

UNDERSTANDING VEGETABLE-INDUCED INDIGESTION THROUGH AYURVEDA: ETIOLOGY AND ANTIDOTES

Dr. Ekta Ambade^{*1}, Dr. Sapana Ukey², Dr. Archana Belge³

^{*1}P.G. Scholar, ²Guide and Associate Professor, ³Professor and HOD,

Department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, Shri Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

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*Corresponding Author

Dr. Ekta Ambade

Department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, Shri Ayurved Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.



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ABSTRACT

Indigestion (*Ajirṇa*) is one of the most common gastrointestinal disturbances described in *Ayurveda*. Impaired digestion is regarded as a primary factor contributing to the development of various diseases. Consumed food which is not properly digested lead to weaken digestive fire(*agni*). When *Agni* becomes weak, indigestion occurs; and when indigestion sets in, all the bodily functions become sluggish and inactive due to *Aama* accumulation. As a result, diseases such as *Jvara*, *Visuchika*, *Alasaka*, and many others begin to manifest. Therefore, indigestion is regarded as the root cause of all diseases. Vegetables are commonly recognized as valuable dietary components vital for maintaining health and nutritional balance. However, *Ayurveda* recognizes that certain vegetables, owing to their inherent *guna*, improper processing, or unsuitable combinations lead to *Ajirṇa* (indigestion). Aims to

analyze the causative factors (*nidana*), and *Ayurvedic* antidotes (*pratyanikachikitsa*) for vegetable-induced indigestion. The study concludes that vegetable-induced indigestion results from imbalance between individual *Agni* and the qualitative attributes of food.

KEYWORDS: *Aama*, *Agni*, *AharaVidhi*, *Ajirṇa*, *Pratyanikachikitsa*, *Vegetable indigestion*.

INTRODUCTION

Food is regarded as the life (*Prana*) of all living things. *Ahara* that is pleasing in colour, smell, taste, and touch, and that is properly prepared and processed, supports and sustains life. Without food, life cannot continue, which proves that *Ahara* is *pranadharaka*—the supporter of life.

Life is maintained by *antaragni* (digestive or metabolic fire), which requires constant fuel in the form of food. When *Ahara* is taken properly, it keeps *Agni* steady, nourishes the body and mind, strengthens tissues, enhances strength and complexion, and supports the sense organs. However, improper intake of food can harm both health and life.

Ayurveda places profound importance on food (*Ahara*), considering it the very basis of health. It upholds the principle अन्नं वै ब्रह्म emphasizing that nourishment is sacred and life-sustaining.^[1] The classical saying “अजीर्णं भोजनं विषम्” highlights the seriousness of impaired digestion, asserting that consuming food when digestion is incomplete can have harmful, poison-like effects on the body.^[2]

Ayurveda considers indigestion to be the underlying cause of many diseases. The *Sanskrit* term for illness, *Amaya*, contrasts with *Niramaya*, which describes a person free from disease hence the well-known prayer, “सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः;” meaning “May all be without illness.” The word *Amaya* is derived from *Ama*, a term that denotes improperly digested or immature food. This concept underscores that *Ama* the toxic residue formed from incomplete digestion is central to the development of numerous disorders. For this reason, *Ayurveda* advises “जीर्णं हितं मितं चाद्यात्,” instructing that wholesome and moderate food should be eaten only after the prior meal has been fully digested. This principle is considered fundamental for preserving optimal health.^[3]

Indigestion or *Ajirna* refers to a condition in which food is not fully digested due to weakened *Agni* (digestive fire), resulting in the buildup of *Aama*, the toxic byproduct of incomplete digestion. *Ayurveda* places *Agni* at the center of health, as reflected in the maxim “रोगः सर्वे अपि मन्दाश्च” meaning that a diminished digestive fire is the root of all diseases.^[4]

Shaka Varga

शाकं गुरु रुक्षं शीतं विष्टम्भि च प्रकीर्तिम्। (*Charak .su.27/215*).

Vegetables are described as heavy (guru), dry (rukṣa), cold (shita) and causing obstruction (viṣṭambhi) in digestion.^[5]

शाकं नित्यं न सेवेत बलवर्णविवर्जनम्।

गुरु रुक्षं हिमं स्तम्भि वातकृच्छ्र विशेषतः॥ (Ashtang Hṛidaya. 8/45)

Excessive consumption of vegetables leads to weakness in the body.^[6]

Classical Ayurvedic literature includes vegetables as an important category of foods, grouping them into six forms according to their structure and origin.: *patra shaka* (leafy vegetables), *puṣpa shaka* (flowering vegetables), *phala shaka* (vegetable fruits), *nala shaka* (hollow-stem vegetables), *kanda shaka* (tubers), and *samsvedaja* (those that grow with the support of moisture in soil or wood). Understanding the properties of these vegetables—as detailed in traditional *Nighaṇṭus* and correlated with modern knowledge of nutrient-rich foods—is crucial, as it aids in both the prevention and management of various diseases.

Ayurveda further notes that these categories differ in their ease of digestion, with an increasing order of heaviness (*uttarottara guruta*).

As the order progresses, the vegetables are believed to become gradually harder for the body to digest.

Patra < Puṣpa < Phala < Nāla < Kanda < Samsvedaja^[7]

From a modern perspective, vegetables play a vital role in human health as they provide essential vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and bioactive phytochemicals. In *Ayurveda*, however, each vegetable also possesses its own *Rasa* (taste), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), therapeutic properties (*Roga-samyata*) and guidelines for suitable (*Pathya*) or unsuitable (*Apathya*) use. Therefore, consuming vegetables in appropriate quantities and combinations is essential to prevent unnecessary *doṣha* aggravation and to maintain overall health. Awareness of *Pathya* and *Apathya* concerning *shaka Varga* in daily diet ensures the promotion of well-being and disease prevention.

CLASSIFICATION OF SHAKA VARGA (VEGETABLES)

1. PATRA SHAKA (LEAFY VEGETABLE): In Ayurveda, Patra Shaka are broadly recognized as a group of leafy vegetables sharing certain general features, though their specific properties differ from plant to plant. They mainly exhibit Madhura Rasa, with some

showing Lavana or Tikta and when taken in excess or without proper *Sanskara*, they commonly vitiate Vata and Kapha Doshas. Most Patra Shaka possess Sheeta Virya, while a few, such as Sarsapa, are exceptions with Ushna potency. Digestively, they are often Guru and Ruksha, predisposing to Vibandha, although certain varieties demonstrate Bhedana or Rechana effects.

Let us see example of : Upodika (Malabar Spinach).^[8]

Dravya Nama: Upodika (*Basella rubra* Linn.)

Rasa: Madhura

Guna: Snigdha

Virya: Sheeta

Vipaka: Madhura

Doshakarma: Kaphakara, Vata–Pittahara.

2. PUSHPA SHAKA (FLOWER VEGETABLE): Pushpa Shaka is a sub-category of Shaka Varga, comprising flowers used as food and medicine based on their inherent properties. Generally, Pushpa Shaka possesses Laghu Guna, Ruksha Guna, which helps in alleviating Kapha Dosha, and Sheeta Virya, which pacifies Pitta Dosha. The predominant Rasa found in Pushpa Shaka are Tikta and Kashaya.

Let us see example of : *Kadali Puṣpa* (Banana Flower).^[9]

Rasa: Madhura, Kaṣaya

Guna: Guru, Rukṣa

Virya: Sita

Vipaka: Madhura

Doṣa Karma: Vata–Pitta hara.

3. PHALA SHAKA (FRUIT VEGETABLE)

Phala Shaka refers to fruit-bearing vegetables included under Shaka Varga. These are vegetables in which the phala (fruit) itself is consumed in an unripe or tender state. Phala Shaka are generally characterized by Guru Guna, Snigdha Guna and Manda in nature. They predominantly possess Madhura Rasa, often associated with Amla or Kashaya Rasa, and usually exhibit Sheeta Virya. Due to these qualities, Phala Shaka tend to increase Kapha Dosha.

Let us see example of: *Kooshmandi Karkaru* – Pumpkin, *Kaddu*^[10]

Ras - Madhura

Guna – Ruksha, Guru

Virya - Sheetha

Vipaka – Madhura

Doshakarma - Pakwa Phala Pittakara, Kaphavatahara

Apakwa Phala Thridoshakaraka.

4. NAALA SHAKA (HOLLOW FORM OF VEGETABLE)

Nala Shaka is a sub-group of Shaka Varga that includes vegetables in which the nala (stalk, stem, or tubular part) is consumed. These vegetables are generally characterized by Laghu and Rukṣa Guna. Nala Saka commonly possesses Tikta and Kaṣaya Rasa with predominance of Uṣṇa or Sita Virya depending on the specific plant. This group contains *Mustard Naala*.

Let us see example of: *Sarshapa Naala* – *Mustard*.^[11]

Ras – Katu, Tikta

Guna – Ushna, Snighdha

Virya – Ushna

Vipaka – Katu

Doshkarma – Kapha-Vatahara

5. KANDA SHAKA (TUBER VEGETABLE)

Kanda Shaka is a sub-group of Shaka Varga that includes vegetables in which the kanda (bulb, tuber) is consumed. Kanda Shaka is generally characterized by Guru Guna and Snigdha Guna, making it relatively difficult to digest. These vegetables predominantly possess Madhura Rasa, often accompanied by Kaṭu or Kaṣaya Rasa and usually exhibit Uṣṇa Virya. Due to these properties, Kanda Shaka tends to increase Kapha and Pitta Doṣa when consumed in excess.

Let us see example of: *Soorana Kanda* – *Elephant foot, Ya*^[12]

Ras - Kashaya, Katu

Guna - Laghu, Rooksha

Virya - Ushna

Vipaka - Katu

Doshkarma – Kaphaahara.

6. SAMSVEDAJA SHAKA

Samsvedaja Shaka is a sub-group of Shaka Varga that includes vegetables which grow in moist, marshy, or water-rich environments and often arise due to natural sweating or dampness of the soil. These vegetables are generally characterized by Guru Guna, Snigdha Guna and Picchila Guna. Samsvedaja Shaka predominantly possesses Madhura and Kaṣhaya Rasa, with Shita Virya. Due to these inherent qualities, they tend to increase Kapha Doṣa and cause Ama formation if consumed in excess or without proper preparation.

Example of this group includes *Chatraka* (Mushroom).^[13]

Guna - Guru, Rooksha

Virya – Sheeta

Vipaka – Madhura

Doshkarma - Krishna Chatraka And Shweta Chatraka – Atyantha Thridosha kara, Raktha Chatraka- Swaalpa

Ajirna.

Major Causative Factors

अनात्मवन्तः पशुवद् भुञ्जते ये प्रमाणतः ।

रोगाणीकस्य ते मूलम् अजीर्ण प्राप्नुवन्ति हि ॥(Madhav. Ajirna-13)

Consuming food in excess of the body's actual needs—motivated solely by taste and without mindful awareness, akin to animalistic behaviour—can lead to indigestion, which is considered the root cause of many ailments. Eating merely for the pleasure of the palate increases susceptibility to various health disorders. It is important to recognize that the true perception of taste emerges from genuine hunger, rather than from the food itself. In this context, a teaching attributed to Vidura offers pertinent guidance.^[14]

अनारोग्यमनायुष्यं अस्वर्ग्यं चातिभोजनम् ।

अपुण्यं लोकविद्विष्टं तस्मात् तत् परिवर्जयेत् ॥ (Manu.2.57)

Overeating not only contributes to the development of disease but also reduces lifespan and causes various forms of physical discomfort. From a moral and social perspective, it is regarded as a source of demerit, as habitual overconsumption may invite criticism for taking more than one's fair share. Therefore, mindful eating and moderation should be consistently practiced to maintain both health and social propriety.^[15]

A similar viewpoint has been expressed by *Vaidyarāja Suṣeṇa*, who states that...

यः क्षुधा लौल्यभावेन कुर्यादाकण्ठभोजनम् ।
सुसव्यालानिव व्याधीन् स नरार्थाय प्रबोधयेत् ॥(charak su.25/40).

A person who eats to the point of overfilling—far beyond the body's actual needs—awakens latent ailments within, much like disturbing sleeping serpents, thereby jeopardizing his own health.^[16] In addition to overeating, a major cause of indigestion is consuming food before the previous meal has been properly digested. Eating at irregular or inappropriate times is regarded as a particularly harmful habit, significantly compromising digestive health. This practice is recognized as one of the primary factors responsible for weakening the digestive system.

अत्यम्बुपानाद्विषमाशनाञ्च सन्धारणात्स्वप्निपर्याञ्च ।

कालेऽपि सात्म्यं लघु चापि भुक्तमन्नं न पाकं भजते नरस्य ॥. (Sushrut su.46/500)

Excessive water intake, irregular eating habits (either too much or too little food), inconsistent meal timing, combining incompatible foods, consuming harmful foods, ignoring the natural urge to relieve oneself, and poor sleep patterns can all negatively affect digestion. Even when food is consumed in appropriate amounts, these factors can prevent proper digestion and may lead to indigestion.^[17]

ईर्ष्यभियक्रोधपरिप्लुतेन लुब्धेन शोकदैन्यनिपीडितेन ।

प्रद्वेषयुक्तेन च सेव्यमानमन्नं न पाकं भजते नरस्य ॥(Sushrut su.46/501)

Food consumed by a person who harbours emotions such as jealousy, fear, anger, greed, sorrow, pity, or hostility is not easily digested. Additionally, insufficient physical activity and inadequate sleep are major contributors to indigestion, as noted by *Vaidyarāja Suṣeṇa*.^[18]

स्थाल्यां यथा नावरणाननायां न घट्टितायां न च साधुपाकः ।

अनासनिद्रस्य तथा नरेन्द्र व्यायामहीनस्य न चान्नपाकः ॥

(Sushrut Ni.Vyayamodvarttanabhyangagunavargah-7)

Just as grain boiled in an open pot does not cook properly without being stirred, O King, similarly, food eaten by a person who does not get sufficient sleep or engage in regular exercise is not digested properly.^[19]

Types of Ajirṇa

अजीर्णप्रभवा रोगस्तदजीर्णं चतुर्विधम् ।

आमं विदग्धं विष्टब्धं रसशेषं चतुर्थकम् ॥(Aacharya Balkrishna. Ajirṇamṛtamāñjari)

The classical verse “Ajirṇaprabhavarogas... rasaseṣamcaturthakam”—states that many diseases emerge from improper digestion, and that indigestion occurs in four principal forms.^[20]

1. *Amajirṇa*
2. *Vidaghajirṇa*
3. *Viṣṭabdhajirṇa*
4. *Rasaseṣajirṇa*.

The reference in Ajirṇamañjīrī is as follows

Vegetable	Negative effects	Antidotes
Alabu (Bottle gourd)	Vata imbalance, leading to bloating, gas, or loose stools. Very cooling (sita) increase Kapha, causing heaviness.	Siddharthaka (White mustard), Brahmataru (Parrot tree/Palash), kṣara-vari (alkaline water)
Aswattha (Holy fig/Pipal)	increase Kapha, causing heaviness or sluggishness, aggravate Pitta	Paryuṣitajala (Stale water)
Aluka (Potato)	gas or bloating, Kapha aggravation	Taṇḍula-vari (Uncooked rice water)
Cancu (White jute/Patta Shaak)	aggravate Pitta, disturb Vata causing gas, create heaviness due to slow digestion, and act as a laxative leading to loose stools, Seeds cause nausea	Khadira (Catechu) decoction
Karavalli (Bitter gourd)	Pitta aggravation: acidity, burning sensations, or diarrhea.	Siddharthaka (White mustard), Brahmataru (Parrot tree/Palash), kṣara-vari (alkaline water)
Kaseru (Bulrush/chatramusta)	heaviness, slow digestion, kapha buildup, bloating, and urinary irritation	Bhadramustaka (Nutgrass)
Kemuk (Costus/ Wild Ginger)	irritate the stomach, increase heat (pitta), cause dryness, and trigger nausea or digestive discomfort	Siddharthaka (White mustard)
Karkaru (Pumpkin)	aggravate Kapha, causing heaviness, bloating, or sluggish digestion, mucus production	Karanja (Pongama tree) seeds
Kuṣmaṇḍaka (Wax gourd) (Verse-33)	mucus accumulation, increase Kapha, leading to heaviness and sluggish digestion.	Karanja (Pongama tree) seeds
Megharava	increase Kapha, leading to	Siddharthaka (White

(Amarantha/Rajgira)	heaviness or mucus accumulation, aggravate cold-related conditions	mustard)
Mṛṇala (Lotus stem)	aggravate Kapha, leading to heaviness or sluggish digestion. Overuse may increase mucus formation.	Bhadramustaka (Nutgrass)
Mulaka (Radish)	aggravate Pitta (causing acidity, burning sensation), increase Vata, leading to dryness or bloating.	Guḍa (Jaggery), Kodrava (Kodo millet); Guḍa (Jaggery)
Nagavalli (Betel leaf)	aggravate Pitta, causing heartburn, acidity, or oral ulcers, dry out tissues and increase Vata-related problems.	Samudraphena (Cuttlefish bone)
Palakya (Spinach)	aggravate Pitta, causing acidity or burning sensation, High oxalate content may contribute to kidney stones.	Siddharthaka (White mustard)
Paruṣa (Phalsa/Indian Sherbet Berry)	increase Kapha, causing heaviness or sluggishness, constipation due to strong astringency.	Picumanda (Margosa/Neem seeds) seeds; Kṣiri (Ceylon wood/East Indian Satinwood)
Piṇḍaluka (Yam/Taro)	heaviness, gas, bloating, and slow digestion, and can increase Kapha and disturb Vata	Kodrava (Kodo millet)
Plakṣa (Java fig)	heaviness, excess mucus, slow digestion, and can increase Kapha and Pitta	Paryuṣita jala (Stale water)
Paṭola (Pointed gourd)	aggravate Kapha, leading to heaviness, lethargy, or mild digestive sluggishness, mild bloating or gas.	Siddharthaka (White mustard), Brahmataru (Parrot tree/Palash), kṣaravari (alkaline water)
Pauṣkara (Lotus seed)	increase Kapha, causing heaviness or lethargy, raw seeds may cause constipation or bloating	Sarṣapatala (Mustard oil)
Shaka (all flowers, roots, leaves etc.)	difficult to digest	Tilakṣara (Alkaline preparation of sesame)
Satina (Pea)	aggravate Kapha, leading to heaviness, bloating, and sluggish digestion cause flatulence due to its protein and fiber content.	Suṇṭhi (Dry ginger)
Suraṇa (Elephant footyam)	itching, burning, gas, and heaviness, and can increase Pitta and Vata	Guḍa (Jaggery)
Sṛṅgataka (Water chestnut)	heaviness, constipation, and Kapha increase, and can slow digestion	Bhadramustaka (Nutgrass)
Siddharthaka (White mustard)	dryness, burning sensations, or irritability, Not suitable for Pitta-dominant individuals in large	Khadira (Catechu) decoction

	amounts.	
Trapuṣa (Cucumber)	increase Kapha, leading to heaviness and lethargy, May cause indigestion	Karanja (Pongama tree) seeds
Udumbara (Fig)	increase Kapha, causing heaviness or lethargy. May lead to indigestion	Paryuṣitajala (Stale water)
Upodika (Malabar spinach)	increase Kapha, leading to heaviness or bloating, cause digestive discomfort	Siddharthaka (White mustard)
Vartaka (Eggplant or Brinjal)	aggravate Vata, causing gas, bloating, or constipation.	Siddharthaka (White mustard)
Vastuka (White goosefoot/bathua)	aggravate Vata, causing dryness or bloating.	Khadira (Catechu) decoction

CONCLUSION

Vegetables provide essential nutrients to the body, yet Ayurveda emphasizes that their impact on digestion is influenced by multiple factors such as one's Agni (digestive fire), individual prakṛti, method of preparation, portion size, and food combinations. When these factors are not in harmony, even naturally wholesome vegetables lead to Ajirṇa (indigestion). Vegetables that are heavy, cold, fibrous, or prone to increasing gas can burden a weakened Agni, especially when they are improperly cooked or combined, undercooking, poor combinations, or unsuitable fats and spices can worsen the issue. Current food habits, especially the overuse of uncooked or cold items like salads and smoothies, can impair the functioning of Agni.

Classical Ayurvedic literature offers rich, practical guidance on both preventing and correcting vegetable-induced indigestion. The texts clearly identify vegetables that are heavy (guru), cold (shita), Rough(khara) or gas-producing (vata-utpadaka), noting that these qualities can easily disturb Agni and lead to Ajirṇa when not prepared or consumed properly. A central contribution of Ayurveda is its systematic use of antidotes (pratyanika dravyas and upayas. Through such intelligent application of antidotes, even problematic vegetables become wholesome.

This rests upon one of Ayurveda's foundational principles

“आहारः प्रथमं औषधम्।”

Food is the first medicine.

This idea is echoed in the classical shloka.

“आहारसंभवं वस्तु रोगास्तत्रैव संभवः।
हिताहितविहारस्तु धिरधार्थं च तदौषधम्॥”

All that is formed from food including both strength and disease arises from the nature of that food. Wholesome diet sustains life, unwholesome diet gives rise to disease, and the proper use of food itself becomes medicine. Ayurvedic wisdom therefore emphasizes that lasting health is sustained not merely by obeying dietary rules, but by cultivating deep awareness of one's own body. Those who observe subtle digestive signals lightness, heaviness, gas, clarity of appetite, sluggishness learn to modify their food and cooking methods before imbalance manifests.

This review highlights that Shakavarga (vegetables) with guru, rukṣa, shita, or picchila qualities can weaken Agni and lead to the formation of Ama, causing Ajirṇa, manifested as heaviness, bloating, nausea, vomiting, and impaired excretion. Classical texts also indicate that when such digestive disturbances occur, appropriate antidotes (Pratikāra)—such as light, warm, easily digestible foods, compatible food combinations, and digestive herbs—can restore Agni, reduce Āma, and reestablish dosha and dhātu balance. Proper selection, preparation, and moderation of vegetables are therefore essential to prevent and manage vegetable-induced indigestion.

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