

Urine therapy in Ayurveda: A time- honoured tradition for health and healing

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World Journal of Biology Pharmacy and Health Sciences, 2025, 21(02), 241-246

Publication history: Received on 13 November 2024; revised on 24 December 2024; accepted on 26 December 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjbphs.2025.21.2.1070>

Abstract

Urine therapy, or *Shivambu*, is a traditional practice in Ayurvedic medicine that involves the use of one's own urine for therapeutic purposes. Despite its controversial nature in contemporary medicine, urine therapy is deeply rooted in the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda, where it is considered a tool for detoxification, rejuvenation, and maintaining balance in the body. This paper explores the principles, applications, and potential benefits of urine therapy within the context of Ayurvedic healing. We examine historical references, Ayurvedic perspectives, the therapeutic uses of urine, and the safety considerations necessary for its application. By evaluating both historical accounts and modern interpretations, this paper seeks to understand the therapeutic potential and limitations of urine therapy in Ayurvedic practice.

Keywords: Shivambu; Urotherapy; Shivambu Kshara; Gomutra; Shuddhi

1. Introduction

Urine therapy, often referred to as *Shivambu* or *Urotherapy*, has been practiced for thousands of years across various cultures, including Ancient Indian, Chinese, and Greek traditions. In Ayurveda, urine is considered not merely as a waste product but as a substance that holds potential for healing and self-care. According to Ayurvedic philosophy, health is the harmonious balance of the body's three primary energies or doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), and any imbalance can lead to disease. Urine, as a by-product of the body's metabolic processes, is seen as reflecting the state of these doshas and can be utilized for therapeutic purposes to restore equilibrium.

This paper examines urine therapy from the Ayurvedic perspective, exploring its historical context, applications, benefits, and the philosophical underpinnings that support its practice.

1.1. Historical Context and References in Ayurveda

Urine therapy is mentioned in several ancient Ayurvedic texts, most notably the *Sushruta Samhita* and *Charaka Samhita*, both of which are foundational texts in the Ayurveda system of medicine. In these texts, urine is described as a diagnostic tool and an important by-product of digestion and metabolism that reveals the body's internal state. While it is typically considered waste, urine is also seen as a product of the body's natural purification processes and is believed to contain the essence of life force (*prana*).

Urine therapy in Ayurveda can be traced back to the practice of *Shivambu Kshara*, which refers to the use of urine for medicinal purposes. Ancient practitioners believed that urine could be used both internally (through ingestion) and externally (through topical application) to cure various ailments, detoxify the body, and improve skin and digestive health. Despite its controversial nature, the practice has persisted through the ages, especially in certain traditional Ayurvedic circles.

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1.2. The Ayurvedic Perspective on Urine

Ayurveda posits that the body is composed of five elements (*pancha mahabhutas*): Earth (*prithvi*), Water (*jala*), Fire (*agni*), Air (*vayu*), and Ether (*akasha*). These elements are combined in the form of three doshas: Vata (air and ether), Pitta (fire and water), and Kapha (earth and water). When the doshas are in harmony, health is maintained; when they are out of balance, disease manifests. Urine, in Ayurvedic thought, is closely linked with the balance of these doshas.

The primary role of urine in Ayurveda is to serve as a diagnostic tool. The colour, smell, and consistency of urine can reveal the state of an individual's health. A healthy person's urine is clear, pale, and odourless, while changes in colour, consistency, or odour can signal an imbalance in the body. Urine is also believed to reflect the potency and purity of the body's digestive fire (*agni*), which governs metabolism and energy production.

Urine therapy, as practiced in Ayurveda, is a fascinating and ancient healing tradition that is based on the principles of self-healing, detoxification, and balance. Though it may seem unconventional to modern sensibilities, its roots in Ayurvedic philosophy reflect a deep understanding of the body's natural processes and its ability to heal itself when supported properly.

Like any holistic therapy, urine therapy requires a deep level of trust in the body's wisdom and the guidance of experienced practitioners. While scientific research on urine therapy is limited, many practitioners and users of this ancient remedy continue to swear by its benefits. As with any natural therapy, it is essential to approach it with care and awareness, ensuring that it is used safely and in alignment with one's unique health needs.

While urine is often perceived as "dirty," actually it is virtually sterile and nearly odourless when it exits the body. However, after leaving the body, bacteria can contaminate the urine, leading to the formation of odorous chemicals, particularly ammonia, which is derived from urea and contributes to the distinctive smell of stale urine.

Although there is a broad spectrum of references to urine therapy in Ayurveda, specific animals whose urine is mentioned in the ancient treatises are relatively few. Most of the references focus on human urine or generalized treatments involving urine. However, some classical Ayurvedic texts mention the urine of specific animals in therapeutic contexts.

2. The animals that are mentioned in the ancient treatises

2.1. Herbivores animals

2.1.1. Cow (*Bos taurus*)

One of the most prominent and frequently referenced animal urines in Ayurvedic texts is cow urine (*gomutra*). Cow urine is considered *sattvic* (pure) and is used in many Ayurvedic remedies. It is often described as having cleansing, detoxifying, and rejuvenating properties. Cow urine is believed to balance the doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and is used in the treatment of:

- Digestive issues
- Skin diseases
- Fever
- Respiratory problems
- Liver ailments
- Detoxification

In texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, cow urine is prescribed for its medicinal value. It is considered a *rasayana* (rejuvenating tonic) and is recommended for improving vitality and longevity. Some references in the Ashtanga Hridayam and Rasa Tarangini also highlight its role in detoxifying the body and enhancing overall health.

2.1.2. Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*)

She-buffalo urine has been prescribed for internal use in treating piles, edema, and various abdominal diseases. It is also common ingredient in concoction formulations to stimulate appetite.

2.1.3. Goat (*Capra hircus*)

In ancient medical texts, goat urine is regarded as significant, second only to cow urine. It is described as astringent-sweet, beneficial for bodily channels, and helpful in balancing all doshas. Notably, the urine of male and female goats is attributed with different medicinal effects; therefore, the urines of he-goats and she-goats were prescribed separately for treating various ailments. It is mentioned in some Ayurvedic texts as a potent substance for managing various health conditions. It is believed to have antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, and antibacterial properties. Goat urine is sometimes used in the treatment of:

- Leprosy (a skin disorder)
- Digestive issues like dyspepsia
- Urinary tract infections

Although not as frequently referenced as cow or horse urine, goat urine is considered valuable in specific treatments for skin diseases and infections.

2.1.4. Sheep (*Ovis aries*)

Considered one of the eight prominent urines according to the scriptures of A treya, sheep urine is described as slightly bitter, unctuous, and non-antagonistic to pitta. Its efficacy is noted for treating epilepsy, leucoderma, insanity, and intermittent fever. Furthermore, the *Yogacandrika* mentions that sheep urine can help in dissolving urinary bladder stones (asmari) and has been used in a powder for blackening hair.

2.1.5. Camel (*Camelus dromedarius*)

In some Ayurvedic and traditional practices, camel urine is occasionally mentioned for its use in the treatment of certain skin diseases and digestive issues. It is also thought to have cooling properties, and can be used for fevers or inflammatory conditions.

In the Caraka-Samhita, camel urine is described as slightly bitter and is recommended for hiccups, cough, and piles. The Yogacandrika text states that camel urine can also be effective for various abdominal ailments and may alleviate inflammation and edema as noted in the Kas'yapa Samhita.

2.1.6. Horse (*Equus caballus*)

Horse urine is mentioned occasionally in some Ayurvedic texts, particularly in connection with the treatment of serious ailments. In the Charaka Samhita, horse urine is considered useful in the management of conditions like:

- Chronic cough
- Asthma
- Skin conditions
- Detoxification

Horse urine, like cow urine, is believed to have a purifying and cleansing effect on the body and is used in various herbal formulations to treat specific diseases.

Horse urine is characterized by a bitter and pungent taste, and it is used to treat skin diseases, wounds, and to neutralize poisons. The estrogen-replacement drug Premarin, which is prescribed to menopausal women, is derived from horse urine; its name stands for "Pregnant mares' urine." Each year, approximately 750,000 mares are impregnated solely for the collection of their estrogen-rich urine, and their water intake is restricted to concentrate the urine.

2.1.7. Ass (*Asinus equidae*)

The urine of the ass has been noted for its potential benefits in treating epilepsy (apasmd ra), insanity (unmdda), and seizures. It is typically used orally as a drink. In addition to the aforementioned conditions, ass urine has also been recommended for curing diabetes and other diseases caused by worms.

2.1.8. Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)

In certain ancient Ayurvedic treatises, the urine of elephants is mentioned for medicinal purposes, although references to elephant urine are less common. The urine of the she-elephant is recommended for treating skin diseases such as

leucoderma when used in lotion form. It has also been prescribed for internal use to help patients suffering from intestinal worms like helminthiasis and to address dermatosis.

2.1.9. Porcupine (*Acanthion leucurus*)

Porcupine urine is said to be beneficial for conditions such as epilepsy and insanity. For epilepsy, it is recommended as an ingredient in ointments, while for insanity, inhaling the fumes from the heated urine may provide relief.

2.2. Carnivores Animals

2.2.1. Cat (*Felis domesticus*)

According to ancient Ayurveda, cat urine is believed to have therapeutic properties for treating insanity and epilepsy. Its application is primarily external, often as an ingredient in eye ointments or through the inhalation of fumes. For both conditions, nasal administration of cat urine has also been indicated to help control the patient.

2.2.2. Dog (*Canis familiaris*)

In the Caraka Samhita, dog urine was historically recommended in the form of snuff for treating epilepsy. This practice likely stemmed from the belief that epilepsy was caused by maleficent spirits (bad grahas). Medical practitioners advised fumigating the patient with dog urine alongside other materials to drive away the evil spirit.

2.2.3. Jackal (*Canis aureus*)

There are numerous references to the therapeutic benefits of jackal urine in treating conditions such as insanity and epilepsy in ancient medical literature. Methods of application include sprinkling, blowing, snuffing, smoking, and preparing collyrium from the urine.

2.2.4. Lion (*Felis leo*)

Lion urine has been prescribed for its medicinal properties in the treatment of epilepsy, primarily used externally as a snuff.

2.2.5. Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

Ancient Indian medical texts indicate that wolf urine possesses medicinal properties and is prescribed for treating insanity. The inhalation of urine fumes and its use as an ingredient in local applications are the primary methods of treatment.

2.3. Birds

2.3.1. Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

The urine of the osprey is noted for its benefits in treating piles. Its applications include both external use as an ingredient in ointments and internal use through inhalation of the fumes when the urine is burned.

2.3.2. Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*)

Owl urine has been recommended as an effective treatment for insanity. The application of owl urine is both internal and external; internal use involves inhaling the fumes when the urine is burned, while external use requires applying the urine locally to the head region for therapeutic effect.

2.4. The Concept of *Shuddhi* (Purification)

Purification (*shuddhi*) is a central concept in Ayurveda. The practice of using urine in therapy aligns with the Ayurvedic view that the body's natural waste products, when used correctly, can assist in eliminating toxins (*ama*) from the system and purifying the body and mind. Urine, as a metabolic by-product, is seen as a powerful tool for this internal purification process, cleansing not just physical impurities but also mental and spiritual blockages.

3. Therapeutic Uses of Urine in Ayurveda

Urine therapy in Ayurveda has both internal and external applications, each with its purported benefits. Here, we explore some of the common therapeutic uses of urine in Ayurvedic practice:

3.1. Internal Consumption (Drinking Urine)

Drinking urine, particularly the first morning urine, is considered the most potent form of urine therapy in Ayurveda. The first urine of the day is believed to contain the highest concentration of metabolic by-products and vital nutrients. It is typically consumed in small quantities, starting with a few drops and gradually increasing as the body adjusts to the practice. The primary benefits associated with drinking urine include:

- Detoxification: Urine is considered a natural detoxifier that helps eliminate toxins from the body.
- Improved Digestion: Urine is believed to stimulate the digestive fire (*agni*) and support healthy digestion.
- Immune Boosting: Urine contains various enzymes, hormones, and antibodies that are thought to strengthen the immune system.
- Rejuvenation: Many Ayurvedic practitioners regard urine as a potent rejuvenator, capable of slowing the aging process and enhancing vitality.

3.2. External Application (Topical Use)

Urine is also applied externally, most commonly for skin care. It is believed to have several healing properties for the skin, such as:

- Treating Skin Disorders: Urine is used as a topical treatment for conditions like acne, eczema, and psoriasis. It is thought to possess anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties that help reduce skin inflammation and infections.
- Promoting Skin Rejuvenation: Urine is believed to have anti-aging properties, improving skin texture, reducing wrinkles, and promoting overall skin health.
- Hair Care: Some practitioners use urine as a scalp treatment to promote hair growth and combat dandruff.

Urine is applied by gently massaging it into the skin or using it as a face wash. In some cases, it is used as a bath additive, where it is thought to detoxify and nourish the skin.

3.3. Nasal and Eye Drops

In certain Ayurvedic practices, urine is used as nasal drops or eye drops to treat conditions such as nasal congestion, eye infections, or irritation. The use of urine in this way is often recommended under the supervision of an experienced practitioner due to the potential risks of infection or irritation.

3.3.1. The Philosophy Behind Urine Therapy in Ayurveda

The use of urine in Ayurveda is deeply intertwined with the system's holistic philosophy. Ayurveda operates on the principle that the body, mind, and spirit are interconnected, and balance among these aspects is essential for health. Urine therapy is based on the idea that the body has an inherent capacity for self-healing. By using the body's natural by-products, such as urine, practitioners believe they can support this self-healing process, enhance detoxification, and restore balance in the doshas.

Additionally, Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of individual constitution (*prakriti*) and the need for personalized treatments. The use of urine therapy is not universally recommended but is often tailored to an individual's specific needs, doshic imbalances, and health conditions.

3.4. Safety and Ethical Considerations

While urine therapy has been practiced for centuries, it is not without its risks. The consumption of urine should be approached cautiously, especially in individuals with pre-existing health conditions or those who are immunocompromised. It is essential to use only fresh, clean urine, as the risk of contamination with pathogens is a concern. Urine therapy should not be considered a substitute for medical treatment, especially in cases of serious illness.

Due to the nature of the practice, urine therapy may be psychologically uncomfortable for some individuals. Practitioners often advise starting with small doses and carefully monitoring the body's response. Additionally, practitioners of urine therapy recommend using only fresh, clean urine for therapeutic purposes. It is important to avoid using urine if one is ill, as the body may expel harmful pathogens that could exacerbate health issues.

Before starting any form of urine therapy, it is advised to consult with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner or healthcare provider to ensure that it is suitable for your individual health needs.

4. Conclusion

Although it is not commonly used in modern medicine, urine therapy is nonetheless regarded as a sacred component of ancient Ayurvedic therapeutic methods in some Ayurvedic communities. Its foundations are located in the Ayurvedic notion that the body, mind, and spirit are interrelated and that natural substances, such as urine, can be used to promote healing and restore equilibrium. Although there is no current scientific research on urine therapy, its continuous use in some societies demonstrates its alleged advantages for health optimization, detoxification, and rejuvenation.

Modern scientific research has raised concerns about the safety and efficacy of using animal and human urine for medicinal purposes. Given the deep historical and philosophical context of urine therapy in Ayurveda, further research is needed to explore its efficacy and safety. Recent interest in alternative and traditional medicine revives curiosity about urine therapies. Scientific studies on urine-derived components (e.g., urea creams, stem cells in urine) demonstrate therapeutic potential. Clinical trials for evaluating the safety and efficacy of urine therapy are required.

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