



Prevention is Care

Makara Sankranthi - Ayurvedic Wisdom for Winter, Agni & Renewal



Makara Sankranti is more than a harvest festival - it is a **precise Ayurvedic Ritucharya marker** aligned with solar movement, seasonal physiology, and community health. Celebrated across India as Makara Sankranti, Pongal, Lohri, and Magh Bihu, it coincides with **Makara Sankramana**, when the Sun begins its northward journey (*Uttarayana*). Ayurveda recognizes this period as a critical seasonal transition influencing **Agni (digestive fire), Vata balance, skin health, and mental well-being**.

Is Agni Strong or Weak During Winter?

According to classical Ayurveda, **Agni is strongest during Hemanta and Shishira Ritu (winter)**.

Cold external temperatures trap internal heat, intensifying digestion. If this strong Agni is not adequately nourished, it begins to **consume body tissues (Dhatu paka)**, leading to dryness, joint pain, fatigue, and cracked skin.

This is why winter rituals emphasize **nourishment, oiling, and grounding practices**.

Why Are Pongal, Huggi & Khichdi Eaten During Makara Sankranti?

Traditional Sankranti foods across India follow one Ayurvedic principle:

Common elements include:

- Rice or millets
- Moong dal
- Ghee
- Jaggery
- Sesame (til / ellu)

These foods:

- Satisfy strong digestive fire
- Prevent tissue depletion
- Lubricate skin and joints
- Balance Vata aggravated by cold and dry winds

Sesame, described in Ayurveda as *ushna* (warming) and *snigdha* (unctuous), is the cornerstone of Sankranti diets.

Abhyanga: Why Oil Massage Is Done Before Pongal/ Makara Sankranti

In South India, the day before Sankranti - **Bhogi** - is dedicated to **Abhyanga (oil massage)** followed by a head bath.

The body and scalp are massaged with **sesame oil infused with jeera (cumin) and pepper**.

Benefits of Abhyanga during Makara Sankranti

- Pacifies Vata before solar transition
- Protects tissues from winter dryness
- Improves circulation and stiffness
- Calms the nervous system
- Prevents headaches and sinus congestion

Sesame oil nourishes deeply, while jeera and pepper enhance circulation and channel-clearing, making this ritual ideal for peak winter.

Kicchu Hayisu: Ayurvedic Animal Care During Makara Sankranti

Sankranti also honors farm animals.

In parts of South India, decorated cattle are gently guided across fire in the ritual of **Kicchu Hayisu**. Beyond symbolism, this practice:

- Removes ticks and parasites common in winter
- Relieves skin irritation naturally
- Reflects Ayurveda's holistic view of human–animal–environment health

Ellu Bella: Social Health Through Ritual

The exchange of **ellu bella** (sesame and jaggery) during Sankranthi is a form of **social harmony** (**Samajika sadvritta**). Winter's inward energy can cause emotional rigidity and conflict. Sharing sweet sesame preparations encourages:

- Soft speech
- Reconciliation
- Community harmony

Ayurveda recognizes mental and social balance as essential to health.

After Sankranthi: What Ayurveda Recommends

As Uttarayana begins:

- Agni remains strong but stabilizes
- Kapha gradually accumulates toward spring

Ayurveda advises:

- Continued nourishing diet in moderate portions
- Regular oil application
- Gradual increase in physical activity
- Avoiding sudden fasting

Makara Sankranthi: Ayurveda in Practice

Makara Sankranthi rituals are **timeless science encoded as tradition**, where food supports digestion, oil protects tissues, rituals heal animals, and sweets restore social harmony.

When the Sun changes direction, Ayurveda teaches us to realign with the body, nature, and one another.