

RELEVANCE OF AYURVEDIC DIETARY RULES IN MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

In modern era people are conscious enough about their diet. The awareness about the food items, their quantity, quality and nutritional values etc. The people who are health conscious mostly know about 'what to eat?' but least conscious about 'how to eat?' The dietetic code or dietary rules are preserved by our age old traditions up to some extent, but there is a big lacuna regarding their awareness in today's society. People basically have a little knowledge about them. More over who know are little bothered to obey such rules as they have not enough trust to obey the dietary rules. The proper method of eating is wrongly being interpreted as mere traditional affair. Though all the

people cannot always follow all the rules due to the bindings of fast and forward life, the awareness is needed regarding the subject. As a famous proverb says 'we are what we eat'; it clearly reflects the importance of diet in one's personality. It is important to know what we should eat, but it is more important to know how, when, where to eat. Ayurvedic literature is abundant in the knowledge regarding healthy diet and dietary rules. Thousands of years ago, Ayurveda gifted human beings the very important dietary rules known as '*Ahara Vidhi vidhana*'. This article concisely reflects these dietary rules and their importance in modern era.

KEYWORDS: *Ahara vidhi vidhana, ushna, snigdha, tanmana.*

INTRODUCTION

Ahara Vidhi means the method for diet intake and *Vidhana* means statement, code, rules etc. Thus *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* means the rules for diet intake as mentioned in *Charaka Samhita*. *Ahara* is not only needed for the continuity of life, but also for growth, strength, complexion, metabolism, functionality etc. The proper diet, taken in proper manner will lead to good health. On the contrary, proper diet if not taken in proper manner may lead to diseases.

Ahara, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance in *Ayurveda*. In other medical sciences, food is considered important, but not the methods of eating. *Acharya Charaka* has given dietary rules in *Rasavimana Adhyaya*. He has coined a term '*Ahara Vidhi Vishesh ayatanani*' for dietary rules. The term *Ahara Vidhi* stands for a system, method, manner, way, arrangement, rule, law, command, conduct, condition or statement for diet intake. *Vishesha* means Speciality, special property, distinguished effect of *Ahara Vidhi*. *Ayatana* means cause, support etc. Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Visesa Ayatana* means, the causative factors responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the methods for diet intake. These are eight in number known as *prakriti* (constitution), *karana* (methods of cooking), *samyoga* (combinations), *rashi* (quantity), *desha* (place), *kala* (time), *upyogasanstha* (rules of usage), *upyokta* (one who uses).^[1] The seventh among them is *upyogasanstha* which is described as the *Niyama* (rules) of *Upyoga* (food intake).^[2] These are the dietetic rules, i.e., *Ahara - Vidhi - Vidhana*. Thus, it can be said that, these rules are specified for 'How to eat?'

BACKGROUND

The term *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* is used first by *Charaka* in *Rasa vimana adhyaya*. Though many other classics have elaborately mentioned the same rules, they have explained them under different headings like *Bhojana Vidhi*, *Annavidhi* etc. These are the dietary rules, regulations and procedure for those, who are healthy as well as for certain types of patients. One should eat food, which is hot, unctuous, in adequate quantity, after the digestion of previous food, and non antagonistic in potency. It should be eaten in a congenial place, provided with all accessories, neither too hurriedly, nor too leisurely, without talking or laughing, with full concentration and having proper regard to oneself.^[3] *Susruta Samhita* gives very descriptive view regarding this subject. It is explained as '*Aharavidhi*'. The kitchen regimen, dining place, dining time, disadvantages of improper dining time, un edible food, qualities of tasty food, post meal regimen and sequence of food articles have been explained by *Sushruta*.^[4] In *Ashtanga Samgraha*, author has described the unwholesome effects of *Ruksha* (dry), *Atisnigdha*(unctuous), *Atiusna*(extremely hot), *Sita Anna*(cold) along with the compilation from ancient classics.^[5] *Ashtanga Hridaya* compiles the references in brief.^[6]

AHARA VIDHI VIDHANA

I. *Ushnam ashniyat* (food should be taken when hot): Here, hot depicts the temperature of food and not its potency (*Veerya*). Taking freshly cooked hot food is very good as it improves digestive fire, gets easily digested, enhances taste of food material, *Vata dosha* undergoes

anulomana (movement in normal direction), it diminishes *Kapha dosha*, purifies *koshtha* (gastrointestinal tract) and does not hamper maintenance of *Dhatu*.^[7]

2. *Snigdham ashniyat* (unctuous food should be taken): *Snigdham* term does not mean exactly *Sneha dravyas* like oil or ghee only, but also *Godhuma*, *Shali* rice etc. are advised as *Snigdha*. *Acharya Charaka* states that *Snigdha* food materials improve the taste of food, enhance digestive power, get digested easily, alleviate *vata*, improves the built of body, enhances the strength of sensorial organs, increases the physical strength and improve complexion.^[8]

3. *Matravata Ashniyat* (food should be taken in adequate quantity): Food taken in required adequate quantity is termed as *Matrat*. *Ayurveda* believes that every human being is unique and different from others; hence the needs for everything are different from one to another. The hunger or the quantity of food needed also differs from one person to other. *Charaka* has given some guidelines in this regard. The stomach should be imagined to be divided in three equal parts and the food items should be taken accordingly. In '*Matra*', total quantity as well as quantity of different items is considered. The former is known as '*Sarvagraha*' (consideration of the whole) and the latter as '*Parigraha*' (item wise consideration).^[9] The optimum quantity of food promotes longevity, without afflicting *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. It easily passes down to the rectum after proper digestion. It does not impair the power of digestion. It gets digested without any difficulty.^[10]

4. *Jirne Ashniyat* (food should be taken after digestion of prior meal): When food is taken after proper digestion of previous meals, the *Doshas* remain in their normal state, *Agni* (digestive power) is kindled, *hunger* is felt, all the *Srotas* remain clear and open; eructation from mouth is healthy, *Vata* is normal and the urges for *Vata*, *Mutra*, *Purisa* are well attended. The food taken in such a condition does not vitiate body elements and serves the sole purpose of promoting life. Therefore it is very important aspect for the maintenance of health.^[11]

5. *Virya Avirudham Ashniyat* (intake of food compatible to body): Articles of diet that are opposite to the body elements tend to disagree with the system and they are termed as '*Viruddha Ahara*'. This incompatibility of diet is of several types. Some articles are naturally incompatible on account of their qualities, some become so, when combined, some by the mode of preparation and some by factors like place, time, dose etc. *Virya* (potency) is one of

the qualities of *Dravya* (eatables). *Virya* is the power by which an action takes place. Nothing can be done in the absence of *Virya*. Every action is the result of it. The substances having opposite *Viryas* when used in combination, it is known as *Virya - viruddham*. Various disorders are caused by taking *Viruddha Virya Ahara*.^[12]

6. *Ishte Deshe Ishta Sarvopkarnam Ashniyat* (intake of food at desired place with desired assistance): To eat in a congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances is needed for sound psychological condition during meals. Otherwise the unpleasant place and atmosphere can lead to the disturbed mind (*Manovighata*). *Ishta* term suggests favored, beloved, liked, etc. Not only favored but also beneficial is expected by the term *Ishta*. Though this is a relative term changing with every individual, generally a pleasant atmosphere is expected while eating. The place should be clean, hygienic and should not produce disturbing emotions like *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Cinta*, *Bhaya*, *Visada*, *Ghrna* etc.^[13]

7. *Na Atidrutam Ashniyat* (food not to be taken hurriedly): The food should not be taken too hurriedly. *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned in detail that food when taken too hurriedly may go to other pathways; its motion can be paralyzed, its properties are not understood and it is not properly settled in the alimentary canal. The food when eaten with hurry violates its normal route that can be understood by an example i.e. *Hikka*. The *Annaja Hikka* is the best example. '*Avasada*' can be applied to both food as well as *Agni*. '*Apratisthanam*' implies for proper placement of food in proper place, at proper time.^[14]

8. *Na Ativilambitam Ashniyat* (food not to be taken too slowly): Food should not be taken too leisurely as, satisfaction cannot be achieved, food is eaten in excess quantity, the food gets cold and the food gets digested irregularly.^[15]

9. *Ajalpan, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjeet* (food to be taken without talking, laughing with concentration): Food should be eaten without much talking and laughing. The reasons given are, one who talks or laughs during meals or who is preoccupied in other thoughts, suffers the same disorders as the one who eats too hastily. The most important statement is that the food should be eaten with enough concentration towards it as well as towards the eating process. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals.^[16]

DISCUSSION

Right food with appropriate manner of eating is the secret of health maintenance as well as avoidance of various diseases and treatment too. According to one quotation of *Sushruta* 'most concised and effective line of treatment is avoidance of causative factors'. *Ahara* and the dietary rules are the basic factors among the causes of diseases. So it obviously becomes an important part of the treatment by avoiding the causative factors. According to *Charaka*, all the *Dravyas*(substances) can be treated as *Aushadhi* (measures of treatment).^[17] These *Aushadhis* are of two types depending on the nature of composition i.e. *Dravyabhuta Ausadhi*(those having materialistic substrata) and *Adravyabhuta Ausadhi*(those not having materialistic substrata). *Ahara Dravyas* can be considered under the *Dravyabhuta* category. Whereas the Dietary rules may be included in the latter category as per *Acharya Chakrapani*. So, the dietary rules can be considered as *Upaya* or *Adravyabhuta Ausadhi*.^[18] Now it becomes imperative to establish the scientific basis of these dietary rules.

The first rule states that food should be taken when hot. By taking hot food, *Vata Anulomana* is achieved, *Pitta* gets stimulated and secreted, thereby increasing *Agni* or power of digestion, *bodhaka kapha* in oral cavity is secreted to acknowledge proper taste of food. With the above conditions, *Agni* gets activated and the digestion process is completed in proper time. This logic can be supported by modern physiology. The Salivation is different for different substances and at different temperatures. The latency of secretion is greatest at the temperature of mouth and less for the materials that are colder. The other category is the food that is again made hot, after preparation (*Punah Usnikrtam*). The *Paryushita Anna* (stale food) can be categorized under this type. The stale food is strictly prohibited or contraindicated in Ayurvedic text. Similar qualities are observed in the food that had been kept for long time and then eaten. Nowadays, fast food can be considered as *Usnikrtam Punah Punah* (repeatedly reheated). It becomes *Vidahi*(acidic) and causes the unwholesome effects mentioned above. Moreover the sequence of these ayurvedic dietary rules is quite suggestive that first of all something hot must be served as it improves the digestive fire and enhances the saliva and enzymatic secretion.

The second rule depicts the importance of *snigdha* food (unctuous food). By taking unctuous food, obviously *Vata* is alleviated (*Anulomana*), for *agnidipana* (improving digestion), *sneha* is required, *kledaka kapha* gets stimulated due to *kledana* (moistening) property of *sneha* which helps in *Madhura Avasthapaka*(a stage of digestion process in ayurveda) of food. Also

Bodhaka Kapha is secreted which aids to feel the proper taste. On the contrary, extremely unctuous (*Atisnigdha*) and *Asnigdha* or *Ruksha* (dry), both inhibit the process of digestion.

The third rule emphasizes on the quantity of food materials. *Ayurveda* clearly states that *Ahara matra* (quantity of food) is dependent on individual's *agni* (digestive power).^[19] Practically the proportion between hunger or digestive power and the '*Matra*' is naturally present in every living being, including humans, as it is the natural instinct of everyone. But as one grows up, this knowledge of self is purposefully suppressed for the likings of tastes and different food items. '*Matra*' is also dependent on many other factors. It also has a psychological aspect. In normal condition of *Mana* (mind) and *Buddhi* (intellect), the proper quantity of food is consumed, but in the psychologically disturbed conditions, always overeating or less eating tendency is observed. In a survey of 500 patients Freud found that 370 ate more when nervous or worried, 95 ate more when idle and bored, only 35 noted no connection between food intake and emotions. The effects of improper quantity are also studied experimentally. In animals also, overfeeding and fasting have shown to produce many diseases. Acute overfeeding in animals may produce 'food shock'. This is a condition of acute gastric dilatation and marked hyperemia of the CNS. It is a common cause of sudden death among the rats receiving excessive amount of food by stomach tube. Chronic overfeeding in animals leads to marked hypertrophy of the testes and adrenals that are typical manifestations of G.A.S. (general adaptation syndrome). In animals, fasting proved to be a particularly effective means of increasing the alarming reaction of any stressor agent.

Fourth dietary rule advises to take next meal after proper digestion of previous meal. Now a day's *adhyashan* (eating prior to digestion of previous meal) has become very common. More over opposite trends are also not uncommon. Few people tend to ignore the urge of hunger even after the previous meal gets digested and they feel hungry. *Ksudha* or hunger is considered as one of the *Adharaniya Vegas* (natural urges which should not be contained). *Ayurveda* advises not to contain or over stimulate these urges.^[20] The people with abnormal digestive power tend to eat abnormally either prior to digestion of previous meal or without hunger. On the contrary there are people who tend to ignore natural hunger either due to their busy schedule or some other reasons. Both of these habits are unhealthy and prolonged adaptation of such habits may lead to serious health problems. Therefore it is quite important to follow this dietary rule regarding time of eating.

The next rule strengthens the importance of intake of compatible food articles. It is a broad aspect. *Viruddha* (incompatibility) has been described at various places in *ayurveda* in detail. Regular intake of *Viruddha Ahara* is very common nowadays. There are many examples of *viruddha ahara* which are very popular in our society. Such as, having milk with food items containing salt for e.g. vegetable curries prepared in milk or milk crème, Combination of milk with fruits for e.g. fruit cream is very popular desert in these days. In meals also soups, milk items, curds anything is eaten altogether without thinking about their potencies. Eating buffets in hotels is a general trend of today's society. The popular Punjabi vegetables prepared in milk, curd or milk cream is all *viruddha ahara*. Preserved food items irrespective of their original tastes contain excess of oil or salt for better preservation. Butter that is preserved by adding plenty of salt is a good example of *Viruddha Ahara*. Consumption of extremely hot or cold beverages before or during or after the meals for e.g., coffee, chilled water, cold drinks (aerated) ice creams etc. The rules for sequence of food items are followed very rarely nowadays.

The next rule deals with the place of eating and associated requirements for eating. Acarya Sushruta has mentioned some important guidelines regarding the *desha* (place) of *bhojana*(food). He had provided important suggestions regarding the place of food preparation i.e. *Mahanasa* (Kitchen) and the place where the food should be kept before serving. The following indications are applicable to all the places related with food - preparation, storage and actual dining. *Sushruta* had advised to take food in such a place that is devoid of (unwanted) people to avoid the unwanted effects due to bad emotions of others. The place having defects in construction influences the psyche in an unwholesome manner. The dining place should be properly leveled, clean, hygienic and pleasant. Appropriate appliances for dining are needed and indicated in detail by *Acaryas*. There is a large list of utensils required for preparation, serving, storage and dining etc. For specific kind of food, specific material is mentioned.^[21] This specification may be due to some chemical reactions between the food material and utensils. This reaction can be helpful for longer preservation of food as well as its healthy effect on body. Some materials are strictly contraindicated for specific foods, e.g., sour foods should not be kept in copper utensils, as the chemical reaction produces poison like substances and leads to many disorders.

Next dietary rule suggests that food should be eaten neither too hurriedly nor too slowly. This is also very relevant in today's scenario. Especially the working class prefer to eat very

hurriedly as they lack time. They get very less time during their lunch break and they become habitual to finish their meal very fast. Practically the people of *Vata Prakrti* (inherent constitution) have natural tendency to finish their meals in comparatively lesser time. Persons who eat too leisurely, naturally tend to eat more, still satiety cannot be achieved. The temperature of food gets altered i.e. the hot items become cold and vice versa. All these factors hamper *Agni* and the food is not digested properly. Again the time required for finishing the meals is a relative factor, changing with everyone. No objective parameters can be applied for the time fixation of meals. There are many physiological as well as psychological variations in the normal time taken for eating. Concluding dietary rule suggests that food should be eaten with concentration without talking or laughing. There is nothing about man that is exclusively psychic or exclusively somatic, everything is psychosomatic. So in every aspect, the concept of *Sharira*(body) and *Manasa* (psyche) is interdependent and inseparable. The psychological condition reflects through various physiological systems organically as well as functionally.^[22] All have the experience of disturbed digestion one or other time and in such a condition one cannot feel high on the level of psyche. This again causes disturbances in the intake of further meals. This vicious cycle affects body as well as mind i.e. physiology as well as psychology. This proves that the process of digestion is totally a psycho-physiological phenomenon because; better state of psyche can yield better digestion. A large number of studies show that numerous factors working through the cerebral cortex significantly influence appetite, quantity of food ingested and caloric balance.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, life is disturbed with instability, insecurity and endless agitation. These mental disturbances initiate pathology. In general many diseases like gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular diseases and others are essentially the diseases of civilization, as they are comparatively uncommon in primitive societies. Their development is promoted by faulty food habits and stress which is inherent in civilized life. Centuries before, Ayurvedic scholars had paid due regard to the importance of dietary rules. The practical importance of the rules is a proven fact for a long time, but today it is the need of time to prove this again with some new applied researches, to uplift the quality of health as well as with a curative purpose in many diseases. It is necessary for all healthy and diseased, for children and aged for rich and poor. Each and everyone need a proper education about the code of diet intake. *Ayurveda* can contribute in preventing the diseases originated by faulty eating habits.

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