hour of the day

The last hour before bed · Well supported · Evening, Sleep, Digital, Mind

How. After dinner, lamps instead of ceiling lights, and screens off for the final hour. Read on paper, talk, wash up, stretch, oil the feet.

Why. Darkness is the signal that starts melatonin. Give the body an hour of it and sleep arrives on its own instead of being chased.

Classical. Ratricharya, the night regimen, winds the day down with lighter food, less activity and an early bed; lamplight was all there was.

Modern. Four hours of a lit screen before bed suppressed melatonin by over half and delayed the clock by about 90 minutes (Chang et al., PNAS, 2015).

Chang 2015, PNAS

Three lines at night 90

What went right, and one thing for tomorrow

Before the lights go down · Supported · Mind, Purpose, Sleep, Evening

How. Paper, not phone. Write three things that went right today, however small, and the one thing tomorrow is for. Two minutes. Close the notebook.

Why. Looking back over the day is old practice; svadhyaya includes the study of oneself. The research splits neatly: counting what went right lifts mood over weeks, and writing down tomorrow's task gets a busy mind to sleep faster.

Classical. Svadhyaya, one of the daily observances in Yoga Sutras 2.32, is study of the texts and of oneself; Ashtanga Hridaya's sadvritta asks you to review your own conduct each day.

Modern. Emmons and McCullough, 2003: weekly and daily gratitude lists raised wellbeing, most reliably positive mood. Scullin et al., 2018: five minutes writing tomorrow's to-do list before bed shortened time to fall asleep in a sleep-lab study of 57 adults.

Emmons & McCullough 2003 · Scullin 2018, J Exp Psychol

Sleep longer in winter

91

Bed a little earlier as the nights lengthen

November to February · Limited evidence · Sleep, Seasonal

How. As the evenings draw in, move bedtime half an hour earlier and keep the wake time. Let the winter night be longer, and the summer one shorter, and stop fighting either.

Why. The seasonal regimen expects the body to change with the year. A sleep clinic that looked at a whole year of recordings found people take more REM sleep in winter, even in a city with electric light, and would sleep longer if allowed.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 3: winter is the season of strength, long nights and heavy food; summer of short nights, rest by day and lightness.

Modern. Seidler et al., Frontiers in Neuroscience, 2023: 292 polysomnographies across a year showed about 30 minutes more REM sleep in winter and less deep sleep in autumn, suggesting longer winter sleep is physiological.

Seidler 2023, Frontiers · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 3, seasons

Phone out of the bedroom

92

Charged in another room, an alarm clock by the bed

An hour before sleep · Well supported · Digital, Sleep, Evening, Focus

How. Buy a cheap alarm clock. Charge the phone in the kitchen or hall. Last look at least an hour before bed; the first look happens after your morning practice, not before.

Why. The phone by the bed costs you both ends of the night: light and scrolling push sleep later, and reaching for it on waking hands the first hour of the day to other people.

Classical. Not in the texts, obviously. But every morning practice in Ashtanga Hridaya 2 assumes you own the first hour; the phone is what takes it.

Modern. Bedtime phone users report poor sleep about twice as often as non-users (Int J Prev Med, 2021); evening screen light delays melatonin and the body clock (Chang et al., PNAS, 2015).

Chang 2015, PNAS · Bedtime smartphone use and sleep

A dark, cool bedroom

93

No light you can read by, and a window cracked open

Setting up for the night · Well supported · Sleep, Evening

How. Curtains that block the street, every standby light covered or unplugged, the room a little cooler than the rest of the house. If you can see your hand in front of your face, it is too bright.

Why. The classical night was dark by default; ours has to be made so. Even the dim light of a single lamp during sleep raised heart rate and next-morning insulin resistance in healthy adults, so this is not a detail.

Classical. Ratricharya assumes a lamp put out and a dark room; the night is for sleep and the senses are withdrawn.

Modern. Mason et al., PNAS, 2022: one night at 100 lux, roughly a bedside lamp, versus near darkness raised night-time heart rate, lowered heart-rate variability and increased insulin resistance the next morning in 20 healthy adults.

Mason 2022, PNAS · Ratricharya, night regimen

Warm oil on the feet

94

Two minutes each foot, before bed

Last thing before bed · Limited evidence · Sleep, Evening, Mind

How. Warm a spoon of sesame oil, sit on the edge of the bed, and rub each foot for two minutes: sole, heel, between the toes. Wipe off the excess, or wear old socks.

Why. The texts single out the feet for daily oiling and promise sleep and clear eyes. The modern evidence is small trials in hospital patients and older adults, most of which found better sleep, so we rate it limited and keep it because it costs two minutes and works for us.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 5.90 to 92: oiling the feet removes roughness, stiffness, dryness and fatigue, gives softness and strength, and steadies sleep and eyesight.

Modern. A meta-analysis of 26 randomised trials (2,366 people) found foot reflexology improved sleep quality; reviews of warm foot baths in older adults report the same. Trials are small and mostly in patients.

Foot reflexology meta-analysis, 2020 · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 2

Hum before bed

95

Bhramari: five slow humming breaths

In bed, lights off · Limited evidence · Sleep, Mind, Evening

How. Sit or lie in the dark, breathe in through the nose, and breathe out with a low hum, like a bee, until the breath ends. Five to ten rounds. Ears covered with the thumbs if you like.

Why. Bhramari is the tradition's bedtime breath. Two odd facts from the lab: humming multiplies the nitric oxide in the nose fifteen times over, which opens the airways, and a slow humming exhale nudges the heart toward its resting rhythm.

Classical. Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2.68: breathe in quickly with the sound of a male bee and out slowly with the sound of a female bee; the mind is filled with delight.

Modern. Weitzberg and Lundberg, American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, 2002: humming raised nasal nitric oxide fifteen-fold in ten healthy subjects. A 2023 trial found bhramari improved heart-rate variability in hypertensive patients.

Weitzberg & Lundberg 2002 · 2023 RCT in hypertension

Wash the feet before bed

96

Warm water over the feet, then dry them well

Last thing before bed · Limited evidence · Sleep, Evening

How. Warm water over both feet at the sink or in a basin, a minute each, then dry thoroughly. Follow with the oil if you keep that practice.

Why. Washing the feet before sleep is in the night regimen and in most Indian homes. Warm feet before bed are a well-tested sleep aid: warmth at the extremities helps the core cool, which is the signal for sleep.

Classical. Ratricharya: wash the feet, hands and face before retiring; the feet in particular, for sound sleep and clear eyes.

Modern. A systematic review of ten trials, mostly in older adults, found warm foot baths before bed improved sleep quality; the mechanism is the same distal warming as the warm bath.

Foot bath review, 2024 · Ratricharya, night regimen

In bed by ten

97

Same bedtime, within half an hour, all week

THE STACK The kapha hours, when sleep comes easiest · Well supported · Sleep, Evening, Morning

How. Choose a bedtime between 9:30 and 10:30 and keep it within 30 minutes every night, weekends included. The wake time you chose at the top of this list depends on it.

Why. In the Ayurvedic clock the hours from six to ten are heavy and slow, which is exactly what you want for falling asleep. Miss the window and the next stretch is light and quick; you get a second wind and pay for it at dawn.

Classical. The evening kapha period (roughly 6pm to 10pm) is the classical time for sleep onset; Ashtanga Hridaya treats proper sleep as one of the three pillars of health.

Modern. Windred et al., Sleep, 2023: regularity of sleep timing predicted mortality risk more strongly than sleep length.

Windred 2023, Sleep

The bed is for sleep

98

No work, no scrolling, no lying awake in it

Bedtime · Well supported · Sleep, Digital, Evening

How. Get into bed only when sleepy. If you are still awake after twenty minutes, get up, sit somewhere dim, and come back when sleep arrives. Nothing else happens in the bed.

Why. Sleep is one of the three pillars in the texts, and the bed is its place. The modern name for this rule is stimulus control, and it is one of the two best-tested treatments for insomnia there is.

Classical. Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutrasthana 7: sleep, food and restraint are the three pillars of life; the bed should be clean, quiet and used for rest.

Modern. Stimulus control, Bootzin's four rules from 1972, is a first-line treatment in the American Academy of Sleep Medicine guideline; a 2024 meta-analysis confirms it works on its own.

Stimulus control meta-analysis, 2024 · Ashtanga Hridaya Su. 7

Sleep on the left side

99

Vamakukshi: left side down, especially after a late meal

Falling asleep · Limited evidence · Sleep, Diet

How. Settle on your left side to fall asleep, with a pillow that keeps the neck straight. You will move in the night; that is fine. It matters most on a night you have eaten late.

Why. The tradition favours the left side for digestion and rest. The reflux research agrees for a plain reason of anatomy: with the stomach below the gullet on the left, acid stays where it belongs.

Classical. Vamakukshi, lying on the left, is the traditional short rest after lunch and the preferred sleeping side in Ayurvedic practice; the texts warn against sleeping on the back or face down.

Modern. Khoury et al., American Journal of Gastroenterology, 1999, and a 2023 meta-analysis: lying on the left produced the least night-time reflux and the fastest acid clearance; the right side was worst.

Left-side sleeping meta-analysis, 2023 · Ratricharya, night regimen

Forgive before sleeping

100

Kshama: one grudge set down, out loud, in the dark

In bed, before sleep · Supported · Mind, Evening, Sleep

How. In the dark, name the day's one irritation and the person in it, and say quietly that you let it go. If it comes back tomorrow, do it again tomorrow.

Why. Forgiveness is a daily discipline in the conduct texts, not a grand gesture. The clinical trials of deliberate forgiveness practices show real drops in depression and anxiety, and a night without a grudge is an easier night.

Classical. Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8: the sadvritta asks that one be free of anger and enmity, forgiving, and kind in speech; the Gita 16.3 lists kshama among the divine qualities.

Modern. Wade et al., Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 2014 (meta-analysis of 54 studies): forgiveness interventions raised forgiveness and lowered depression and anxiety compared with no treatment.

Wade 2014, meta-analysis · Charaka Su. 8, sadvritta

Doing it alone is the hard part.

Everything in this guide is free, and most people who read it will keep two or three of the practices for a fortnight and drift. That is not a failure of will; it is what happens without someone on the other end.

The 21-Day Reset is these practices with a guide who lives them: a day built with you on a discovery call, a conversation every week, and two minutes morning and evening that a person reads and answers. It runs on your own clock, wherever you are.

sattvastack.com/sattvastack-21-day-reset

Sources are linked on every card at sattvastack.com/practices. Classical references follow the standard editions: Ashtanga Hridaya (Vagbhata), Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Modern references are cited by first author, journal and year.