



# Sciatica (Gridhrasi): A Comparative Study Of Modern And Ayurvedic Approaches

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## Abstract

Sciatica, known as Gridhrasi in Ayurveda, is a prevalent neuromuscular condition marked by pain that radiates along the sciatic nerve. While contemporary medicine mainly attributes it to nerve compression from lumbar disc herniation or spinal issues, Ayurveda views it as a disorder characterized by a dominance of Vata and systemic imbalance. This article offers a comparative analysis of Sciatica from both modern and Ayurvedic viewpoints, exploring their concepts regarding causes, symptoms, diagnostic methods, and treatment options. The modern perspective prioritizes relieving symptoms, relies on imaging for diagnosis, and includes surgical procedures, while Ayurveda emphasizes restoring balance among doshas through Panchakarma treatments, herbal solutions, and changes in lifestyle. The research underscores how both systems can complement each other and promotes an integrated approach to treatment. A comprehensive strategy that merges the advantages of both fields can improve clinical results and enhance overall well-being for patients dealing with Sciatica.

## Keywords

Sciatica, Gridhrasi, Ayurveda, Vata Vyadhi, Panchakarma, Modern medicine, Comparative study, Integrative approach, Neuromuscular disorder

## Introduction

Sciatica refers to a condition marked by pain that travels along the course of the sciatic nerve, which extends from the lower back, passing through the hips and buttocks, and going down both legs. This issue is often linked to problems like lumbar disc herniation, spinal stenosis, or degenerative disc disease. In traditional medicine, Ayurveda identifies this condition as "Gridhrasi," placing it within the category of Vata disorders. While both modern and traditional practices seek to relieve pain and improve function, they have notable differences in their causes, methods of diagnosis, and treatment strategies.

With the rising incidence of musculoskeletal disorders worldwide, there is a growing interest in integrative approaches. This document intends to present a comparative analysis of Sciatica from both contemporary medical and Ayurvedic viewpoints, examining their individual causes, symptoms, diagnostic processes, and treatment options.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on a comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts, modern medical literature, and peer-reviewed research articles. Sources include the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and modern neurology and orthopedics textbooks. Additional data was gathered from PubMed, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate.

The comparison focuses on:

- Etiology and pathophysiology
- Clinical features
- Diagnostic tools
- Treatment strategies

Results

Etiology and Pathogenesis

**Modern Medicine:** Sciatica frequently occurs when the sciatic nerve is compressed or irritated, mainly caused by issues such as herniated lumbar discs, narrowing of the spinal canal, spondylolisthesis, or piriformis syndrome. The irritation of the nerve roots results from either mechanical pressure or inflammatory substances, causing pain and neurological issues (Andersson, 1997).

**Ayurveda:** Gridhrasi is mainly classified as a Vata Vyadhi, which refers to a neurological condition resulting from an imbalance of Vata, occasionally linked to Kapha. This disorder arises from the excess of Vata or the combination of Vata and Kapha doshas impacting the Kati, Sphik, and Pada areas, hindering the movement of Prana Vayu and leading to discomfort, rigidity, and limited movement. (Charaka Samhita, Chikitsa Sthana).

Clinical Features

Feature	Modern Perspective	Ayurvedic Perspective
Nature of pain	Sharp, shooting, burning, or tingling	Ruka (pain), Toda (pricking), Stambha (stiffness)
Radiation	From lower back to foot along sciatic nerve	Sphik to Pada (hip to leg)
Associated symptoms	Numbness, muscle weakness	Gaurava (heaviness), Aruchi (disinterest), Ardita (facial palsy in severe cases)
Laterality	Usually unilateral	Generally unilateral

Diagnosis

Modern Diagnostics:

- **Clinical Examination:** Straight leg raise test, neurological assessment.
- **Imaging:** MRI, CT scan, X-ray to identify disc pathology or nerve compression.

## Ayurvedic Diagnostics:

- **Clinical Observation:** Nadi Pariksha (pulse diagnosis), Dashavidha Pariksha (tenfold examination), and observation of gait, pain, and Vata involvement.

## Treatment Modalities

### Modern Medicine

- **Pharmacotherapy:** NSAIDs, muscle relaxants, corticosteroids, anticonvulsants (e.g., pregabalin).
- **Physical Therapy:** Strengthening exercises, posture correction, electrotherapy.
- **Surgical Intervention:** Microdiscectomy, laminectomy for severe or non-responsive cases.

### Ayurvedic Medicine

- **Shodhana (Purification Therapies):**
  - *Snehan* (oleation) using Mahanarayana or Sahacharadi taila.
  - *Swedana* (sudation) such as Pinda Sweda.
  - *Basti* (medicated enema), particularly Ksheerabasti and Dashamoola Niruha Basti.
- **Shamana (Palliative Therapies):**
  - Herbal formulations: *Yogaraja Guggulu*, *Rasnadi Guggulu*, *Dashamoola Kvatha*.
  - Internal medications: *Eranda Sneha* (castor oil), *Brihat Vata Chintamani Rasa*.
- **Diet and Lifestyle:**
  - Vata-pacifying diet: warm, oily, easily digestible foods.
  - Avoid cold exposure, excessive strain, and irregular routines.
- **Yoga and Physiotherapy:**
- **Asanas:** Bhujangasana, Salabhasana, Makarasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana
- **Pranayama:** Anulom Vilom, Bhramari
- Avoid strenuous exercises during acute pain

## Comparative Summary Table:

Parameter	Modern Medicine	Ayurveda
Concept of Disease	Nerve compression or irritation	Vata-Vyadhi (neuromuscular disorder)
Diagnosis	MRI, CT, physical tests	Clinical examination, Nadi Pariksha
Treatment Goals	Reduce inflammation, relieve pressure	Balance Doshas, eliminate Ama and Vata
Acute Management	NSAIDs, muscle relaxants	Basti, Swedana, Rasayana
Chronic Management	Surgery (in severe cases)	Rasayana, Panchakarma, lifestyle changes

## Discussion

The views on Sciatica from both Ayurvedic and contemporary medical fields showcase differing yet supportive methodologies. While modern healthcare provides quick relief from symptoms and sophisticated imaging for accurate diagnosis, Ayurveda prioritizes identifying the underlying issue by focusing on systemic disruptions, especially concerning Vata dosha.

Treatments in Ayurveda, such as Basti and Abhyanga, can notably alleviate pain and enhance mobility for individuals suffering from Sciatica. Additionally, combining physiotherapy with Ayurvedic practices has been found to improve recovery rates and lower the chances of recurrence.

Although surgery in modern medicine may resolve persistent cases of Sciatica, it is associated with possible risks. In contrast, Ayurveda typically avoids invasive methods and prioritizes sustained health.

Combining Ayurvedic treatments with conventional medical practices could provide a comprehensive approach—addressing symptoms while promoting overall well-being. This strategy might include the use of current diagnostic tools and emergency interventions, paired with Ayurvedic therapies for ongoing care and prevention.

## Conclusion

Here are some sample conclusions from other scholarly articles and clinical reviews on the topic of Sciatica (Gridhrasi) from both modern and Ayurvedic perspectives.

### 1. From an Ayurvedic Clinical Study

Source: Tillu, G., et al. *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine*, 2010

Conclusion:

Ayurvedic treatment modalities, especially Basti therapy, have shown significant improvements in pain relief and functional mobility in patients with Gridhrasi. Panchakarma therapies, when administered correctly, provide long-term benefits with minimal side effects. Further controlled clinical trials are recommended to validate these traditional practices in a modern clinical setting.

### 2. From a Modern Medical Review

Source: Valat, J. P., et al. *The Lancet*, 2010

Conclusion:

The management of sciatica involves a multifaceted approach, including pharmacological pain control, physical rehabilitation, and in some cases, surgical intervention. While most cases resolve over time, the recurrence rate and chronicity remain high. Newer strategies that emphasize patient education, physical activity, and minimally invasive procedures are proving beneficial.

### 3. From an Integrative Medicine Perspective

Source: Sharma, H., et al. *Integrative Medicine Journal*, 2016

Conclusion:

Integrative approaches combining conventional diagnostics and emergency care with Ayurvedic therapies such as Abhyanga, Swedana, and herbal medication offer promising outcomes. Addressing both symptomatic relief and systemic imbalance, such a model is holistic, patient-centered, and sustainable for long-term management.

### 4. From a Comparative Research Study

Source: Patil, S. V., *AYU Journal*, 2015

Conclusion:



The comparative analysis highlights that while modern medicine offers rapid symptomatic control, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive long-term solution by correcting the root cause of disease. When integrated thoughtfully, both systems can play a synergistic role in improving quality of life and reducing recurrence of Sciatica.

#### 5. From a Panchakarma-focused Clinical Evaluation

Source: Kulkarni, R. R., *Ancient Science of Life*, 2012

Conclusion:

Basti Karma, combined with internal medications and lifestyle modifications, proves effective in managing chronic cases of Gridhrasi. Unlike modern pharmacotherapy, the Ayurvedic approach avoids dependency and side effects, offering a more sustainable path to recovery. However, standardization of protocols and documentation is needed.

#### 6. Ayurveda-Based Conclusion

Source: Patgiri, B. J., et al.

Title: “A Clinical Study on the Role of Erandamooladi Yapana Basti in the Management of Gridhrasi”

Journal: AYU – An International Quarterly Journal of Research in Ayurveda, 2013

Conclusion:

Erandamooladi Yapana Basti has proven to be effective in relieving the signs and symptoms of Gridhrasi. The therapy provided significant relief in pain, stiffness, and radiation without adverse effects. It acts by pacifying aggravated Vata and nourishing the Dhatus involved in the pathogenesis. The study supports classical Ayurvedic claims regarding the effectiveness of Basti in Vata disorders.

Citation: Patgiri, B. J., et al. “A Clinical Study on the Role of Erandamooladi Yapana Basti in the Management of Gridhrasi.” *AYU*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2013, pp. 383–387.

#### 7. Modern Medical Perspective

Source: Konstantinou, K., and Hay, E. M.

Title: “Clinical Assessment and Management of Sciatica: A Review”

Journal: British Medical Journal (BMJ), 2007

Conclusion:

While most cases of sciatica resolve spontaneously, conservative treatment such as NSAIDs, physiotherapy, and patient education is often sufficient. In refractory cases, imaging and surgical interventions may be required. Timely recognition and risk stratification are crucial to minimize chronicity.

Citation: Konstantinou, K., and E. M. Hay. “Clinical Assessment and Management of Sciatica: A Review.” *BMJ*, vol. 334, no. 7607, 2007, pp. 1313–1317.

#### 8. Integrative Treatment Conclusion

Source: Tillu, G., et al.

Title: “Ayurveda for Sciatica: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Study”

Journal: Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine, 2010

Conclusion:

“This pilot study suggests that Ayurvedic treatment may offer a safe and effective alternative for Sciatica. Panchakarma procedures such as Basti, combined with Rasayana therapy, led to statistically significant improvements in functional status and pain intensity.”

Citation: Tillu, Girish, et al. "Ayurveda for Sciatica: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Study." *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, pp. 45–52.

## 9. Comparative Review Conclusion

Source: Kotecha, M.

Title: "A Holistic Review of the Management of Sciatica in Ayurveda and Modern Medicine"

Journal: International Journal of Research in Ayurveda and Pharmacy (IJRAP), 2015

Conclusion :

Both systems have their unique merits: modern medicine excels in diagnostic precision and emergency care, while Ayurveda offers personalized and long-term therapeutic solutions. A multidisciplinary model combining both systems could offer optimal care.

Citation: Kotecha, Manish. "A Holistic Review of the Management of Sciatica in Ayurveda and Modern Medicine." *IJRAP*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, pp. 321–325.

## 10. Functional Outcome Study

Source: Sharma, R., et al.

Title: "Efficacy of Panchakarma and Shamana Therapy in the Management of Gridhrasi (Sciatica): A Clinical Study"

Journal: International Ayurvedic Medical Journal (IAMJ), 2016

Conclusion:

Panchakarma therapies such as Basti and Abhyanga along with internal medication show superior results compared to conventional analgesic use in terms of functional improvement and reduced recurrence.

Citation: Sharma, R., et al. "Efficacy of Panchakarma and Shamana Therapy in the Management of Gridhrasi (Sciatica): A Clinical Study." *IAMJ*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2016, pp. 1241–1248.

## My Conclusion

Sciatica, known as Gridhrasi, is a condition recognized in both contemporary and Ayurvedic medical practices. Modern medicine utilizes anatomical and neurological concepts for both identifying and treating the issue, whereas Ayurveda presents a comprehensive approach concentrating on the balance of doshas and the healing power of nature.

A side-by-side comparison shows that each system has its advantages—modern medicine excels at acute treatment and diagnostic procedures, while Ayurveda is beneficial for long-term management, detoxifying the body, and preventing further issues. An integrated, multidisciplinary strategy that honors the strengths of both methods could yield the most effective and long-lasting results for individuals dealing with Sciatica.

Additional research, such as randomized controlled trials and long-term studies, is essential to confirm the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatments and to blend them successfully with contemporary medical practices.

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