

CONCEPT OF AHARA VIDHI VIDHANA AS A CLASSICAL DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH MAINTENANCE

¹*Dr. Sambhaji Shivaji Gosavi, ²Dr. Rahul Hanumantrao Kale,

³Dr. Shital Hanmanlu Thakrod

¹Asst. Professor, Dept. of Swasthavritta Evam Yoga, Mahesh Ayurved College, Asthi, Maharashtra.

²Asst. Professor, Dept. of Samhita, Mahesh Ayurved College, Asthi, Maharashtra.

³Asst. Professor, Dept. of Rasashastra and Bhaishajya Kalpana, Mahesh Ayurved College, Asthi, Maharashtra.

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*Corresponding Author

Dr. Sambhaji Shivaji Gosavi

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Swasthavritta
Evam Yoga, Mahesh Ayurved College,
Asthi, Maharashtra.



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ABSTRACT

Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna is an important dietary guideline described in the Ayurveda text. Ayurveda considers food (Āhāra) as one of the three pillars of life, along with sleep and disciplined conduct. Food is not viewed only as nutrition but also as a tool to maintain health and prevents disease. According to Charaka, the same food can act as useful or harmful depending on the guidelines. Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna explains the right way of eating by developing rules related to food selection, processing, combination, quantity, time, place, and manner of eating. The concept of Āhāra Vidhi Viśeṣāyatana highlights eight important factors that influence the effect of food, including Prakṛti, Karaṇa, Saṃyoga, Rāśi, Deśa, Kāla, Upayoga Saṃsthā, and Upayoktā. These factors help in understanding individual selection of diet based on the principles of body constitution, digestion and nourishment. Ayurveda also describes practical rules of eating, which focus on warm food, proper quantity, appropriate timing, compatible

combinations, and mindful eating. These rules protect digestive power (Agni), prevent formation of toxins (Āma), and support proper tissue nourishment. The physiological and clinical significance of these principles shows their relevance in maintaining digestion,

metabolic balance, and overall health. This review highlights that Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna is not merely a traditional dietary guideline but a comprehensive preventive and therapeutic approach. The principles discussed remain highly relevant in present times, especially in the prevention of lifestyle and metabolic disorders. Proper understanding and application of these dietary rules can contribute significantly to health maintenance and disease prevention.

KEYWORDS: Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna; Āhāra; Agni; Dietetics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Āhāra has a very important place in Ayurveda. Along with Nidrā and Brahmacharya, it is described as one of the **Traya Upastambha**, the three supporting pillars of life. These three pillars together play important role in maintaining health and sustaining life. Among them, Āhāra is considered the most important because it directly nourishes the body.

Ayurveda does not consider Āhāra only as a source of nutrition. It also considers that food is best preventive medicine. When taken properly, food maintains health and prevents disease. When taken improperly, the same food can become a cause of disease.

Charaka Saṁhitā explains that the human body is formed from food, and diseases are also produced due to improper food intake. Proper food taken in the right way supports digestion, strength, immunity and longevity. On the other hand, improper food disturbs digestion, weakens body tissues, and leads to the development of disease.

The concept of **Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna** explains the rules related to selection of food, its preparation, quantity, time, place, and manner of eating. These rules are to protect **Agni**, maintain health, and prevent from improper nourishment of body. Even in the present time, these principles remain highly relevant in daily life.^[1]

2. Concept of Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna^[1]

Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna means the **correct method of taking food**. Ayurveda clearly states that the same food can produce beneficial effects or harmful effects depending on how it is consumed.

Ayurveda explains that food should not be selected randomly. The choice of food depends on many factors such as digestive strength, body constitution, age, season, Habitat and present health condition. Therefore, everybody needs different Āhāra at different stage.

This principle highlights that diet should always be individualized. Proper understanding and application of Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna helps in maintaining health, preventing disease, and supporting treatment when illness is present.

3. Āhāra Vidhi Viśeṣāyatana^[1]

(Factors Influencing the Effect of Food)

Ayurveda suggests that the same food may act differently in different persons or situations. To explain this, Charaka has described eight important factors known as Āhāra Vidhi Viśeṣāyatana.

These factors help in understanding how food supports health or becomes a cause of disease. Proper consideration of these factors ensures good digestion, proper nourishment, and maintenance of health.

3.1 Prakṛuti (Natural Quality of Food)

Prakṛuti refers to the basic nature or qualities of food substances. Some foods are heavy (Guru), while others are light (Laghu). Some foods are hot (Uṣṇa), while others are cold (Śīta).

Heavy foods require strong digestive power and take more time to digest and give satiety. Light foods are digested easily and are suitable when digestion is weak. Hot foods can help in digestion, while cold foods may not. Therefore, food should be selected after considering both its natural qualities and the digestive capacity of the person.

Thus, Prakṛuti of food plays an important role in digestion and nourishment.

3.2 Karaṇa (Processing of Food)

Karaṇa refers to the processing methods applied to food. Common processing methods include cooking, boiling, roasting, frying, fermenting, churning, and soaking.

Processing changes the qualities of food and makes it suitable for digestion. Raw grains are difficult to digest, but after cooking they become lighter and easier to digest. Curd is Gure and may cause Srotorodha, but when churned into buttermilk, it becomes light and improves digestion.

Proper processing makes food safe, digestible, and nourishing. Improper processing reduces the quality of food and disturbs digestion. Now a day over processing of food items is considered unhealthy. Therefore, Karaṇa is an important factor in food intake.

3.3 Saṃyoga (Combination of Food)

Saṃyoga considers effect of food items when they are combined. Some food combinations are beneficial and improve digestion, while others are harmful.

Harmful food combinations are known as **Viruddhāhāra**. Such combinations can disturb digestion and give improper nourishment to dhatu.^[2]

Therefore, food combinations should be selected carefully, and incompatible combinations should be avoided for maintaining health.

3.4 Rāśi (Quantity of Food)

Rāśi means the quantity or amount of food taken. Charaka explains that food should be taken in proper quantity according to digestive strength.

Excessive food intake overloads digestion and leads to heaviness, indigestion, and toxin formation. Insufficient food intake causes weakness, poor nourishment, and reduced strength. Proper quantity of food maintains digestion, supports tissue formation, and keeps the body healthy. Thus, Rāśi plays a key role in dietetics.^[3]

3.5 Deśa (Habitat and Region)

Deśa refers to the geographical region where a person lives. Climate, soil, and water of a region influence both the body and the food grown in that area.

People living in cold regions require nourishing and warming food, while those living in hot regions need lighter and cooling food. Therefore, diet should be selected according to the place of living.

Considering Deśa helps in maintaining balance and preventing diseases related to climate and environment.

3.6 Kāla (Time)

Kāla includes time of day, season, and stage of disease. Food taken at the proper time supports digestion and strength.

Eating at irregular times weakens digestive power and disturbs body balance. Seasonal changes require appropriate dietary modifications to maintain health throughout the year.

Thus, Kāla is an important factor in deciding the effect of food.^[4]

3.7 Upayoga Samsthā (Manner of Eating)

Upayoga Samsthā refers to the manner or method of eating food. Food should be eaten slowly, properly chewed, and with full attention.

Eating too fast, eating while talking, laughing, or eating in a disturbed mental state affects digestion negatively. Calm eating supports proper digestion and assimilation of food.^[5]

3.8 Upayoktā (Individual)

Upayoktā refers to the person who consumes food. Every individual differs in digestion, strength, age, constitution, and adaptability.

The same food may be suitable for one person and unsuitable for another. Therefore, individual consideration is essential while planning diet.^[6]

4. The Ten Rules of Eating (*Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*)^[1,7,8]

These are the practical steps Charaka suggests we follow every time we sit down to eat.

1. Eat Warm Food: Warm food tastes better and stimulates your "digestive fire" (*Agni*). It helps the food move smoothly through your system.
2. Eat Unctuous (Moist) Food: Food should have a little healthy fat (like Ghee). This helps build strength and keeps the skin and organs from becoming too dry.
3. Eat the Right Amount: Your stomach should never be 100% full. Ideally, leave 1/4th of your stomach empty to allow your digestive juices to mix properly with the food.
4. Wait for the Last Meal to Digest: If you eat before your last meal is gone, the old food and new food mix poorly, creating toxins called *Aama*.
5. Check Food Compatibility: Don't eat things that have "opposite powers" (like ice cream with hot coffee). It confuses your metabolism.
6. Eat in a Good Place: Your environment matters. Eat in a clean, quiet, and comfortable place.
7. Don't Eat Too Fast: If you bolt your food, you won't taste it, and your body won't realize it's full.
8. Don't Eat Too Slow: If you take too long, the food gets cold and your digestion loses its rhythm.
9. Focus on the Food: Stop talking, laughing, or watching TV while eating. Focus on the smell, texture, and taste. This tells your brain to start the digestive process.
10. Know Yourself: Always eat with the knowledge of what suits your unique body type and current health.

5. Physiological and Clinical Significance^[9,10]

Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna is a dietary guideline based on physiological and clinical principles. Each guideline mentioned by Charaka has importance in digestion, metabolism, and overall health.

5.1 Role of Warm Food and Digestive Enzymes

Charaka advises that warm food should be taken (**Uṣṇam Aśniyāt**). Warm food stimulates digestion. When warm food enters the stomach, it improves blood circulation in the digestive organs and supports the secretion of digestive juices.

Cold food reduces digestive activity and delays digestion. Repeated intake of cold food weakens Agni and leads to indigestion, bloating, and heaviness. Therefore, consuming warm food regularly helps in maintaining strong digestion and prevents formation of Āma.

5.2 Importance of Eating After Complete Digestion of Previous Meal

Ayurveda recommends that food should be taken only after the previous meal is completely digested (**Jīrṇe Aśniyāt**). If a person eats before the digestion of the previous meal, the new food mixes with partially digested food.

This improper mixing disturbs digestive juices and leads to fermentation inside the stomach. Over time, this causes gas formation, acidity, heaviness, and toxin formation. Clinically, this habit contributes to indigestion, loss of appetite, and chronic digestive disorders.

5.3 Speed of Eating and Satiety Response

Charaka recommends food should not be eaten too fast (**Na Ati-drutam Aśniyāt**) and not too slowly (**Na Ati-vilambitam Aśniyāt**). Eating very fast does not allow proper chewing and digestion. It also prevents the body from recognizing fullness at the right time.

Eating very slowly causes food to become cold, delays satiety and disrupts the natural rhythm of digestion. Proper speed of eating helps the digestive system function smoothly and prevents overeating and indigestion.

5.4 Role of Concentration During Eating

Food must be eaten with full attention (**Tanmana Bhunjīta**). When a person eats with concentration, the body prepares itself for digestion. Saliva secretion increases, and digestive enzymes are released properly.

Eating while talking, laughing, or being mentally disturbed diverts attention from food. This weakens digestion and leads to poor absorption of nutrients. Clinically, this habit contributes to digestive complaints and nutritional deficiencies.

5.5 Importance of Unctuous Food

Ayurveda recommends food should be slightly unctuous (**Snigdham Aśniyāt**). Unctuous food supports smooth movement of food through the digestive tract. It prevents dryness, supports tissue nourishment, and helps in proper elimination of waste.

Very dry food disturbs Vāta and leads to constipation, dryness, and weakness. Adding a small amount of unctuous substances supports digestion and overall health.

6. Comparison with Modern Dietetics^[3-10]

The principles explained under Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna can be correlated with many concepts accepted in modern dietetics and nutritional science.

6.1 Concept of Incompatible Food Combinations (Viruddhāhāra)

Ayurveda explains that certain food combinations are harmful even if the individual foods are healthy. These incompatible combinations disturb digestion, give improper nourishment and gradually cause disease.

Such combinations alter digestion, produce toxins, and affect tissue health. Repeated intake can lead to chronic disorders, especially skin and digestive diseases.

6.2 Meal Timing and Biological Rhythm

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of food time (**Kāla**). It explains that digestion is strongest at certain times of the day and weaker at others.

Eating heavy food at inappropriate times can disturb digestion and leads to metabolic imbalance. Regular meal timing especially matching with circadian cycle supports digestion, metabolism.

6.3 Mindful Eating and Digestive Efficiency

The principle of eating with concentration is similar to mindful eating. When food is eaten with awareness, digestion improves naturally.

Distraction during meals leads to poor chewing, delayed digestion, and excessive food intake. Regular mindful eating supports better digestion and nutrient utilization.

6.4 Quantity of Food and Gastric Function

Charaka guides that the stomach should not be filled completely, at least 1/3rd part should be kept empty. Adequate space is required for movement of food and digestive activity.

Overfilling the stomach restricts movement and leads to indigestion, acidity, and reflux. Proper quantity supports mechanical digestion and prevents gastric discomfort.

6.5 Processing of Food and Digestibility

Karāṇa explains how food processing changes digestibility. Proper cooking, soaking, and fermentation make food easier to digest and absorb.

Improper processing or excessive refinement reduces food quality and disturbs digestion. Thus, traditional processing methods support digestive health.

6.6 Individualized Nutrition

Ayurveda strongly recommends individual-based diet planning. Digestive strength, constitution, age, habitat and health condition should guide food selection.

The same food may act differently in different individuals. Therefore, diet should always be personalized.

Ayurvedic Principle	Modern Scientific Concept	Health Outcome
Kala (Time)	Circadian Biology	Better Weight Management
Tanmana (Concentration)	Cephalic Phase Response	Improved Nutrient Absorption
Matravat (Quantity)	Gastric Distension Limits	Prevention of Acid Reflux
Karana (Processing)	Bioavailability	Reduction of Antinutrients
Samyoga (Combination)	Chemical Synergy/Antagonism	Reduced Gut Inflammation

7. DISCUSSION

Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna gives a detailed understanding of diet as a tool to prevent diseases and management if disease develops. It explains that health does not depend only on the quality of food but other factors also play a role.

Current health issues such as obesity, diabetes, digestive disorders, and metabolic diseases are highly related to improper food habits. Irregular meals, overeating, incompatible food combinations, and distracted eating can disturb digestion and metabolism.

Proper quantity of food emphasizes the mechanical function of digestion. Space is needed for movement and mixing of food. Overeating reduces this space and leads to indigestion and reflux.

The rule of eating with concentration becomes highly relevant in the present digital age. Eating while using screens reduces awareness of food intake and digestion. This leads to overeating and poor nutrient absorption.

The emphasis on warm and unctuous food is against the current trend of excessive cold and dry food intake. Such foods weaken digestion and disturb body balance over time.

Thus, Āhāra Vidhi Vidhāna is not a cultural tradition alone. It is a scientific, practical, and preventive dietary code that remains highly relevant even today.

8. CONCLUSION

The **Ahara Vidhi Vidhana** as described in the *Ayurveda* represents a blueprint for preventive health. It does not focus on nutrient quantities only and instead emphasizes how nutrients are available to body. By integrating these time proof dietary rules such as eating mindfully, respecting the body's internal clock, and maintaining proper gastric volume—one can find a holistic solution to many of the diseases of modern civilization that are paralysing the society.

The review of these principles reveals several key takeaways.

- **The Power of Process:** Digestion is not just a biological certainty; it is an active process that requires the right temperature, environment, and mental state.
- **Practicality:** These rules are cost-effective and easy to implement, making them ideal for public health education and primary prevention.
- **Scientific Validity:** Modern research in circadian biology, the gut-brain axis, and nutrigenomics continues to validate the wisdom of Charaka's observations.

In conclusion, the dietary code of the *Ayurveda* provides a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern clinical nutrition.

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