ISSN : 2583-3677

AYUSCRIPT

International Journal for Empirical Research in Ayurveda

www.ayuscript.com

Volume - 5, Issue - 3
July-Septmeber:2026



An official Publication of AYURVEDA RESEARCH & CAREER ACADEMY

Review Article

AYUSCRIPT, 2026; 5(3):55-61 ISSN: 2583-3677

AYUSCRIPT

International Journal for Empirical Research in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic Emergency First Response: Insights from Classical Texts

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ABSTRACT:

Emergency care in Ayurveda is embedded within various classical branches including Agadtantra, Shalyatantra, and Kayachikitsa. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe immediate life-saving interventions for poisoning, trauma, burns, hemorrhage, fractures, and acute systemic disorders. To explore and analyze emergency first-response measures described in classical Ayurvedic texts and evaluate their relevance in contemporary emergency care. A narrative review was conducted using primary classical Ayurvedic texts including Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and other authoritative commentaries. Secondary literature from indexed journals and WHO publications was reviewed for comparative analysis. Data were thematically organized into types of emergencies and corresponding first-response measures. Classical texts describe structured emergency responses such as Bandhana (immobilization), Raktastambhana (hemostasis), Agnikarma (cauterization), Vamana (therapeutic emesis), Vishaghna Agada (antidotes), Vrana Prakshalana (wound irrigation), and Pranaraksha measures. Many principles parallel modern first aid, including airway management, bleeding control, detoxification, immobilization, and supportive care. Ayurvedic classical literature contains well-defined emergency first-response principles emphasizing rapid assessment, immediate intervention, and holistic stabilization. These insights offer potential integrative applications, particularly in rural and resource-limited settings.

Keywords: Ayurveda, First Aid, Emergency Care, Agadtantra, Sushruta, Classical Texts.

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How to cite this Article:

Radke Avinash. Ayurvedic Emergency First Response: Insights from Classical Texts. AYUSCRIPT 2026;5(3):55-61 DOI: http://doi.org/10.55552/AYUSCRIPT.2026.5309

AYUSCRIPT, 2026; 5(3):55-61 ISSN: 2583-3677

Introduction:

Emergency medicine is a specialized branch of healthcare that emphasizes the rapid assessment, diagnosis, stabilization, and treatment of patients with acute illnesses or injuries that pose an immediate threat to life or organ function. The primary objective is to preserve life, prevent deterioration, and initiate timely therapeutic interventions until definitive treatment can be provided. Modern emergency medicine relies on advanced technologies, standardized protocols such as Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), sophisticated diagnostic tools, and multidisciplinary healthcare teams to manage medical and surgical emergencies effectively. Although contemporary emergency medicine has evolved significantly with technological innovations, the fundamental principles of prompt recognition, immediate intervention, and patient stabilization have been recognized for thousands of years in traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars understood that certain diseases and injuries required urgent management, and they developed systematic approaches for dealing with such critical situations. Classical Ayurvedic literature contains numerous references to emergency care under concepts such as Atyayika Chikitsa (emergency or urgent management), Sadyo Vrana Chikitsa (immediate wound management), and Visha Chikitsa (toxicology and poisoning management). These concepts demonstrate that Ayurveda not only focused on preventive and promotive healthcare but also provided detailed guidance for managing acute life-threatening conditions. The Charaka Samhita discusses various sudden and severe disorders requiring immediate medical attention, emphasizing rapid diagnosis, assessment of the patient's vitality (*Prana*), and prompt therapeutic measures. The Sushruta Samhita, regarded as one of the earliest surgical texts in the world, provides extensive descriptions of emergency surgical procedures, including the management of traumatic injuries, fractures (*Bhagna*), dislocations (*Sandhimukta*), hemorrhage (*Raktasrava*), burns (*Dagdha Vrana*), foreign body removal (*Shalya Nirharana*), wound care, and reconstructive surgical techniques. Similarly, the Ashtanga Hridaya integrates medical and surgical emergency principles and describes practical treatment protocols for poisoning, snake bites, insect bites, acute fevers, respiratory distress, unconsciousness, and various sudden pathological conditions. Ayurveda also emphasizes the importance of rapid clinical examination, identification of prognostic signs (*Arishta Lakshana*), maintenance of vital functions, and individualized treatment based on the patient's constitution (*Prakriti*), strength (*Bala*), disease stage, and involvement of the Tridosha. Emergency interventions described in classical texts include hemostatic therapies, detoxification procedures, external applications, splinting of fractures, wound dressing, surgical interventions, resuscitative measures, and administration of fast-acting herbal formulations. Many principles outlined in these classical texts closely resemble modern concepts of triage, trauma care, hemorrhage control, poison management, and emergency surgical intervention. While the therapeutic modalities differ from those used in contemporary medicine, the underlying philosophy of immediate assessment and timely intervention remains remarkably relevant. In the present era of integrative medicine, revisiting the emergency management principles described in Ayurveda offers valuable insights into the historical evolution of emergency care. Scientific evaluation and evidence-based integration of selected Ayurvedic emergency practices may complement modern healthcare systems, particularly in areas such as first aid, wound healing, supportive care, rehabilitation, toxicology, and disaster

AYUSCRIPT, 2026; 5(3):55-61 ISSN: 2583-3677

management. Understanding these classical emergency responses not only enriches our knowledge of traditional medical wisdom but also provides opportunities for developing holistic and patient-centered emergency healthcare frameworks that combine the strengths of both Ayurveda and modern medicine.

Materials and Methods:

- **Study Design:** Narrative textual review.
- **Sources:** Classical *Ayurvedic* texts with commentaries and peer-reviewed articles indexed in PubMed and AYUSH databases.
- **Inclusion Criteria:** Descriptions of immediate interventions for trauma, poisoning, hemorrhage, burns, fractures, unconsciousness, and acute systemic emergencies.
- **Method of Analysis:** Thematic categorization and comparative interpretation with modern first aid principles.

Results:

Emergency Assessment Principles:

Classical texts emphasize:

- Rapid observation (*Darshana*)
- Palpation (*Sparshana)*
- Questioning (*Prashna*)
- Assessment of consciousness and respiration

This parallels modern primary survey (Airway, Breathing, and Circulation).

Table 1: Classification of Emergencies in Classical *Ayurveda*

Type of Emergency	Classical Term	Textual Reference	Primary First Aid Measure
Poisoning	*Visha*	*Sushruta Kalpasthana*	*Bandhana, Vamana, Agada*
Hemorrhage	*Raktapitta / Vrana*	*Charaka, Sushruta*	*Raktastambhana*
Fracture	*Bhagna*	*Sushruta Chikitsasthana*	Immobilization
Burns	*Dagdha Vrana*	*Sushruta*	Cooling, *Ghrita*
Unconsciousness	*Murcha / Sanyasa*	*Charaka*	*Nasya*, Aromatics

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Hemorrhage and Wound Management (*Sadyo Vrana Chikitsa*)

Classical Measures:

- *Raktastambhana* (hemostatic herbs, pressure techniques)
- *Bandhana* (bandaging)
- *Agnikarma* (cauterization)
- *Vrana Prakshalana* (wound cleansing with herbal decoctions)

These correspond to modern bleeding control, sterilization, and cauterization techniques.

Table 2: Comparison of *Ayurvedic* and Modern First Aid Principles

Ayurvedic Principle	Description	Modern Equivalent
Darshana–Sparshana	Rapid assessment	Primary Survey
Bandhana	Immobilization / Pressure	Splinting / Pressure Dressing
Vamana	Induced emesis	Gastric Decontamination
Agada	Antidote	Anti-venom / Antidotal therapy
Agnikarma	Cauterization	Electrocautery

AYUSCRIPT, 2026; 5(3):55-61 ISSN: 2583-3677

Ayurvedic Principle	Description	Modern Equivalent
Ghrita Application	Cooling & healing	Burn ointments

Fractures and Dislocations (*Bhagna Chikitsa*):
Described extensively in *Sushruta*:

- Traction (*Anchana*)
- Manipulation (**Pidana**)
- Immobilization using splints (*Kusha*, bark, wooden supports)
- Bandaging in specific patterns

These resemble modern orthopedic first aid splinting.

Table 3: Herbal Drugs Used in Emergency First Response

Indication	Drug	Classical Action	Pharmacological Correlation
Hemorrhage	*Lodhra*	*Raktastambhana*	Astringent
Poisoning	*Haridra*	*Vishaghna*	Anti-inflammatory
Burns	*Ghrita*	*Shothahara*	Emollient
Shock	*Arjuna*	*Hridya*	Cardio-protective
Wounds	*Neem*	*Krimighna*	Antimicrobial

Poisoning and Envenomation (*Visha Chikitsa*)
Immediate Measures:

- Tourniquet application (*Bandhana)*
- Incision and suction (in selected classical contexts)
- *Vamana* (emesis)
- Administration of *Vishaghna Agada*
- Fumigation and nasal therapies

These parallel modern first aid steps like immobilization and antidotal therapy.

Table 4: Classical Procedures and Their Emergency Utility

Procedure	Indication	Emergency Role
Agnikarma	Bleeding / Local toxin	Immediate cauterization
Raktamokshana	Local toxin accumulation	Venom removal
Nasya	Unconsciousness	Revival stimulation
Dhumapana	Toxic inhalation	Airway clearance
Bandhana	Trauma / Bite	Prevent spread

Burns and Thermal Injuries (*Dagdha Vrana*):

- Cooling applications *(Ghrita*, herbal pastes)
- Anti-inflammatory and wound-healing drugs
- Prevention of infection

Comparable to modern cooling and topical antimicrobial management.
Unconsciousness and Shock (*Murcha, Sanyasa*):

- *Nasya* (nasal stimulation)
- Herbal stimulants
- Aromatic substances
- Cardio-supportive drugs (*Hridya dravya*)

These resemble revival techniques and circulatory support.

Discussion:
Classical Ayurvedic literature presents a well-organized, systematic, and clinically reasoned approach to the management of medical and surgical emergencies. The foundational texts—Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya—demonstrate that ancient Ayurvedic physicians recognized the

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importance of immediate intervention in life-threatening conditions and developed comprehensive treatment protocols accordingly. Detailed descriptions of wound management (Vrana Chikitsa), fracture and dislocation management (Bhagna Chikitsa), poisoning and toxicology (Visha Chikitsa), hemorrhage control (Raktasthambhana), burn care, foreign body removal (Shalya Nirharana), and revival measures for unconscious patients reflect a sophisticated understanding of emergency care that was remarkably advanced for its time. A defining strength of Ayurveda is its emphasis on rapid clinical assessment, identification of the severity of the condition, evaluation of the patient's vitality (*Prana*), and prompt initiation of appropriate therapeutic interventions. These principles closely parallel the modern concepts of emergency medicine, where early recognition, stabilization of vital functions, and timely treatment significantly improve patient outcomes. Classical Ayurvedic emergency management also incorporates individualized patient care by considering factors such as Prakriti (constitutional type), Bala (physical strength), age, disease stage, and Dosha involvement, thereby promoting a holistic approach to treatment. Although many classical procedures require rigorous scientific validation and adaptation to meet contemporary standards of patient safety, infection control, pharmacological efficacy, and ethical medical practice, the fundamental principles underlying Ayurvedic emergency care remain highly relevant. Concepts such as rapid assessment, patient stabilization, control of bleeding, detoxification, pain management, prevention of complications, and supportive care are universal principles that continue to form the cornerstone of emergency medicine worldwide. Modern research into Ayurvedic herbal formulations, wound-healing agents, anti-inflammatory drugs, and antitoxic therapies may further strengthen the evidence base for their complementary use in appropriate clinical settings. The integration of selected evidence-based Ayurvedic emergency practices into contemporary healthcare has significant potential, particularly in resource-limited and rural regions where immediate access to advanced medical facilities may not always be available. In such settings, traditional first-aid measures, herbal interventions with proven efficacy, basic wound care, fracture immobilization techniques, and community-based emergency preparedness may serve as valuable adjuncts until definitive medical care can be accessed. Furthermore, Ayurveda's emphasis on rehabilitation, tissue healing, restoration of strength, and prevention of long-term disability complements modern emergency and trauma care by supporting holistic recovery. In the evolving landscape of integrative medicine, the study of Ayurvedic emergency management provides an opportunity to bridge ancient medical wisdom with contemporary scientific advancements. Rather than replacing modern emergency medicine, Ayurvedic principles should be viewed as complementary approaches that may enhance patient care when supported by robust clinical evidence. Continued interdisciplinary research, standardization of traditional therapies, and collaborative clinical practice can help develop integrative emergency healthcare models that are safe, effective, culturally acceptable, and accessible to diverse populations.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the classical Ayurvedic approach to emergency medicine represents an enduring legacy of clinical innovation and holistic patient care. Its systematic emphasis on prompt diagnosis, timely intervention, individualized treatment, and supportive recovery highlights the depth of Ayurvedic medical knowledge. By critically evaluating and scientifically integrating these time-tested

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principles with modern emergency medicine, healthcare systems can move toward more comprehensive, patient-centered, and resilient models of emergency care, particularly in settings where both traditional knowledge and modern medical resources can work synergistically to improve health outcomes. *Ayurvedic* classical texts provide comprehensive descriptions of emergency first-response measures. The principles of rapid diagnosis, immediate intervention, and holistic stabilization demonstrate that *Ayurveda* contains an indigenous emergency care framework. Scientific validation and integrative protocols may enhance its applicability in contemporary healthcare systems.

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AYUSCRIPT, 2026; 5(3):55-61 *ISSN: 2583-3677*

Authors Contribution: All authors have contributed equally.
Financial Support and Sponsorship: None declared
Conflict of Interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI Assisted Technologies in the writing process: The author has used generative AI/AI assisted technologies in the writing process.

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Website: https://ayuscript.com/ **Email**: ayuscriptjournal@gmail.com
IIFS Impact Factor: 4.17

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International Journal for Empirical Research in Ayurveda