

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Pathya-Apathya in Preventive Cardiology: A Critical Appraisal in the Contemporary Scenario

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### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, accords prime importance to the *Hridaya* (heart) as a vital organ governing both physiological and psychological functions. Classical Ayurvedic texts describe the *Hridaya* as a principal *Marma* and the seat of *Ojas*, *Chetana* (consciousness), and *Manas* (mind), emphasizing its indispensable role in sustaining life. Ayurvedic literature explains that even minor disturbances of the heart resulting from improper *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (psychological factors) may manifest as *Murchha* (syncope) or *Sanyasa* (loss of consciousness), while severe impairment can lead to fatal consequences. Hence, preservation of cardiac health is regarded as a cornerstone of preventive medicine in Ayurveda, with special emphasis on maintaining mental equilibrium and emotional stability. Ayurveda advocates the systematic adoption of *Hridya* (cardio-protective) dietary regimens, lifestyle practices, and behavioral measures to nourish and protect the heart. The present article reviews and analyzes the preventive and heart-protective principles described in classical Ayurvedic texts and discusses their relevance in the promotion of cardiovascular health and holistic well-being.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

William Harvey (1578–1657) is credited with describing systemic blood circulation in his work *De Motu Cordis* (1628). However, classical Ayurvedic texts, particularly the *Charaka Samhita*, had already elaborated on the *Hridaya* (heart), its associated channels (*Srotas*),<sup>[1]</sup> and its vital role in sustaining life centuries earlier. The heart is metaphorically described as the central pillar of the body, reflecting its foundational importance in maintaining physiological and psychological integrity.

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are currently the leading cause of mortality worldwide in both men and women. In 2008, approximately 17.3 million deaths were attributed to heart-related conditions, with over 80% occurring in low- and middle-income countries. The global burden of CVDs is projected to rise in the coming years.

These disorders include ischemic heart disease, stroke, hypertension, heart failure, and congenital cardiac anomalies, among others. The

increasing prevalence of cardiovascular conditions highlights the urgent need for effective preventive strategies.

Ayurveda offers a holistic and preventive approach through concepts, such as *Hridaya*, *Ojas*, and *Hridya* measures, emphasizing the maintenance of cardiac function and mental equilibrium.<sup>[2]</sup> A critical analysis of these classical principles provides valuable insights for integrative and preventive strategies in modern cardiovascular health.

In the contemporary era, lifestyle-related disorders – often referred to as “life-style disorders” – have reached epidemic proportions, contributing significantly to cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. Modern preventive cardiology primarily focuses on the identification and management of risk factors, such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, obesity, and sedentary behavior. Ayurveda, however, offers a broader, holistic perspective by defining health as the maintenance of equilibrium among the *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, and *Agni*, with disease arising from their imbalance. Within this paradigm, the heart (*Hridaya*) is considered the *Moola* (root) of the *Pranavaha Srotas* and *Rasavaha Srotas*, the channels responsible for the circulation of vital energy (*Prana*) and nourishment (*Rasa*), respectively.<sup>[3]</sup>

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Classical texts emphasize that the integrity and proper functioning of the *Hridaya* are central to the preservation of *Ojas*, the subtle essence that sustains life and immunity (*Charaka Samhita*, Sutrasthana 30/7). Disruptions in cardiac function, whether due to improper diet (*Ahara*), lifestyle (*Vihara*), or psychological stress (*Manasika Bhava*), can lead to diminished vitality and increased susceptibility to disease. Consequently, Ayurvedic principles advocate *Hridaya* (cardio-protective) measures, including *Sattvic* diet, balanced daily routines, regulated physical activity, and mental discipline, which align with modern preventive cardiology strategies aimed at reducing cardiovascular risk. By integrating these classical insights with contemporary approaches, a comprehensive, preventive framework for cardiovascular health can be established.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF PATHYA AND APATHYA

In Ayurveda, *Pathya* refers to diet and lifestyle practices that are conducive to maintaining physiological balance, supporting the integrity of the *Srotas* (channels), and promoting overall health. Such practices help preserve the equilibrium of the *Doshas* and maintain optimal functioning of vital organs, including the *Hridaya* (heart). For cardiovascular health, *Pathya* measures typically include the consumption of fresh, easily digestible foods, intake of heart-friendly (*Hridaya*) substances, such as ghee, almonds, and milk in moderation, and adherence to a daily routine that incorporates adequate sleep, moderate physical activity, and stress management.<sup>[4]</sup>

Conversely, *Apathya* encompasses dietary and lifestyle factors that disrupt the balance of the *Doshas* and lead to the accumulation of *Ama* (metabolic toxins), which is considered a primary contributor to disease. In the context of cardiovascular health, *Apathya* may include excessive intake of oily, fried, or processed foods, overconsumption of alcohol, sedentary behavior, irregular sleep patterns, and unregulated emotional stress. The accumulation of *Ama* can obstruct the *Rasavaha* and *Pranavaha Srotas*, impairing the circulation of nutrients and vital energy, which may predispose an individual to conditions, such as atherosclerosis, hypertension, and other heart disorders.<sup>[5]</sup>

By identifying and adhering to *Pathya* while avoiding *Apathya*, Ayurveda emphasizes a proactive, preventive approach to cardiac health. These principles align closely with modern preventive cardiology, which focuses on controlling modifiable risk factors, such as diet, physical activity, and stress to reduce the incidence of CVDs.<sup>[6]</sup>

- Purity of Ahara (diet) leads to purity of Prana (life force)
- Purity of Prana leads to purity of Mind (Manas)
- Purity of Mind leads to purity of Self (Atma)
- When the Self is pure, one experiences supreme happiness.

The right *Pathya* (pure, beneficial diet and lifestyle) directly influences physical, mental, and spiritual health, whereas *Apathya* leads to vitiation and imbalance.<sup>[7]</sup>

One who consumes *Pathya* (wholesome, beneficial foods) does not acquire disease; one who consumes *Apathya* (harmful, unsuitable foods) becomes prone to disease.<sup>[8]</sup>

*Pathya* and *Apathya*, forming the foundation for dietary and lifestyle prescriptions in Ayurveda. It underlines that disease prevention is deeply linked to mindful consumption and daily habits.

## 2.1. Aim and Objectives

### 2.1.1. Aim

To review the concept of *Hridaya* and *Hridaya* measures described in Ayurveda with reference to cardiac protection and prevention of heart-related disorders.

### 2.1.2. Objectives

1. To elucidate the Ayurvedic concept of *Hridaya* as described in classical texts
2. To analyze the role of *Ojas* and mental factors in maintaining cardiac health
3. To compile and review *Hridaya* dietary and lifestyle measures advocated in Ayurveda for preventive cardiology.

## 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Classical Ayurvedic texts, including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and *Madhava Nidana*, along with their commentaries, were reviewed. Relevant modern literature on CVDs was also analyzed to understand conceptual correlations.

### 3.1. Concept and Classification of Hridroga According to Ayurveda Classification

According to *Charaka*, *Madhavakara*, and *Vagbhata*, *Hridroga* is classified into five types based on Dosha predominance and causative factors:<sup>[9]</sup>

- *Vataja Hridroga*
- *Pittaja Hridroga*
- *Kaphaja Hridroga*
- *Tridoshaja (Sannipataja) Hridroga*
- *Krimija Hridroga* [*Charaka Samhita*, *Chikitsa Sthana*; *Madhava Nidana*; *Ashtanga Hridaya*].

*Sushruta* has described only four types of *Hridroga* and has not mentioned *Sannipataja Hridroga*.

### 3.2. Modern Classification

CVDs are a group of disorders involving the heart and blood vessels. These include coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, peripheral arterial disease, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease, deep vein thrombosis, and pulmonary embolism. Heart attacks and strokes are acute conditions mainly caused by atherosclerotic obstruction or embolism, while strokes may also occur due to vascular rupture.

### 3.3. Etiology (Nidana) of Hridroga

#### 3.3.1. According to Charaka

*Charaka* describes excessive physical exertion, improper and excessive use of *Shodhana* therapies, psychological factors, such as anxiety, fear, and stress, suppression of natural urges, accumulation of *Ama*, emaciation, and physical or mental trauma as important etiological factors of *Hridroga*. [*Charaka Samhita*, *Chikitsa Sthana*].<sup>[10]</sup>

#### 3.3.2. According to Madhukosha

Continuous intake of excessively hot (*Ushna*) and heavy (*Guru*) foods, consumption of astringent and irritant substances, excessive labor, injury, excessive study, *Ati-Chinta* (excessive thinking), and suppression of non-suppressible urges are stated as causative factors leading to *Hridroga*.<sup>[5]</sup> [*Madhava Nidana* with *Madhukosha* commentary].

### 3.3.3. According to Vagbhata

Vagbhata states that the causative factors of *Hridroga* are similar to those of *Gulma*, highlighting improper dietary and lifestyle practices as major contributors. [*Ashtanga Hridaya, Nidana Sthana*].

### 3.4. Modern View

From early childhood to adulthood, unhealthy dietary habits, such as consumption of junk food, fatty and fried foods, excessive intake of spicy foods, sedentary lifestyle, and chronic stress significantly contribute to the development of CVDs.

#### 3.4.1. Types of Hridroga (Heart disease)<sup>[11]</sup>

*Hridroga* has been classified into five groups, namely, *Vatika*, *Paitika*, *Kaphaja*, *Sannipattika*, and *Krimija*.

#### 3.4.2. Vatika Hridroga

In *Vatika Hridroga*, the patient has acute pain in the heart region; the pain is like that of cutting, sawing, churning, or stretching. Other symptoms include palpitation, arrhythmia, heart block, and fainting.

#### 3.4.3. Paitik Hridroga

Feeling of heaviness and fatigue in the heart, thirst, burning sensation, sweating, dryness of the mouth, and fainting are the main symptoms of *Paitika Hridroga*.

#### 3.4.4. Kaphaja Hridroga

Feelings of seizure of the heart, heaviness in the body, excessive secretion of phlegm, loss of appetite, and sweet taste in the mouth are the main symptoms of *Kaphaja Hridroga*.

#### 3.4.5. Sannipatika Hridroga

All the symptoms described in *Vatika*, *Paitika*, and *Kaphaja* types of *Hridroga* are present in *Sannipatika*.

### 3.5. Samprapti (Pathogenesis)<sup>[12]</sup>

- *Agnimandya* occurs due to *mithya ahara- vihara*
- *Agnimandya* produces *saama rasa* dhatu and due to *saama rasa dhatu srotoavrodh, dhamnipartichya* occurs
- And results in *hridroga* samprapti mentioned in Figure 1.

### 3.6. Symptoms of Hridroga as per Ayurveda and Modern View

Mentioned in Table 1.

### 3.7. Hridya (Cardiac Tonics/Cardio-protectives in Ayurveda)- Ahara (Food Articles)<sup>[13]</sup>

- *Mamsa Varga* (Meat)
  - *Jangala Mamsa* (meat of animals of the desert)
  - *Ena Mamsa* (back Deer)
  - *Krakara Mamsa* (flesh of Snipe)
  - *Shulya Mamsa* (Meat Pierced with an Iron Rod and Roasted on Burning Coal/Flame) prepared with Ghee
  - *Mamsa Rasa* (meat Soup).
- *Gorasavarga* (Milk and Milk Products)
  - *Navanetam* (Butter)
  - *Ksheeram* (milk)
  - *Takram* (butter Milk)
- *Madhu Varga* (Honey)
  - *Madhu* (honey)
- *Phala Varga* (Fruits)
  - *Lavali Phala* (cicca Acida Merrill)
  - *Dadima* (pomogranate)
  - *Nagaranga Phala* (*Citrus reticulata*),
  - *Kharjura* (*Phoenix sylvestris*/Dates),
  - *Karchura* (*Hedychium spicatum*)
  - *Amra* (ripen fruit of mango)
- *Harita Varga* (Leafy Vegetables)
  - *Yavani* (*Trachyspermum ammi*)
  - *Arjaka* (*Ocimum gratissimum*)
  - *Sigru* (*Moringa oleifera*)
  - *Saleya* (*Trigonella foenum-graccum*)
  - *Mrishtaka* (*Brassica nigra*)
  - *Tikta Saka* (vegetables of bitter taste)
- *Ahara Yogi Varga* (Spices and Condiments)
  - *Eranda Taila* (castor Oil)
  - *Viswabheshajam* (dry Ginger)
  - *Sourchalam* (sonchal Salt)
  - *Bida Lavanam* (type of Lavan)
  - *Yavakshara* (an Alkali Prepared From Plant *Hordium Valgare*)
- *Kritanna Kalpana* (prepared foods)
  - *Odana* (porridge)
  - *Mudga Supa* (green Gram Soup)
  - *Laja Manda* (scum of Gruel Prepared with Fried Paddy)
  - *Yusha* (soup) Prepared with Patola and Nimba
  - *Dadimaamalaki Yusha* (soup of Pomogranate and Indian Gooseberry)
  - *Khad and Kambalika* (prepared from Cooked Pulses or Vegetables, added with Butter Milk and Processed with Spices and Salt, raga)
  - *Shadava* (Thick Sauce-as Mixture of Sugar, *Bida Lavana*, *saindhava Lavana*, *vrikshamla*)
  - *Juice of Parushaka, Jambuphala, and Rajika* Used as a Syrup
  - *Guda Samyukta Dadhi* (curds added with Jaggery)
  - *Panaka* (syrup) Prepared from *Parushaka or Kola*
- *Madya Varga* (Fermented Preparations)
  - *Draksha Kharjura Panaka* (beverage Prepared from Grapes and Dates)
  - *Kharjura Madyam* (wine Prepared from Dates)
  - *Sarkaraseedhu* (fermented Liquor from Sugar)
  - *Surasava* (wine Prepared by Fermenting Beer)
  - *Purana Madya* (old Wine)
  - *Tushambu* (fermented Liquid Prepared by Using Husk of Barley)
  - *Dhataki Sura* (Beer Prepared from Flowers of Dhataki)
  - *Madhvika* (Beer Prepared from Honey).
- *Hridya Dasemani* (Ten Dugs Good for the Heart/Cordial)
  - *Amra* (*Mangifera indica*)
  - *Amrataka* (*Spondias pinnata*)
  - *Likucha* (*Artocarpus lacucha*)
  - *Karamarda* (*Carissa carandas*)
  - *Vrikshamla* (*Tamarindus indica*)
  - *Amlavetasa* (*Rheum emodi*)
  - *Kuvala* (*Zizyphus sativa*)
  - *Badara* (*Zizyphus jujuba*), *dadima* (*Punica granatum*)
  - *Matulunga* (*Citrus decumana*)
- *Dinacharya* (Daily Regimen)
  - *Tambula Sevana*
  - *Snana* (Bath).

### 3.8. Diet Chart

#### 3.8.1. Early-Morning (6:00 am–7:00 am)

Have ash gourd soup in the morning after passing stool and brushing teeth well.

*(It helps in strengthening the body muscles)*

Or

Have lukewarm water + rock salt empty stomach

*(It stabilizes kapha dosha).*

#### 3.8.2. Breakfast (8:00 am–9:00 am)

Broken wheat porridge/Veg Semolina (veg upma)/Veg Vermicelli/Veg Poha (Rice flakes)/Veg Idli/Veg Oats/Besan pancake (Gram flour)/Missi Roti/Chapati with Veg or Dal/Skimmed Milk/Egg white

*(Having light breakfast is good for maintaining strong digestive fire).*

#### 3.8.3. Lunch (1:00 pm–2:00 pm)

Chapati + Brown rice + Salad + Vegetable + Dal/steam chicken

*(A light lunch is also very important to maintain adequate nutrition levels in the body).*

#### 3.8.4. Evening (4:00 pm–5:00 pm)

Roasted chana/Rice flakes/Homemade soup/Vermicelli/Herbal tea

*(Having these food articles are very beneficial to avoid long hours of an empty stomach).*

#### 3.8.5. Dinner (7:00 pm–8:00 pm)

Chapati + Vegetable + Dal

*(A nutritious yet light dinner helps in proper digestion of food articles and also avoid indigestion associated with constipation).*

### 3.9. Diet Instructions

#### 3.9.1. Cereals

##### 3.9.1.1. Cereals to be consumed

Wheat, Quinoa, Buckwheat, millets, Brown Rice, Oats, Sorghum, Corn, Finger millet, Foxtail millet, Little millet, Barley.

Flour Composition – Wheat flour (70%) + barley flour (30%)

*(They are light to digest and, in addition, do not cause accumulation of endotoxins).*

##### 3.9.1.2. Cereals to be avoided

Refined Cereals, white refined flour, pasta, white rice, freshly harvested rice.

*(They cause endotoxin accumulation and leads to diminisation of digestive fire).*

#### 3.9.2. Fruits

##### 3.9.2.1. Fruits to be consumed

Apples, Cherries, Apricots, Avocadoes, Raspberries, Banana, Black grapes, Peaches, Kiwi, Squash, Pomegranate, mangoes, muskmelons, amla (1–2 in a day), papaya

*(These fruits are very beneficial and provide the body with adequate nutrition. They add fibre to the digestive system and hence help in digestive fire ignition if taken in adequate amounts).*

##### 3.9.2.2. Fruits to be avoided

Canned fruit, citrus fruits, such as oranges, raspberries, berries, grapes, lemons, strawberries, kiwi, etc.

*(They causes pitta aggravation, canned or frozen items contain preservatives and have excessive added sugar which is not good for health).*

#### 3.9.3. Vegetables

##### 3.9.3.1. Vegetables to be consumed

Broccoli, Sweet potatoes, Spinach, Asparagus, Onions, Garlic, Ginger, Beans, Pumpkin, Zucchini, Peas, Carrots, Potatoes, Snake gourd, Bitter gourd, Mushroom, Bottle gourd, Turnips, Pumpkin, Ash gourd, Cauliflower, Ginger, Tomato, Garlic

*(The vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals. They nourish the body and provide the body with strength).*

##### 3.9.3.2. Vegetables to be avoided

Canned vegetables, frozen vegetables, eggplant, capsicum

*(They are not good for digestive fire and hence helps in endotoxin accumulation).*

#### 3.9.4. Pulses

##### 3.9.4.1. Pulses to be consumed

Yellow Lentils, Green lentils, Soybeans, Horse gram soup, tuvar dal (Pigeon peas), chana dal (Split black gram), whole black gram (limited), Pink lentils.

##### 3.9.4.2. Pulses to be avoided

Black lentils, kidney beans

*(They weakens the already diminishing digestive agni).*

#### 3.9.5. Dairy Products<sup>[14]</sup>

##### 3.9.5.1. Dairy Products to be consumed

Low-fat milk, Cow's ghee (Limited)

*(They are easy to digest and controlled intake of cow's ghee helps in agni balancing).*

##### 3.9.5.2. Dairy Products to be avoided

Full-fat milk, Cheese, Yogurt, Cheese, Condensed milk, Icecreams, Butter, Paneer

*(They all are to be avoided as they are a high source of fat which is difficult to digest. Thus causing accumulation of endotoxins and aggravation of symptoms).*

#### 3.9.6. Drinks

##### 3.9.6.1. Drinks to be consumed

Coconut water, homemade soups, such as ash gourd soup or horse gram soup, Green tea, Soy milk, Herbal tea (Arjuna Tea), Beetroot juice, Pomegranate juice, Amla juice

*(They help in strengthening the body as well as the heart).*

##### 3.9.6.2. Drinks to be avoided

Whole milk drinks, Caffeine, Alcohol, Sweetened drinks, Carbonated drinks, Packaged soup, Canned fruit juices, Coffee, Tea, Soya milk

*(They are not good for digestive fire as well as has bad effect on rasave strotas thus affecting heart functioning).*

### 3.9.7. Flesh Foods

#### 3.9.7.1. Flesh foods to be consumed

Egg white, Grilled Salmon, and Rohu, Shredded chicken soup.

(They are to digest and are balya; hence, provide strength to different body metabolisms).

#### 3.9.7.2. Flesh Foods to be avoided

Red meat, Canned and smoked fish, Smoked meats, such as liver, Branded meats, Glandular meat (brain, liver, kidney), prawns, lobster, crab, lean beef, pork, lamb, ham, rabbit, Egg yolk, fish roe, sausages, mutton, salami, bacon, Salami, duck, goose, meat pies, chicken skin, liver, kidney, chest, Sea food fish, Processed meat.

(They unstabilize the digestive agni and hence causes dosha aggravation which is responsible for various metabolic symptoms and also have bad effect on heart).

### 3.9.8. Sweeteners

#### 3.9.8.1. Sweeteners to be consumed

Jaggery.

(Do not cause kapha aggravation).

#### 3.9.8.2. Sweeteners to be avoided

White refined sugar, artificial sweeteners

(They are not good for digestive fire as they cause kapha aggravation resulting in diminishing of digestion power thus causing metabolic symptoms).

## 4. DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, the concept of *Pathya* (prescribed diet and lifestyle) is a cornerstone of cardiovascular health. To ensure physical vitality, a balanced and nutrient-dense diet is essential; however, for those suffering from *Hridroga* (heart disease), these dietary choices must be precisely tailored to the individual's *Dosha* and the specific stage of their condition.

One of the most vital components of *Pathya* is *Langhana* (therapeutic fasting). Captured in the proverb "*Langhanam Parama Ausadham*" (Fasting is the supreme medicine), this practice prevents the stomach from being overloaded. Overeating leads to indigestion and the formation of *Ama* (metabolic toxins), which obstruct the body's channels and impair cardiac function. By practicing controlled fasting, these obstructions are cleared, restoring the patency of blood vessels – a process known as *Srotoshodhana* – which ensures the healthy circulation of blood.<sup>[12]</sup>

Beyond *what* we eat, the *manner* in which we eat is equally important. Food should be fresh, warm, and appetizing, ideally consumed in the company of loved ones to foster a positive emotional state. Conventionally, the sequence of flavors also matters: Meals should begin with sweet tastes, followed by sour and salty notes, to align with the body's natural digestive rhythm.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* maintain the normal structure and function of the heart when they are in balance. When these *Doshas* become disturbed, they impair heart function and cause different types of cardiac diseases. The heart is considered the primary seat of *Oja*, which is circulated throughout the body along with *Rasa* by a healthy heart to support normal tissue function. Ayurveda has greatly

contributed to human health by emphasizing both preventive and therapeutic management of *Hridroga* (heart diseases). A simple, non-spicy, non-greasy, and bland *Satvika* diet is advised for maintaining heart health.

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## 9. ETHICAL STATEMENT

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## 10. CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## 11. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data analyzed in this review were obtained from publicly available sources, including peer-reviewed articles, observational studies, and surveys accessible through databases.

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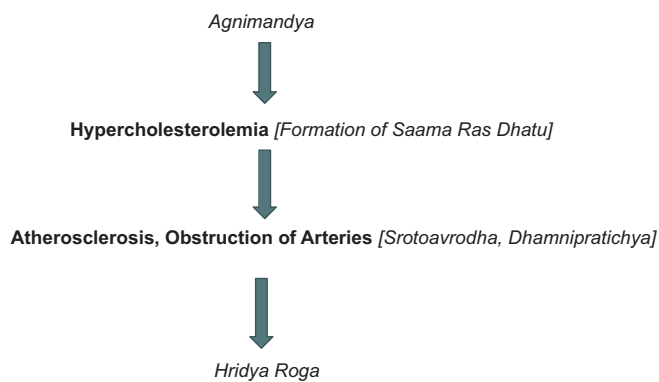
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**Figure 3:** Samparapti of Hridyaroga

**Table 1:** Symptoms of Hridya roga

Symptoms of Hridroga (as per Ayurveda)	Symptoms of cardiovascular diseases (as per modern view)
<i>Vaivarnya</i> (Cyanosis)	Dyspnea
<i>Murcha</i> (syncope)	Orthopnea
<i>Jwara</i> (fever)	Chest pain
<i>Kasa</i> (cough)	Peripheral edema
<i>Hikka</i> (hiccup)	Palpitation
<i>Swasha</i> (dyspnea, orthopnea)	Cheyne-Stokes breathing
<i>Mukhvairasya</i>	Anorexia
<i>Trishna</i> (excessive thirst)	Vomiting
<i>Pramoha</i> (stupor)	Fatigue
<i>Chardi</i> (vomiting)	Syncope
<i>Kaphutklesha</i> (nausea)	
<i>Urashool</i> (pain in chest)	