

Nature's Pharmacy: A Scientific Investigation into Ayurvedic and Japanese Remedies

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Abstract: *Modern medicine has significantly advanced the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases. However, treatment outcomes vary among individuals, and some patients continue to experience symptoms despite receiving conventional care. These challenges have encouraged scientific interest in nutrition, lifestyle modifications, and traditional medical practices as potential complementary approaches to healthcare. This study aims to critically examine the strengths and limitations of conventional medical treatment and evaluate the scientific evidence for selected foods and traditional remedies, focusing particularly on digestive health. A structured literature review will examine peer-reviewed research, systematic reviews, clinical trials, and recognised medical guidelines. The review will investigate selected examples, including Triphala, amla, dates, and Japanese Kampo formulations such as Rikkunshito and Daikenchuto. Their proposed biological functions, reported health benefits, safety concerns, and levels of clinical evidence will be compared with relevant conventional approaches. Particular attention will be given to distinguishing nutritional benefits and preliminary findings from evidence demonstrating effectiveness in treating a specific disease. The study will not assume that natural approaches are universally superior to modern medicine. Instead, it will investigate which interventions have credible scientific support, where the evidence remains uncertain, and whether selected approaches may complement conventional healthcare. By identifying potential benefits, limitations, and research gaps, this review aims to promote a balanced, evidence-based understanding of nutrition, traditional medicine, and modern medical treatment.*

Keywords: Modern medicine, natural healing, Triphala, amla, dates, Kampo medicine, dietary interventions, digestive health, evidence-based healthcare

1. Introduction

Modern medicine has transformed healthcare through advances in pharmaceutical treatments, surgery, diagnostic technologies, vaccination, and disease prevention. These developments have improved survival and quality of life for many people. Conventional treatments are essential for managing numerous conditions, including serious infections, nutritional deficiencies, and chronic diseases. Nevertheless, medical treatments have limitations: some may cause adverse effects, some patients may respond differently to the same treatment, and certain chronic conditions require long-term symptom management. These challenges make it important to investigate treatment effectiveness, safety, and complementary approaches without overlooking the established benefits of modern medicine.

Nutrition and lifestyle are important influences on health. Food provides essential nutrients, while dietary patterns can affect energy levels, bowel function, and general wellbeing. For selected conditions, evidence-based dietary changes may support symptom management or form part of treatment. However, the effects of food depend on its nutritional composition, the individual's health, and the condition being investigated. A food that supports general nutrition should not automatically be considered a treatment for a disease.

Traditional healthcare systems provide further areas for scientific investigation. Ayurveda, associated with the Indian subcontinent, includes dietary practices and herbal formulations such as Triphala. Triphala is traditionally prepared from three fruits: amla (*Phyllanthus emblica*), haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*), and bibhitaki (*Terminalia bellirica*). Its traditional use and proposed biological effects make it a subject for research, although evidence from high-

quality human studies is needed to establish its effectiveness for particular conditions.

Amla contains vitamin C and other plant compounds, including polyphenols. Dates provide carbohydrates, dietary fibre, and minerals and can contribute to a balanced diet. These foods illustrate how familiar dietary components may support nutrition. However, their nutritional value does not prove that they can independently cure digestive disorders or other diseases. Dates, in particular, are not a reliable source of vitamin B12 and should not be considered a treatment for vitamin B12 deficiency.

Japanese traditional medicine offers additional examples. Kampo is a system that includes specific herbal formulations used in clinical settings in Japan. Rikkunshito has been investigated for upper gastrointestinal symptoms, including functional dyspepsia. A systematic review found mixed results and concluded that its effectiveness remained uncertain because of limitations in the available studies. Daikenchuto has also been examined in clinical research; one randomised, placebo-controlled study reported improvements in selected constipation-related outcomes, although findings from a particular study population cannot automatically be applied to everyone.

These examples demonstrate why natural foods, traditional formulations, and conventional medicines must be evaluated according to the conditions they are intended to treat and the strength of the evidence supporting them. Traditional use may provide useful research questions, but it is not sufficient by itself to establish effectiveness or safety. Similarly, limitations in conventional treatment do not mean that traditional remedies are necessarily more effective.

The present study therefore aims to critically examine the limitations of conventional medical treatment and evaluate selected dietary and traditional approaches, focusing on their possible roles in digestive health. It will compare reported benefits, safety concerns, and the quality of available evidence to identify where these approaches may be useful and where further research is required.

2. Research Aim and Questions

2.1 Aim

To critically evaluate the limitations of conventional medical treatment and investigate the scientific evidence for selected foods, dietary practices, and traditional remedies as potential approaches to supporting health, particularly digestive health.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1) What limitations of conventional treatment are reported in research on recurrent abdominal pain and functional digestive disorders?
- 2) What nutritional or biological functions are associated with Triphala, amla, and dates, and what clinical evidence supports their proposed health benefits?
- 3) What does published research indicate about selected Japanese Kampo formulations, particularly Rikkunshito and Daikenchuto?
- 4) How strong is the evidence supporting these approaches, and what safety concerns or research gaps remain?
- 5) Under what circumstances might evidence-based dietary or traditional approaches complement conventional medical care?

3. Methods

3.1 Study Design

A structured literature review will be conducted to evaluate published scientific evidence on conventional medical treatment, dietary approaches, and selected traditional remedies. The review will focus on digestive health while including relevant research on the nutritional properties of the selected foods.

This study will analyse existing research rather than administer treatments or conduct clinical experiments.

3.2 Information Sources

The following sources will be searched:

- PubMed/MEDLINE
- Cochrane Library
- Google Scholar
- Relevant clinical practice guidelines and official health publications

Priority will be given to peer-reviewed systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomised controlled trials, and well-designed human studies.

3.3 Search Strategy

Search terms will include combinations of:

- “Recurrent abdominal pain” and “functional digestive disorders”
- “Triphala” and “clinical evidence”
- “Phyllanthus emblica” and “health outcomes”
- “Dates” and “dietary fibre”
- “Rikkunshito” and “functional dyspepsia”
- “Daikenchuto” and “constipation”
- “Conventional treatment” and “adverse effects”
- “Traditional medicine” and “clinical effectiveness”

Search terms will be adapted to each database. The review will prioritise research published between January 2015 and October 2026, while including older influential studies when they are necessary for understanding the evidence base. The actual search dates and results will be documented during the research process.

3.4 Inclusion Criteria

Studies will be considered if they:

- Evaluate a relevant food, dietary intervention, traditional formulation, or conventional treatment.
- Report health outcomes, biological functions, safety, or adverse effects.
- Are peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or recognised clinical guidelines.
- Provide sufficient information about the study design and intervention.
- Clearly identify the population and condition studied, where applicable.

3.5 Exclusion Criteria

Studies will be excluded if they:

- Make unsupported claims that a food or remedy cures all diseases.
- Present testimonials as conclusive scientific evidence.
- Lack verifiable sources or sufficient methodological information.
- Do not relate to the research questions.
- Make claims about an entire traditional medical system based on evidence from only one intervention.

3.6 Data Extraction

For each eligible source, the following information will be recorded:

- 1) Author and year of publication.
- 2) Study design and number of participants, where available.
- 3) Population and health condition.
- 4) Food, formulation, or medical treatment investigated.
- 5) Comparison group, if applicable.
- 6) Proposed mechanism or nutritional role.
- 7) Main outcomes and reported benefits.
- 8) Adverse effects and safety concerns.
- 9) Study limitations and certainty of evidence.

3.7 Data Analysis

The findings will be organised into four categories:

- 1) Conventional medical treatment: Reported benefits, adverse effects, incomplete responses, and limitations of specific treatments.
- 2) Foods and nutrition: Nutritional properties of amla and dates, and evidence relating to Triphala's constituent fruits and formulation.
- 3) Traditional treatments: Clinical evidence for selected Ayurvedic and Japanese Kampo formulations, including Rikkunshito and Daikenchuto.
- 4) Comparative interpretation: The strength of evidence, applicability to particular conditions, safety, and potential for complementary use alongside conventional healthcare.

A narrative synthesis will be used to compare findings. Nutritional studies, laboratory experiments, animal research, and human clinical trials will be distinguished because they provide different levels of evidence. Findings from one condition will not automatically be generalised to another.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This literature review will use previously published research and will not involve clinical experiments or the collection of identifiable patient information. If future work includes surveys or interviews, participant consent, privacy, safety, and applicable ethics-review requirements will be assessed before data collection.

4. Limitations

The review may be limited by the availability and quality of published research. Some traditional remedies have fewer rigorous human trials than established medical treatments, and studies may differ in formulation, dosage, population, and outcome measures. Foods and herbal formulations also cannot be treated as equivalent interventions: the nutritional benefits of a food do not establish its effectiveness as a medicine.

The review will not assume that natural approaches are safer or more effective simply because they are natural, nor that conventional medicine is ineffective because it has limitations. Conclusions will be restricted to the interventions and conditions supported by the available evidence. The review will also avoid making treatment recommendations for individual patients.

5. Expected Contribution

This review is intended to clarify the difference between traditional use, nutritional value, proposed biological mechanisms, and demonstrated clinical effectiveness. By examining specific examples from Indian and Japanese healthcare traditions alongside conventional treatment, it may identify promising areas for further research and highlight where evidence remains insufficient. The study aims to support informed discussion about how nutrition, traditional

knowledge, and evidence-based medicine may contribute to healthcare without treating them as mutually exclusive.

References

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