



Usadha Bali as a healthy lifestyle: the application of lifestyle practices, dietary patterns, and the balance of nature, mind, and body

Putu Setiani^{1*}, I Putu Nendya Aryadi Putra²,
Rachel Angeline Setya Osawita², I Wayan Agus Putra Darmawan²,
Anjelika Lastiar Manuela Naiborhu², Baiq Syahrini²

ABSTRACT

The concept of health has evolved well beyond a purely biomedical perspective to encompass a holistic understanding that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Usadha Bali, a traditional Balinese ethnomedical system rooted in Hindu philosophy, reflects this paradigm by emphasizing harmony among the body, mind, and natural environment. This review explores Usadha Bali as a comprehensive healthy lifestyle framework, focusing on its philosophical foundations, lifestyle practices, dietary patterns, and the balance of nature–mind–body. The system is grounded in three core philosophical principles: *Tri Hita Karana*, which governs harmony between humans, the divine, fellow humans, and the natural environment; *Buana Alit* and *Buana Agung*, the microcosm–macrocosm correspondence between the human body and the universe; and *Rwa Bhineda*, the principle of complementary opposites that must remain in equilibrium for health to be sustained. In practice, Usadha Bali promotes preventive healthcare through regulated lifestyle behaviors, the use of traditional herbal formulations, including medicinal plants such as turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), and garlic (*Allium sativum*), and dietary patterns based on natural, locally sourced ingredients rich in bioactive compounds. Health is achieved through the integration of physical (*sekala*) and spiritual (*niskala*) approaches, underscoring the indispensable role of spirituality and inner balance in sustaining well-being. Usadha Bali represents a culturally rooted, comprehensive model of holistic health with significant relevance to modern preventive medicine and sustainable health promotion.

Keywords: bali, ethnomedicine, holistic health, lifestyle, traditional medicine.

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¹Department of Neurology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Indonesia

²Bachelor of Medicine Program, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Indonesia

*Corresponding author:

Putu Setiani;
Department of Neurology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Indonesia;
setiani@unmas.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of health and disease has undergone a profound transformation in contemporary healthcare paradigms. Health is no longer defined merely as the absence of disease, but as a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.¹ Correspondingly, illness is increasingly understood not as an isolated biological event but as a manifestation of imbalance within the individual or between humans and their surrounding environment.² This paradigm shift has accelerated the global recognition of holistic health approaches that emphasize prevention, balance, and sustainability as pillars of well-being.

One longstanding system embodying this holistic perspective is Usadha Bali, a traditional Balinese ethnomedical practice that conceptualizes health as a state of

dynamic harmony among the body (*raga*), mind and spirit (*jiwa*), and the natural environment (*alam*).³ Rooted in Hindu philosophy, Usadha Bali is not merely a curative system but a comprehensive framework for maintaining health throughout life. Its conceptual architecture aligns closely with contemporary holistic healthcare models that integrate physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions into a unified understanding of well-being.⁴

The philosophical pillars of Usadha Bali—namely *Tri Hita Karana*, *Buana Alit* and *Buana Agung*, and *Rwa Bhineda*—provide a structured worldview in which human health is inseparable from cosmic, social, and ecological order.⁵ These principles, encoded in ancient lontar manuscripts, prescribe a way of life that regulates daily activity, diet, ritual

practice, and the use of natural remedies, constituting an integrated preventive healthcare system.⁶

Despite its cultural significance and practical relevance, Usadha Bali remains underrepresented in academic health discourse, particularly in relation to its utility as a lifestyle-based preventive framework applicable to modern health challenges such as non-communicable diseases. This review aims to bridge that gap by systematically examining Usadha Bali as a healthy lifestyle framework, with specific attention to its philosophical foundations, lifestyle regulation practices, traditional dietary and herbal medicine applications, and the overarching principle of nature–mind–body balance. By situating these elements within current scientific understanding, this paper seeks to demonstrate the contemporary

relevance of Usadha Bali and its potential contribution to integrative and preventive medicine.

RESULTS

Philosophical Foundations of Usadha Bali

Usadha Bali is a system of traditional ethnomedical knowledge derived from the Sanskrit word *ausadha*, meaning medicinal plants or the science of healing.⁶ In the Balinese cultural context, however, Usadha transcends simple herbal medicine; it constitutes an integrated body of knowledge encompassing medical, religious, and cosmological dimensions encoded in lontar (palm-leaf) manuscripts such as *Usadha Taru Pramana*, *Usadha Rare*, and *Usadha Tenung*. Three foundational philosophical principles structure the Usadha worldview:

First, *Tri Hita Karana* (literally, “three causes of well-being”) posits that human health depends on the harmony of three essential relationships: the relationship between humans and the divine (*Parhyangan*), the relationship among fellow humans (*Pawongan*), and the relationship between humans and the natural environment (*Palemahan*).⁷ Within the Usadha framework, illness is understood not as an event caused by a single physiological factor, but frequently as the consequence of disharmony or ethical transgression within any of these three relational domains. Accordingly, a healthy lifestyle in Usadha Bali necessarily begins with maintaining harmonious relationships with the divine, with community, and with the natural world.⁷

Second, the *Buana Alit-Buana Agung* concept articulates an absolute correspondence between the human body (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm). Both are believed to be constituted by the same five primordial elements, or *Panca Maha Bhuta*: *pertiwi* (earth/solid matter), *apah* (water), *teja* (fire/heat), *bayu* (air), and *akasa* (ether/space).⁸ Optimal health is achieved when the elemental composition within the body remains in adaptive equilibrium with the energetic fluctuations of the universe. This principle implies that environmental disruptions—ecological damage, seasonal changes, or cosmic imbalances—can

directly affect human physiological and psychological stability.³

Third, *Rwa Bhineda* expresses the philosophical understanding that the world is constituted by pairs of complementary opposites—such as hot and cold, or health and disease—which, rather than being in permanent conflict, must remain in dynamic equilibrium.⁹ In Usadha Bali, every therapeutic and preventive action aims to balance these opposing forces within the body. When thermal energies (hot and cold) are properly equilibrated, the individual achieves *Svasthya*, a state of comprehensive well-being encompassing physical health and inner serenity.⁹

These three principles collectively frame health as an active, relational, and cosmologically situated condition—one that requires continuous effort to maintain through appropriate lifestyle choices, ritual practices, and attentiveness to the environment.

Health in the Hindu Perspective as the Basis of Usadha Bali

Hindu teachings underpin the conceptual framework of Usadha Bali and provide a comprehensive account of health, disease causation, and the goals of human existence. Health in Hinduism is understood holistically, encompassing not only physical strength but also psychological equilibrium and spiritual alignment.¹⁰

Hindu doctrine identifies three primary sources of disease. *Adhibhautika* refers to diseases originating from external factors, such as environmental pollution, pathogens (viruses and bacteria), or physical injury. *Adhyatmika* describes diseases arising from within the self, particularly from psychological disturbances such as chronic stress, emotional dysregulation, or mental illness. *Adhidaiwika* encompasses diseases with a spiritual or karmic dimension, arising from the consequences of past actions or exposure to negative spiritual energies (*niskala*).¹⁰ This tripartite etiology reinforces the necessity of addressing physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously in the pursuit of health.

Furthermore, Hindu philosophy establishes four ultimate purposes of human life—*Catur Purusartha*—

comprising the fulfillment of moral duty (*Dharma*), the attainment of material prosperity (*Artha*), the satisfaction of legitimate desires (*Kama*), and the achievement of spiritual liberation (*Moksha*).¹¹ Health is positioned as the foundational prerequisite for achieving all four purposes; without physical and mental well-being, the pursuit of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha* is profoundly compromised.¹¹

Critically, Usadha Bali operationalizes healing through two complementary dimensions: *sekala* (the visible and physical), which employs herbal remedies derived from medicinal plants (*Taru Pramana*) whose therapeutic effects can be empirically observed; and *niskala* (the invisible and spiritual), which employs ritual prayers, sacred mantras, and purification ceremonies such as *panglukatan* to restore inner balance and spiritual harmony.¹² This dual-dimensional approach ensures that both the physiological and metaphysical sources of illness are addressed, reflecting a genuinely integrative model of healthcare.

Lifestyle Practices in Usadha Bali

Usadha Bali functions not merely as a curative system but as a holistic lifestyle framework that emphasizes preventive and promotive health throughout all stages of life. Central to this framework is the concept of *tri sarira*, the three-body doctrine that describes the human being as constituted by the physical body (*stula sarira*), the subtle or psychic body (*sukma sarira*), and the causal or spiritual body (*antahkarana sarira*).¹³ The three dimensions are understood to be in continuous dynamic interaction; disruption in any one body reverberates across the others, producing disease at physical, psychological, or spiritual levels.

Body Care and Disease Prevention Practices

Preventive body care in Usadha Bali is comprehensive, encompassing physical, temporal, and spiritual dimensions. At the physical level, traditional therapeutic practices—including the application of medicinal herbal preparations (*loloh* for internal use; *boreh*, *sembur*, and *tampel* for topical application), traditional massage (*urut*), and other inherited body-care

techniques—are employed to maintain the elemental balance of the body and prevent the onset of illness.¹⁴

A particularly notable component of preventive practice in Usadha Bali is the system of *wariga*, a sophisticated body of cosmological and calendrical knowledge used to determine auspicious timings for therapeutic activities, daily routines, and health maintenance practices. Through *wariga*, practitioners identify the dominant elemental constitution of an individual and the prevailing cosmic conditions at any given time, enabling them to anticipate potential health vulnerabilities and prescribe appropriate preventive measures. The early indicators of imbalance—such as excessive internal heat (*panes*), pathological cold (*tis*), or a moderate intermediate state (*sebaa*)—are recognized and addressed before frank disease manifests.¹³

This preventive approach promotes community health autonomy by encouraging individuals to utilize locally available natural resources for self-care, thereby reducing dependence on external medical systems while simultaneously preserving the traditional health knowledge encoded in Balinese lontar literature.¹⁴

Balanced Living as a Sustained Health Strategy

The principle of balanced living (*hidup seimbang*) is the cornerstone of health maintenance in Usadha Bali. Balance is understood to encompass the harmonious integration of regulated physical activity, emotional self-regulation, mental discipline, and spiritual fulfillment. When these dimensions are in equilibrium, the individual is said to have achieved *Svasthya*—the ideal state of health according to Usadha Bali.¹³

This concept of balanced living is explicitly aligned with the *Tri Hita Karana* doctrine: maintaining harmony with the divine through ritual practice and devotion (*Parhyangan*), fostering constructive and ethical relationships within the community (*Pawongan*), and preserving the integrity of the natural environment (*Palemahan*).¹³ Disruption of any of these three harmonies is believed to destabilize the body's energetic equilibrium and create conditions conducive to disease.

Balanced living is thus not merely a personal health practice but an ethical and social commitment with implications for community and ecological well-being.¹⁴

Dietary Patterns and Traditional Herbal Utilization

Natural Ingredients and Medicinal Plants in Usadha Bali

The use of natural ingredients and medicinal plants constitutes one of the most empirically documented and practically significant dimensions of Usadha Bali. Knowledge of medicinal plants is preserved in lontar manuscripts, particularly *Usadha Taru Pramana*, which classifies hundreds of plant species according to their therapeutic properties, preparation methods, and appropriate applications.¹⁵ Traditional preparations are diverse and functionally specialized: *loloh* (herbal decoctions or infusions for oral consumption), *boreh* (topical paste preparations), *sembur* (medicated sprays applied to the body), and *tampel* (poultices) each serve distinct therapeutic purposes.¹⁶

The scientific community has increasingly validated the bioactive properties of the medicinal plants most commonly employed in Usadha Bali. Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) contains curcumin, a polyphenolic compound with well-documented anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and metabolic-regulatory properties. Clinical studies have demonstrated that curcumin supplementation contributes to glycemic control in patients with diabetes mellitus by enhancing insulin sensitivity, reducing oxidative stress, and attenuating systemic inflammation—mechanisms directly relevant to the management and prevention of metabolic disease.¹⁷

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) contains the bioactive compounds gingerol and shogaol, which exhibit significant antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activities. Emerging evidence suggests these compounds can favorably modulate blood pressure and endothelial function, positioning ginger as a valuable dietary component for the prevention of cardiometabolic disorders.¹⁸ Similarly, garlic (*Allium sativum*) produces allicin—a sulfur-containing compound generated enzymatically when garlic

is crushed or chopped—which exerts vasodilatory effects by relaxing smooth muscle in arterial walls and thereby reducing peripheral vascular resistance. Peer-reviewed research has demonstrated that regular garlic consumption, whether as fresh garlic or standardized extract, is associated with clinically meaningful reductions in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure in hypertensive individuals.¹⁹

Additional medicinal plants prominently utilized in Usadha Bali include kencur (*Kaempferia galanga*), betel leaf (*Piper betle*), and *moringa* (*Moringa oleifera*), all of which possess antibacterial and immunomodulatory properties that complement the broader preventive health strategy of the system.¹⁶ The convergence of traditional knowledge with contemporary pharmacological research affirms that Usadha Bali's herbal medicine practice is not merely symbolic but constitutes a legitimate form of preventive complementary medicine with measurable biological efficacy.²⁰

Traditional Diet as a Foundation of Preventive Health

The dietary dimension of Usadha Bali extends beyond herbal medicine to encompass a comprehensive approach to food as a medium of health maintenance and disease prevention. Traditional Balinese dietary practices emphasize the consumption of minimally processed, locally sourced, and seasonally appropriate foods that are rich in bioactive compounds including antioxidants, flavonoids, and diverse phytochemicals.²¹

Traditional fermented and plant-based foods such as *tempe*, *tape*, and *preparations incorporating culinary spices—ginger, turmeric, and kencur—* provide not only essential macronutrients and micronutrients but also functional health benefits including blood glucose regulation, immune system enhancement, and protection against metabolic dysregulation.²¹ In this conceptualization, food is simultaneously nutritional and therapeutic: the boundary between diet and medicine is deliberately porous.

The relevance of this approach to contemporary health challenges cannot be overstated. The shift in modern dietary patterns toward highly processed, energy-

dense foods with low micronutrient and fiber content has been closely associated with the global epidemic of non-communicable diseases, including type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.²² Community-level interventions promoting the principles of traditional dietary patterns embedded in Usadha Bali—emphasizing whole, natural foods with recognized bioactive properties—represent a culturally grounded and evidence-compatible strategy for reducing the burden of degenerative disease, particularly in populations undergoing nutritional transition.²²

Balance of Nature, Mind, and Body in Usadha Bali

The Human–Nature Relationship as the Foundation of Health

In Usadha Bali, the natural environment is not merely a repository of therapeutic resources but an active partner in the maintenance of human health. The relationship between humans and nature is considered sacred and reciprocal: nature sustains human life and health, while humans bear an ethical obligation to preserve the integrity of the natural world.²³ This understanding is practically expressed through the culturally embedded practice of sourcing medicinal plants with attentiveness to ecological balance and with gratitude, treating each plant not only as a pharmacological resource but as a living entity within the cosmic order.

The principle of *Buana Alit–Buana Agung* makes explicit the ontological continuity between the human body and the natural universe. Because both are composed of the same elemental forces, environmental degradation—whether of soil, water, *air*, or ecosystems—is understood to translate directly into disruptions of human health.⁸ This cosmological reasoning anticipates contemporary ecological medicine's recognition that environmental health and human health are inseparable, lending philosophical depth to sustainability efforts within Balinese communities.²⁴

The cultural practices of the Balinese people—including temple ceremonies, the maintenance of sacred forests (*alas*

angker), communal water management through the subak irrigation system, and ritual offerings to the elements—can be understood within this framework as active health maintenance behaviors at the community and ecological levels, reinforcing the interdependence of environmental stewardship and personal well-being.²⁴

Spirituality and the Role of the Inner Self in Holistic Health

The spiritual dimension (*jiwa*) represents the deepest organizing principle of health in Usadha Bali. The inner self is understood not merely as the seat of consciousness or emotion but as the primary source of vital energy (*prana*) that animates the physical body and mediates its relationship with the natural and cosmic order.²⁵ Disturbances in the inner self—arising from unresolved psychological conflicts, moral transgressions, grief, or spiritual disalignment—are considered primary etiological factors in the Usadha Bali model of disease, capable of precipitating physical illness through their effects on the body's energetic system.

The *niskala* (*spiritual/non-physical*) dimension of healing is addressed through several modalities. Ritual practices including prayer, communal ceremonies, and dedicated meditation (*yoga and semadi*) function to realign the individual's consciousness with cosmic order, quieting the mind and restoring inner equilibrium.²⁶ Illness, within this framework, is interpreted not as a random physiological event but as a meaningful signal of relational disharmony—between the self and others, the self and nature, or the self and the divine—requiring not only physical treatment but ethical reflection and spiritual realignment.²⁷

This spiritual dimension of Usadha Bali finds empirical support in contemporary psychoneuroimmunological research, which demonstrates that psychological states—particularly chronic stress, depression, and social isolation—exert measurable negative effects on immune function, inflammatory markers, and cardiovascular health. Conversely, spiritual practice, a sense of meaning, and strong social connection have been associated with enhanced coping capacity, greater psychological resilience, and

improved health outcomes across diverse populations.²⁸ The holistic integration of *stula sarira* (physical body), *suksma sarira* (subtle/psychic body), and *antahkarana sarira* (causal/spiritual body)—as articulated in the *tri sarira* doctrine—thus constitutes an ancient formulation of the biopsychosocial-spiritual model that contemporary medicine increasingly recognizes as essential to comprehensive healthcare.¹³

Integrative Perspective: Usadha Bali in Modern Holistic Health

Taken together, the philosophical principles, lifestyle practices, dietary traditions, and spiritual orientation of Usadha Bali constitute a remarkably coherent and comprehensive integrative health system. Its emphasis on prevention rather than cure, on the dynamic equilibrium of internal and external forces, and on the indivisibility of physical, psychological, and spiritual health anticipates many of the central insights of contemporary holistic and preventive medicine.⁴

From a public health perspective, Usadha Bali offers several actionable insights. Its emphasis on locally sourced, minimally processed functional foods provides a culturally appropriate model for dietary intervention in populations at risk of non-communicable diseases. Its integration of physical care with stress management, spiritual practice, and community cohesion addresses the multidimensional determinants of health in a manner that resonates with the World Health Organization's comprehensive definition of health. Its knowledge base, preserved in lontar manuscripts, represents an underutilized repository of pharmacological and epidemiological wisdom that warrants systematic scientific investigation.

The digitization of lontar manuscripts and the pharmacological validation of traditional medicinal plants through rigorous clinical and laboratory research represent important steps toward integrating Usadha Bali into evidence-based health promotion programs. Such integration would not only enhance the scientific credibility of traditional Balinese medicine but also contribute to the preservation and revitalization of

an irreplaceable cultural heritage that continues to serve the health needs of Balinese communities.

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CONCLUSION

Usadha Bali represents a holistic, philosophically grounded, and culturally integrated system of health that addresses the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being through a unified framework. Its core philosophical principles—*Tri Hita Karana*, *Buana Alit-Buana Agung*, and *Rwa Bhineda*—define health as a relational, dynamic, and cosmologically embedded condition, fundamentally incompatible with reductionist biomedical models that treat illness as an isolated organic event. As a lifestyle-based approach, Usadha Bali promotes preventive healthcare through regulated daily practice, the application of traditional herbal medicine with scientifically validated bioactive properties, and dietary patterns centered on locally sourced functional foods.

This review affirms that Usadha Bali is not merely a historical or cultural artifact but a living system with substantial relevance to contemporary health challenges, particularly the global burden of non-communicable diseases. It is recommended that Usadha Bali be further integrated into public health promotion strategies through several complementary pathways: systematic pharmacological research into the medicinal plants of the *Usadha Taru Pramana* tradition; the digitization and academic documentation of lontar manuscripts to ensure knowledge preservation; the incorporation of

Usadha Bali's preventive principles into community health education programs; and the development of interdisciplinary collaborations between Balinese healers (*balian*), medical professionals, and public health researchers. Such efforts hold the potential to contribute culturally sensitive, sustainable, and evidence-compatible approaches to improving population health while honoring and perpetuating the profound wisdom of Balinese cultural heritage.

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