

## AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE OF DIGESTIVE HEALTH: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

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### ABSTRACT

Digestive health is a core concept in *Ayurveda*, where *Agni* (digestive fire) is considered essential for physical and metabolic well-being. According to *Ayurveda*, imbalance of the three doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—impairs *Agni*, leading to the formation of *Ama* (toxins) and the development of digestive disorders. This article presents an overview of the *Ayurvedic* understanding of digestion, highlighting the roles of *Agni*, *Ama*, and *dosha* balance. It also outlines key dietary, lifestyle, and herbal interventions recommended in *Ayurveda* to restore digestive harmony. Traditional practices such as individualized diet planning, seasonal regimens (*ritucharya*), mindful eating, and the use of digestive herbs like *triphal*a are emphasized. These holistic strategies aim to improve digestion, enhance metabolism, and prevent common gastrointestinal issues such as bloating, constipation, and sluggish digestion. Overall, the

*Ayurvedic* approach provides a personalized, preventive, and integrative framework for promoting long-term digestive health, with potential benefits that can be further supported through modern scientific research.

**KEYWORDS:** *Agni, Ama, Doshas, Digestive Health, Ritucharya.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda*, the traditional system of medicine originating in India, emphasizes a holistic approach to health, incorporating physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Digestive health holds a central position in *Ayurvedic* medicine, where *Agni* (digestive fire) is regarded as the foundation of overall wellness. A balanced *Agni* helps the body to digest, absorb, and use nutrients properly, which keeps both the body and mind healthy. Conversely, an impaired *Agni* leads to the accumulation of *Ama* (toxins), which *Ayurveda* identifies as a root cause of various diseases. This article explores the *Ayurvedic* perspective on digestive health, delving into its ancient principles and their relevance to contemporary healthcare.

## AIM

To explore and explain the *Ayurvedic* perspective of digestive health.

## OBJECTIVE

1. To analyse the role of *Agni, Ama* and *Dosha* in digestive functioning.
2. To compile and evaluate *Ayurvedic* dietary, lifestyle, and herbal strategies for improving digestion.

## METHODOLOGY

This comprehensive guide draws upon classical *Ayurvedic* texts, contemporary interpretations, and integrative health research to explain the mechanisms of *Agni, Ama* (toxins), and *Dosha* interactions. It also reviews traditional therapeutic methods, dietary principles, herbal interventions, and lifestyle practices used to restore digestive balance.

### The Ayurvedic Perspective of Digestive Health

In *Ayurveda*, digestive health holds a central role in determining overall well-being, bridging physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of health. Unlike modern medicine, which predominantly views the gut through the lens of digestion and microbiota, *Ayurveda* takes a more integrative approach by emphasizing the balance of bodily energies (*Doshas*), the

quality of the *Agni* (digestive fire), and the prevention of *Ama* (toxins). These foundational concepts form the basis for Ayurvedic strategies to maintain and restore digestive health.

## 1. Agni: The Digestive Fire

A balanced *Agni* supports proper digestion and contributes to the production of Ojas, the essence of vitality, which directly impacts immunity and mental clarity.

**Samagni (Balanced Agni):** Leads to optimal digestion, a robust metabolism, and the absence of disease. The ideal state, where digestion is harmonious and complete.

**Imbalance** Agni: Ayurveda categorizes impaired Agni into 3 states:

1. *Mandagni* (weakened digestive fire): Causes incomplete digestion, leading to *Ama* formation.
2. *Tikshnagni* (hyperactive digestive fire): Results in excessive digestion, often seen in *Pitta* imbalances.
3. *Vishamagni*(erratic digestive fire): Irregular digestion, associated with *Vata* dominance.

## Role of Agni in *Ama* Dosha

As food moves through the body, it gets broken down at different stages until it is finally used by the cells and tissues, which is brought by the *Agni*. If *Agni* is diminished or not properly work then there will be no tissue nourishment and ultimately there will be no possibility of life. Acharya *Charak* had also described about the importance of *Agni* that all the body entities such as *Bala*, *Varna*, *Swasthya*, *Utsaha*, *Upachaya*, *Prabha*, *Ojas*, *Shareera*, *Ushma* (*Teja*), *DehaPushti*, *Vriddhi*, are all the functions of *Agni*.<sup>[2]</sup> Acharya *Charak* has also stated that proper functioning of *Agni* results in sustenance of good health and life. While impaired *Agni* causes ill health or even death.

## 2. Tridosha and Digestive Health:

The *Tridosha* theory - *Vata, Pitta, and Kapha* provides a framework for understanding individual differences in digestive processes. Each *Dosha* plays a specific role in digestion.

**1. Vata:** Governs the movement of food and waste through the digestive tract. Its imbalance can cause bloating, gas, and irregular bowel movements.

**2. Pitta:** Responsible for enzymatic activity and metabolic processes. Imbalances often result in hyperacidity, inflammation, or diarrhea.

**3. Kapha:** Provides stability and lubrication within the gastrointestinal system. Its imbalance may manifest as sluggish digestion, heaviness, or mucus accumulation.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Ama: The Root of Disease

*Ama* (undigested metabolic waste), is a concept unique to *Ayurveda* that underscores the importance of a healthy digestive system. According to Acharya *Vaghbhatta*, due to hypofunctioning of *Agni*, *Rasa Dhatu* is not properly formed. Instead, the *Annarasa* undergoes fermentation (Dushta) being retained in the *Amashaya* (Stomach). It is the state of rasa which is spoken as *Ama*.<sup>[4]</sup> Properties of *Ama* are that it is incompletely digested food, sticky in nature, foul smelling, and produces lethargy in the body.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### Aetiological factors responsible for Ama production

*Aharaja: Guru, Shita, Ruksha, Shushka, Vidahi, Pichhila, Vishtambhi, Vidahi Guna* cause formation of *Ama*. *Abhojan, Ajeernashana, Adhayshana, Vishmasana* etc. produces *Amavikar, Grahani Vikara*.

*Viharaja: Vega Dharana, Diva Swapna, Dukhashayya*.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Mansika: Chinta, Shoka, Bhaya, Krodha, Irshya, Lobha, Udvega, Hri, Kama*.<sup>[7]</sup>

*Other: Atidushta Dosha-Sammilana, Improper management of Vamana, Virechan and Snehana, Desh-Kala-Ritu Vaishamya*.<sup>[6]</sup>

#### The presence of *Ama* leads to following symptoms

1. *Srotorodha* - Obstruction of Srotasas (micro channels) i.e. intestines, capillaries and blood vessels in the body.
2. *Balabhransha* - Weakness or loss of strength.
3. *Gaurava* - Heaviness in the body.
4. *Alasya* - Fatigue.
5. *AnilaMudhata* - Obstruction in the flow of Vayu i.e., excrete gas.
6. *Apakti* - Indigestion.

7. *Nishthivana* - Excessive salivation.
8. *Mala Sanga* - Obstruction of Malas i.e., stool, urine, excrete gas, etc.
9. *Aruchi* - Anorexia.
10. *Klama* – Lethargy.<sup>[8]</sup>

#### 4. Signs of Good Digestive Health in Ayurveda & its importance

According to *Ashtanga Hrudaya Samhita*, *Prasrushta Mala-Mutra*, *Suvimala Hrudaya*, *Svapathaga Dosha*, *VishuddhaUdgara*, *Kshut Uapagamana*, *Vatanulomana*, *Agni Udirana*, *Vishadakarana*, *Laghuta in Deha* are elucidated as *Jirnahara Lakshana*. It is supposed that one should not consume next food until previously taken food is digested completely. *Jirnahara Lakshana* reflects process of digestion. In addition, it tells about completion of digestion, like the end stage of digestion is formation and excretion of waste product. After which one is supposed to consume next food (full meal). Changes in *Jirnahara Lakshana* can show if there is something wrong or abnormal. So knowing *Jirnahara Lakshana* is important.<sup>[9]</sup>

#### Ayurvedic Framework for Optimal Digestive Health

Ayurveda provides a comprehensive framework for maintaining and improving Digestive health.

##### 1. Dietary Practices: (*Aharavidhividhan*)

*Aharavidhividhan*, that are the base of dietetics, indicates the method to which Ahara (food) should be taken; these are warm food (*Ushna*), unctuous food (*Snigdha*), proper quantity (*Matravat*), which is consumed after the digestion of previously ingested food, food that is not in contradictory potency (*Virya avirudha ahara*), Is to be taken in favourite place (*Iste Deshe*), With instruments (*Ista sarvopakarana*), Not to be taken speedily (*na atidrutham*), Not to be taken too slowly, taken without talking with others (*ajalpa*), taken without laughing (*ahasan*), taken with utmost concentration (*atmanaabisameekshya*).<sup>[10]</sup> Eating foods that don't go well together, like milk and sour fruits, should be avoided. For instance, *Ushnamashniyat* rules indicate food should be consumed in a warm state, which results in good taste and maintains the normalcy of *Jatharagni* controls the *Vata* and *Kapha*. *Snigdhamashniyat* indicates Diet should be unctuous, refers to the consumption of food with ghee, results in good tastes, quickens the process of digestion, eases the digestion, nourishes the body and sense organs, increases strength, and enhances complexion, normalizes the functions of *Vata*. *Matravatashniyat* means food should be consumed in proper quantity and *Aahara Matra*

should be decided based on *Agni Bala*. However, the quantity of diet differs based on the *Guna of Ahara*. *Guru* (heavy) *Ahara* should be consumed only up to one third or half satisfaction point, and *Laghu* (light) *Ahara* should not be consumed in surfeit to maintain the *Bala* of *Agni*. One must fill only one-third of the total stomach capacity with solids, one-third with liquids, and keep the other one third for the movement of *Dosha*.<sup>[11]</sup> So only when a person consumes food according to the quantity which is suitable to oneself it quickly passes down the bowel, doesn't disturb the *Agni*, gets digested without any discomfort and promotes life span. *Veerya Avirudha*, compatible food, expels the *doshas* out of the body. Incompatible food causes various disorders like *Visarpa*, *Unmada*, *Adhmana*, *Grahani*, etc. *Ishtadeshe Ishtasarvopkarnam cha Ashniyat*, i.e., meals taken at favorable places and provide comfort and satisfaction with favourable instruments. The person tends to get up in between meals when they do not have a favourable environment and instrument, making the food cold and less tasty. Eating in an unfavourable climate may also disturb *Raja* and *Tama Dosha* of *Manas*. In turn, it results in various psychological disorders like *Unmada* etc. *Naatidrutamashniyat* and *Naativilambitamashniyat* are Not eating too fast or slow. If food is eaten too fast, it may enter the respiratory tract and cause choking or other respiratory tract infections or problems like GERD. Also, a person will not be able to appreciate the taste. When food is taken at the proper speed, enzymatic juices mix properly and ease digestion. Eating too slowly leads to overeating, lack of satiety, and the food becomes cold, which leads to indigestion. *Ajalpanahasan* is eating without talking or laughing and *tanmanabhunjeet* is mindful eating. When a person is laughing or talking, there are chances of food entering the respiratory tract. Having a diverted mind while eating may lead to entry to the unnoticed foreign body and the food. Olfactory and visual senses activate the brain to secrete digestive juices; hence one should consume food with complete concertation. *Atmanamabhisamikshya Bhunjeet Samyak* is Eating after analyzing one's needs; therefore, the diet should be taken according to *Rutu*, *Desha*, *Satmya*, *Prakruti*, *Agni*, and *Bala*. *Ama* formation occurs in the body if these rules and regulations are not followed, which is the root cause of most diseases. Hence following these rules and regulations become crucial.

## 2. Yoga Asanas & Pranayama for Digestion:

### **Yoga Asanas**

*Yoga asanas* quickly stimulate abdominal organs, promote blood circulation, and balance the autonomic nerve system, improving digestion. Twisting positions like *Ardha Matsyendrasana* (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose) massage the liver, pancreas, and intestines,

supporting digestion and purification. Forward bends like *Paschimottanasana* (Seated Forward Bend) increase intra-abdominal pressure, peristalsis, and intestinal compression to relax the nervous system and relieve constipation and bloating. *Sarvangasana* (Shoulder Stand) and *Viparita Karani* (Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose) invert abdominal gravity, increase digestive organ circulation, and control peristaltic movement. Corpse Pose decreases cortisol, counteracts sympathetic overdrive, and promotes rest-and-digest. Yoga digestive therapy relies on these asanas to stimulate the gastrointestinal tract, relax muscles, and calm the mind.

### **Pranayama (Breathing)**

*Pranayama* improves digestion through moderate autonomic nervous system modulation and vagal tone activation. Deep diaphragmatic breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, improving stomach secretions, motility and relaxation for stress-related digestive issues. *Kapalabhati* (Skull Shining Breath) and *Bhastrika* (Bellows Breath) are quick, cleaning abdominal contractions that massage digestive organs, increase circulation, and boost metabolism, helping slow digestion and metabolic imbalance. However, balancing techniques like *Anulom-Vilom* (Alternate Nostril Breathing) manage *Prana*(vital energy), balance sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, and improve emotional balance, curing stress-related IBS and GERD. *Pranayama* increases gut-beneficial heart rate variability, vagal stimulation, and cortisol. *Pranayama* improves intestinal health physiologically and mentally without medication.<sup>[12]</sup>

**3.Cleansing and Detoxification:** Regular detox treatments like *Panchakarma* help clean the digestive system and make the body feel fresh by improving digestion.

Key methods include:

Vamana: Therapeutic vomiting to clear excess mucus (*Kapha Dosha*) and toxins.  
 Virechana: Purgation therapy to eliminate toxins through the bowels.  
 Basti: This is a special type of medicated enema that is given based on individual dosha imbalance.

### **4. Use of Herbs and Spices that supports digestion**

1. Spices: Ginger – Improves circulation and Agni. *Jeerak* (cumin) – Relieves gas and promotes assimilation Fennel – Cooling and helpful for acidity. Coriander – Balances all three doshas. Turmeric – Anti-inflammatory and supports liver function.

2. Herbs: Triphala – Supports gut cleansing. Amla – Rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, *Pittashamak*. AloeVera – Good for acidity & bowel regulation.

## 5. Lifestyle Modifications: **Dinacharya (Daily Routine)**

An organised daily routine improves digestion and metabolic harmony. *Ayurveda* recommends: Early morning wake-up (*Brahma Muhurta*): Getting up 1.5 hours before sunrise balances *Vata* and synchronises with the circadian rhythm.

**Drinking warm water in the morning:** This helps start digestion and cleans the bowels

**Daily bowel movement & tongue scraping:** This supports *Ama* elimination and digestion support.

**Eating at Regular Times:** *Ayurveda* recommends following a consistent eating routine to ensure that *Agni* is balanced.

## **Ritucharya (Seasonal regimen)**

Diet and Lifestyle without seasonal regimens can have a significant impact on commensal microbial communities, resulting in dysbiosis, which can increase pathogen susceptibility, inflammatory disorders, and the current epidemic of metabolic disorders. In Ayurvedic advocacy, the status of the *Agni* depends on the *Ritu*(Seasons) and it helps to maintain the homeostasis microbiome of the gut. Adopting *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) helps to maintain the harmony of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Agni*, *Mala* and also in contemporary science provide an adequate opportunity to fine-tune the dynamics of human gut flora and save the host from pathogenic symptoms of seasonal changes and other diverse causes. Reverting to seasonal foods can change the gut flora to promotes health.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

*Ayurveda* considers *Agni*, to be the foundation of good health. When *Agni* is strong, food is properly digested, nutrients are absorbed well, and *Ama*(toxins) do not accumulate. When *Agni* is weak or imbalanced, problems like gas, acidity, constipation, and heaviness occur. According to *Ayurveda*, digestion is influenced by the three doshas—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—each creating different digestive patterns. To maintain healthy digestion, *Ayurveda* recommends eating fresh, warm, and well-spiced food, avoiding overeating, and following proper food combinations. Herbs like ginger, cumin, fennel, and *Triphala* help stimulate and strengthen the digestive fire. Lifestyle practices such as drinking warm water in the morning,

walking after meals, practicing yoga (especially *Vajrasana* and *Pawanmuktasana*), and managing stress play a key role in balancing digestion. Overall, Ayurveda promotes a holistic approach—balancing diet, lifestyle, and mental well-being—to keep the digestive system strong and free from disease.

## CONCLUSION

A healthy gut is the foundation of overall health, and Ayurveda provides an ageless, down-to-earth approach to attaining it. By igniting digestive fire (*Agni*), regulating the *Doshas*, and removing toxins (*Ama*), you build the ground for increased immunity, clarity of mind, and enduring energy. Easy daily rituals, mindful eating, Specific herbs, and cleansing according to season maintain this equilibrium from within.

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