

REVIEWING AGNI AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Health encompasses complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not just the absence of illness. In Ayurvedic terms, health is achieved when Doshas, Dhatus, and Malas are balanced (Sama-awastha) and the senses, soul, and mind (Indriya, Aatma, and Mana) function harmoniously. Central to maintaining health is the regulation of Agni, the key element responsible for digestion and metabolic processes involving hormones, enzymes, and co-enzymes. Life is a series of continuous transformations, with the body growing, evolving, and eventually decaying. Disease arises when Agni is disrupted, as Ayurveda posits that all diseases stem from such disturbances. Therefore, understanding the role of Agni is crucial in recognizing states of health and illness. **Materials & Methods:** This paper reviews the ancient Ayurvedic scriptures, including the Charak Samhita, Sushrut Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with other classical texts, to shed light on the concept of Agni. **Discussion:** Agni, often

termed the Macrofire, is a key Ayurvedic element crucial for health and disease management. When balanced, it promotes longevity, vitality, and immunity, while also regulating other vital Agnis like Bhutagni and Dhatvagni. As the primary metabolic driver, Jatharagni processes food at the atomic level, separating it into nourishing essence and waste, thereby influencing lifespan and well-being. **Conclusion:** Agni is fundamental in Ayurveda, vital for digestion, metabolism, and overall vitality. It underpins health, influencing everything from strength to immunity. A harmonious Agni signifies wellness, while imbalance may cause disease, underscoring its indispensable role in life's sustenance.

KEYWORDS: Agni, Digestion, Metabolism, Jatharagni, Bhutagni, Dhatvagni, Pitta.

The term ‘Agni’ originates from ‘Anga dhatu,’ signifying an entity that expands broadly and moves upward. In Sanskrit, “Agni” signifies fire, and within Ayurvedic principles, it denotes the vital force overseeing digestion and metabolism in humans.^{[5][6]} The Acharyas have identified the primary locations of Agni as the Jathara and Grahani.^[1] Without Agni, life ceases in the body, but when Agni is in perfect equilibrium, it leads to a longevity and healthy life. The natural Agni is responsible for vital functions such as life span (Ayu), complexion (Varna), strength (Bala), health (Swasthya), enthusiasm (Utsaha), growth (Upchaya), luster (Prabha), vitality (Oja), and energy (Teja). Hence, Agni is considered the fundamental essence of life or moola of life.^[7] The essential process of digesting, absorbing, and assimilating ingested food, which is fundamental to sustaining life, is governed by Agni.

Acharya Charaka has categorized the ‘Agni’ into three types: Jatharagni, Panchbhautikagni, and Dhatwagni.^[2] The Panchbhautik agni includes five fires corresponding to the elements: Parthivagni (earth), Apyagni (water), Tejasagni (fire), Vayaviyagni (air), and Akashiyaagni (ether). Similarly, Dhatwagni comprises seven fires associated with bodily tissues: Rasaagni (plasma), Raktaagni (blood), Mansaagni (muscle), Medoaagni (fat), Asthiaagni (bone), Majjaagni (bone marrow), and Shukraagni (reproductive tissue). According to the Loka-Purusha Samya Siddhanta, which is detailed in Ayurvedic texts, the human body is composed of the five elements, mirroring nature itself.^[3] Food ingested is first transformed by Jatharagni into a nutrient essence. This essence is then acted upon by the Panchbhautik agni, which processes the parts of the essence that share similar qualities. The Sapta Dhatwagni further refines this essence, separating it into the essential and waste components. The ‘Sara’ bhag (Essential part) is used to form natural bodily tissues, while the ‘Kitta’ bhag (waste) is eliminated from the body. The essential process of digesting, absorbing, and assimilating ingested food, which is fundamental to sustaining life, is governed by Agni. Ayurveda has clearly emphasized the critical role of Agni, stating that a Agnimandya (disturbed digestive fire) is the root cause of all bodily diseases.^[4]

There are 61 synonyms for Agni as listed in the Shabdikalpadruma, agni is represented by a multitude of names, some of them are **Vaishwanara, Sarvapaka, Tanoonpata, Dhanunasa, Anala, Rudra, Tejasa, Shikhi, Vanhi** etc each reflecting a different aspect or quality of fire.

Nyaya and Vaisheshika Darshana described following forms of Agni’s

Bhauma i.e. physical fire ; **Divya** i.e. celestial fire like the lightning, rays of sun, moon, and stars etc.; **Audarya** i.e. abdominal fire which is responsible for the process of digestion and metabolism of food; **Akaraja** i.e. Agni present in a metal such as gold and silver.

Types of agni

Sr. No.	Acharya	No. of agni	Names
1	Charak	13	Dhatvagni-7, Bhutagni-5, Jatharagni-1
2	Sushrut	5	Pachagagni, Ranjakagni, sadhakagni, Bhrajakagni, Aalochakagni
3	Vagbhata	18	Dhatvagni-7, Doshagni-3, Bhutagni-5, Malagni-3
4	Sharangdhara	5	Pachak, Ranjak, Sadhaka, Bhrajaka, Aalochaka
5	Garbhpanishada	3	Koshthagni, Dnyanagni, Darshanagni

Extol of Jatharagni (Macrofire) - Jatharagni (Macrofire), is a fundamental element pivotal to both health and disease. In a state of balance, it fosters **longevity, a radiant complexion, robust strength, vitality, and a strong immune system** (Known as ojas). It regulates the temperature of other Agnis, such as Bhutagni and Dhatvagni, which are essential for various vital functions and are dependent on Jatharagni's stability. Moreover, Jatharagni's role extends to influencing an individual's lifespan and overall well-being, acting as the core force behind the body's metabolic processes. Its significance is underscored by the fact that it is the initial point of contact for all consumed food, this digestive fire breaks down food into its nutrient components, which are composed of the five great elements, or pancha-Mahabhutas, and converts them into forms that can be assimilated by the body's tissues, or dhatus, at the atomic level. Additionally, Jatharagni bifurcates the ingested material into prasada, the nourishing essence, and kitta, the waste products, within the body.^[9]

Relation between Rutu & Jatharagni

Prabal	Madhyam bal	Alpa bal/ Mand
Shishir	Vasanta	Grishma
Hemanta	Sharad	Varsha

“आदानदुर्बले देहे पक्ता भवति दुर्बलः| Ch.Su.6/33

The verse from the **Charak Samhita** discusses the concept of **seasonal changes** affecting the body's strength and digestive fire, known as **Agni**. In the body weakened by the **Adana Kala** (the period of Northern Solstice), the digestive fire (Agni) also becomes weak. Such a person is further afflicted by the impurities of the wind and other elements during the rainy season. This verse highlights the importance of adapting one's diet and lifestyle to maintain balance.

and health during the various seasons, particularly during the **rainy season** when the body's digestive fire is naturally weaker.^[12] It's a reminder of the wisdom in Ayurveda that emphasizes **preventive healthcare** by living in harmony with nature's cycles.^[12]

Bhutagni (Micro fire) - In the concept of Bhutagni, it is believed that the universe's physical matter is created through the union of five fundamental elements, known as the Mahabhutas. Correspondingly, there are five Bhutagnis, each residing within its respective Mahabhuta. Every cell within our bodies is an amalgamation of these five basic elements.^[8] Following the digestion process by the Bhutagni, the resultant nutrients, which possess properties akin to the individual bhutas, provide nourishment to the specific elemental components of the body that they match.^[7]

Sr. No	Panchamahabhuta	Types of agni
1	Space (Aakash)	Nabhasa Agni
2	Air (Vayu)	Vayveeya Agni
3	Fire (Teja)	Tejasa Agni
4	Water (Aapa)	Aapya Agni
5	Earth (Prithvi)	Parthiva Agni

Dhatvagni- In the concept of Dhatvagni, it is understood that each of the seven dhatus, or bodily tissues, houses its own metabolic fire or Agni. This intrinsic Agni is responsible for processing nutrients that are transported to them via their respective channels, known as strotasas, ensuring that each dhatu is nourished and maintained.^[7,11]

Sr. no.	Dhatus	Types of agni
1	Rasa Dhatu (Nutrient fluid)	Rasagni
2	Rakta Dhatu (Blood tissue)	Raktagni
3	Mamsa Dhatu (Muscle Tissue)	Mamsagni
4	Meda Dhatu (Adipose tissue)	Medagni
5	Asthi Dhatu (Bony tissue)	Asthiyagni
6	Majja Dhatu (Bone Marrow)	Majjagni
7	Shukra Dhatu (Reproductive tissue)	Shukragni

In Ayurveda, vitiation of Agni is caused by various factors like **Dietary habits** such as excessive fasting, overeating, and consuming inappropriate food can vitiate Agni. **Psychological stressors** like anger, anxiety, fear, and jealousy also play a role in disrupting Agni. The balance of the **three doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha**—is crucial for Agni's stability. A diet incorporating the **six tastes**—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent—is recommended to support Agni and maintain doshic balance. **Emotional well-**

being is another pillar; chronic stress can weaken Agni, causing digestive issues. **Eating patterns** that are regular and mindful bolster Agni, while erratic habits can impair it. The quality of food matters too; whole, unprocessed foods nourish Agni, whereas overly spicy or processed foods can disturb it. Lastly, **mindful eating**—taking time to eat attentively and without haste—is essential for Agni’s proper functioning. By addressing these factors, one can enhance their Agni and, by extension, their overall health in line with Ayurvedic teachings.^[14,15,16]

DISCUSSION

In the Ayurvedic discourse, **Agni** and **Pitta** are often equated due to their shared role in digestion. Pitta is recognized for its **digestive functions**, akin to the metabolic actions of Agni. Acharya Sushruta posits that no distinct form of Agni exists within the body apart from Pitta, attributing increased digestive activity and metabolic heat to Pitta’s **ushna (hot) quality**, which is treated similarly to Agni. Acharya Chakrapani clarifies that Pitta’s role is not to combust but to serve as the bodily heat essential for Agni’s operations. Furthermore, Acharya Sushruta categorizes the five types of Agni as variations of Pitta, highlighting their intrinsic connection.^[8]

Agni and Prakruti

Sr. No.	Agni	Prakriti
1	Vishamagni	Vata Prakruti
2	Tikshnagni	Pitta Prakruti
3	Mandagni	Kapha Prakruti

Eventuality of agni

Sr. no.	Dosha	Agni dushti	Associated pathology
1	Vata	Vishamagni	Disturbed digestive and metabolic activities; Irregular appetite, eg. Udargat Roga
2	Pitta	Tikshhagni	Sharp appetite, acidic digestive system. Hypermetabolism eg. Bhasmak roga.
3	Kapha	Mandagni	Low Appetite, slow and weak digestion. Hypometabolism
4	Sama Dosha	Samaagni	Healthy state of body

Jatharagni is further categorized into four types based on the dominant dosha present, reflecting its adaptability and nuanced function within the body’s complex system.^[7,10] Agni’s significance in Ayurveda is twofold, encompassing both physiological and pathological dimensions. **Samagni** represents Agni’s balanced state, unaffiliated with any dosha, ensuring

proper and timely digestion, thereby enhancing individual health and the quality of bodily tissues. **Vishamagni** indicates a state of erratic digestion, where metabolism fluctuates between normal and abnormal, leading to symptoms like flatulence, abdominal pain, and irregular bowel movements. This condition arises when Vata dosha disturbs Agni, potentially causing Vata-related disorders such as paralysis and udaragat rogas. **Tikshnagni** is characterized by an excess of Pitta dosha, resulting in an intensified digestive capacity that rapidly processes food, inducing frequent hunger—a state referred to as ‘Bhasmak Roga’ in Ayurveda, common in individuals with a Pitta-dominant constitution. Lastly, **Mandagni** is a sluggish digestive state with diminished digestive power, often associated with Kapha dosha dominance, which can lead to conditions like cough, dyspnoea, vomiting, and excessive salivation, giving rise to Kapha-related Vikar.^[12,13]

Malady of aama: In Ayurveda, **Ama** represents the toxic byproduct of improperly digested food and is seen as the root of many diseases. When **Agni**, the digestive fire, is weak—a condition known as **mandagni**—it fails to fully digest food, leading to the accumulation of Ama. This accumulation, referred to as **agnimandya**, allows undigested food particles to build up in the body. Therefore, Ama is both a result of agnimandya and a contributor to further weakening Agni, creating a detrimental cycle that impacts health.

आमप्रदोष दुर्बलो हि अग्निः न युगपत् दोषम औषधम आहारजातम च शक्तः पक्तुम्। Ch.Vi.2/13

This verse from Viman Sthan of Charaka Samhita states that “When the digestive fire (agni) is the doshas, medicine, and food all at once, due to the strong nature of ama-induced disorders, administering food and medicine indiscriminately can suddenly weaken the already subdued digestive fire and severely debilitate the patient. This excerpt emphasizes the importance of Agni and the judicious use of medicine and diet in Ayurveda.

CONCLUSION

Numerous samhitas underscore the critical role of **Agni** in digestion and metabolic transformation, highlighting its essential contribution to overall health. Agni is instrumental in fostering strength, vitality, immunity, energy, and life force. A balanced **Samagni** is indicative of optimal physical and mental well-being, whereas an imbalanced Agni can lead to illness. In essence, Agni is pivotal in sustaining bodily functions, ensuring equilibrium, and

facilitating metabolism. It is the constant factor in the body's process of transformation, making it indispensable for life and vitality.

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