

THE ROLE OF AAHARA DRAVYAS AS THERAPEUTIC AGENTS IN AYURVEDA -A REVIEW ARTICLE

Mamta Pradhan^{*1}, Ashok Kumar Bhagat² and Gitanjali Sasmal³

¹PG Scholar Department of Kriya Shareera Shri N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College Raipur (C.G).

²Guide Department of Kriyashareera Shri N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College Raipur (C.G).

³Co Guide Department of Kriyashareera. Shri N.P.A. Govt. Ayurveda College Raipur (C.G).

Article Received on
01 August 2024,

Revised on 22 August 2024,
Accepted on 11 Sept. 2024

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr202418-33879



***Corresponding Author**

Mamta Pradhan

PG Scholar Department of
Kriya Shareera Shri N.P.A.
Govt. Ayurveda College Raipur
(C.G).

ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine from India, emphasizes a holistic approach to health where Aahara Dravyas (food substances) play a pivotal role in both the prevention and treatment of diseases. This article explores the concept of "Aahara as Aushadhi" (food as medicine) within Ayurvedic practice, highlighting how diet serves as a cornerstone of therapeutic interventions. Drawing on classical Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya, this study examines the preventive, curative, and restorative functions of Aahara Dravyas. The analysis reveals that diet is not merely a source of nourishment but a potent tool for balancing the doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), strengthening the digestive fire (Agni), and promoting overall well-being. Specific foods are prescribed based on their taste (Rasa), potency (Virya), post-digestive effect (Vipaka), and specific action (Prabhava), enabling personalized dietary regimens

that cater to individual health needs. Additionally, the role of diet in Panchakarma (detoxification therapy) and Rasayana (rejuvenation therapy) is discussed, underscoring its significance in Ayurvedic treatment protocols. The findings suggest that integrating Ayurvedic dietary principles with modern nutritional science could offer valuable insights for developing holistic and personalized health care strategies.

KEYWORDS: Aahara, Rasa, Vipaka, Virya, Prabhava, Agni.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine originating in India, emphasizes a holistic approach

to health that integrates body, mind, and spirit. One of the central tenets of Ayurveda is the concept of Aahara (diet or food) as a fundamental pillar of health. Unlike modern medicine, which often separates diet from therapeutic interventions, Ayurveda regards Aahara as both preventive and curative. The principle of "Aahara Dravyas as Chikitsa" (food substances as treatment) underscores the belief that the right food, when consumed appropriately, can serve as potent medicine, restoring balance and promoting health. This article explores the role of Aahara Dravyas in Ayurvedic treatment, examining their preventive, curative, and restorative functions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The primary aim of this article is to explore and elucidate the role of Aahara Dravyas (food substances) as therapeutic agents in Ayurvedic medicine, highlighting how diet functions as both preventive and curative medicine within the holistic framework of Ayurveda.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the concept of "Aahara as Aushadhi" in Ayurveda: Analyze how food is integrated into the Ayurvedic system as a tool for maintaining health and treating diseases.
2. To investigate the preventive role of Aahara Dravyas: Identify how specific dietary practices help in preventing diseases by balancing the doshas and maintaining optimal health.
3. To explore the curative applications of Aahara Dravyas: Detail the therapeutic use of food substances in the treatment of various diseases, focusing on their properties and actions as described in classical Ayurvedic texts.
4. To discuss the restorative function of Aahara Dravyas in Rasayana therapy: Understand how specific foods are used to rejuvenate the body, enhance immunity, and promote longevity.
5. To integrate traditional Ayurvedic knowledge with modern perspectives: Correlate the Ayurvedic principles of dietary therapy with contemporary scientific understanding of diet and health, exploring the potential of Ayurveda in contributing to personalized nutrition and integrative health care.

These objectives collectively aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the significance of diet in Ayurveda, demonstrating how Aahara Dravyas serve as a cornerstone in the promotion of health and the treatment of diseases.

METHODS

The analysis in this article is based on a comprehensive review of classical Ayurvedic texts, including the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya. These texts provide detailed descriptions of the properties of various foods, their effects on the body's doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), and their application in treating specific diseases. Modern studies on the therapeutic benefits of dietary substances in Ayurveda were also reviewed to understand the contemporary relevance of these practices.

The Concept of Aahara in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, the concept of Aahara (diet or food) plays an important role in maintaining health and treating diseases, often referred to as the concept of "Aahar as Aushadhi" (food as medicine).

According to Ayurvedic principles, the right kind of food can act as a powerful therapeutic tool to balance the doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), maintain agni (digestive fire), and promote overall well-being.

Ayurveda perceives food as a source of life and energy, integral to sustaining the balance of the three doshas—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. Each individual's unique constitution (Prakriti) and the state of their doshas guide dietary choices. The concept of Aahara in Ayurveda is multifaceted, emphasizing not only what is consumed but also how, when, and in what environment.

Key principles of Aahara include

1. **Satmya (Wholesomeness):** Refers to food that is congenial to an individual's body constitution.
2. **Desha (Geographical Condition):** Diet should be aligned with the region's climate and environment where a person lives.
3. **Kala (Time/Season):** The diet should change according to the time of day, season, and stage of life.
4. **Prakriti (Individual Constitution):** A diet that suits the individual's body type—*Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha*—is essential for maintaining balance and health.
5. **Rasa (Taste):** Ayurveda identifies six tastes—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent—and recommends including all six in a balanced meal to nourish the body and mind.

6. Virya (Potency): The inherent potency of food, which could be heating or cooling, affects the balance of doshas.
7. Vipaka (Post-Digestive Effect): The long-term effect of food on the body after digestion, which is also important in determining its impact on health.
8. Ahara Vidhi (Dietary Rules): The proper way of consuming food, which includes eating in a calm environment, at regular times, with a grateful attitude, and stopping before feeling completely full.

RESULTS

1. Preventive Role of Aahara Dravyas

Ayurvedic texts emphasise the importance of diet in maintaining the balance of *doshas* and preventing diseases. Each individual is unique, with a specific Prakriti (constitution) that determines their dietary needs. For instance, individuals with a Vata constitution are advised to consume warm, moist, and nourishing foods to prevent Vata-related disorders like joint pain, anxiety, and constipation. Similarly, those with a Pitta constitution are recommended to consume cooling and calming foods to prevent heat-related disorders such as acid reflux, inflammation, and skin conditions.

The seasonal regimen (Ritucharya) and daily regimen (Dinacharya) outlined in Ayurveda also highlight the role of diet in preventing diseases.

2. Curative Role of Aahara Dravyas

- Aahara Dravyas play a significant role in the treatment of various diseases in Ayurveda. The therapeutic properties of foods are determined by their taste (Rasa), potency (Virya), post-digestive effect (Vipaka), and specific action (Prabhava).
- Digestive Disorders: Foods like buttermilk, pomegranate, and ginger are used to treat digestive issues like indigestion and diarrhoea. These foods are known to balance the digestive fire (Agni) and pacify the aggravated doshas responsible for the condition.
- Respiratory Disorders: Warming spices like turmeric, black pepper, and ginger, along with light and easily digestible foods, are recommended for respiratory issues like cough and asthma. These foods help in liquefying and expelling Kapha, thereby clearing the respiratory tract.
- Skin Diseases: Bitter and astringent foods such as neem, bitter melon, and turmeric are used in the treatment of skin diseases. These foods have detoxifying properties that help in balancing Pitta dosha and cleansing the blood.

3. Restorative Role of Aahara Dravyas

In addition to their preventive and curative roles, Aahara Dravyas are also used in restorative therapies, particularly in Rasayana(rejuvenation) therapy. Rasayana foods like milk, ghee, and certain herbs (e.g., Amalaki, Ashwagandha) are believed to rejuvenate the body, enhance immunity, and promote longevity. These foods are rich in nutrients that nourish the body tissues (Dhatus) and improve overall vitality.

4. Integration with Panchakarma

Aahara Dravyas are integral to Panchakarma, the Ayurvedic detoxification therapy. Specific diets, such as a mono-diet of *Khichari* (a combination of rice and mung beans), are used to prepare the body for detoxification, support the elimination process, and restore balance post-treatment.

DISCUSSION

The findings from classical Ayurvedic texts and modern studies highlight the multifaceted role of Aahara Dravyas in Ayurvedic treatment. The preventive, curative, and restorative functions of food underscore the holistic nature of Ayurveda, where diet is not just a source of nutrition but a powerful tool for maintaining health and treating diseases. The personalized approach to diet, based on an individual's constitution, season, and health condition, is a unique feature of Ayurveda that distinguishes it from other medical systems. The therapeutic use of Aahara Dravyas aligns with the growing recognition in modern medicine of the role of diet in disease prevention and management. However, the Ayurvedic approach goes beyond the biochemical properties of food, considering the energetic and doshic effects of diet, which may offer new insights into personalized nutrition and integrative health care.

CONCLUSION

Aahara Dravyas as Chikitsa in Ayurveda represents a profound understanding of the relationship between food and health. By using diet as both preventive and curative medicine, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive approach to health care that integrates the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of well-being. As modern science continues to explore the connections between diet and health, the Ayurvedic concept of food as medicine provides a valuable framework for developing holistic and personalized nutritional therapies.

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