

Nasya Karma: A Promising Approach To Integrative Medicine And Public Health

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Abstract:

Background: Nasya Karma is a unique Ayurvedic therapeutic method and a part of one the five Panchakarma therapies. It involves the administration of medicated oils or ghee, and herbal preparations through the nasal passages to target various disorders affecting the sensory organs, nervous system and respiratory system. This therapy have ability to access the central nervous system through the nasal cavity and establishes it as a valuable method for both disease prevention and treatment modalities.

Materials and Methods: This research explains the history, mode of action, and clinical applications of Nasya Karma through analysis of traditional Ayurvedic literature and research findings from search engines such as pubmed and google scholar. The study demonstrates the preventive and curative aspects of nasya karma, evaluates its procedure, therapeutic mode of action, and potential application in modern healthcare frameworks.

Results: The results indicate that Nasya Karma shows as a promising cost-effective with minimal side effect treatment procedure which is applicable in various clinical areas. This therapy provide direct access to the central nervous system via the nasal passage and allows to target various neurological, respiratory, and head-related disorders. The clinical applications shows effectiveness in treating conditions affecting sensory organs and associated structures while maintaining minimal adverse effects.

Conclusion: Nasya Karma provides both preventive and curative benefits and can be used for enhancing public health and make healthier society.

Key Word: Ayurveda; Nasya Karma; Panchakarma; Nasal therapy; Preventive healthcare.

Date of Submission: 10-07-2025

Date of Acceptance: 20-07-2025

I. Introduction

In India, Ayurveda is a thousand-year-old traditional medicinal science, with its objective to maintain the health of individual and to cure the person from diseases caused by biotic and abiotic factors. It has provided numerous therapeutic procedures that continue to show their importance in the current healthcare system. Among these, Nasya Karma is a clinically effective procedure, representing the ancient medical knowledge and has potential for disease management in modern therapeutic applications. Nasya Karma is a unique procedure of Ayurveda that involves administering medicated oil/ghee or drugs through the nasal passage or nasal cavity. This method is used for the nourishment and treatment of the upper part of our body such as eye, ear, nose, throat, orodentary and head disorders. Nasya Karma is one of the five primary purification procedures collectively known as Panchakarma (Dwivedi and Pathrikar, 2022).

The lifestyle of individuals in present era has changed significantly all over the world. The routines involves irregular food habits, more screen time on TVs, mobiles, and laptops, and residing in air, water and noisy polluted environments. All these factors along with inadequate sleep, insufficient rest, and the suppression of natural desires, have affected the health of individuals and lead to various disease and disorders. Due to these challenges in society, healthcare systems worldwide face an increased costs in health care and rising disease burden. Therefore, it is necessary to find sustainable preventive strategies to overcome these problems. Nasya Karma with minimal side-effects, cost-effective, and a complete treatment approach make it relevant for addressing modern health challenges while promoting community wellness. The objective of present article is to explore various aspects of Nasya Karma, examining its historical background, mode of action, clinical applications, and potential contributions to healthcare systems. By combining knowledge from classical literature with modern research findings, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this ancient therapy can contribute to creating healthier society.

II. History Of Nasya Karma

The evidence for Nasya Karma is documented in Ayurveda literature, which provides a fundamental knowledge of Nasya Karma that has been used in clinical practice over thousands of years. Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridayam demonstrate the nasal anatomy, physiology, and the therapeutic potential of nasal drug delivery systems in Nasya Karma (Pandey & Mishra, 2019). Acharya Charaka in Charaka Samhita describes detailed protocols for various types of nasal therapies including Nasya Karma. He mainly focused on the importance of proper patient selection, formulation choice, and administration technique for achieving optimal therapeutic outcomes. This classical knowledge provides valuable guidance for contemporary practice and helps establish evidence-based treatment protocols (Tripathi 2007). The Sushruta Samhita provides detailed anatomy of the nose, nasal cavity and surrounding structures, offering insights into the physiological mechanisms of Nasya Karma's effectiveness. Therapeutic protocols described in the Sushruta Samhita include specific procedures for various types of nasal therapies (Shastri 2009). The Ashtanga Hridayam written by Vagbhata, provides a systematic approach to Nasya Karma. He compiled knowledge from earlier texts and described a comprehensive framework for understanding different types of nasal therapies and the appropriate application of Nasya. The treatment protocols include detailed procedures for drug preparation, treatment administration, and post-treatment care of the patient (Tripathi 2009).

Recent research based on Nasya Karma has explained its mode of action, clinical efficacy, and clinical safety of Nasya Karma. The research has focused on validation of traditional knowledge and identifying new therapeutic applications. The modern analytical techniques explain how therapeutic drugs used in Nasya reach to the target tissue and provide insight into the physiological pathways. Pharmacokinetic studies have demonstrated that nasal passages can provide rapid and efficient delivery of therapeutic drugs to the central nervous system (Dhuria et al, 2010). These studies have validated the traditional understanding of the nose as a gateway to the brain. Pharmacodynamic studies have investigated the therapeutic mechanisms of various herbs commonly used in Nasya formulations. These studies have identified active compounds and their mechanisms of action, providing a scientific basis for traditional formulations (Kotwal and Gupta 2020).

All physiological and pathological process in the body is regulated by three doshas, which include Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, also known as Tridosha concept. The Tridosha play an important role in disease management according to Ayurveda (Alex 2010). The head is controlled by Kapha dosha. The nasal cavity is associated with the brain, heart and lungs, also known as Prana Vata (vital life force) and serves as the site for Prana Vata circulation. This anatomical relationship forms the basic principle of Nasya Karma, which is used for various neurological, psychological, and physiological disorders. Maintaining proper nasal health and ensuring free flow of Prana Vata enhances Ojas (vital essence), thereby strengthening the body's natural immunity and resistance to disease. During the medieval period, scholars like Madhavakara, Sharandhar and Bhavamishra further illustrated the understanding of nasal therapies, used new formulations and extended its clinical applications. In British time, Ayurveda medical practices was declined, but dedicated scholars preserved the knowledge of Ayurveda and Nasya Karma. After independence, Ayurveda was revived, and created interest in Panchakarma therapies, including Nasya Karma, as several side effect in modern allopathy system. The efforts were made to standardize procedures and validate the therapeutic claims of Nasya Karma through scientific research. The integration of modern tools and techniques with traditional assessment methods has enabled more precise therapeutic interventions and better patient outcomes.

III. Types Of Nasya Karma

Ayurvedic literature outlines various procedures and medicines attributed to Acharya Charaka, Sushruta, Vagbhata, and other sages for maintaining health and treating diseases. *Nasya Karma* is one of the five major procedures of *Panchakarma*. Daily and periodic use of Nasya gives excellent results to individuals. Acharya Charaka and Sushruta classify Nasya Karma in five types. Based on the quantity of dose used by person, Sushruta classified Nasya in three types. *Hina Matra* – 8 drops in each nostril. *Madhyama Matra* - 16 drops in each nostril and *Uttama Matra*– 32 drops in each nostril. In Vagbhata's Ashtanga Sangraha, *Nasya* was categorized by based on its three functions: *Brimhana*, *Shamana* and *Virechana* (Sharma, 2006). There are several criteria is used to classify Nasya Karma. However, to easily understand by the reader, we classify Nasya karma on the basis of therapeutic objectives, drug composition, and clinical applications, as shown in Figure 1.

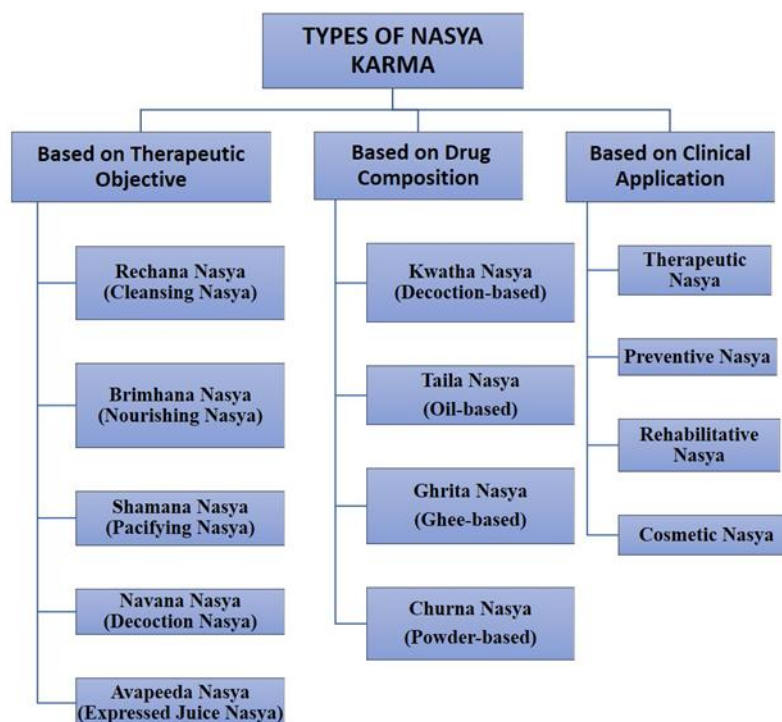


Figure 1. Various types of Nasya Karma based on therapeutic objective, drug composition and clinical application

Based on therapeutic objectives, the Nasya Karma is categorized in five types (KS et al, 2019). Table 1 presents various types of Nasya Karma, their primary objective, drug composition, clinical indication and duration of effect.

Table 1. Classification of Nasya Karma Based on Therapeutic

Type of Nasya	Primary Objective	Drug Composition	Clinical Indications	Duration of Effect
Rechana Nasya (Cleansing Nasya)	Cleansing and detoxification	Herbal powders, strong decoctions	Chronic sinusitis, allergic rhinitis, mental disorders	2-4 hours
Brimhana Nasya (Nourishing Nasya)	Nourishment and strengthening	Medicated oils, ghee preparations	Neurological disorders, memory enhancement	6-8 hours
Shamana Nasya (Pacifying Nasya)	Balancing and pacifying	Mild herbal preparations	Maintenance therapy, mild disorders	4-6 hours
Navana Nasya (Decoction Nasya)	Liquid-based therapy	Decoctions, medicated oils	Acute and chronic conditions	3-5 hours
Avapeeda Nasya (Fresh juices and extract Nasya)	Fresh extract therapy	Fresh plant juices, concentrated extracts	Acute inflammatory conditions	1-3 hours

According to the drug composition Nasya is classified into four types- Kwatha Nasya (Decoction based), Taila nasya (Oil based), Ghrita Nasya (Ghee based) and Churna Nasya (Powder based). In Kwatha Nasya herbal decoctions and aqueous extracts are used. It is highly effective for treating body inflammation and offers cleansing benefits. Taila Nasya is based on lipid-soluble therapeutic compounds in oleaginous preparations. It provide sustained nourishment to the body and effective for treating degenerative conditions and offers long-term therapeutic benefits. In Ghrita Nasya, medicated ghee is used. It is highly beneficial for disorders related to the nervous system and for enhancing cognitive function. Churna Nasya utilizes fine herbal powders and offers therapeutic effect for treating chronic conditions and provides lasting therapeutic benefits.

Based on Clinical Application, Nasya Karma are divided in four types. Therapeutic Nasya, which is designed for treating specific diseases and disorders, using target specific therapeutic drugs. Preventive Nasya focused on maintaining health and preventing disease. Rehabilitative Nasya is used for post-illness recovery and rehabilitation that promotes healing and restoration of normal physiological function. Cosmetic Nasya employs substances for aesthetic purposes, including treatments for improving facial appearance and maintaining healthy skin.

IV. Method Of Administration

Acharya Charaka advised that to maintain clear sight, smell, and hearing, individuals should undergo a nasya treatment once a year. This should be carried out during one of three specific seasons- Pravata (the pre-rainy season), Sishira (autumn), or Basanta (spring), when the sky is clear of clouds. In specific situations, treatments can be given in any season by creating conditions that mimic the specified seasons. For example, during summer, nasal treatments should be applied in cool places, while in winter, they should be given in warmer places. The suitable time for nasya during the summer and monsoon seasons is evening. According to the doshas, Kaphaja Vikara is best in the morning, Pittaja Vikara at noon, and Vataja Vikara in the evening. The procedure of Nasya Karma can be divided into three parts: Purva Karma, Pradhan Karma, and Paschat Karma. In Purva karma, the patient lies down on the table before receiving Nasya. Light massage and *Swedan* should be applied on nose and surrounding area including forehead and face. In Pradhan karma, known amount of medicated oil and drugs are given into the nostrils according to the severity of the disease or dose prescribed by the doctor. In Paschat karma, a gentle massage on the nose, forehead and face are given. After waiting for some time gargling with lukewarm water, and then dhoopan can be applied.

Acharya Charak stated that Nasya therapy may be given according to the severity of disease and can be administrated in age group of seven to seventy year. According to Acharya Vagabhatta, Nasya may be accomplished sequentially up to seven days. According to Acharya Sushruta, Nasya may be given the interval of 1, 2, 7 and 22 days depending upon the condition of the patient and the disease conditions. If the patient is suffering from extreme vitiation of Vata then Nasya may be performed twice a day. i.e., in the morning and evening. Vagabhatta in Ashtanga Samgraha also suggested the use of Nasya on 3rd, 5th, 7th, 8th day or till the patient shows the symptoms of Samyak yoga. According Ashtang Hrudaya and Sushrut Samhita the timings of Nasya administrations are as follows: Sayanuthan paschat (after wake up from Sleeping), Prakshalikadanta (After tooth wash), Gruhanirgachhatah (Before living home), Vyayam paschat (After exercise), Vyavya paschat (After sexual act), Adhwa-parishrant kala (After heavy and tired work), Mutra visarjan (After Urination), Mala visarjan (After defecation), Kawal grahan (after gargling), Anjan paschat (after collyrium), Bhojan paschat (After meal), Vaman paschat (After Vomiting/Emesis procedure), Diwaswapna (after wake from sleep in day time), Sayan kala (in the evening), Shiroabhyanga (after head massage).

V. Mechanism Of Nasya Karma

Anatomical Basis of Nasya Karma

The efficiency of Nasya Karma depends on the anatomy of the nose, nasal cavity, and their association with the central nervous system, respiratory system, and olfactory region (Khunt and Misra, 2021). The nasal cavity has extensive vascular supply and rich innervation, which provides an ideal route for drug administration in Nasya Karma. Nasal cavity provides direct access to the central nervous system through the olfactory nerve. This pathway allows therapeutic drugs to bypass the blood-brain barrier and directly influence brain function, making Nasya Karma uniquely effective for neurological and psychological disorder (Sheetal et al., 2019). The nasal cavity also shows connections with paranasal sinuses, middle ear, and lacrimal system provide additional therapeutic opportunities.

Physiological basis of Nasya Karma

The physiological mechanisms of Nasya Karma are complex and multi-step. It involves both local as well as systemic actions. Local action involves direct contact of medicated drug with nasal mucosa, leading to immediate effect on body. The rich vascular supply and presence of specific transport mechanisms in nasal cavity ensures rapid absorption of therapeutic drugs. The mucociliary pathway plays a significant role in Nasya Karma, as therapeutic drug can influence ciliary function and mucus production, which is important in treatment of respiratory disease and maintaining nasal hygiene. This approach is effective in treating allergic conditions, sinusitis, and inflammatory disorders of the nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses. Systemic mechanisms involve the absorption of therapeutic drugs into the systemic circulation. The nasal route provides advantages over oral administration, including avoidance of first-pass metabolism and more bioavailability. The neurological effects of Nasya Karma are mediated through direct access to the central nervous system via the olfactory and trigeminal pathways. This mechanism allows for rapid onset of neurological effects and makes Nasya Karma more effective for treating neurological and psychological disorders (Kotwal & Gupta, 2020). Hormonal influences represent another important systemic mechanism, as nasal administration can affect hypothalamic-pituitary function through direct neural pathways. This mechanism is particularly relevant for treating endocrine disorders and hormonal imbalances (Mehar et al., 2025).

Dosha-Specific Mechanisms

Mechanism of Nasya Karma is understood in terms of its effects on the tridosha. Different types of Nasya are applied to address specific dosha imbalance (Kotwal & Gupta, 2020). Vata regulated Nasya use oleaginous

substances that provide lubrication and nourishment to the nasal cavity and associated structures. The mechanism involves the absorption of lipid-soluble substances that cross cell membranes and provide nourishment to nervous tissue. This approach is effective for treating degenerative neurological conditions and stress-related disorders. Pitta-regulated Nasya therapies work by cooling and soothing inflamed tissues, reducing excessive heat and inflammation in the head and neck region. The mechanism involves the neutralization of inflammation and the promotion of tissue healing. Kapha-reducing Nasya therapies work by removing excess mucus and congestion from the nasal passages and respiratory system. These therapies use substances with expectorant and decongestant properties. The mechanism involves the stimulation of mucociliary clearance and the reduction of mucus viscosity.

VI. Clinical Applications And Therapeutic Indications

Nasya is beneficial for the proper functioning of sensory organs. It helps to prevent vision problems, hearing impairment, and can also delay early graying or hair loss. Additionally, it has a soothing effect on the mind, reducing stress, inducing sound sleep, and alleviating headaches and migraines. Nasya can also help with skin issues such as acne, pigmentation, and dryness, leading to healthier skin with a natural glow. When medicated oils are applied through the nose during Nasya, they reach the eyes and provide nourishment (Dwivedi & Pathrikar 2022). This practice can help manage and prevent various eye conditions, including dry eyes, irritation, eye strain, and age-related issues like cataracts. The diseases and disorders treated with Nasya Karma are explained in the following section.

Neurological Disorders

Nasya Karma has shown significant effectiveness in treating various neurological and neurodegenerative diseases and disorders, including Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, depression, anxiety, insomnia, and sleep apnea. These conditions can be effectively addressed through Nasya Karma. It has ability to access the central nervous system through the nasal pathways. This therapy is effective for neurological conditions because it delivers therapeutic substances directly to brain, bypassing the blood-brain barrier (Sheetal et al., 2019). In Alzheimer's disease, Nasya Karma using Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*) based preparations has demonstrated neuroprotective effects, potentially slowing cognitive decline and improving memory function (Dubey & Chinnathambi, 2019). Parkinson's disease treatment through Nasya Karma focuses on using formulations that support dopaminergic function and reduce neuroinflammation. Preparations containing Kapikacchu (*Mucuna pruriens*) and other dopamine-supporting herbs have shown promise in improving motor function and reducing disease progression (Sahu et al., 2021).

Respiratory Disorders

The respiratory system is the therapeutic target of Nasya Karma, with the nasal route providing direct access to the entire respiratory tract. Allergic rhinitis and sinusitis are the most common conditions treated with Nasya Karma, with excellent clinical outcomes reported in both acute and chronic cases. The therapy's ability to reduce inflammation, clear congestion, and modulate immune responses makes it effective for the treatment of respiratory disorders (Sreedharan et al., 2022). Anti-allergic Nasya preparations typically contain herbs with antihistamine and anti-inflammatory properties, including *Curcuma longa*, *Berberis aristata*, and other anti-allergic herbs.

Stress Management and Mental Health Maintenance

Modern life's stresses significantly impact mental health, making effective stress management crucial for preventive healthcare. Nasya Karma offers effective tools for managing stress and maintaining optimal mental health throughout life, which is illustrated in Figure 2.

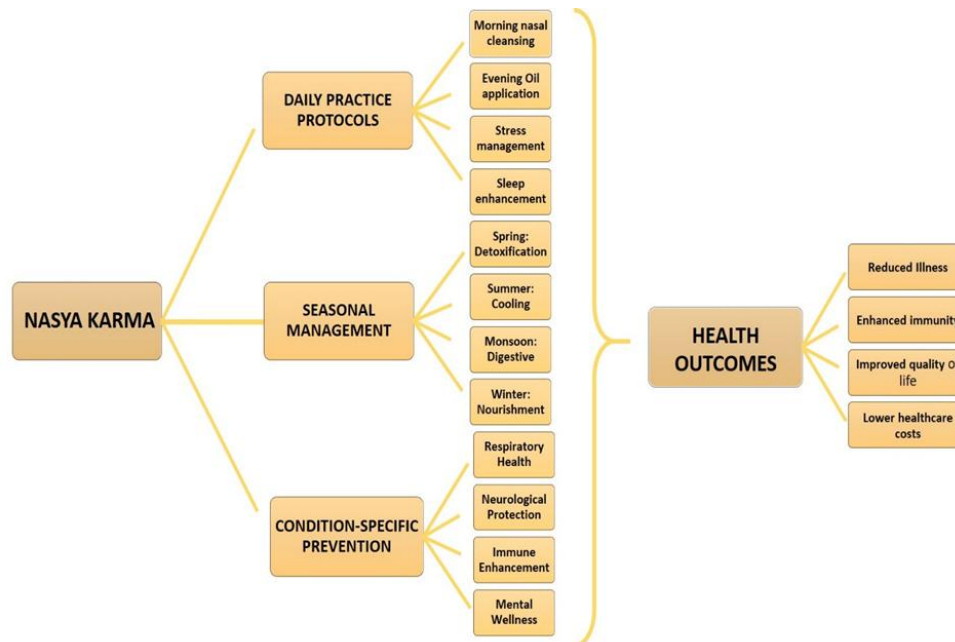


Figure 2: Healthcare Model using Nasya Karma

The herbs used in this therapy promote relaxation and provides rapid relief from stress and anxiety by delivering compounds directly to the brain. It also improves sleep quality by influencing circadian rhythms and neurotransmitter systems through herbs that enhance natural sleep patterns (Undre et al., 2021). Additionally, Nasya Karma supports memory by using herbs that aid memory formation and retrieval, helping prevent age-related decline. Seasonal health management through Nasya Karma recognizes the influence of seasonal changes on health. Different therapeutic formulations are designed to balance doshas according to the seasons. In the Spring season, Nasya focuses on reducing Kapha dosha and detoxifying the body with decongestant herbs. During the Summer season, Nasya emphasizes cooling therapies to manage heat using cooling herbs. In the Monsoon, Nasya promotes digestive health and prevents Vata aggravation by utilizing digestive herbs. In the Winter, Nasya nourishes and warms the body with immunomodulatory herbs to support the increased metabolic demands of the season. Overall, Nasya Karma offers a comprehensive approach to maintaining optimal health throughout the year.

VII. Future Prospective

The Nasya Karma is multidisciplinary subject that requires several areas for further research to optimize therapeutic outcomes and expand clinical applications. The research is required to understand the physiological pathways using advanced analytical techniques, which is helpful to investigate drug absorption, distribution, and metabolism. The research on investing in neurological pathways and the specific therapeutic effects transmitted from the nasal cavity to target tissues is also considered. Molecular mechanism research should investigate the molecular targets and pathways involved in therapeutic responses. This research could identify new therapeutic targets and guide the development of more effective formulations. Nanotechnology applications could enhance the delivery and efficacy of Nasya formulations. Combination therapy research should investigate the potential for combining Nasya Karma with other therapeutic modalities. The integration of Nasya Karma into modern healthcare requires careful planning to ensure optimal outcomes and patient safety. Collaboration between Ayurvedic practitioners and conventional healthcare providers is essential for developing effective treatment plans. Training and regulatory frameworks must be established to ensure the safe use of Nasya Karma. Advanced technologies can enhance the effectiveness and safety of formulations, requiring careful evaluation to align with traditional methods. Additionally, analytical and clinical research tools can validate the composition of Nasya formulations and provide evidence for their safety and efficacy.

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, Nasya Karma offers a promising approach to improving health outcomes, especially in resource-limited settings. Its affordability, simple application, and use of readily available materials make it an excellent option for integration into global health initiatives. However, successful implementation requires careful planning that takes into account cultural contexts and local practices. It is essential to train community health workers in the safe and effective application of Nasya Karma to ensure its efficacy and acceptance within

communities. Overall, this traditional practice not only contributes to curative health but also plays a significant role in preventive care, making it a valuable asset in the pursuit of sustainable healthcare solutions.

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