

Infertility (Vandhyatva): Ayurvedic Approaches vs. Modern Treatment

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ABSTRACT

Infertility, termed "Vandhyatva" in Ayurveda, affects approximately 17.5% of the adult population globally, representing roughly 1 in 6 people worldwide. In India, primary infertility prevalence is 1.5% while secondary infertility reaches 13.7%, with higher rates in southern states. This paper comprehensively examines the contrasting philosophical frameworks, treatment methodologies, efficacy rates, and cost considerations between Ayurvedic approaches and modern medical interventions for infertility. Ayurveda emphasizes holistic healing through Dosha balance, detoxification via Panchakarma, and natural reproductive rejuvenation using herbs like Shatavari and Ashwagandha. Modern medicine employs hormonal treatments, assisted reproductive technologies (ART) including IVF (30-50% success per cycle in India), and surgical interventions. While IVF costs ₹1,00,000 to ₹2,50,000 per cycle in India, Ayurvedic treatment ranges from ₹3,000 to ₹30,000 over 3-12 months. This analysis reveals that integrated approaches may offer optimal outcomes for couples navigating infertility.

KEYWORDS: *Infertility, Vandhyatva, Ayurveda, IVF (In Vitro Fertilization), Panchakarma, PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome), Shatavari, Ashwagandha, Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), Reproductive Health, Uttara Basti*

INTRODUCTION

Infertility represents one of the most emotionally challenging conditions affecting couples worldwide, defined as the inability to conceive after one year of regular, unprotected intercourse. The condition affects both males and females, with causes ranging from anatomical abnormalities to hormonal imbalances, lifestyle factors, and psychosomatic

influences. The emotional distress, frustration, and social pressure accompanying infertility create significant psychological burdens on affected couples.

In the Indian context, infertility carries additional cultural weight due to societal expectations surrounding progeny. The fifth round of the Indian National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) revealed that while primary infertility affects 1.5% of women, secondary infertility (inability to conceive after previous successful pregnancy) reaches 13.7%. Regional variations show higher prevalence in southern Indian states, while urban women face increased risk due to environmental and lifestyle factors.

Two distinct medical paradigms address this condition: modern allopathic medicine, which has developed sophisticated technological interventions, and Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine that emphasizes holistic, natural healing. Understanding both approaches enables couples to make informed decisions about their fertility journey. This paper examines the conceptual frameworks, treatment modalities, efficacy data, and practical considerations of both systems.

AYURVEDIC FRAMEWORK OF VANDHYATVA

1. Definition and Classification

In Ayurveda, infertility is termed "Vandhyatva" and is defined as the failure to conceive despite regular and timely coitus during the fertile period for at least one year. Ayurvedic texts describe nine types of Vandhyatva based on Dosha involvement and causative factors: Aativandhya, Raktavandhya, Vatavandhya, Pittavandhya, Kaphavandhya, Tridoshvandhya, Grahadosha Janya, Daeva Bala Janya, and Guruaadi Apachara Janya.

2. Philosophical Basis: The Four Factors of Conception

Ayurveda identifies four essential factors (Garbhasambhava Samagri) required for successful conception:

- **Ritu** (timely ovulation): The fertile period when ovulation occurs
- **Kshetra** (healthy uterine environment): A properly functioning female genital tract
- **Ambu** (adequate nourishment): Nutritional fluid supporting fetal development
- **Bija** (viable gametes): Healthy sperm and ovum

Successful reproduction depends on the proper integration of these factors along with balanced Doshas, healthy Dhatus (body tissues), effective Agni (digestive fire), and functioning Srotas (channels).

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY: DOSHA IMBALANCE AND SHUKRA DHATU

The primary cause of Vandhyatva in Ayurveda is imbalance in the three Doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and disturbance of Shukra Dhatu (reproductive tissue). Each Dosha plays specific roles in reproduction:

Table: 1

| Dosha | Reproductive Function | Imbalance Effect |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Vata (particularly Apana Vata) | Controls menstruation, implantation, fertilization, and ovum release | Disrupts physiological rhythms, causes blockages |
| Pitta | Endometrial alterations, ovulation, hormonal regulation, metabolic processes | Causes hormonal imbalances, inflammatory conditions |
| Kapha | Provides lubrication and structure, cervical mucus consistency, follicle growth | Leads to blockages, cyst formation, excessive黏性 |

When Doshas become vitiated, they disrupt the physiological rhythms and anatomical structures required for reproduction. Additional contributing factors include:

- **Weak Agni** (digestive fire): Impairs nutrient conversion to healthy tissues
- **Accumulation of Ama** (toxins): Blocks channels (Srotorodha), preventing proper gamete transport
- **Disturbed Shukra Dhatu**: Vitiated reproductive tissue loses fertile properties

The Charaka Samhita states: "Shuddha Shukra Yonir Yasyati Tasya Santanotpatti Bhavet" – A person with pure reproductive essence and a healthy womb will conceive successfully.

1. Etiological Factors

Ayurvedic literature identifies multiple causes of infertility:

- Sukra Dosha (unhealthy semen)
- Ativyayama (over-exercise)
- Loss of Bala (low strength)

- Improper Ahara (food) and Vihara (lifestyle)
- Abnormality in Kshetra (female genital tract) like Margaavrodha (fallopian tube obstruction)

AYURVEDIC TREATMENT APPROACHES

1. Herbal Medications for Fertility

Ayurveda utilizes customized herbal formulations targeting specific reproductive functions. Key herbs include:

For Female Fertility:

- **Shatavari (Asparagus racemosus):** A renowned female reproductive tonic containing phytoestrogens that mimic natural estrogens, aiding hormonal balance and increasing fertility outcomes. Enhances ovulation and nourishes the uterus.
- **Ashoka and Lodhra:** Balance hormones and support endometrium
- **Aloe Vera and Gokshura:** Reduce inflammation and improve implantation chances

For Male Fertility:

- **Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera):** Increases testosterone and sperm count, improves sperm motility and morphology, reduces oxidative stress, and minimizes stress-induced infertility. Studies demonstrate considerable enhancement of semen parameters.
- **Shilajit:** Boosts sperm motility and vitality
- **Kapikacchu (Mucuna):** Enhances libido and fertility

These herbs work together to establish harmonious hormonal equilibrium between Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Luteinizing Hormone (LH). No single herb is effective alone; combinations correct the problem comprehensively.



Figure 1: Infertility Treatment for Female in Ayurveda

2. Panchakarma Detoxification Therapies

Panchakarma plays a crucial role in treating infertility by removing toxins affecting fertility and balancing Doshas. Key therapies include:

| Therapy | Fertility Benefit |
|---|---|
| Virechana (Purgation Therapy) | Cleanses Pitta-related hormonal imbalances |
| Uttar Basti (Herbal Uterine Therapy) | Removes blockages in fallopian tubes; highlighted in classics for substantial results |
| Nasya (Nasal Therapy) | Regulates hormones by balancing Prana Vayu |
| Shirodhara (Oil Therapy on Forehead) | Reduces stress and enhances fertility hormones |
| Snehapana, Vamanam, Virechanam | Purification therapies chosen based on underlying causes |

Uttara Basti Karma is well-practiced with substantial results and can bypass surgical management to provide fruitful outcomes. For PCOS/PCOD, anovulatory cycles, fallopian tube blockages, and uterine fibroids, Uttarbasti stimulates ovary function and enhances egg quality.

3. Ayurvedic Diet (Ahara) for Fertility

Ayurveda recommends specific dietary modifications:

Fertility-Boosting Foods:

- Nuts and seeds (almonds, walnuts, flaxseeds): Strengthen reproductive tissue
- Whole grains and ghee: Nourish hormones and support ovulation
- Fruits (dates, pomegranates, bananas): Enhance sperm and egg quality
- Fresh fruits, green leafy vegetables, and juices: Provide nutrient-rich foods

Foods to Avoid:

- Processed sugar and junk food: Disrupts hormones
- Excessive caffeine and alcohol: Affects sperm production and ovulation

- Cold and heavy foods: Increases Kapha, leading to blockages
- Processed foods, saturated fats, oily/sticky foods, processed salt, sugar, carbonated drinks, and excess dairy products

Drinking large amounts of water is recommended.

4. Lifestyle Modifications

Ayurveda emphasizes comprehensive lifestyle changes:

- Maintaining healthy weight
- Regular exercise
- Avoiding substance abuse
- Yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises for stress management
- Reducing frustration, grief, and anger

Infertility is primarily triggered by stress, and Vata imbalance from stress is managed with Shirodhara, Yoga, and meditation.

5. Case Evidence

Clinical studies demonstrate Ayurvedic efficacy:

- A 25-year woman with PCOD and primary infertility conceived naturally after four months of integrated Ayurvedic and modern treatment, experiencing regular menstruation and significant weight loss
- A 26-year woman with PCOS-induced infertility conceived after Uttar Basti and Shamana Chikitsa treatment, with cyst size remarkably decreased
- A 27-year female with secondary infertility of 1.5 years confirmed conception after ten months of personalized Ayurvedic regimen

MODERN MEDICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Definition and Classification

Modern medicine defines infertility as the inability to achieve pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse. Infertility affects up to 15% of women who want to conceive. The World Health Organization reports that around 17.5% of the adult population—roughly 1 in 6 worldwide—experience infertility.

Infertility is classified as:

- **Primary infertility:** No previous successful pregnancy
- **Secondary infertility:** Inability to conceive after previous successful pregnancy

2. Etiological Factors

Modern medicine identifies causes across maternal, paternal, and embryonic factors:

Female Causes:

- Ovulatory disorders (PCOS, hypothalamic-pituitary dysfunction)
- Tubal factor infertility (blocked fallopian tubes)
- Uterine abnormalities (fibroids, polyps, endometriosis)
- Endometriosis
- Age-related decline in egg quality

Male Causes:

- Low sperm count (oligospermia)
- Poor sperm motility (asthenospermia)
- Abnormal sperm morphology (teratospermia)
- Varicocele
- Hormonal imbalances

Unexplained Infertility: No clear medical reason identified, affecting approximately 10-30% of couples

3. Diagnostic Approach

Modern medicine employs sophisticated diagnostic technologies:

- Hormonal assays (FSH, LH, estradiol, progesterone, testosterone)
- Ultrasound imaging (follicular monitoring, ovarian assessment)
- Hysterosalpingography (tubal evaluation)
- Semen analysis
- Genetic testing

MODERN TREATMENT APPROACHES

1. Lifestyle Modifications

The Cleveland Clinic recommends:

- Gaining or losing weight to achieve optimal BMI
- Stopping smoking or drug use
- Improving other health conditions

2. Medications

For Women:

- Fertility drugs stimulate ovaries to ovulate more eggs
- Synthetic hormones (FSH, LH, Clomid) regulate ovulation

For Men:

- Medications raise testosterone or other hormone levels
- Drugs for erectile dysfunction

3. Surgical Interventions

Surgery can:

- Open blocked fallopian tubes
- Remove polyps, fibroids, or scar tissue
- Repair structural problems
- Perform varicocele surgery to make sperm healthier

4. Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)

ART involves handling sperm or egg by a healthcare provider:

Intrauterine Insemination (IUI):

- Sperm placed directly into uterus using thin tube
- Success rate: 10-20% per cycle in India
- Under 30: 15-20%; 30-35: 12-18%; 35-38: 8-12%; Above 40: 5% or lower
- Up to 80% of couples become pregnant after six IUI cycles

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF):

- Eggs retrieved from ovary, placed with sperm in lab dish
- Sperm fertilizes eggs; 1-3 embryos transferred to uterus
- Success rate in India: 30-50% per cycle

- Women under 35: approximately 52% success rate
- Success drops to 20-26% for older women

Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI):

- Single sperm injected directly into each egg
- Added cost: ₹45,000-₹65,000

Additional ART Procedures:

- Assisted hatching: Opens embryo outer layer for easier implantation
- Third-party ART: Donor eggs, sperm, embryos, or gestational carriers

5. Cost Considerations

IVF in India (2025):

- Average cost: ₹1,00,000 to ₹2,50,000 per cycle
- Delhi/NCR: ₹1,10,000-₹2,50,000
- Hormonal stimulation medications: ₹70,000-₹95,000
- Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET): ₹65,000-₹85,000
- PGT (Genetic Testing): ₹1,50,000+

Ayurvedic Treatment in India:

- Range: ₹3,000 to ₹30,000 over 3-12 months
- Consulting charges: ₹500-₹1,000
- Medicine charges: ₹3,000-₹4,000 per month
- Single therapy sitting: ₹600-₹2,500 depending on procedure

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: AYURVEDA VS. MODERN MEDICINE

1. Key Differences in Approach

| Factor | Modern Medicine (Allopathy) | Ayurveda |
|------------------|---|---|
| Focus | Treats infertility with medications, ART (IVF, IUI) | Treats root cause & prepares body for natural conception |
| Hormonal Balance | Uses synthetic hormones (FSH, LH, Clomid) | Uses herbs (Shatavari, Ashwagandha) to balance hormones naturally |

| Factor | Modern Medicine (Allopathy) | Ayurveda |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Egg & Sperm Quality | Improves ovulation via medication | Strengthens Shukra Dhatu with herbs & diet |
| Uterine Health | Corrects issues via surgeries or medications | Improves endometrial lining, treats PCOS/fibroids naturally |
| Detoxification | No focus on detox | Panchakarma removes toxins affecting fertility |
| Overall Wellbeing | Side effects (weight gain, mood swings) | Enhances overall health & emotional stability |

2. Efficacy Comparison

Modern Medicine:

- IVF: 30-50% per cycle in India
- IUI: 10-20% per cycle; 30-40% cumulative after 3 cycles
- 80% success after six IUI cycles

Ayurveda:

- Case studies report natural conception within 4-10 months
- Systematic review shows promising role in managing PCOS symptoms and infertility
- Ayurvedic approach beneficial and cost-effective with minimum adverse effects

3. Time Considerations

- **IVF:** Quick results (one cycle takes 2-3 weeks), but may require multiple attempts
- **Ayurveda:** Requires 3-12 months for comprehensive treatment
- **Integrated approach:** A case report showed conception after four months with combined treatment

4. Side Effects and Safety

Modern Medicine:

- Hormonal medications cause weight gain, mood swings
- Strong hormone treatments create emotional stress

- NICE states complementary therapies lack evidence of effectiveness

Ayurveda:

- Natural healing with minimum adverse effects
- No external substances required to regulate hormones
- Enhances overall health without pharmaceutical side effects

INTEGRATED APPROACH: COMBINING BOTH SYSTEMS

Recent research suggests that infertile couples can achieve conception and carry home a healthy baby following both Ayurveda and ART together. An integrated approach offers several advantages:

1. **Pre-ART Prepatation:** Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation before IVF/IUI may improve outcomes
2. **Managing IVF Failure:** Ayurvedic lifestyle approaches may address causes of IVF failure
3. **Post-ART Support:** Ayurveda supports pregnancy maintenance after ART success
4. **Unexplained Infertility:** For cases where ART fails, Ayurveda addresses deep-seated Ama (toxins)

A case report demonstrated successful integration: insulin sensitizers combined with Rasayana, Artavavaha Srotoshodhana, and Vatanulomana therapies resulted in natural conception without assisted reproductive techniques after four months.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

1. Strengths of Ayurveda

- **Holistic Approach:** Addresses root causes rather than symptoms alone
- **Natural Healing:** No synthetic hormones or external interventions
- **Cost-Effective:** Significantly lower cost (₹3,000-₹30,000 vs. ₹1,00,000-₹2,50,000)
- **Minimum Adverse Effects:** Safe with negligible side effects
- **Overall Health Enhancement:** Improves emotional stability and vitality
- **Treats PCOS Naturally:** Effective for metabolic disorders linked to infertility

2. Limitations of Ayurveda

- **Time-Intensive:** Requires 3-12 months versus quick ART results

- **Limited Evidence:** Few large-scale randomized controlled trials
- **Age Limitations:** May be less effective for advanced maternal age (>40 years)
- **Structural Issues:** Cannot rapidly correct severe anatomical abnormalities

3. Strengths of Modern Medicine

- **High Success Rates:** IVF achieves 30-50% per cycle
- **Rapid Results:** Quick intervention for time-sensitive cases
- **Advanced Diagnostics:** Sophisticated technology identifies specific causes
- **Structural Correction:** Surgery addresses anatomical blockages
- **Age-Independent Options:** Donor eggs/sperm for advanced age

4. Limitations of Modern Medicine

- **High Cost:** ₹1-2.5 lakhs per cycle creates financial burden
- **Side Effects:** Hormonal medications cause weight gain, mood swings
- **Emotional Stress:** Intensive procedures create psychological burden
- **Multiple Attempts:** Many require several cycles for success
- **No Detox Focus:** Does not address underlying toxin accumulation

5. Recommendations for Couples

Based on this comparative analysis, couples should consider:

- **Age Factor:** Under 35 with no structural issues: Consider Ayurveda first; over 38 or with blocked tubes: ART may be necessary
- **Duration of Infertility:** Less than 2 years: Ayurveda; over 5 years: Consider integrated approach
- **Specific Diagnosis:** PCOS/Unexplained: Ayurveda highly effective; Tubal blockage/severe male factor: ART necessary
- **Financial Constraints:** Ayurveda offers cost-effective alternative
- **Previous ART Failure:** Ayurvedic preparation may improve subsequent ART success
- **Integrated Strategy:** Combine Ayurvedic pre-treatment (3-6 months) with ART for optimized outcomes

CONCLUSION

Infertility (Vandhyatva) represents a complex multifactorial condition requiring comprehensive management. Ayurveda and modern medicine offer fundamentally different yet potentially complementary approaches. Ayurveda emphasizes holistic healing through Dosha balance, detoxification via Panchakarma, and natural reproductive rejuvenation using herbs like Shatavari and Ashwagandha, achieving natural conception in 4-10 months with minimal side effects and significantly lower costs (₹3,000-₹30,000). Modern medicine employs hormonal treatments and ART achieving 30-50% IVF success per cycle but at higher costs (₹1,00,000-₹2,50,000) with notable side effects.

The optimal approach may be integrative, combining Ayurvedic root-cause treatment with modern technological interventions when necessary. As research demonstrates, "Infertile couples can achieve the goal of conception and carry home healthy baby following Ayurveda and ART together". Future research should focus on large-scale randomized controlled trials validating Ayurvedic efficacy and establishing standardized integrative protocols for different infertility etiologies.

This dual-paradigm approach empowers couples to make informed decisions based on their specific diagnosis, age, financial situation, and personal preferences, ultimately enhancing access to effective fertility care while minimizing adverse effects and financial burden.

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Received Date: January 10, 2026

Accepted Date: January 25, 2026

Published Date: February 21, 2026

Citation: Dr. Namita Bhatt, Kirti Patel, Arvind Joshi. Infertility (Vandhyatva): Ayurvedic Approaches vs. Modern Treatment. Amruta: A Journal on Prasuti Tantra, Bal and Stree Rog. 2026; 5(1): 1- 15p