

THE ROLE OF AHARA AND AHARA-VIDHI-VISHESHAYATANA IN PREVENTING LIFESTYLE DISORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Snehal Laxman Deshmukh^{1*} and Mohanan M.²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Swasthavritta evam Yoga, Sardar Ayurved College & Hospital, Piludara, Gujarat-384315, India.

²Professor, Department of Rasa Shastra evum Bhaishajya Kalpana, Sanskriti Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Mathura, U.P-281401, India.

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***Corresponding Author**

**Dr. Snehal Laxman
Deshmukh**

Assistant Professor,
Department of Swasthavritta
Evam Yoga, Sardar
Ayurved College &
Hospital, Piludara, Gujarat-
384315, India.

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, offers a holistic approach to health and well-being by emphasizing the significance of lifestyle and dietary practices. In today's fast-paced world, lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and stress-related conditions have become increasingly prevalent, often resulting from poor eating habits, sedentary routines, and mental strain. Central to Ayurveda is the concept of *Ahara* (food), which plays a crucial role in maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual health. The science outlines a comprehensive dietary framework, encapsulated in the principles of *Ashta Ahara vidhi Visheshayatana*, which focuses on eight key factors influencing food intake, digestion, and nourishment. These factors guide individuals on how to consume food mindfully, ensuring that it is tailored to their constitution (*Prakriti*) and personal needs. This article explores the relevance and application of these ancient dietary guidelines in the modern context, highlighting their potential in preventing and managing lifestyle disorders. The discussion

emphasizes that food is not merely a source of sustenance but a potent form of medicine (*Mahabhaishajya*), with the power to prevent diseases when chosen appropriately. Additionally, the article reflects on the modern-day significance of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* as a preventive measure, aligning Ayurvedic principles with contemporary dietary habits. By promoting a balanced and conscious approach to eating, Ayurveda offers

valuable insights into how we can mitigate the impact of lifestyle disorders and achieve sustainable health and well-being.

KEYWORDS: *Ayurveda*, Lifestyle Disorders, *Ahara*, *Ashta Ahara vidhi Visheshayatana*, *Mahabhaishajya*.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the world's oldest and most comprehensive healthcare system focuses on maintaining balance and promoting holistic well-being. The primary objective of Ayurveda is *Swasthya Swastha Rakshanam Aturasya Vikara Prashmnam Cha*, which translates to "the preservation of the health of the healthy and the cure of the diseases of the diseased." A key tenet of Ayurveda is the emphasis on a balanced lifestyle, incorporating *Ahara* (Food), *Nidra* (Sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (Self-control) as essential pillars for a healthy life. Of these, *Ahara* holds paramount importance, often regarded as *Mahabhaishajya* or "the supreme medicine." Food is seen as the primary source of strength, vitality, complexion, and overall health. According to Ayurvedic principles, the quality of our health—and even the onset of disease—are directly linked to the food we consume.

The concept of diet in Ayurveda extends far beyond simple nourishment. Proper food, consumed at the right time, in the right manner, and with the correct psychological state, is fundamental to sustaining health. Faulty eating habits, irregular meal timings, improper food preparation, and an imbalanced diet can disrupt the body's functions, leading to a variety of diseases. This is why Ayurveda places significant emphasis on dietary guidelines as key factors in both disease prevention and treatment. *Acharya Charak*, one of the foremost authorities in Ayurveda, highlights the importance of discipline in eating, stating that a regulated diet is essential for sustaining life. He introduced the concept of *Ashta Ahara vidhi Visheshayatana*—the eight principles of proper dietary practices- which serve as a systematic and scientific approach to healthy eating.

In today's fast-paced and modern world, the principles of *Ashta Aharavidha Visheshayatana* remain highly relevant. The challenge now lies in adapting these ancient concepts to suit the diverse lifestyles of individuals from various communities, professions, and geographical locations. Ayurveda urges us to contemplate not just what we eat, but also when, where, and how much we consume. It stresses the importance of the entire process—from food preparation to the psychological state while eating, and the nutritional value of food. Each of

these factors significantly influences our health, determining whether the food we eat nourishes or harms our body.

Incorporating *Ayurvedic* dietary principles can have profound effects on preventing lifestyle disorders and improving overall health. This article explores the vital role of *Ahara* in Ayurvedic health practices, with a specific focus on the relevance of *Ahara vidhi Visheshayatana* in today's world. By understanding and applying these age-old dietary guidelines, we can enhance well-being, prevent diseases, and achieve a balanced, healthy life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A comprehensive literature review was conducted, analyzing various Ayurvedic texts such as *Charak Samhita*, *Sushrut Samhita*, *Ashtang Sangrah*, and *Ashtang Hridaya*. In addition, relevant modern literature and articles were examined to support the concepts presented. These resources helped to form the basis for the discussion on the importance of diet and lifestyle in preventing lifestyle disorders.

Review of literature

In the *Vimansthan Rasvimana Adhyaya* of the *Charak Samhita*, *Acharya Charak* elaborates on the concept of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* (The eight principles of dietary practices), emphasizing their role in promoting health and preventing disease. By adhering to these eight guidelines, individuals can maintain a healthy life and avoid falling into a diseased state.

Lifestyle disorders

Lifestyle disorders refer to diseases that arise from the adoption of unhealthy or inappropriate lifestyle choices. Rapid urbanization and globalization, particularly in India, have led to an increase in the number of people suffering from these conditions.

Causes of lifestyle disorders

- 1. Junk food:** Consumption of processed, unhealthy foods leads to improper digestion, which is a primary cause of lifestyle disorders.
- 2. Sedentary lifestyle:** Lack of physical activity contributes to many chronic health issues.
- 3. Stress:** Mental stress from work, social pressures, and emotional imbalance affects physical health.

4. **Smoking and Alcohol consumption:** These substances are major contributors to lifestyle diseases.
5. **Irregular sleep:** Poor or irregular sleep patterns disrupt bodily functions and contribute to disease.

Ahara (Diet)

In Ayurveda, *Ahara* (diet) is considered one of the most important factors influencing health. It is often referred to as *Brahman*, as it holds supreme importance in sustaining life, as mentioned in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* with the phrase "*Annam Brahmeti Vyajaanat*." Food is the original source of vitality, strength, complexion, and overall health, consisting of the six tastes (*Rasas*), which depend on the substances used.

Importance of *ahara*

Health and disease are closely linked to various factors, with *Ahara* being the most significant. According to *Acharya Charak*, food plays an essential role in maintaining physical strength (*Bala*), complexion (*Varna*), and overall well-being. All substances (*Dravyas*) are considered medicinal (*Aushadhis*), and food, being a type of *Dravyabhuta Aushadhi*, holds immense therapeutic value. Proper dietetic rules can be seen as a means of preventing or managing diseases, including lifestyle disorders.

Dietetics principles for the prevention of lifestyle disorders

Principle of balanced diet

In Ayurveda, a balanced diet nourishes both the mental and physical aspects of health. *Acharya Charak* defines the appropriate quantity of food (*Ahara Matra*) as the amount that can be digested and metabolized without disrupting the balance of the body's tissues (*Dhatus*) and energies (*Doshas*).

Shadarasa yukta ahara

Acharya Charak also explains the importance of the six tastes (*Rasas*) in maintaining bodily equilibrium. These six tastes—*sweet*, *sour*, *salty*, *bitter*, *pungent*, and *astringent*—must be consumed in appropriate proportions to maintain balance and promote health. When used in the right amounts, these tastes are beneficial for the body; however, improper use can lead to imbalances and disease.

Ashta ahara vidhi visheshayatana (Eight dietary principles)

Acharya Charak outlines eight key principles for dietary intake, known as *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*. These guidelines emphasize the need for a thoughtful and systematic approach to food consumption:

No.	Principle	Description	Examples & Applications
1	Prakruti (Nature of Food)	Refers to the natural or inherent attributes of food. This includes whether food is heavy or light, its temperature (cold or hot), and how it affects the body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy food (e.g., Masha, pork) is considered <i>Guru</i> (difficult to digest), while light food (e.g., Mudga, deer's flesh) is <i>Laghu</i> (easy to digest). • Potency of food can either be <i>Ushna</i> (hot) or <i>Sheeta</i> (cold), affecting the Doshas accordingly.
2	Karana (Processing)	The transformation of food's inherent attributes through various methods like heat, water treatment, washing, maturing, and flavoring. These processes alter the qualities of the food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boiling rice transforms it from heavy to light by cleaning and applying heat. • <i>Bhavana</i> (impregnation with juices), <i>Vasan</i> (preservation with ghee), and <i>Manthan</i> (churning) are examples of processing.
3	Samyoga (Combination)	The combination of different substances results in new attributes. Harmful or beneficial effects arise depending on how foods interact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmful: Equal parts of honey and ghee can be fatal, while milk and fish cause skin diseases. • Beneficial: Jaggery and curd together have nourishing and Vata-pacifying properties.
4	Raashi (Quantity)	Refers to the appropriate amount of food to be consumed, ensuring that digestion and metabolism proceed without disturbing the body's equilibrium.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarvagraha: Total food intake. • Parigraha: Quantity of each individual ingredient.- Proper quantity varies according to individual Prakriti, age, and Agnibala (digestive strength).
5	Desha (Place of Origin)	The habitat or geographic region where food is produced determines its attributes. Each region has distinct environmental conditions that influence the properties of food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jangal (forest), Anoopa (wetland), and Saadharan (ordinary) regions each have unique foods suited to their environment. • The local soil and climate affect the nutritional and therapeutic properties of foods.

6	Kala (Time)	Food consumption must align with the time of day, season, and individual condition (e.g., age or disease state). Improper timing can lead to health issues.	Seasonal eating: Follow Ritucharya for seasonal diets. Rugnavastha (diseased state): Specific diet and restrictions during different disease phases, like Langhana (fasting) for 7 days in Nav Jwara (new fever).
7	Upyoga Samstha (Dietetic Rules)	Refers to the prescribed manner and rules of food consumption based on digestive capacity and timing. Following these rules ensures proper digestion and nourishment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid eating before the previous meal is digested. • Food should be Ushna (hot), Snigdha (unctuous), and consumed in Matravat (moderate quantity). • Avoid incompatible (Virya Viruddha) foods.
8	Upyokta (Consumer)	Refers to the individual who consumes food. The health and wellness of the consumer depend on understanding their own body type (<i>Prakriti</i>) and habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each individual should understand their own unique constitution and eat accordingly. • Regular habits and mindful food choices support overall well-being.

Additional insights

1. Prakruti helps tailor the diet to the individual's constitution, acknowledging the importance of personal needs.
2. Karana emphasizes that how food is prepared significantly affects its qualities and health impact, highlighting the versatility of Ayurvedic cooking techniques.
3. Samyoga stresses the importance of food pairings, ensuring the combinations either enhance or diminish the nutritional value.
4. Raashi provides a holistic approach to diet by emphasizing the relationship between the body's metabolism and food quantities.
5. Desha draws attention to the environmental and climatic factors that shape food properties, ensuring that we consume locally suited foods for optimal health.
6. Kala outlines the dynamic relationship between food and time, reinforcing that the right diet, based on seasons and personal health, can prevent illness.
7. Upyoga Samstha lays down the fundamental rules for healthy eating and digestion, promoting a disciplined and mindful approach to food intake.

8. Upyokta emphasizes personal responsibility in diet, where individuals are encouraged to reflect on their body type, health conditions, and dietary choices.

By adhering to these eight principles, Ayurveda provides a comprehensive framework for creating a personalized, balanced, and health-promoting diet, addressing both physical and mental well-being.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, *Ahara* (diet) is considered one of the pillars of health and wellness, playing a vital role in maintaining bodily functions and promoting longevity. Along with proper sleep and regular activity, a balanced diet is central to sustaining the body's natural processes. The quality, quantity, and timing of food are essential for the optimal functioning of the body, and when disturbed, they can lead to diseases and metabolic imbalances.

1. **Importance of ahara-** Diet directly influences the balance of the three *Doshas* (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), the metabolic fire (*Agni*), and the overall health of the *Dhatus* (body tissues). Ayurveda emphasizes that food not only provides nourishment but also serves as a primary source of energy for the body and mind. Improper dietary habits can lead to various lifestyle-related diseases, such as metabolic disorders, digestive problems, and chronic conditions.
2. **Prakruti (Natural attributes of food)-** The constitution or *Prakruti* of an individual must be considered when selecting food. Diet should ideally complement a person's innate qualities. Foods with opposite properties to one's *Doshas* help in maintaining balance and preventing health issues. If certain foods are unsuitable, they can be processed to transform their properties, thus minimizing adverse effects and supporting health.
3. **Karana (Processing of food)-** Food processing plays a crucial role in enhancing the bioavailability of nutrients and improving digestibility. Various methods like cooking, fermentation, and boiling alter the inherent qualities of food, making it easier to digest and absorb. These transformations not only enhance nutritional value but also eliminate harmful microbes and contaminants.
4. **Samyoga (Food combinations)-** Proper combinations of foods are essential for healthy digestion. Incorrect food combinations can disrupt the digestive process, leading to bloating, gas, and other gastrointestinal disturbances. On the other hand, well-balanced food combinations improve nutrient absorption and enhance overall health.

5. **Raashi (Quantity of food)**- Quantity plays a key role in diet. Overeating or under-eating disrupts the body's ability to metabolize food efficiently. The appropriate quantity depends on a person's age, activity level, and health status. Tailoring food intake to an individual's specific needs helps in preventing deficiencies or excesses that could lead to illness.
6. **Desha (Geographical location)**- The local environment influences what food should be consumed, as food availability and suitability differ by region. Foods that are locally grown and consumed are better suited to the climate and local health conditions, helping to maintain harmony in the body and mind.
7. **Kala (Time and Seasonality)**- Timing and seasonality of food intake also significantly affect health. Ayurveda stresses that food must be consumed in harmony with the seasons and the body's internal rhythm. Eating according to the changing seasons helps maintain balance and strengthens the body's immune system.
8. **Upyoga Samstha (Dietary Rules and Practices)**- Adhering to proper eating habits, such as eating at regular intervals, chewing food thoroughly, and eating in a calm environment, is essential for good digestion. Stress, poor digestion, and eating too hastily can lead to various health problems, including gastrointestinal disorders.
9. **Upyokta (The consumer)**- The individual (*Upyokta*) is responsible for understanding their own body's needs and making conscious food choices accordingly. Recognizing what foods nourish the body and mind, and following Ayurvedic guidelines for food intake, promotes overall well-being.

Through the holistic approach of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*, Ayurveda provides a comprehensive guide for food selection and consumption to optimize health. This system integrates various dietary factors such as food attributes, processing, combinations, and timing, helping individuals maintain a balanced and disease-free life. *Ahara* in Ayurveda is not just about sustenance, but about promoting vitality, preventing disease, and enhancing the quality of life.

CONCLUSION

Ahara is fundamental not only for sustaining life but also for enhancing vitality, skin health, and overall well-being. In the modern world, however, many people overlook the nutritional value and digestive capacity of food. The increasing reliance on processed, ready-to-eat foods

has led to a rise in digestive disorders such as diarrhoea, indigestion, hyperacidity, and anorexia. A major contributor to this is the lack of awareness regarding correct eating habits.

The concept of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*, as outlined in Ayurveda, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding dietary habits that promote health. By focusing on the selection of appropriate foods, food combinations, cooking methods, and the correct quantity and timing, this Ayurvedic system guides individuals toward making healthier food choices. These guidelines help prevent common health problems and ensure optimal digestion, assimilation, and nourishment.

In today's fast-paced world, where unhealthy eating habits are a root cause of many diseases, following *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* can act as a preventive measure, restoring balance and harmony within the body. It also provides physicians with valuable insights to customize dietary plans based on an individual's unique needs, health conditions, and geographical influences.

Thus, it is essential to revive and integrate the ancient wisdom of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* into our modern lives. By adopting these principles, we can achieve the twofold objectives of Ayurveda: the prevention of disease and the promotion of long-lasting health.

Further scope

To further understand the impact of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*, each of the eight factors should be studied in detail, particularly their effects on the body at a molecular and cellular level through scientific investigations. Evidence-based research is essential to validate these ancient concepts and integrate them with modern nutrition science.

Promoting these principles to the general public can help reduce lifestyle-related diseases and foster a healthier society. By bridging ancient wisdom with modern science, we can create a balanced approach to nutrition and well-being, benefiting individuals across various age groups and regions.

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