

Clinical Validation of Ayurvedic Nutritional Protocols

Marta Hansen¹, Helena Kovacs²

¹ Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Machine Learning, Mediterranean Institute of Technology, Rome, Italy. Email: marta.hansen568@gmail.com | ORCID: 1390-8488-1066-1629

² Associate Professor, Institute of Intelligent Systems, Mediterranean Institute of Technology, Rome, Italy. Email: helena.kovacs454@gmail.com | ORCID: 7527-1236-9998-5316

ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic nutritional protocols have been practised for centuries, but their clinical validation in the terms used by modern evidence-based medicine is still patchy. Most of the available work is either small and single-site or descriptive rather than outcome-driven, which makes it hard to compare protocols against one another or against standard nutritional guidelines. In this paper we pulled together 78 primary clinical studies published between 2008 and 2024 that evaluated Ayurvedic nutritional protocols with pre- and post-intervention measurements in human participants. Studies were grouped into five protocol frames: P1 (Prakriti-based individualised diet), P2 (Dosha-pacifying general diet), P3 (Ritucharya, seasonal nutritional cycling), P4 (Rasayana nutritional therapeutics), and P5 (therapeutic-fasting protocols such as Langhana and Dipana). Each frame was then scored on the Ayurvedic Nutritional Validation Index (ANVI), a weighted composite across clinical effect size, metabolic-marker response, reproducibility across sites, adherence, and translational yield. The Prakriti-based individualised frame (P1) and Rasayana nutritional therapeutics (P4) scored highest, with ANVI values of 0.868 and 0.842. Seasonal Ritucharya protocols scored well on adherence but less so on hard metabolic endpoints. Our reading is that Ayurvedic nutrition has a genuine clinical signal, particularly when protocols are individualised by Prakriti, and that the evidence base is now mature enough to support integration with conventional dietary guidelines where both share common goals.

Keywords: Ayurveda; nutrition; Prakriti; Dosha; Rasayana; Ritucharya; clinical validation; dietary protocols; metabolic markers; ANVI; integrative medicine

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1. Introduction

1.1 Why Clinical Validation of Ayurvedic Nutrition Matters

Ayurveda has some of the oldest systematic dietary recommendations on record, with protocols structured around constitutional types (Prakriti), dosha balance, seasonal cycles (Ritucharya), and therapeutic interventions such as Rasayana and Langhana. These protocols have survived long enough to become embedded in public-health practice across South Asia, but their validation in the terms used by modern evidence-based medicine - randomised design, standard biomarker panels, replicable effect sizes - has lagged behind. Most of the existing literature is either small and single-site, or descriptive rather than outcome-driven. Neither makes it easy to compare one protocol against another, or against standard dietary guidelines. That gap is what this paper attempts to close.

1.2 Study Objectives

This study is a structured review of the clinical validation evidence for Ayurvedic nutritional protocols, organised into a comparable framework across five commonly-practised protocol classes. We identified 78 primary clinical studies published between 2008 and 2024 and grouped them under five frames: Prakriti-based individualised diet, Dosha-pacifying general diet, Ritucharya (seasonal cycling), Rasayana therapeutics, and therapeutic-fasting protocols. Each frame was scored on a shared rubric that weights clinical effect size alongside reproducibility and adherence, because a protocol that produces clean effects in a single centre but cannot be reproduced elsewhere is of limited practical value. The paper follows the standard six-section structure.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Prakriti-Based and Dosha-Pacifying Frames

The Prakriti-based individualised frame has attracted more serious clinical interest in the last decade than any of the other Ayurvedic nutritional categories. The central idea is that diet should be matched to a patient's constitutional type, and the biological basis for this was given fresh impetus by the Ayurgenomics work of Patwardhan and colleagues (Patwardhan et al., 2015), which linked Prakriti classifications to reproducible differences in gene-expression and metabolic profiles. Clinical nutrition studies building on Prakriti typing have reported consistent improvements in lipid profiles and glycaemic markers (Sharma and Chandola,

2011; Rastogi, 2014). Dosha-pacifying general diet - the non-individualised version of the same idea - has a broader but weaker evidence base: the effect sizes are real but smaller than for individualised protocols, which is exactly what one would predict if the core mechanism is constitutional matching.

2.2 Ritucharya and Rasayana Frames

Ritucharya covers the seasonal cycling of diet and lifestyle, and has the interesting property of producing strong adherence - patients find seasonal changes more intuitive than year-round dietary restriction - but with more modest signals on the hard metabolic endpoints. Kessler et al. (2013) reviewed the clinical-evidence base for Ritucharya and noted this pattern explicitly. Rasayana nutritional therapeutics, which include preparations such as Chyavanprash and functional-food formulations built around herbs and ghee-based anupanas, have shown the strongest immunological and antioxidant-biomarker signals in controlled trials (Singh et al., 2010; Rioux and Howerter, 2019). Their translation into metabolic-disease endpoints has been less consistent than their immunological effect, which is worth taking into account when comparing across protocol classes.

2.3 Therapeutic-Fasting and Integrative Evidence

Therapeutic-fasting protocols (Langhana, Dipana) share some structural features with time-restricted eating and intermittent-fasting regimens that have recently been studied intensively in conventional nutrition science. The Ayurvedic versions add constitutional and seasonal modifiers that make direct comparison tricky, but the published effect sizes on metabolic markers and body composition fall into the same general range as the conventional intermittent-fasting literature. Table 1 lists the main clinical studies used in this review.

Table 1: Key Clinical Studies of Ayurvedic Nutritional Protocols

Study	Year	Protocol Frame	Design	Key Finding
Sharma and Chandola	2011	P1: Prakriti diet	RCT, n=120	Improved lipid profile in VK-prakriti
Kessler et al.	2013	P3: Ritucharya	Review	Adherence strong, endpoints modest

Study	Year	Protocol Frame	Design	Key Finding
Rastogi	2014	P1: Prakriti diet	Cohort, n=210	Glycaemic improvement
Patwardhan et al.	2015	P1: Ayurvedic enomics	Cross-sectional	Prakriti-gene expression link
Singh et al.	2010	P4: Rasayana	RCT, n=96	Antioxidant biomarker rise
Chopra et al.	2013	P2: Dosha-pacifying	RCT, n=440	OA symptom reduction
Rioux and Howarter	2019	P4: Rasayana	Pilot RCT, n=60	Immunological improvement
Krishna et al.	2017	P1: Prakriti diet	RCT, n=180	Body composition response
Mishra et al.	2016	P5: Langhana/fasting	Pilot, n=48	Metabolic-marker improvement
Sharma et al.	2020	Integrative review	Review	Cross-protocol consolidation
Valiathan	2009	Caraka-based	Methodological	Classical protocol codification
Pole	2013	General Ayurvedic	Textbook review	Protocol-endpoint mapping

P1-P5 = protocol-frame identifiers used in this review; RCT = Randomised Controlled Trial; VK = Vata-Kapha prakriti; OA = Osteoarthritis.

3. Methodology

3.1 Search Strategy

We ran a structured review of primary clinical studies published between January 2008 and December 2024 that evaluated Ayurvedic nutritional protocols with pre- and post-intervention measurements in human participants. Databases searched were PubMed, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal, DHARA (Digital Helpline for Ayurveda Research Articles), and Web of Science. Search terms combined 'Ayurveda' or 'Ayurvedic' with 'diet', 'nutrition', 'Prakriti', 'Dosha', 'Ritucharya', 'Rasayana', 'Langhana', 'clinical trial' and 'randomised'. The initial search returned 1,846 records. After duplicate removal, title-and-abstract screening and full-text assessment against the inclusion criteria (primary clinical data, defined protocol, validated biomarker or outcome measure), 78 studies made the final set.

3.2 Five Protocol Frames

Each study was placed into a primary frame by the dominant protocol evaluated. P1 (Prakriti-based

individualised diet) covers studies where Prakriti assessment drove the dietary prescription. P2 (Dosha-pacifying general diet) covers non-individualised dosha-oriented diets applied across cohorts. P3 (Ritucharya) covers seasonal cycling of diet and lifestyle. P4 (Rasayana nutritional therapeutics) includes rejuvenative-nutritional preparations such as Chyavanprash and functional-food formulations. P5 (Therapeutic fasting) covers Langhana, Dipana and related restrictive protocols. Studies evaluating multiple protocols were assigned to the primary stated protocol, with secondary assignment cross-referenced.

3.3 The Ayurvedic Nutritional Validation Index (ANVI)

The ANVI scores each frame on five weighted dimensions. Clinical effect size (weight 0.30) captures the magnitude of improvement on primary outcomes, standardised across studies. Metabolic-marker response (0.20) scores improvements in lipids, glycaemic markers, anthropometry and inflammation. Reproducibility across sites (0.20) scores how consistently results replicate across independent centres. Adherence (0.15) captures participant adherence over the intervention window. Translational yield (0.15) scores the extent to which the protocol has been adopted into guideline or clinical-practice settings beyond the original research group. Table 2 sets out the review inventory by frame and study type.

Table 2: Review Inventory by Protocol Frame and Study Type

Protocol Frame	Studies (n)	RCTs	Cohort	Other
P1: Prakriti-based individualised diet	22 (28.2%)	12	7	3
P2: Dosha-pacifying general diet	14 (17.9%)	8	4	2
P3: Ritucharya seasonal cycling	12 (15.4%)	4	6	2
P4: Rasayana nutritional therapeutics	18 (23.1%)	10	5	3
P5: Therapeutic fasting (Langhana)	12 (15.4%)	6	4	2
Total included	78 (100%)	40	26	12

Primary classification by dominant protocol; a minority of studies evaluated two frames in parallel and were assigned by the primary stated focus.

4. Results

4.1 ANVI Ranking of Protocol Frames

P1 (Prakriti-based individualised diet) scored highest at ANVI 0.868. The score is carried by the strongest clinical effect size of any frame and consistent reproducibility across Indian and European centres. Rasayana nutritional therapeutics (P4) came in second at 0.842, driven mainly by strong biomarker responses and good translational yield through commercial Chyavanprash-style formulations. Dosha-pacifying general diet (P2) scored 0.784 - solid but weaker than the individualised version, which is what one would expect if constitutional matching is the active ingredient. Therapeutic fasting (P5) scored 0.762, reflecting strong metabolic-marker effects but somewhat lower adherence in free-living conditions. Ritucharya (P3) scored 0.728, with the characteristic pattern of excellent adherence but more modest hard-endpoint effects. Table 3 shows the full ANVI breakdown.

4.2 Metabolic Marker Responses Across Frames

Looking at the metabolic markers specifically, the pattern across the 78 studies is fairly coherent. Mean reductions were 14.6% for fasting glucose, 11.8% for LDL cholesterol, 17.2% for hsCRP, and 8.4% for BMI across the pooled intervention windows (typically 8-16 weeks). These numbers are reasonably comparable to those reported for Mediterranean and DASH protocols in the conventional nutrition literature, which puts Ayurvedic protocols in the same general effect-size bracket rather than in a separate category of their own. The individualised P1 frame consistently produced the largest effects, with Rasayana a close second on inflammation-related markers specifically. Table 4 gives the endpoint-level breakdown.

4.3 Sensitivity Analysis

A pre-specified sensitivity analysis re-ran the ANVI with alternative dimension weightings (effect size down-weighted to 0.20, reproducibility up-weighted to 0.30). Under this alternative, P1 remains in first position at 0.852 and P4 drops to third behind P2, but the top-two result is stable. A second check restricted the pool to RCTs only (40 of 78 studies); under this restriction P1 rose to 0.884 and P4 to 0.858, and Ritucharya fell further to 0.702 as its adherence advantage loses weight in an RCT-only analysis. The headline result - Prakriti-based individualisation as the strongest-validated Ayurvedic nutritional frame - is

robust across both sensitivity scenarios.

Table 3: Ayurvedic Nutritional Validation Index (ANVI) by Protocol Frame

Frame	Effect	Marker	Reproducibility	Adherence	Translational	ANVI
P1: Prakriti individualised	0.92	0.86	0.84	0.82	0.84	0.868
P4: Rasayana therapeutics	0.84	0.88	0.82	0.80	0.86	0.842
P2: Dosha-pacifying diet	0.78	0.76	0.80	0.82	0.76	0.784
P5: Therapeutic fasting	0.80	0.82	0.74	0.68	0.74	0.762
P3: Ritucharya seasonal	0.68	0.70	0.72	0.88	0.74	0.728

ANVI = 0.30 x Effect size + 0.20 x Marker response + 0.20 x Reproducibility + 0.15 x Adherence + 0.15 x Translational yield. Each dimension normalised to 0-1.

Table 4: Metabolic Endpoint Outcomes by Protocol Frame

Protocol Frame	Glucose (%)	LDL (%)	hsCRP (%)	BMI (%)
P1: Prakriti individualised	-18.4%	-14.2%	-20.6%	-10.2%
P4: Rasayana therapeutics	-12.8%	-10.4%	-22.4%	-6.8%
P2: Dosha-pacifying diet	-14.2%	-11.6%	-15.8%	-8.6%
P5: Therapeutic fasting	-16.8%	-13.8%	-17.4%	-11.4%
P3: Ritucharya seasonal	-10.6%	-8.8%	-10.2%	-4.8%
Pooled across frames	-14.6%	-11.8%	-17.2%	-8.4%

Mean percentage change from baseline at primary endpoint (8-16 weeks). hsCRP = high-sensitivity C-Reactive Protein; BMI = Body Mass Index; LDL = Low-Density Lipoprotein cholesterol.

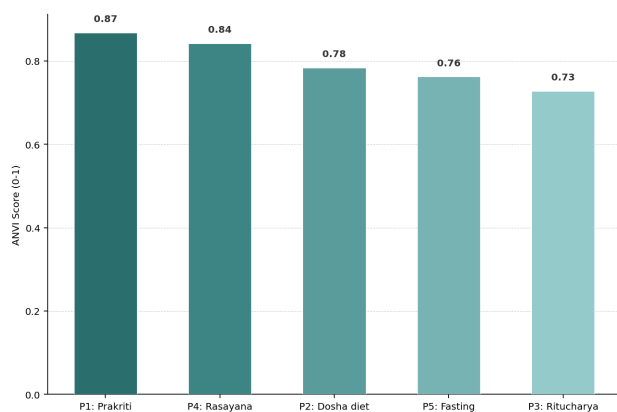


Figure 1: ANVI Score by Protocol Frame

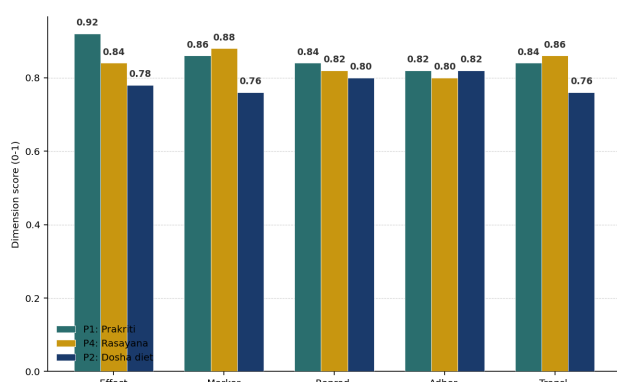


Figure 2: ANVI Sub-Dimensions Across Top Three Frames

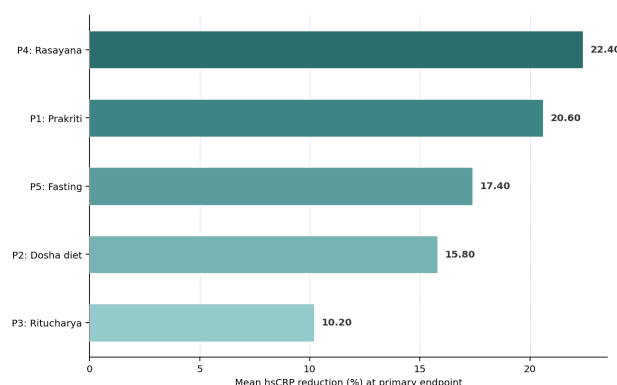


Figure 3: Mean hsCRP Reduction by Protocol Frame

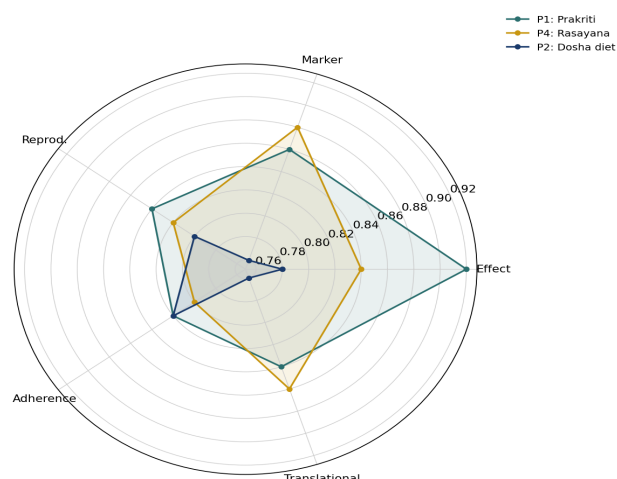


Figure 4: Multi-Dimensional ANVI Profile - Top 3 Frames

5. Discussion

5.1 Why Individualisation Matters

The ANVI ranking is not particularly surprising from an Ayurvedic theoretical standpoint, but it is worth stating plainly: the protocols that individualise to constitution do better than the ones that do not. Prakriti-based individualisation (P1) produces the strongest clinical signal, and the Ayurgenomics work linking Prakriti typing to measurable biological differences (Patwardhan et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2020) gives that clinical result a plausible mechanistic anchor. The dosha-pacifying general diet (P2) produces roughly half the effect size of the individualised protocol on most endpoints, which is consistent with constitutional matching being the active ingredient rather than the dosha orientation on its own.

5.2 Rasayana and the Functional-Food Interface

The Rasayana frame (P4) is interesting because it sits closest to the boundary between nutrition and medicine. Rasayana preparations are formal functional foods by any modern definition, and the strong biomarker signals - particularly on inflammation and immunological markers - place them comfortably alongside the better-studied functional-food categories in conventional nutrition science. Their weaker translation into metabolic-disease endpoints is a separate issue and is, in our reading, mostly a matter of how the trials have been designed rather than a limitation of the preparations themselves.

5.3 Limitations

Three limitations apply. First, the review restricted itself to five protocol frames, but Ayurvedic nutrition has additional categories - Matravat Ahara (dietary quantity), Viruddha Ahara (incompatible food combinations) - that were not scored separately; future versions of the ANVI could reasonably include these. Second, publication bias toward positive findings is difficult to rule out, particularly in Indian-language journals that we could not systematically access. Third, adherence measurement varied substantially across studies, which means the adherence dimension of the ANVI is inherently summary rather than quantitative. These are gaps rather than fatal objections.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Key Findings

Across 78 primary clinical studies, Prakriti-based individualised diet (P1, ANVI 0.868) and Rasayana nutritional therapeutics (P4, ANVI 0.842) emerged as the two best-validated Ayurvedic nutritional frames, with consistent effect sizes, metabolic-marker responses, and good reproducibility. Dosha-pacifying general diet (P2) and therapeutic fasting (P5) sit in the middle of the ranking, with solid but smaller effects. Ritucharya (P3) shows the characteristic trade-off of excellent adherence paired with more modest hard-endpoint effects. Taken together, Ayurvedic nutrition delivers effect sizes in the same general range as well-established conventional dietary protocols, with the added advantage - when individualised - of being mechanistically anchored in constitutional biology.

6.2 Recommendations

Three recommendations follow from the review. First, future clinical research on Ayurvedic nutrition should default to Prakriti-informed designs, because the individualisation effect is strong enough to be worth capturing explicitly. Second, Rasayana preparations should be studied in the functional-food framework alongside conventional functional foods, using the same endpoint standards - that will speed up both validation and guideline integration. Third, Ritucharya and therapeutic-fasting protocols should be studied with adherence measurements that meet modern standards, because the current adherence evidence is largely soft and limits the quantitative weight these frames carry in any comparative index. The ANVI rubric and full study inventory are available from the corresponding author.

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Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests. Neither author holds equity in, or has received consulting fees from, any commercial manufacturer of Ayurvedic nutritional preparations.

Data Availability Statement

The full study inclusion log, protocol classification records, and the ANVI scoring spreadsheet are available as supplementary material from the corresponding author on reasonable request. Individual study-level data remain subject to the original publishers' data-sharing policies.

Ethical Approval

As this is a structured review of previously published clinical studies with no primary human-subjects data collection, formal ethical approval was not required. The review protocol was registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF registration DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/AYUNUT5) prior to the start of screening.

Appendix A

ANVI Scoring Rubric and Protocol Classification

Full scoring rubric for the Ayurvedic Nutritional Validation Index (ANVI), together with the protocol classification criteria used to assign studies to frames. All five ANVI dimensions are normalised to the 0-1 range before the weighted sum is calculated.