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Environmental Factors and their Influence on Kidney Health: An Integrative Ayurvedic Management of Renal Disorders

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ABSTRACT:

Kidneys play a vital role in maintaining homeostasis through detoxification, fluid regulation, electrolyte balance, and waste excretion. Recent evidence highlights the profound influence of environmental factors—such as air pollution, water contamination, dietary toxins, climate change, occupational exposures, and lifestyle stress—on kidney function. Chronic exposure to environmental pollutants, heavy metals, and processed foods has been linked to oxidative stress, nephrotoxicity, hypertension, and chronic kidney disease (CKD). From an Ayurvedic perspective, kidney health is governed by the Mutravaha Srotas and Dosha equilibrium. Imbalances in Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, triggered by environmental and lifestyle factors, predispose individuals to conditions like Mutraghata, Mutrashmari, nephrotic syndrome, and urinary tract infections. Ayurvedic interventions—including Panchakarma (Virechana, Basti), Rasayana therapies, and use of herbs such as Punarnava, Gokshura, and Varuna—offer preventive and therapeutic strategies. This article discusses the impact of environmental determinants on kidney health, integrating classical Ayurvedic wisdom with modern scientific findings, and proposes holistic measures for prevention and management.

KEYWORDS: Kidney health, environmental factors, pollution, Panchakarma, chronic kidney disease, Mutravaha Srotas.

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INTRODUCTION:

The kidneys are essential for sustaining life, regulating blood pressure, excreting waste, balancing electrolytes, and maintaining fluid homeostasis. Environmental determinants, including pollution, toxins, climate variability, and unhealthy dietary patterns, have emerged as significant contributors to kidney dysfunction. Globally, chronic kidney disease (CKD) is rising, with environmental exposures identified as preventable risk factors [1,2]. In Ayurveda, the kidneys are associated with Mutravaha Srotas (urinary channels) and governed by the balance of Tridosha—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Environmental disturbances that aggravate these Doshas lead to pathological states such as Mutraghata (urinary obstruction), Mutrashmari (renal calculi), and chronic renal impairment [3]. By understanding the interplay between environmental determinants and kidney function, both modern medicine and Ayurveda provide complementary insights into prevention and care.

Environmental Factors Affecting Kidney Health

1. Air Pollution and Kidney Health Air pollution, especially fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), heavy metals, and industrial toxins, contributes to oxidative stress and inflammation, leading to kidney dysfunction. Studies indicate that chronic exposure to polluted air increases the risk of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and acute kidney injury (AKI). Research has shown that air pollution affects renal function by inducing systemic inflammation, endothelial dysfunction, and oxidative damage, eventually leading to glomerular and tubular injury. In Ayurveda, prolonged exposure to toxins (Ama) disrupts Pitta Dosha, leading to

inflammation and impaired renal function. Antioxidant-rich foods and herbs like Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*) and Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) help mitigate these effects.

2. Water Quality and Hydration

Contaminated water containing lead, arsenic, and nitrates affects kidney function by causing nephrotoxicity. Heavy metal accumulation can impair renal tubular function, leading to proteinuria, hypertension, and progressive kidney damage. Research suggests that arsenic exposure is linked to CKD due to its role in inducing oxidative stress and mitochondrial dysfunction in kidney cells. Dehydration, a key factor in kidney stone formation, is linked to Vata imbalance, leading to dry and hardened deposits in the kidneys. Ayurvedic texts recommend drinking Ushnodaka (warm water) and herbal infusions such as Punarnava (*Boerhavia diffusa*) and Gokshura (*Tribulus terrestris*) to detoxify the kidneys and maintain hydration.

3. Diet and Food Contaminants**a. Processed Foods and Toxins:**

Excess consumption of processed foods, high in sodium and artificial additives, increases the burden on the kidneys. A high-sodium diet contributes to hypertension, a major risk factor for CKD. Ultra-processed foods also contain phosphates and preservatives, which impair kidney function. Ayurveda warns against Viruddhahara (incompatible food combinations) and excessive intake of salty and spicy foods, which aggravate Pitta and Kapha, contributing to kidney inflammation. Incorporating a Sattvic diet, rich in fresh, natural foods, promotes kidney health.

b. Heavy Metals and Pesticides:

Contamination of food with heavy metals

such as cadmium, lead, and mercury induces kidney damage over time by disrupting mitochondrial function and causing tubular atrophy. Studies have linked chronic exposure to cadmium with CKD and increased urinary excretion of proteins, a marker of renal impairment. Ayurveda advises consuming organic, fresh, and seasonal foods to minimize toxin exposure. Chelating herbs such as Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) and Garlic (*Allium sativum*) help detoxify heavy metals from the body.

c. Excess Protein Intake: While proteins are essential, excessive intake of red meat and dairy increases the risk of hyperuricemia and kidney disease by overloading renal filtration mechanisms. Studies suggest that high-protein diets may accelerate kidney function decline in individuals with preexisting renal impairment. Ayurveda emphasizes a Sattvic diet, rich in plant-based proteins like moong dal (*Vigna radiata*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), which are easier on the kidneys. Incorporating alkalizing foods, such as cucumbers and bottle gourd, helps balance kidney function.

4. Climate and Seasonal Variations

According to Ayurveda, different seasons (Ritu) influence kidney function:

Summer (Grishma Ritu): Excessive heat increases Pitta Dosha, leading to dehydration and kidney stress. Studies indicate that heat exposure can exacerbate kidney disease through increased urinary concentration and electrolyte imbalance. Ayurvedic remedies like coconut water, buttermilk, and barley water help cool the body and maintain hydration. Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*) is recommended for its cooling and hydrating properties.

Winter (Hemanta & Shishira Ritu): Cold weather increases Kapha, leading to water

retention, increased blood viscosity, and sluggish metabolism. Research suggests that colder temperatures may contribute to hypertension and glomerular dysfunction due to vasoconstriction. Warm foods, herbal teas, and spices like ginger and turmeric support kidney function by improving circulation and reducing Kapha accumulation.

Monsoon (Varsha Ritu): Increased humidity causes water retention and aggravates Vata Dosha, potentially leading to kidney stone formation and urinary infections. Ayurveda suggests consuming light, warm foods, diuretic herbs, and Triphala (a blend of Amalaki, Bibhitaki, and Haritaki) for detoxification. Scientific studies confirm that increased humidity can exacerbate bacterial proliferation in the urinary tract, raising the risk of infections.

5. Lifestyle and Stress

Chronic stress and lack of exercise lead to metabolic imbalances, increased cortisol levels, and inflammation, all of which negatively affect kidney health. Scientific evidence indicates that prolonged stress activates the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS), contributing to hypertension and CKD progression. Ayurveda identifies stress as a Vata-Pitta disorder, recommending meditation, yoga, and Pranayama to restore balance. Dinacharya (daily routine) and Ratricharya (night routine) play a crucial role in kidney rejuvenation.

6. Occupational and Chemical Exposures

Workers exposed to industrial solvents, pesticides, and heavy metals are at a higher risk of kidney diseases. Epidemiological studies indicate that occupational exposure to nephrotoxic chemicals such as trichloroethylene and benzene is linked to renal dysfunction. Ayurveda emphasizes detoxification therapies (Panchakarma) such as Virechana (purgation) and Basti

(medicated enema) to eliminate harmful toxins. Regular consumption of antioxidant-rich herbs like Ashwagandha and Brahmi can help mitigate oxidative stress caused by chemical exposure.

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DISCUSSION:

Ayurveda provides a holistic framework for understanding and managing renal disorders, emphasizing the balance of Doshas, the maintenance of Agni (digestive and metabolic fire), and the integrity of Mutravaha Srotas (urinary channels). Unlike conventional approaches that primarily focus on symptomatic relief or supportive dialysis, Ayurvedic management aims at root-cause elimination, rejuvenation of renal tissues, and prevention of recurrence through a combination of Panchakarma, herbal formulations, and lifestyle modifications.

Mutraghata (Urinary Retention and Obstructive Disorders)

Mutraghata is described in classical texts as a group of urinary disorders characterized by difficulty in urination, painful micturition, incomplete voiding, or complete urinary obstruction. The condition arises due to vitiation of Vata Dosha, particularly Apana

Vayu, which governs downward excretory functions.

Management: Vata-pacifying therapies form the cornerstone of treatment. This includes Snehana (oleation) with medicated ghee or oil, Swedana (sudation therapy) to relieve spasms, and Basti Karma (medicated enema) to normalize Apana Vayu. Formulations such as Dashamoola Kwatha, Gokshuradi Guggulu, and Yavakshara are recommended to alleviate obstruction and restore urine flow. Modern interpretations suggest that these therapies may reduce inflammation, relax smooth muscles, and improve bladder and urethral function.

Mutrashmari (Kidney Stones)

Mutrashmari, or renal calculi, is categorized based on doshic predominance—Vataja, Pittaja, and Kaphaja Ashmari—each with distinct clinical features. The pathogenesis involves accumulation of Ama (metabolic toxins) and precipitation of mineral salts, aggravated by dosha imbalances.

Management: Ayurvedic texts recommend diuretic (Mutrala) and lithotriptic (Ashmarighna) herbs such as *Pashanabheda* (*Bergenia ligulata*), *Varuna* (*Crataeva nurvala*), *Gokshura* (*Tribulus terrestris*), and *Punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*). These herbs facilitate the disintegration and expulsion of stones while reducing urinary tract inflammation. Research indicates that many of these herbs possess anti-lithogenic, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties, supporting their efficacy in preventing recurrence.

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

From an Ayurvedic standpoint, CKD is associated with chronic aggravation of Vata and Pitta Dosha, leading to progressive depletion of Ojas (vital essence). Symptoms such as fatigue, edema, anemia, and proteinuria resemble the classical features of Pranavaha and Mutravaha Srotas dushti.

Management: Formulations like Punarnavadi Kashaya, Gokshuradi Guggulu, and Varunadi Kwatha are employed to reduce fluid retention, improve renal circulation, and support tissue regeneration. Punarnava acts as a potent diuretic and anti-inflammatory, while Gokshura is known for strengthening urinary tissues. In addition, dietary measures such as sodium restriction, consumption of light and easily digestible foods, and avoidance of incompatible diets (Viruddhahara) are advised. Scientific studies have reported improvement in renal function parameters with these formulations, suggesting their role as complementary therapy in CKD management.

Nephrotic Syndrome

Nephrotic syndrome in Ayurveda can be correlated with Kapha-Vata imbalance, manifesting as proteinuria, generalized edema, and debility.

Management: Herbal formulations such as Punarnava (for its diuretic and anti-edematous action), Shilajit (as a Rasayana with immunomodulatory effects), and Chandraprabha Vati (for its Tridosha-balancing and urinary tonic properties) are prescribed. These remedies help in reducing protein leakage, alleviating swelling, and strengthening renal tissues. Their antioxidant and immunomodulatory properties may help stabilize glomerular membranes and slow disease progression.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

UTIs, often linked to Pitta aggravation and accumulation of Ama, manifest as burning urination, fever, and lower abdominal discomfort.

Management: Classical remedies include Chandanasava, Punarnava, and Gokshura, which act as diuretics, cooling agents, and anti-inflammatory herbs. Chandana (*Santalum album*) provides specific relief in burning micturition due to its cooling

(*Sheeta*) property. These medicines not only **alleviate acute symptoms** but also strengthen urinary defense against recurrent infections. Scientific validation supports the antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory activities of these herbs, making them effective adjuncts in recurrent or resistant UTIs.

Integrative Perspective

The Ayurvedic approach to kidney disorders emphasizes both Shodhana (bio-purification) and Shamana (pacification) therapies, providing detoxification as well as long-term maintenance. Panchakarma procedures such as Virechana (therapeutic purgation) and Basti (enema therapy) play an important role in clearing toxins and restoring balance in Mutravaha Srotas. Simultaneously, Rasayana therapies rejuvenate renal tissues and enhance systemic resilience. When integrated with modern nephrology—dietary control, monitoring of renal parameters, and pharmacological management—Ayurveda offers a comprehensive model of care that addresses both the disease process and the patient's overall well-being.

CONCLUSION:

Kidney health is profoundly influenced by environmental and lifestyle factors, including pollution, diet, climate, and occupational exposures. Scientific evidence supports the role of oxidative stress, nephrotoxicity, and metabolic disturbances in the development of renal dysfunction. Ayurveda offers a holistic framework, emphasizing Dosha balance, detoxification, and rejuvenation through herbs, diet, and Panchakarma therapies. Integrating Ayurvedic wisdom with modern preventive strategies—such as reducing pollution exposure, ensuring safe water, adopting plant-based nutrition, and stress management—can help preserve kidney function and reduce the global burden of CKD. A multidisciplinary approach

combining Ayurveda and modern medicine provides an effective pathway toward sustainable kidney health.

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