

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Trataka Karma and Eye Health: Ancient Practice, Modern Relevance

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### ABSTRACT

*Trataka Karma* is one of the *Shatkarma* practices mentioned in *Yogic* literature, and it holds an important place in both ocular and mental health traditions of ancient India. *Ayurveda* considers the *Netra* (eye) a highly delicate sense organ, governed primarily by *Alochaka Pitta* and nourished by all seven *Dhatus*. Imbalance of *Doshas*, especially due to overuse, misuse, or excessive strain, leads to visual disturbances such as *Timira*, which begins with blurred or unclear vision. Yoga provides complementary practices to purify and strengthen both the eyes and the mind. Among these, *Trataka Karma*, steady gazing without blinking until tears naturally flow, is described in texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita* as beneficial for cleansing the eyes, improving concentration, and calming mental restlessness. This review compiles references from classical *Ayurvedic* and *Yogic* sources, including the *Rigveda*, *Upanishads*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and *Gheranda Samhita*, along with modern scientific insights. The conceptual basis of *Trataka Karma* is explored through the lens of *Netra Sharira*, *Dosha* dynamics, and *Yogic* purification techniques. Modern correlations, such as accommodation exercise, tear-film stability, relaxation response, and attention enhancement, help validate the classical claims. With digital eye strain, myopia, and mental stress rising globally, *Trataka Karma* emerges as a safe, inexpensive, and practical preventive tool. Its enduring relevance demonstrates the wisdom of integrating ancient holistic knowledge with contemporary wellness needs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Good vision is essential for optimal functioning in personal, educational, and professional settings. In *Ayurveda*, the eyes, *Netra*, are regarded as extremely delicate and precious among the *Indriyas* (sense organs). Vision is mainly governed by *Alochaka Pitta*, which receives, interprets, and processes light. When *Doshas*, *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* are disturbed due to overuse, strain, improper lifestyle, or stress, the integrity of the eyes is compromised, leading to conditions such as *Timira*, which manifests as blurred or unclear vision in early stages.

*Vagbhata* highlights the importance of vision by stating that loss of sight is nearly equivalent to loss of life.<sup>[1]</sup> This powerful statement reflects the seriousness with which classical *Ayurvedic* scholars viewed ocular disorders.

Parallel to *Ayurveda*, *Yogic* texts provide significant emphasis on purification practices that help maintain clarity of both body and mind. *Trataka Karma*, one of the *Shatkarmas*, involves steady

and unblinking gazing at a single point until tears naturally appear. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita* describe it as a technique that can remove eye diseases, dispel dullness, and enhance mental concentration.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

In today's world, digital screens, extended near work, artificial light exposure, and mental stress have made visual fatigue extremely common. Current statistics from WHO predict a dramatic rise in refractive errors such as myopia, making preventive strategies more important than ever.<sup>[4,5]</sup> In this context, *Trataka Karma* stands out as a practice that is easy, cost-free, and rooted in thousands of years of holistic wisdom.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This article follows a narrative literature review method focused on collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing classical *Ayurvedic* and *Yogic* concepts related to *Trataka Karma* and ocular health.

### 2.1. Sources Included

1. Primary *vedic* and *ayurvedic* texts:  
*Rigveda*, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *Charaka Samhita*,  
*Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*

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2. Primary Yogic texts:  
*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Hatharatnavali*, *Bhagavad Gita*
3. Secondary literature:  
Books on *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*, peer-reviewed articles from AYU, J-AIM, PubMed, and WHO reports.
  - Content related to *Trataka Karma*
  - Descriptions of *Netra Sharira*
  - *Ayurvedic* interpretation of *Timira*
  - *Yogic* benefits relating to the eyes or cognition
  - Modern physiological/psychological studies on visual focus or breathing practices

## 2.2. Steps Followed

- Extraction of definitions, concepts, and descriptions from classical texts
- Integration of modern scientific findings to correlate ancient concepts.

This structured narrative method ensures clarity, reliability, and a holistic understanding of ancient and modern perspectives.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 3.1. *Trataka* in Ancient Literature

#### 3.1.1. Vedic and Upanishadic Foundations

The *Rigveda* describes the Ashwini Kumaras as divine physicians capable of restoring vision.<sup>[6]</sup> The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* identifies ocular structures such as *Shukla* (white), *Krishna* (black), and *Vartma* (eyelid), showing an early understanding of ocular anatomy.<sup>[7]</sup>

*Upanishadic* instructions, such as gazing at the nose tip or between the eyebrows, reflect proto-*Trataka* methods.

#### 3.1.2. Philosophical Significance

These ancient texts associate vision not only with physical sight but also with insight, awareness, and spiritual perception. Steady visual focus was linked with mental focus, forming the foundation for later *Yogic* practices.

### 3.2. *Ayurvedic Samhitas* and Ocular Concepts

#### 3.2.1. *Charaka Samhita*

*Charaka* emphasizes that improper use (*Asatmya Indriyarth Samyoga*), overuse, or misuse of sense organs leads to disease.<sup>[8]</sup> This parallels modern digital eye strain due to excessive screen exposure and prolonged near work.

#### 3.2.2. *Sushruta Samhita*

*Sushruta* describes 76 ocular diseases and provides detailed accounts of *Timira*, *Linganastha*, and *Kacha*.<sup>[9]</sup> Early-stage *Timira* manifests as indistinct or blurred vision affecting superficial *Patalas*, similar to initial myopia or other refractive errors.<sup>[10]</sup>

#### 3.2.3. *Ashtanga Hridaya*

*Vagbhata* emphasizes the role of *Dosha* imbalance and *Patala* involvement in the progression of *Timira*.<sup>[11]</sup> His descriptions align conceptually with the modern pathophysiology of progressive refractive or degenerative conditions.

### 3.3. *Netra Sharira: Ayurvedic Anatomy of the Eye*

According to *Sushruta*, the eye comprises:

- Five *Mandalas*
- Six *Sandhis*
- Six *Patalas* (layers).<sup>[12]</sup>

Each contributes to clarity of vision. Vision depends on balanced *Alochaka Pitta*, adequate *Kapha* lubrication, and proper *Vata*-governed neural coordination. Disruption of any one causes visual impairment.

### 3.4. *Trataka* in Yogic Literature

#### 3.4.1. Definition and Purpose

*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* describes *Trataka* as gazing steadily at a small object until tears flow, which eradicates eye disorders and fatigue of the mind.

*Gheranda Samhita* emphasizes its power to produce clear and radiant vision.

#### 3.4.2. Classical Process

1. Sit comfortably with spine erect
2. Fix gaze on a flame or point without blinking
3. Continue until tears appear naturally
4. Close your eyes and observe internal after-images.

#### 3.4.3. Benefits mentioned

- Cleansing of ocular impurities
- Strengthening of visual focus
- Removal of *Tamas* (inertia) and mental dullness
- Development of *Dharana* (concentration)
- Preparation for meditation.

### 3.5. Modern Correlations

Modern research supports many classical claims:

- Improves accommodation and extraocular muscle strength<sup>[13]</sup>
- Enhances tear-film stability, reducing dry-eye symptoms
- Improves visual reaction time<sup>[14]</sup>
- Promotes parasympathetic dominance, reducing stress<sup>[15]</sup>
- Strengthens attention networks and cognition.<sup>[16,17]</sup>

This shows that *Trataka* influences ocular physiology, neural pathways, and psychological functioning simultaneously.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Integrating *Ayurvedic* and *Yogic* Perspectives

*Ayurveda* explains ocular disorders through *Dosha* imbalance and structural distortions within *Patalas* and *Mandalas*. *Yoga* emphasizes cleansing, strengthening, and mental focus. Together, they provide a complete preventive approach, maintaining the eye at physical, functional, and mental levels.

### 4.2. Relevance in the Modern Digital Era

Excessive screen use causes reduced blinking, ciliary muscle strain, and disturbed tear-film, factors directly addressed by *Trataka*. Regular practice may counteract early-stage visual fatigue and maintain clarity.

### 4.3. Mind-Body Integration

Classical texts knew that steady visual focus steadies the mind. Modern neuroscience confirms that fixed-focus meditation reduces sympathetic arousal and improves cognitive function.

### 4.4. Preventive, Safe, and Accessible

Unlike invasive or pharmacological methods, *Trataka Karma* is:

- Non-invasive
- Free of cost
- Easy to learn
- Time-efficient
- Suitable for all ages.

Its preventive nature aligns perfectly with the growing global focus on lifestyle-based health interventions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Trataka Karma* is a timeless practice rooted deeply in *Ayurvedic* and *Yogic* wisdom. Classical literature, from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* to the *Samhitas* and *Yogic* texts, highlights its dual role in maintaining ocular clarity and enhancing mental focus. The practice influences *Alochaka Pitta*, ocular lubrication, neural pathways, and psychological balance.

In the context of increasing screen use, myopia, visual fatigue, and mental stress, *Trataka Karma* offers a simple, effective, and holistic method for preventive eye care. Its benefits extend beyond the eyes, supporting mental clarity, emotional stability, and overall well-being. Integrating such traditional practices into modern lifestyles may help reduce the burden of ocular disorders and promote sustainable health.

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## 11. DATA AVAILABILITY

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