

Concept of *Koshtha* and *Koshtha Parikshana*: A comprehensive review

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Abstract

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Koshtha* integrates both anatomical and physiological dimensions, playing a pivotal role in understanding digestive health and *Dosha* balance. Anatomically, *Koshtha* denotes the body's cavities. Physiologically, it refers to the functional state of the digestive tract, influencing bowel movements and digestive processes based on an individual's *Dosha* constitution. *Koshtha* is categorized based on predominant *Dosha* influence. *Koshtha Parikshana* (assessment of *Koshtha*) is crucial for effective Ayurvedic treatment. It aids in diagnosing digestive disorders, selecting appropriate medications, and determining dosages. Additionally, it informs dietary and lifestyle recommendations and guides preparatory treatments such as *Snehapana* before *Shodhana* (detoxification) therapies. By understanding *Koshtha*, practitioners can tailor treatments to align with the individual's digestive constitution, enhancing therapeutic outcomes and overall health. This review emphasizes the importance of *Koshtha* in Ayurvedic practice, highlighting its physiological relevance, clinical implications, and its role in personalized treatment planning.

Keywords: *Ayurveda*; *Koshtha*; *Koshtha Parikshana*; Digestive tract; *Snehapana*; Physiology

1. Introduction

In Ayurveda, *Koshtha* represents the state of an individual's health, body constitution, and *Dosha* balance. In Anatomical view *Koshtha* refers as cavities [1], These cavities include major regions such as the stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas, intestines, and pelvic cavity, which houses the uterus, urinary bladder, and lower bowel. Thus, *Koshtha* denotes the anatomical hollowness that accommodates various organs. From a physiological point of view, *Koshtha* pertains to bowel movements and digestive function in relation to an individual's basic constitution. This definition reflects how the digestive process and stool characteristics vary based on the predominant *Dosha* in an individual.

Overall *Koshtha* refers to the digestive tract, including the motility of the intestines and the movement of food and faecal matter. It is categorized into three types [2] based on the predominant *Dosha*: *Krura Koshtha*, *Mridu Koshtha*, *Madhyama Koshtha*

These types reflect the dominance of one *Dosha* and are crucial for diagnosing and treating digestive disorders. *Koshtha Parikshana* (examination of the digestive tract) aids in selecting *Aushadhi* (appropriate medications) and *Aushadhimatra* (dosages). The type of *Koshtha* determines the appropriate *Shodhana Chikitsa* methods.

1.1. Aim and objectives

Describe the anatomical meaning of *Koshtha* as it relates to the body's cavities and organ accommodation.

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To explore and elucidate the physiological significance of *Koshtha* in Ayurvedic practice, emphasizing its impact on digestive health and treatment efficacy.

1.2. Material and methods

It is a conceptual study. The material is collected from the classical Ayurvedic texts, modern literature and various research papers etc.

Acharya Charaka has given synonyms of *Koshtha*:

- ▪ *Mahasrotas* - is starts from *Grahani* (pharynx) to *Guda* (anus), i.e. whole of the alimentary canal.
- ▪ *Sharir Madhya* - the part lies in the *Madhya Bhaga* of *Shareer*.
- ▪ *Mahanimana* - the deepest part of the body
- ▪ *Aampakwashya* - major organs of gastrointestinal tract

According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the eight *Ashayas* are cumulatively called as *Koshtha*. *Hridaya* (heart), *Rudhira* (blood), *Phuphusa* (lungs), *Aamaashaya* (stomach), *Pakwaashaya* (intestine), *Unduka* (appendix), *Mutrashaya* (bladder).

1.3. Types of *Koshtha*

Krura Koshtha (Hard bowel): *Krura Koshtha* (Hard Bowel): In *Krura Koshtha*, the predominant *Dosha* is *Vata*[1]. Elevated *Vata* leads to the formation of hard stools, which may be difficult or even impossible to pass. This condition is characterized by the dominance of *Vata's Ruksha* (dry) and *Khara* (rough) qualities over the *Sara* (fluid) quality of *Pitta*. Consequently, *Krura Koshtha* tends to exhibit reduced secretory and absorptive functions.

Mridu Koshtha (Soft Bowel): In *Mridu Koshtha*, *Pitta* is the dominant *Dosha*[3] Increased *Pitta* results in the production of watery or semi-solid stools, which are passed frequently throughout the day. The qualities of *Pitta*—*Sara* (laxative), *Drava* (fluid), *Snigdha* (unctuous), and *Laghu* (light)—characterize *Mridu Koshtha*. As a result, this type of bowel tends to be slick and slippery, with increased secretions that are less effective at absorption.

Madhyama Koshtha: is characterized by a predominance of *Kapha Dosha*, leading to the production of soft, solid faces that pass smoothly. In this type of *Koshtha*, the properties of *Kapha*—*Snigdha* (unctuous), *Guru* (heavy), and *Sthira* (steady)—are dominant. This results in optimal absorption and regular bowel movements.

Sama Koshtha: Described in the *Ashtanga Hridaya* by *Vagbhata* represents a balanced state of the digestive tract where the three *Dosha*[4] (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*) are in equilibrium[1]. This balance leads to optimal digestion and the passage of normal stools.

Table 1 Assessment of *Koshtha*[5]

S. No.	Parameters to be assessed	<i>Mridu Koshtha</i>	<i>Madhyam Koshtha</i>	<i>Krura Koshtha</i>
1.	Effects of purgatives	Purgation occurs on consuming milk, jaggery, jaggery juice, grapes, curd etc.	No occurrence of purgation on consuming milk, jaggery, jaggery juice, grapes, curd etc.	No occurrence of purgation even on consumption of strong purgatives.
2.	Bowel habits	Regular bowel habits. Strong urge of defecation. Satisfactory defecation.	Regular bowel habits. Straining may or may not be required. Satisfactory defecation.	Irregular bowel habits. More straining required. Unsatisfactory defecation.
3.	Faecal composition	Loose stools.	Formed stools.	Hard stools.
4.	Time taken for defecation	2-5 min	Up to 5 min	More than 10 min
5.	Frequency encounters of	more probable	not sure	Constipation may be frequently present

	diarrhoea and constipation			
6.	Recurrent history of getting distension in abdomen	No recurrence	No recurrence	Frequently recurrent
7.	Time taken for <i>Jirna ahara Lakshana</i>	Might be appearing faster	optimum timing	Might be appearing late
8.	Water intake	Might be having more water intake.	Might be having normal water intake.	Might be having less water intake.
9.	<i>Satmya</i> to types of consumption of <i>Rasa</i>	Might be consuming more amounts of <i>Amla, Lavana, Katu Rasa.</i>	Might be consuming same quantity of all the <i>Rasa.</i>	Might be consuming more amounts of <i>Katu, Tikta, Kashaya rasa s.</i>

1.4. Importance of Koshtha Parikshana

1. *Prakriti* assessment *Koshtha Parikshana* (assessment of the digestive tract) can reveal an individual's *Prakriti* (constitution):

Vata Prakriti individuals typically have *Krura Koshtha* (hard bowel), characterized by difficulty in bowel movements and hard faces due to the predominance of *Vata Dosha*.

Pitta Prakriti individuals usually exhibit *Mridu Koshtha* (soft bowel), with more frequent, watery, or semi-solid stools due to the dominance of *Pitta Dosha*.

Kapha Prakriti individuals are often observed to have *Madhyama Koshtha* (moderate bowel), characterized by soft, solid faces and smooth bowel movements, reflecting the predominance of *Kapha Dosha*.

2. Based on *Koshtha*, we can select the appropriate medication for *Chikitsa*. If a patient can undergo *Virechana* (purgation) using substances like *Kshira, Aaragwadha, Ikshu, Takra, Mastu, Guda, Krushara, Nava-Madhya, Ushnodak, Draksha*, it indicates a predominance of *Pitta*, suggesting that the *Koshtha* is *Mridu* (soft). Conversely, if *Virechana* is effective with ingredients like *Shama, Kushtha, Triphala, or Sudhathan*, it suggests a predominance of *Vata*, indicating that the *Koshtha* is *Krura* (hard).

3. *Koshtha* is crucial in determining both *Aushadhi Dravyas* and *Aushadhi Matra*. E.g. For example, individuals with *Mridu Koshtha* require *Soumya Aushadhi* in minimum dose whereas those with *Krura Koshtha* require *Teekshna Aushadhi* in large dose.

4 *Koshtha Pariksha* also helps in understanding a person's *Ahara Vihara* (diet and lifestyle).

5. Before performing *Shodhana Karma* (purification therapies), *Snehapana* (internal oleation) is an essential *Purvakarma* (preparatory procedure). *Sneha dravya* and *Sneha Matra* can be determined by *Koshtha Pariksha*.

6. *Koshtha* assessment is also important in *Shodhana Chikitsa* (purification therapies) such as *Basti* (enema), *Virechana* (purgation), and *Vamana* (emesis), which are the main Ayurvedic treatments for *Dosha* elimination. These therapies are indicated for *Krura, Mridu, and Madhyama Koshtha*, respectively, based on the dominance of *Vata, Pitta, and Kapha Dosha*.

7 It helps to determine whether a disease is *Koshthagata* (related to the gastrointestinal tract), *Shakhagata* (related to the extremities), or *Madhyama* (related to the deeper tissues and organs).

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Koshtha* holds significant value both anatomically and physiologically. Here's an overview of its importance [1]:

1.5. Anatomical and Physiological Significance of Koshtha

Anatomical Perspective: *Koshtha* refers to the cavity or space within the body that houses vital organs such as the stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas, intestines, and pelvic organs like the uterus and urinary bladder. This space is crucial

for the accommodation and proper functioning of these organs. It is also known as *Mahanimna*, *Mahasrotasa* (Alimentary tract) [1]

Physiologically, *Koshtha* represents the functional state of the digestive tract and its motility. It is indicative of how well the digestive system processes and moves food and waste.

2. Discussion

2.1. Expression of *Koshtha*

In Ayurveda, the nature of *Koshtha* is primarily determined based on how the bowels respond to certain purgatives. Each individual has a different response, largely influenced by the enteric nervous system. The reflex responses originating from this system can vary among individuals. Based on these reflexes, Ayurveda classifies bowel nature into three categories: *Mridu*, *Madhya*, and *Krura Koshtha*. The physiological understanding of these three *Koshtha* might be as follows;

2.1.1. *Mridu Koshtha*

When the parasympathetic defecation reflex acts in conjunction with the intrinsic defecation reflex (mediated by the local enteric nervous system), it significantly intensifies peristaltic waves and relaxes the internal anal sphincter. This converts a weak intrinsic defecation reflex into a strong defecation process that can sometimes result in the complete emptying of the large bowel at once.[3]

Individuals with *Mridu Koshtha* may have a faster gastrointestinal response due to more rapid enteric nervous system activation. The myenteric plexus in such individuals responds more quickly.

These individuals may also exhibit a faster secretory and hormonal response in the gastrointestinal tract, leading to quicker digestion and easier, more rapid defecation.

These characteristics are likely due to the *Tikshna* (sharp) and *Ushna* (hot) qualities of Pitta, which are predominant in such individuals. People with *Mridu Koshtha* tend to have semi-solid stools because of the *Drava* (liquid) property of Pitta.

These individuals often have loose stools, which may indicate either higher water intake or reduced water absorption due to rapid peristaltic movements.

Due to their sensitive myenteric plexus, individuals with *Mridu Koshtha* may be more prone to frequent diarrhea.

These individuals experience quick bowel movements, potentially due to the *Drava* (liquid) and *Sara* (flowing) properties present in their constitution.

2.1.2. *Krura koshtha*

Individuals with *Krura Koshtha* may have a slower expression of gastrointestinal factors, with a slower enteric response compared to those with more relaxed bowels.

The myenteric plexus response is slower, and the submucosal plexuses may exert a more inhibitory effect, acting more slowly on the intestinal muscles. This can lead to delayed bowel emptying and frequent constipation.

This characteristic is associated with the *Manda* (slow) property of *Kapha*, which contributes to the *Krura* nature of *Koshtha*.

These individuals may have a reduced or slower secretory response, resulting in slow digestion, gradual fecal formation, and delayed defecation.

The *Ruksha* (dry) property of *Vata*, which is predominant in *Krura Koshtha*, may be responsible for these actions. *Vata* dominance also indicates the irregularity (*Vishamata*) associated with *Krura Koshtha*, suggesting variability in gastrointestinal activity.

The presence of hard stools suggests higher water absorption in the intestines compared to others.

It may also indicate that these individuals consume less water than others.

2.1.3. Madhya Koshtha

Individuals with Madhya Koshtha have formed smooth stools due to the *Snigdha* (unctuous) property of Kapha. Their gastrointestinal response is slower than that of *Mridu Koshtha* but faster than that of *Krura Koshtha*.

3. Conclusion

Physiologically, *Koshtha* relates to the functional state of the digestive tract and its motility. By categorizing *Koshtha* into *Krura*, *Mridu*, *Madhyama*, and *Sama* based on *Dosha* predominance, Ayurveda provides a framework for assessing and addressing digestive health comprehensively. *Koshtha Parikshna* is essential for accurate diagnosis and effective treatment in Ayurvedic practices. It enables practitioners to identify the type of digestive disorder, select appropriate medications, and determine correct dosages. Furthermore, it informs dietary and lifestyle recommendations and guides preparatory treatments for detoxification therapies, such as *Snehapana*. Understanding *Koshtha* allows for personalized treatment planning, aligning interventions with the individual's digestive constitution to enhance therapeutic outcomes. This approach underscores the significance of *Koshtha* not only in diagnosing and treating digestive issues but also in promoting overall health and well-being. By integrating anatomical insights with physiological understanding, Ayurveda offers a holistic perspective on digestive health, facilitating tailored care and improving patient outcomes.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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