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NUTRACEUTICAL IN AYURVEDA

MUDASSIR ANSARI[1], MISS. SHEFALI AGRAHARI [2]

[2] CO AUTHOR-

ABSTRACT :

The concept of nutraceutical pertains to food or components of food that offer medical or health advantages, including the prevention and/or treatment of illnesses.

The traditional Ayurvedic system (Indian life-science) underscores the importance of diet (āhāra), lifestyle (vihāra), and medicinal plants (auṣadha) as essential for maintaining health and preventing diseases. Numerous classical Ayurvedic principles—such as rasāyana (rejuvenation), bālya (strength-enhancing), medhya (intellect-enhancing), etc.—correspond with the contemporary understanding of functional foods and nutraceuticals.

This review encapsulates Ayurvedic viewpoints on nutraceuticals, significant herbs and formulations, contemporary evidence, regulatory challenges, and prospective developments. It references classical texts alongside recent peer-reviewed studies. The incorporation of Ayurvedic nutraceuticals into modern preventive health presents opportunities but also encounters obstacles related to standardization, regulatory clarity, and substantial clinical evidence.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Nutraceuticals, Functional foods, Rasāyana, Ayurveda herbs, Preventive medicine, Dietary supplements

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of nutraceuticals has gained significant attention: these are foods or food-derived products that offer health benefits beyond basic nutrition. The term "nutraceutical" was introduced by Stephen L. DeFelice in 1989. Concurrently, Ayurveda—an ancient Indian medical system—has long asserted that "āhāra is mahā-auṣadha" (food is great medicine). The intersection between Ayurvedic dietary practices and the contemporary nutraceutical movement is becoming increasingly acknowledged (e.g., pathya-āhāra, rasāyana therapies).
This review intends to investigate how the nutraceutical paradigm is reflected in Ayurveda, assess the evidence surrounding key herbs and formulations, address regulatory and practical challenges, and propose future research and practice directions.

2. Ayurvedic Concepts Relevant to Nutraceuticals

2.1 Āhāra (Diet) and Pathya/Apathya

In Ayurveda, diet (āhāra) transcends mere nourishment; it is a crucial factor in determining health and disease. The classical texts outline guidelines for a wholesome diet, incompatible foods (viruddha-āhāra), and dietary recommendations for specific dosha conditions.

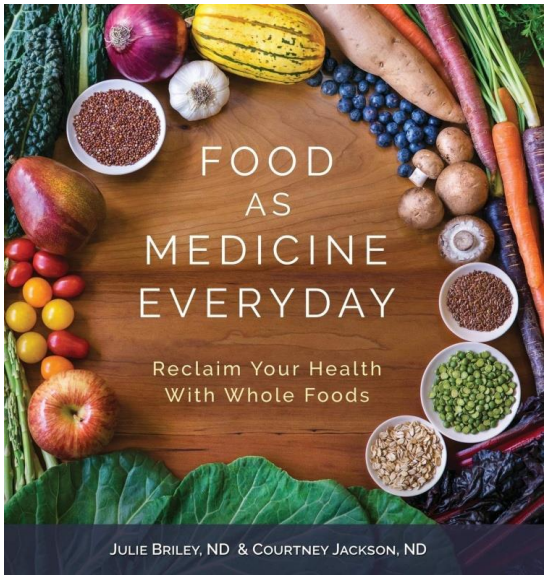
2.2 Rasāyana (Rejuvenation) and Bhārya/Kṛtanna Varga

Rasāyana therapies focus on enhancing immunity, slowing the aging process, and boosting ojas and vitality. These therapies can be viewed as comparable to functional foods or nutraceuticals. For instance, the kṛtanna varga concept encompasses preparations such as yāvāgu (gruel) used in various ailments, serving as "functional nutraceuticals."

2.3 Gunas, Karmas and Ayurvedic Classification of Food/Herbs

Ayurvedic literature categorizes substances based on their qualities (gunas) and actions (karmas), including bālya (strength-promoting), bṛhman (nourishing), medhya (intellect-promoting), and jīvanīya (life-sustaining), among others. These classifications correspond with health-promoting functional foods.

2.4 Food as Medicine – The Overlap with Nutraceuticals



Ayurveda acknowledges that specific foods and dietary practices can function as medicinal agents. For example, kṣīrpāka kalpana (milk-based decoctions) are identified as nutraceuticals within Ayurvedic pharmaceutics. Consequently, one can correlate:

• Modern nutraceutical → Ayurvedic rasāyana and pathya-āhāra formulations

• Functional food → food/herbs possessing therapeutic properties in Ayurveda

3. Modern Evidence and Key Ayurvedic Herbs/Preparations

3.1 Selected Herbs & Nutraceutical Potential

• Trigonella foenum graecum (Fenugreek): The seeds and leaves have been examined for their anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and immune-modulating characteristics.

• Other herbs: Numerous Ayurvedic herbs are currently being investigated through network pharmacology for their neuro-regulatory and metabolic impacts. 3.2 Ayurvedic Formulation Studies

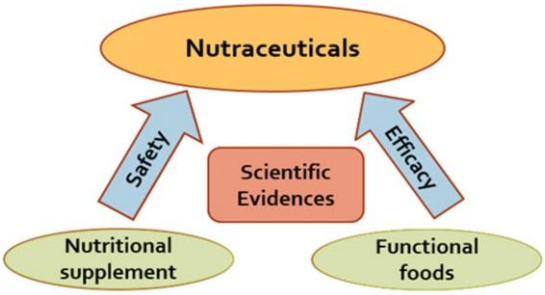
A study on a herbal nutraceutical tablet formulation demonstrated antihyperglycemic and antihyperlipidemic effects in an animal model (ob/ob mice), containing sufficient micronutrients, vitamins, and trace elements.

3.3 Reviews & Conceptual Works

• "Conceptual Review of Yāvāgukalpana as a functional nutraceutical" investigates how Ayurvedic food preparations correspond to contemporary nutraceuticals. "Concept of Nutraceuticals in Ayurveda – A Review" delineates Ayurvedic principles that correspond with the nutraceutical concept. "Ayurvedic Food and Nutraceuticals – A review on understanding roles, food as medicine" (2025) presents newer literature. 3.4 Regulatory & Industry Context

In India, the regulatory stance is that products under the Ministry of AYUSH / ASU&H are not permitted to claim "nutraceutical" status. This differentiation between traditional Ayurvedic products and nutraceuticals is crucial for marketing, claims, and regulatory adherence.

4. Opportunities and Challenges



4.1 Opportunities

• Preventive health: The increasing incidence of lifestyle-related disorders and non-communicable diseases highlights the potential of nutraceuticals based on Ayurveda as a complementary solution. For instance, dietary risk factors account for a significant proportion of global Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). Integrative model: Merging Ayurvedic dietary practices and herb-based functional foods with contemporary nutraceutical science provides a comprehensive approach.
• Consumer interest: The rising awareness of "food as medicine" and functional foods enhances market opportunities**.**

4.2 Challenges

• Standardisation: There is considerable variability in Ayurvedic herbs and preparations; issues related to bioavailability, dosages, and quality control persist.
• Evidence base: Although numerous herbs possess preclinical data, there is a scarcity of robust randomized controlled trials (RCTs) demonstrating efficacy in human subjects.
• Regulatory ambiguity: As previously mentioned, Ayurvedic products often cannot assert nutraceutical status; the classification and labeling processes remain vague.
• Safety / Adverse effects: Herbs may present risks of interactions and contamination; therefore, caution is necessary.
• Translational gap: The challenge of reconciling traditional Ayurvedic principles with modern scientific paradigms is intricate.

4.3 Future Directions

• Conducting rigorous clinical trials on Ayurvedic-nutraceutical formulations (e.g., targeting metabolic syndrome, cognitive function)
• Establishing formulation standards and quality-control protocols for Ayurvedic nutraceuticals
• Performing mechanistic studies (pharmacology, nutrigenomics) that connect Ayurvedic practices (e.g., rasāyana) to specific biomarkers
• Developing clear regulatory frameworks that differentiate traditional Ayurvedic foods and medicines from nutraceuticals
• Promoting consumer education: ensuring that claims are substantiated by evidence and are transparent.

5. Proposed Framework for Ayurvedic Nutraceutical Development

A proposed workflow may encompass:

1. Identification of Ayurvedic herbs and food preparations with established traditional uses (rasāyana, bālya, medhya, etc.)
2. Phytochemical profiling and standardization of extracts
3. Preclinical validation (in vitro, in vivo) to explore mechanisms (antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, metabolic regulation)

6. Conclusion

. The concept of nutraceuticals aligns seamlessly with Ayurveda: the principles of diet, rejuvenation (rasāyana), and medicinal herbs emphasize the notion of food as medicine and the importance of preventive wellness.
Modern research is progressively substantiating certain Ayurvedic herbs and formulations as functional foods or nutraceuticals. However, to fully harness this potential, it is essential to establish robust evidence, standardization, a clear regulatory framework, and effective translational pathways. Given the global focus on preventive health, Ayurvedic-based nutraceuticals could significantly contribute—provided they are supported by sound scientific evidence and ethical marketing practices that respect tradition.

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