

A REVIEW ON AAHAR-VIHAR IN AYURVEDA: ADAPTING ANCIENT KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda's approach towards the way of living life is portrayed across multiple dimensions of physical health, mental health as well as at a spiritual level. Acharya Sushruta also focuses on *tridosha*, *agni*, *dhatu*, *mala*, *indriya* and *mana* to keep ourselves *swastha*. But in today's era, everyone is in running in a competitive race of life with overstressed body and mind. Hence, by not following the correct conducts required to remain healthy, they witness *dosha* – *dhatu vaishamyata*, *agni* – *bala vikruti*, *sroto dushti*, *alpa satva*, etc. in their body and ultimately become a victim of lifestyle disorders. To counteract this, Ayurveda plays an important role by focusing primarily on the preventive aspects than the curative aspects. Classical texts mention interventions like *Aahar* – *Vihar*, *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya*, *Sadvrutta*, *Nidra*, etc. to promote health and be disease free.

KEYWORDS: *Aahar*, *Vihar*, Lifestyle disorders, *Dinacharya*,

Rutucharya.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda comprises of 2 words 'ayu' and 'veda' which means "science of life". This knowledge deals with various ways to protect our health and to cure the diseases if caused

due to *mithyayoga*, *ayoga* or *atiyoga*.^[1] Samhitas have references of many diseases caused wherein different *hetu*, *purvarupa*, *rupa*, etc. have been mentioned. But in today's era, new *hetus* are emerging due to improper lifestyle due to which new *sampraptis* take place as a result of which new *vyadhis* are formed. These new *vyadhis* can be placed under the heading of 'Lifestyle Disorders' because they are non – communicable diseases which stems from a person's daily habits and his/her way of life rather than infectious or hereditary factors as per modern science. Commonest examples are CVD (cardiovascular diseases), Type 2 Diabetes, Obesity, Respiratory disorders, etc. Factors like smoking, alcohol consumption, processed foods, sedentary lifestyle, chronic stress, exposure to various chemicals, excessive meat consumption and many more contribute to occurrence of such diseases.

Ayurveda was written 5000 years ago, yet almost all the factors causing lifestyle disorders were mentioned under different diseases as their *hetu* like *avyayama*, *guru – madhura – sheeta aahar atisevana*, *viruddha aahar*, *ati teekshna – ushna aahar*, *atichinta*, *eka rasa bhojan*, *anashana*, *vishamashana*, etc. All these *hetus* are still relevant in today's era for many *vyadhis*. But it is not just about mentioning about the causative factors, samhitas have also mentioned about the preventive aspects for all the *vyadhi* because the main objective of Ayurveda is '*Swasthasya swastya rakshanam, aturasya vikar prashamanam cha*'.^[2]

A recent study by Redcliffe Labs has revealed that one in two individuals is affected by lifestyle disorders in India, which analysed health data from 2.8 million people across the country, showing that 52 per cent of those impacted were female and 48 per cent male.^[3] Preventive aspects mentioned in ayurveda classics are crucial for maintaining overall health by focusing lifestyle, diet, sleep, etc. rather than just mere reliance on curing the illness. Therefore, lifestyle modification can be relied upon as a part of successful treatment strategy for various diseases. These lifestyle modifications are included under the umbrella of *aahar – vihar*, *nidra*, *sadvrutta*, etc. as per ayurveda classics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Aahar

Health of an individual can be maintained by a proper diet. Following a balanced diet can prevent various diseases. Ayurveda not only focuses on diseases and its treatments but also states principles to live a healthy life. This includes *Aahar* and its types, *Aahar matra*, *Ashta ahar vidhi visesha ayatana*, *Aahar parinamkara bhava* and the effects caused by different *Aahar Matras* or different types of *Aahar* on our body.

A) Aahar and its types

According to *Sushruta samhita* 4 types of *Aahar* are told namely *Bhojya*, *Bhaksha*, *Lehya* and *Peya*.^[4] According to *Charak samhita* 4 types of *Aahar* are mentioned namely *Ashita*, *Khadita*, *Pita* and *Lidha*.^[5] According to *Ashtang Hrudaya*, 3 types of *Dravya* are mentioned which also applies to the concept of *Aahar*, having its effect on the *doshas*, i.e. *Shamana*, *Kopana* and *Swasthahitam*.^[6]

B) Aahar matra

According to *Acharya Charak*, stomach is divided into 3 parts out of which 1 part should be occupied by solid food, 1 for the liquids and 1 for the movement of *doshas*.^[7] Hence one should have their diet as per *Aahar matra*. Disturbance in this ratio ultimately will cause imbalance of *doshas* resulting in formation of different diseases. *Aahar* when taken in proper quantity will maintain a balance amongst all the 5 *indriyas* along with *mana*, subsides the urge of hunger and thirst, will not cause any discomfort during digestion etc.

C) Ashta Aahar vidhi vishesh ayatana^[8]

- ☐ *Prakruti*
- ☐ *Karana*
- ☐ *Samyoga*
- ☐ *Rashi*
- ☐ *Desha*
- ☐ *Kala*
- ☐ *Upayogasamstha*
- ☐ *Upayokta*

1. Prakruti

The nature of a particular food is called its *prakruti*. Knowing the nature of food will help the individual select the appropriate diet. *Guru Aahar* like Chicken, fish are heavy to digest hence one should consume it in an appropriate quantity as per individual's digestive capacity. Other examples like black gram, pig meat are heavy to digest whereas moong dal, puffed rice (*murmura*) are light to digest.

2. *Karan*

Karan are various *samskaras* to process the food in different ways like roasting, frying, steaming, churning, heating, etc. and change its *gunas* making it appropriate or beneficial to consume. For example, steaming raw rice grains makes them light, edible and easy to digest.

3. *Samyoga*

Combination of different substances is called *samyoga*. This combination of substances may result into a recipe which may be either beneficial or harmful to the body. Milk + ghee is beneficial to our body whereas Milk + fish when consumed together are harmful for our body.

4. *Rashi*

This factor determines the quantity in which one should consume food. Proper digestion of food is achieved by consuming it in the appropriate amount.

Types of *Rashi*: *Sarvagraha rashi*, *Parigraha rashi*.

Sarvagraha rashi – Total food quantity consumed.

Parigraha rashi – Quantity of individual food consumed.

5. *Desha*

It means the place of origin of food. Based on the *desha* of that *dravya*, its *guna* as well as its effects on the body will be determined. There are 3 types of *desha* mainly: *Sadharana desha*, *jangala desha*, *anoopa desha*. As per these divisions, the eating habits vary and peculiarities for certain diseases are predominant in those *desha*. In *anoopa desha*, *kaphaja vikaras* are predominantly seen because the humidity is abundant. Due to this the dietary habits change.

6. *Kaal*

Aahar should be consumed in accordance with different seasons, according to the *dosha sthithi* in one's body and also according to the different stages of childhood, adolescence and old age.

Types of *Kaal*: *Nityag* and *Awasthik kaal*.

Rutucharya and *Dinacharya* should be followed as per told in classics to avoid various lifestyle diseases.

7. Upayog Samstha

These are the rules which should be followed while consuming meals.

- a) *Ushnam* – consumed food should be fresh and hot. This helps in improving the digestion power of *agni*, helps in *vatanuloman* etc.
- b) *Snigdham* – consuming *snigdha* food helps in *sharir upachaya*, increasing the *bala* of *indriya*, *vatanuloman*, increase in *sharirik bala*, *varna* is also improved.
- c) *Matravata* – consuming food in a proper quantity maintains *vata*, *pitta*, *kapha* at their own sites avoiding the conditions like *prakopa* and *kshaya*. It also helps in adequate digestion of food making it easier to pass through the digestive track till the elimination of waste product.
- d) *Jirna ashniyat* – one should consume the food only after the consideration whether the previously consumed food is digested or not. This can be assessed by *jirna Aahar lakshanas* like *udgar shudhi* (clear blech without any taste of food consumed), *utsaha* (enthusiasm), *vega utsarga* (evacualtion of the waste products out of the body), *laghuta* (lightness in the body), *kshut* (proper appetite), *pipassa* (proper thirst) etc.
- e) *Viryaviruddha Aahar* – It implies that one should consume food that has similar *veerya*. By consuming such foods, one avoids contracting the diseases that can result from consuming foods with the opposite *veerya*. Intake of *viruddha veerya* causing disorders like *kushta*, *Andhatva*, *Visarpa* and other *rakta dushti vyadhi*. Such 18 types of *viruddha Aahar* are mentioned in *charak samita sutrasthan*.
- f) *Ishta deshe* and *Ishta sarvopakarane* – one should consume food at a proper place or else *anishta bhojyan* can cause *mano abhighata*. Along with this, utensils used for cooking as well as serving should be clean and hygienic so that the food is free from disease causing organism and hence won't cause any diseases.
- g) *Na ati drutam* – due to fast lifestyle in today's world people don't focus on eating the food by chewing it properly. This results in improper digestion of food as well as supplementation of lack of nutrition to our body. Also, this has an effect on the *dosha* as specially *vata dosha*, leading to its imbalance and further leading to *koshthagata vyadhi*.
- h) *Na ati vilambitam* – as eating too fast is unhealthy, similarly eating too slow is also equally not good. This leads to *vishamata* i.e, irregular digestion of food. Along with this the individual will not be satisfied and the food consumed attains *sheetatvam*. There by requiring more time to digest.

- i) *Ajalpana, ahasana, tanmana bhunjita* – one should not talk much and avoid laughing as well. Instead eating food with concentration helps to function the mind properly as well as maintain the balance in the *doshas*.

8. *Upayokta*

Upayokta is the person who consumes the food as per his/her *prakruti*, age, and the *Aahar* which is suitable for the individual.

By following all the *Ashta Aahar vidhi visheshayatan* one can live their life in a healthy way by getting all the nutritional qualities from the *Aahar* consumed hence avoiding various diseases caused due to improper *Aahar* consumption.

D) *Aahar parinamkara bhavas*^[9]

These are the factors due to which *samskars* are inculcated into the food which helps in digestion of food.

- a) *Ushma* – it is the heat provided for the *parinaman* of the food.
- b) *Vayu* – it is the most important factor due to which food is pushed down forward and also regulates the mixing of the food.
- c) *Kleda* – the *kleda* provides moistness to the food.
- d) *Sneha* – *mardatvam* is provided to the food by this factor so that propulsion of the food is possible throughout the entire GIT.
- e) *Kaal* – time period is essential for complete digestion of food. Providing time to digest the previous food before consuming the next meal helps in the proper maintenance of *agni*.
- f) *Samayoga* – includes all the factors mentioned under *ashta Aahar vidhi vishesh ayatana* along with its *balanced* coordination with the above mentioned 5 *Aahar parinamkara bhavas*.

Vihar and Lifestyle changes

In Ayurveda, *Vihar* is equally important as *Aahar*. *Vihar* includes all the lifestyle routines to be followed like *Rutucharya*, *Dinacharya*, etc. which helps in maintenance of the way we live our daily life.

A. *Dinacharya*

Daily regimen or *Dinacharya* has been told by our acharyas since a very long time. It is a self-care routine through different daily activities. By bringing us in tune with nature, it regularizes our own biological clock and makes us more self-aware.

Out of all those mentioned, some of the habits that we should daily follow are not being followed correctly.

a. *Brahma muhurth utthana*

“Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” A proverb which gained its fame in the mid-15th century had its base right in our samhitas stating that –

“Braahme muhurth utthishte swastho rakshaartham aayushah”

Ashtang Hrudaya mentions this sutra citing the same meaning as to what the above proverb depicts.^[10]

Swastha purusha has been defined by sushruta as “*Samadosha samaagnischa samadhatu malakriya. Prasanna aatma indriya mana swastha iti abhidheeyate*”.^[11] This shows how well advanced we were at those ages where we already had discovered that if we wake up early in the morning, we remain healthy as well as free from diseases. Compared to today’s world, getting up at *brahma muhurth* may not be possible at times, but getting up early can be implemented in our routine for our better health.

b. *Shouch vidhi*

Attending the natural urges such as evacuating bowel movement is equally important. People tend to restrain their urge as a result of getting up late due to which disorders like constipation arise in the body. Irregular bowel movement results in hard stools and can also damage the pelvic muscles. Other common disorders include anal fissures, haemorrhoids, diverticulitis, etc. which occur due to the same. At the same time, forcing oneself to evacuate bowels is equally harmful for our body in case of absence of the urge.

c. *Dantadhavan*

Brushing our teeth has its own benefits like strengthening gums and teeth thereby keeping our mouth and teeth healthy. *Ashtang Hrudaya* mentions about brushing twice a day, i.e. morning and after having food. Although those days, toothpaste was not in picture, *kashaya*, *katu* and

tikta rasatmak kaashtha were used for brushing. These *rasas* are prevalent even today amongst the toothpastes.

Not all should do *dantadhavan* because contraindications are also mentioned by *Ashtang Hrudaya*. Those are *ajeerna*, *chhardi*, *shwaas*, *kasa*, *jwara*, *ardita*, *trushna*, *aasyapaak*, *hrudroga*, *netra roga*, *shira roga* and *karna roga*.^[12]

d. Jivha Nirlekhana^[13]

Cleansing of tongue maintains the sensation of taste, removes foul smell and keeps mouth fresh by maintaining the oral health.

e. Abhyanga^[14]

Taila abhyanga has been a part of *Dinacharya* since a long time. But nowadays, only occasionally *abhyanga* is performed during festive seasons. As per *Ashtang Hrudaya*, *abhyanga* has been indicated daily due to its effects like *jara*, *shrama* and *vata prashaman*. It also does *drushti prasadan*, *aayu pushti*, provides good sleep, and *twak dardiyata*. *Ashtang Hrudaya* also specifies that *abhyanga* should be done primarily on *shira*, *karna* and *paada*. Its contraindications are *kapha prakopa avastha*, after *shodhan* procedures and *ajeerna*.

f. Vyayam

Definition of *vyayam* as per *Ashtang Hrudaya*^[15] states that the karma which exerts the body is *vyayam*. *Vyayam* has 5 benefits in total, i.e. *sharira laghavatva*, *karma saamarthyam*, *agni deepti*, *meda kshaya* and making *sharira ghana*, *sthira* and *druda*. *Acharya Charak* states in *agrya sangraha* that *vyayam* is best for *sthairyakara*. Although *vyayam* is excellent *kaphashaamak*, it is not indicated in *vataja* and *pittaja vikaras*. As per *Ashtang Hrudaya*, children less than 16 years are not advised for *vyayam* because the dhatus are not fully formed resulting in *alpa bala*. Similarly, elders above 70 years coming under *vrudhavadhava* are contraindicated for *vyayam* due to *alpa bala*. People having *ajeerna* are also not advised *vyayam*.

The key point here is that, according to *Ashtang Hrudaya*, exercise (*vyayam*) should be performed at half the individual's capacity, especially for those who are strong (*balvaan*), consume nourishing (*snigdha*) food, and during specific seasons like *Vasant* (spring), *Hemant* (early winter), and *Shishir* (late winter). During these seasons, exercise is recommended because the body's strength (*sharir bala*) is optimal in *Hemant* and *Shishir*, and although

physical strength is slightly less in *Vasant*, exercise is still advised to counterbalance the aggravation of *Kapha dosha*. However, in other seasons, exercise should be minimized. Over-exercising (*ati vyayam*) beyond one's capacity can lead to *sahasaja karma*, reducing one's strength and weakening the *dhatu*s (tissues), potentially leading to chronic conditions like *shosha* (emaciation). Hence, it is crucial for an individual to understand their own capacity and engage in regular, appropriate exercise.

g. *Snana*

Snana or bathing, although done externally, it has its effects inside our body as well. These are *deepan*, *vrushya*, *aayushya*, *oorja* and *bala pradana*. It also nullifies *kandu*, *mala*, *sweda*, *shrama*, *tandra*, *trushna*, *daha* and does *nivaraana* of *paapa karma*. *Acharya charak* states that *snaan* is *uttam shramahar*.^[16]

Due to *snaana*, *bahya mala* is removed resulting in *deepti* of *bhrajakagni* and further *jatharagni deepan* takes place. *Snaan* is also said to be *vrushya* as it has its effects on *mana* causing *harsha*. If we combine all the effects of *snaan*, then in a way it is *hitakaarak* for *aayushya*. Hence it is indicated under *Dinacharya*. *Oorja* or *utsaaha* is seen because *snana* reduces tiredness in the body. *Ushnodak snaan* is said to provide *bala* to the parts of the body below the *shira pradesha*, whereas *sheetodak snaan* on *shira pradesha* provides *bala* to *netra* and *kesha* as *shira* is the *sthaan* for 5 *indriyas* as well as *praana*.^[17] Therefore, *soumya gunatmak sheeta jala* is used for *snaan* for the same.

Along with its indications, *snaan* has its own set of contraindications stating that persons having *ardita*, *netraroga*, *karna roga*, *aasya roga*, *atisaara*, *aadhmaan*, *peenas*, *ajeerna* and after having food should not bath.

B. *Rutucharya*^[18,19]

Like daily regimen, seasonal regimen is equally important to follow as per various seasons. Each season has its own climatic conditions as a result of which our body has to adapt accordingly to function properly. In total we have 6 *rutus*, i.e. *Hemant*, *Shishir*, *Vasant*, *Greeshma*, *Varsha*, *Sharad*. These are divided into 2 major time periods namely *Aadan kaal* and *Visarga kaal*. *Shishir*, *Vasant*, and *Greeshma* *Rutu* are all part of *Aadan Kaal*, while *Visarga Kaal* spans the latter. As per this *kaal*, *uttarottar* the *bala* of *agni* reduces or increases. For example, the *agni bala* decreases from *Shishira* to *Greeshma rutu* in *Aadaan kaal*, whereas *agni bala* increases from *Varsha* to *Hemant rutu* in *Visarga kaal*. The type and

quantity of Aahar to be consumed is specified by the agni bala. Along with this *Vihar* also changes seasonally. Therefore, opting *Aahar – Vihar* as per *rutu* avoids lifestyle disorders.

a. Hemant and Shishir Rutu

Environment – cold winds, early to late winter, dryness

Body changes – *Agni bala* increases, *Kapha dosha sanchay avastha*

Recommended *Aahar* – *Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Guru, Snigdha, Ushna*

Recommended *Vihar* – *Abhyanga*, staying in warm areas and less windy places.

Avoid – *Ati katu, tikta, kashaya rasa, sheeta Aahar, divaswaapa*.

b. Vasant Rutu

Environment – hot weather

Body changes – reduced *agni bala*, *kapha dosha prakopa avastha*

Recommended *Aahar* – *Katu, Tikta, Kashaya, Laghu, Ruksha*

Recommended *Vihar* – *Vaman, Udvartana, Dhumpana, Kaval, Anjana*

Avoid – *Madhura, Amla, Lavana rasa, divaswaapa*

c. Greeshma Rutu

Environment – loss of moisture, high temperature and sunlight

Body changes – minimal *agni bala*, *Vata dosha sanchay avastha*

Recommended *Aahar* – *Madhura, Sheeta*, very less/no alcohol consumption if used to it.

Recommended *Vihar* – sleeping under moonlight, *shweta vastra dharan*, visit cool forests and water bodies with flowers, *divaswaapa* is indicated, drink fluids and water timely

Avoid – *Lavana, Amla, Katu, Tikta, Kashaya rasa, Ati vyayam, Ati maithuna*.

d. Varsha Rutu

Environment – rainy clouds, less sunlight, heavy winds

Body changes – minimal *agni bala*, *Tridosha prakopa avastha*

Recommended *Aahar* – *Sadharan Aahar* should be consumed; using honey a bit in foods is beneficial

Recommended *Vihar* – *Basti, Snaana, Gandhamala dharana*, steaming and ironing clothes before wearing

Avoid – *divaswaap, sheeta Aahar*, drinking river water, *Ati bhojan*

e. Sharad Rutu

Environment – temperature rises a bit, sunlight is increased

Body changes – *agni bala* same as *vasant rutu*, *pitta dosha prakopa avastha*

Recommended Aahar – *Madhura, Tikta, Sheeta, Laghu*

Recommended Vihar – *Virechana, Raktamokshana, Hansodaka sevan*, exposure to moon rays at night.

Avoid – *Diwaswap*, curd consumption, *Katu, Amla, Lavana rasa*.

C. Sadvritta^[20,21]

It includes guidance about the dressing, speaking, social behaviour, personal hygiene, etc.

For example, bathing twice a day, grooming regularly, speaking the truth, being patient in all situations, helping the needy, following all the regimen told in *dinacharya and rutucharya* etc. *sadvritta* has a direct impact on the health of an individual both physical and mentally. This makes sure that the person attains good immunity there by reducing vulnerability to diseases and leads a productive life.

D. Nidra

Just like proper Aahar and Vihar, Samyak Nidra is vital for our well-being. Persons face from Emaciation or Obesity due to improper sleep and diet. *Diwaswap* is contraindicated for all except *Greeshma rutu* and emaciated persons. *Nidra* helps in balancing the 3 *dosha*, increases the efficacy of the *dhatu*s, restores our strength and gives mental clarity along with emotional stability of mind.

CONCLUSION

The incidence of lifestyle disorders like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cancers, obesity, etc. are increasing at a steady rate due to adaption of increased westernization of lifestyle and fast-pace life. Basically, a particular lifestyle of a person is based on the combined efforts made physically and mentally along with his/her dietary habits, behaviour, life pattern and so on. Some part of it is contributed from the person's social interactions like parents, siblings, friends, relationships and peer pressure as well. Ayurveda mentions about *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga*, *Pragyaparadh* and *Parinaam* or *Kaal* as the main causative factors for diseases.^[22] Out of these, *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga* and *Pragyaparadh* can be considered as a primary *hetu* for lifestyle disorders. As Ayurveda has been gaining popularity in recent years due to its holistic approach and a big contribution in explaining about preventive aspects, the whole world is being attracted to its potential. Therefore, by following the above-mentioned

preventive aspects causative factors like *Asatmyendriyarthasamyoga* and *Pragyaparadh* can be cut off from our lives. The above said Ayurvedic principles are rather easy to follow and simple. However, it is the duty of a *Vaidya* to make it convenient for people to follow as per their individuality considering the modern-day scenario. It is better to take one step at a time and start working on it instead of starting it all at once and tiring his/her mind often with pressure. This implementation of lifestyle will not only benefit our generation but will also help to improve the quality of life in upcoming generations as well. It is high time we focus on improvising our health rather than those factors which compromise on our health indirectly.

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