

**AYURVEDA AAHAR-SWASTH BHARAT KA AADHAAR****Dr. Aruna Kumari Sangwan\*, Dr. Sudhir Kumar Pani<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Swapnil C. R.<sup>2</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

Ayurveda is a holistic system of natural health care that originated from Vedas. As it deals with various aspects of life it is not merely the system of treatment but is an ideal way of life to attain healthy life. Aahar is life, strength, complexion and Oja of living beings. Acharya define the Aahar in detail and explains how to take Aahar for healthy and long-life span. Aahar is first and most important factor for the “*swasthaysaswastyarakshanam*” if we did not follow the proper rules for Aahar then body leads to *Roga Avastha*. Aahar plays vital role in healthy and diseased condition. Food in turn, derives its properties from six primary tastes which are inherent in the substances that comprise food. The substances, their specific tastes, qualities,

potencies and digestive transformations are responsible for equilibrium of the Dosha and Dhātu. As growth, strength, good health, complexion and the alertness of senses are traceable to food and its inequality causes illness. Diet therapy is a broad term for the practical application of the concept of nutrition as a preventive or corrective treatment of diseases. It comprises food prescribed, regulated or restricted in kind amount for therapeutic and other purposes. This usually involves the modification of an existing dietary lifestyle to promote optimum health. However, in some cases, an alternative dietary lifestyle plan may be developed for the purpose of eliminating certain foods in order to reclaim health. Ayurvedic principles are concerned about every part of the body, mentally and physically through diet.

**KEYWORDS:** Aahar; Aahar vidhi vidhanam; Aahar Niyam; Vayu; Agni.

## INTRODUCTION

Aahar is the most essential requirement of all living beings. Nowadays there is increased prevalence of life style disorders, in which faulty dietary habits play an important role. Ayurveda has given detailed discipline and process to take the Aahar for an individual and in general both. This discipline is titled as Aahar vidhi vidhanm<sup>1</sup>, where all the laws about the diet and drinks are given. Basically, Ayurveda is having an<sup>2</sup> introducing concept that the health and disease both are the product of Aahar. Acharyas had described Aahar, Nindra and Brahmcharya as Trayoupsthambha (three sub pillars) which support the body itself. Here Aahar has been placed first which shows that it is most important to maintain and sustain the life<sup>3</sup>. Aahar supplies bio-energy to the body. This bio-energy is supplied by proper and adequate nutrition in the form of,<sup>[4]</sup> it's essential constituents (viz.- protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins and water). In Ayurveda, Aahar as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance. Food which are consumed according to the prescribed methods (in the scriptures) are the seat for the satisfaction for the life. Ojas, teja (splendor), dhatus, senses, bala (strength), Tushti (satisfaction of mind), Aarogya (Health), are all dependant on food.<sup>[5]</sup> They are fuel for the Agni (fire inside the body) which is the main basis for sustaining the body. According to Charak Samhita, the life of all living things is food and all the world seeks food. Complexion, good voice, long life, understanding, happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength and intelligence are all established in food.<sup>[6]</sup> In the present modern life style, we do not take care of our health and the consequences of our eating habits and other lifestyles, which are harmful for us. Acharya Charak has stated that diet sustains life if taken with discipline in a proper manner. According to Acharya Kashyap, Aahar is considered as the Mahabhaishajya i.e., the great medicine. Diet supports the body constantly just like the house is supported by the pillars. Complete nutritional diet or the wholesome food is responsible for the growth of the living beings while unwholesome food for the growth of diseases. Proper growth and maintenance of the body depends on the balanced diet. Aahar and the dietetic rules are basic factors among the causes of disease. Though everyone cannot always follow all the rules due to the bindings of fast and forward life, the awareness is needed regarding the subject.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data regarding the Ayurveda concept of Aahar and Aaharvidhi Vidhana is compiled, analysed and presented in scientific manner from different classical texts, Samhita Grantha and academic texts of Ayurveda. In addition, data regarding the modern diet concept and

dietic regulation and its role in health of human being is thoroughly searched from different indexed journals, research articles medical manuals and magazines and analysed and presented in given article. Different e-books and electronic literature also thoroughly searched and analysed.

### **Classification of Aahar**

The sages of the vedic times, the rishis had researched and categorized the gross and subtle qualities and effects of food in three categories 1. Satvika 2. Rajasika 3. Tamasika. They had also enjoined that those desirous of having the purity, piety and sagacity of thoughts, feelings and emotions along with the vibrant health of the body, should avoid Tamasika and Rajasika food and take only Satvika food.

### **Ashta Ahar Vidhi Vishesha Ayatanani (Eight aspects of Dietics)<sup>[7]</sup>**

Aahar Vidhi Vishesha Ayatanani means the factors responsible for wholesome and unwholesome effect of the Aahar and methods of Aahar sevan (special rule for diet intake). These eight factors should be considered before taking food. Prakriti (Natural qualities); Karana (Processing of substances); Samayoga (Combinations); Rashi (Quantity); Desha (Habitat); Kala (Time); Upyoga Sanstha (Dietetic rules); Upayokta (The users).

### **Rules For Food Intake (Aharavidhi Vidhanam)<sup>[8]</sup>**

Aahar vidhi vidhanam described in our classics which are the foundation of dietetics indicates the method of Aahar. All persons should follow these rules while eating the food to remain healthy and enhance the span of life.

1. Ushnam Ashniyat - Food should be warm and freshly prepared.

Significance as per Charaka - Swadishta, Agnidipaka, Kshigrapachana, Kaphahara

Modern - Appealing to senses, fresh food without contamination and highest bio -availability of nutrients will be suitable nourishment for everyone.<sup>[9]</sup>

2. Snigdham Ashniyat Eat food which is not roasted, hard to eat & dry to eat

Significance as per Charaka - Agnidipaka, Vata anuloman, Balvridhikar, Varnaprasadar

Modern - Food products which are hard, roasted are generally unwholesome in their nutritive value and satiety quotient is also very less hence are not recommended.<sup>[9]</sup>

3. Matravat Ashniyat - Adequate quantity either less or more.

Significance as per Charaka - Ayuvardhak, easily digested

Modern - Quantity based on calorific value and satiety quotient of particular food either alone or in combination with other must be kept in mind when ever food is consumed otherwise it will lead to excess nourishment or inadequate nourishment.<sup>[9]</sup>

4. Jirne Ashniyat- Eat only when the food taken is digested (don't munch too much in between)

Significance as per Charaka - Ajir nabhojana-doshaprakopaka, Jirna-Ayurvedhak

Modern - Digestion process has its own biological clock and pattern. Honouring it is very important to ensure smooth functioning of the organism.<sup>[9]</sup>

5. Virya Virudha Ashniyat- Do not take food which is incompatible

SIGNIFICANCE as per Charaka -Virudhaaharajanya diseases can be avoided

Modern -Incompatibility of food must be viewed in light of bio-availability of nutrients. Sometimes the combination of different kinds of food together may cause local irritation or may result in toxic substances which may cause more harm than good.<sup>[9]</sup>

6. Ishta Deshe / Ishta Sarvopkarnam Ashniyat: Eat at a suitable and pleasant place where you are comfortable and happy.

Significance as per Charaka -Gives happiness

Modern -Mood plays a vital role in eating digestion and even assimilation of food. Digestion is predominantly a parasympathetic activity which is activated and functions at its best when the organism is relaxed and calm. Hence it is must to be very relaxed clean and well settled before taking food.<sup>[9]</sup>

7. Na Atidrutam Ashniyat: Avoid eating too fast (not paying attention to what you are eating and how much you are eating)

Significance as per Charaka - Food is tasteless when is consumed fast

Modern - Flight and fright are the responses to emergency. It is predominantly mediated by sympathetic activity. When this system is on, secretions are lowered, blood circulation is shifted from central pool to periphery and person is very tense such situation is not good for food intake.<sup>[9]</sup>

8. Na Ativilambit Ashniyat: Avoid eating too slow

SIGNIFICANCE as per Charaka - Unsatisfaction

Modern - Too slow eating may result in excess food intake, hence must be avoided. It may indicate depression and lack of attention. Hence must be attended appropriately.<sup>[9]</sup>

9. Ajalpana, Ahasan, Tanmanabhunjitam: Eat quietly

Significance as per Charaka-Food does not go to its place properly

Modern-Eating silently without taking, laughing will avoid aerophagy (engulfing air) and ensure proper eating and early satisfaction.<sup>[9]</sup>

10. Aatanam Abhisamikshya Bhunjitam: Paying total attention while you take food is essential it include what is your choice of food and adds spiritual dimension to the food

Significance as per Charaka-Maintains the Equilibrium of Tridosha

Modern-Help to make choice regarding what to eat what not to eat how much to eat etc.<sup>[9]</sup>

### Wrong Eating Habits In Present Era<sup>[10]</sup>

Eating when not hungry	Eating soon after meal	Eating at the wrong time of the day
Eating incomplete food combinations	Overeating	Eating too much heavy too little light food
Eating hurriedly	Emotional eating	Eating food one cannot digest
Eating when constipated	Drinking cold or chilled water, especially during meal	Too much water or no water at all during a meal
Preserved and stale food	Frozen food	Too spicy, sour, salty food

According to Sushrutacharya, Achokshyam (dirty), Dushta (affected by poison etc.), Utsrutam (left over), Pashana-truna-lashtavata (containing stone, grass and dust), Dwishta (disliked), vyushitam (stale), Aswadu (unpalatable) and Puti (putrified food) should be discarded. Chirsiddham (Food which is cooked long before), Sthira (hard), Sheetam (cold), ushnikrutam puna (reheated), Ashantam (incompletely strained) and Upadagdhm (over burned) is not palatable (loses its natural taste) and as such should be discarded.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Principles of Ayurvedic Diet<sup>[12]</sup>

An ayurvedic diet does not limit its concept to the selection of food items alone but also extends it to food preparation and modulation (Aahar Sanskara and Aahar Kalpana). Some principles of Ayurvedic diet are - Food items to be chosen, prepared and catered depends on the individual's body and mind. The mind and body must be prepared before having the meal with bhojana purva karma (food rituals before food intake). The quantity and quality of the food for an individual is based on their vital factors like digestive fire, age, time of eating (day/ night), occupation etc. To enhance the process of digestion, absorption, and assimilation of food, Ayurveda recommends performing Bhojanottara Karma (food rituals after food intake) like walking hundred steps, eating betel leaves, herbal smoking etc. Ayurveda categorises the individuals based on their prakriti. A person belonging to a particular prakriti should strive to take foods, which are opposite to their prakriti to maintain the balance of the Dosha or bio-energies and Dhatu or body tissues. Ayurveda proposes intake of food according to the habitat and season.

In Ayurveda it is clearly stated that सर्वदा सर्वभावानं सामान्य वृद्धिकारणम् । (च सू१/ ४४) which means that food articles having similar properties to predominant dosha in a person will increase that dosha resulting in onset of diseased condition. On the other hand, हास हेतुविशेषश्च प्रवृत्ति रुभायसस्य तू । (च सू१/ ४४), which means intake of food articles having opposite properties to predominant dosha help in keeping everything balanced. The constitutions may change based on their physical, mental and emotional conditions. A lifestyle must be created based on one's dosha.

### **Food Can Alter Moods**

Another interesting taxonomy of foods is based on their effect on psychological dispositions of individuals. According to Ayurveda, there is a subtle link between disease manifestation and the six psychological expressions such as lust, anger, greed, desire, attachment and ego. These psychological states are closely linked to foods. This connection is further discussed in terms of three states of being including Sattva (contented state), rajas (excited state) whereas tamas relates to a lethargic disposition, i.e., foods can induce these states of mind.<sup>[13,14]</sup>

### **Proper Metabolism is Key to Good Health**

The energy that drives metabolic processes in the body is called Agni, which also has an important effect on health. There are three stages in the digestive cycle starting from the gross form in the gastrointestinal tract followed by tissue-specific metabolism and elemental level metabolism. In this sequence of events, vipaka has a specific impact on the body. Generally, the predominant taste of the food material remains in the post digestive effect; but for materials with multiple tastes, the taste changes post metabolism: an important indicator of its impact on the system. For example, Indian gooseberry (amla) is predominantly sour in taste but post-digestive effect is sweet. Even though sour taste can increase pitta in the body, gooseberry nullifies pitta due to the sweet post digestive function.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Prakriti – A Guide to Personalize Diets**

An individual's prakriti is another important determinant of the effect of food on the system. Prakriti of an individual is characterized by a set of physical, physiological, and psychological attributes. For example, based on taste preference, individuals can be grouped as vata (having affinity for sweet, sour, and salty tastes); pitta (with liking for sweet, bitter, and astringent taste), and kapha (for pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes).<sup>[16]</sup>

**Incompatible Foods (Viruddha Aahar) and Processes**

Yet another distinctive feature of Ayurveda is its understanding of incompatibilities of food materials and processing. There are 18 forms of incompatibilities according to Ayurveda.<sup>[17]</sup> Incompatibilities are explained based on the potency of materials, processing, quantity/dose, process of intake, time/season; combining materials, such as sour fruits and milk or honey and ghee (clarified butter) in equal quantities.

**Wholesome and Unwholesome Food (Pathya and Apathya):** Several examples are provided in Ayurvedic texts in terms of pathya and apathya. These are particularly indicated in disease management. For example, pomegranate, amla (Indian gooseberry), buttermilk etc. are mentioned as good pathya aahar in the management of iron-deficiency anemia.<sup>[18]</sup> Processing of a material can change the potency, safety and pharmacological effect of the material. Curd is considered unwholesome in most dosha imbalanced conditions. There are specific instructions to consume yogurt; that it should not be taken at night or in seasons such as spring, summer and fall. As an example, a patient suffering from cough is advised to consume vegetables, such as coccinea; spices such as garlic and cardamom, long pepper, ginger, and condiments prepared with puffed paddy<sup>18</sup>. It is indicated that certain tastes have direct correlation with disease manifestation hence they are avoided during treatment of those conditions.<sup>[19]</sup>

**DISCUSSION**

Ayurveda has scientific approach in health management. The diet and regimen which is beneficial to the body and gives happiness to the mind. Improper dietary habit is primary reason for increasing trend of health disorders in current era. In this era of modernization and civilization the society is conscious enough about what to eat? The awareness about the diet and their nutritional values etc. is increasing gradually, still the popularity of fast food / junk food is greater due to the fast life. People basically know very little about them and they who know are less bothered to obey such rules, even they do not have trust enough to consider the code of diet as an important health matter. So, there is need to awake the people about the importance of fresh food. According to Charaka Samhita, processing of substances which leads to alteration in the inherent properties of substances is known as Sanskara.<sup>[20]</sup> In the process of freezing large ice crystals are formed that can damage cell walls and destroy the texture and flavour of foods. Losses of nutrients during freezing can be the result of physical separation (peeling during thawing), leaching (especially during blanching), thermal (during



blanching) or chemical degradation (during storage).<sup>[21]</sup> At present many newer food processing methods are in practice that bring about chemical as well as physical changes in consumption of food substances. They definitely improve the appearance, taste, flavour, shelf life and preservation of food. At the same time, they are changing the properties of food constituents making them unsuitable for human consumption, causing many diseases. According to modern perspectives processing techniques are used for the preservation of food. To increase the digestibility, to enhance the colour and flavour of the food in order to increase the appearance of food and ultimately to increase the appetite and they reduce the cooking time but become a root cause for various diseases. Viewing the above points, it can be concluded that Aahar should be taken according to Aaharvidhi vidhanam and other guidelines given by Ayurveda Acharya are rational, time tested and very scientific and useful to improve the health and longevity of an individual.

## CONCLUSION

**“Deho Hi Aahar Sambhava”** Human body is said to be the bio-product of food. Healthy life starts with healthy food. Aahar plays vital role in healthy and diseased condition. The strength and complexion of a person will enhance only if he practices correct diet and regimen.

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