

AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF AHAR (DIET): A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Ahara is the most important factor in life. Health as well as disease is dependent on ahara. Proper diet, taken in proper manner can lead to better health or else can lead to diseases. Food is the source of life, strength, complexion and Oja of living beings. 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 Dhatu. 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 and amount for therapeutic and other purposes. This usually involves the modification of an existing dietary lifestyle to promote optimum health. Ayurvedic principles are concerned about every part of the body, mentally and physically through diet.

KEYWORDS: Ahara; Ahara Parinamkarak Bhava; Ahara Niyam; Vayu; Agni.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara i.e. diet is believed to be one of the *Upastambha* of life. Faulty diet results in disturbed functions of the body. That is the reason why while describing causative factors of diseases, dietary articles (*apathya*) have been given prime importance. *Acharya Charak* has stated that diet sustains life if taken with discipline in a proper manner. Ahara has a prime role in maintaining health and also in treating various disorders. *Ayurveda* emphasizes that the *Àhàra* is the nourisher of the body elements; vital essence, vitality, complexion and other things, but its action is dependent on the proper function of *Jatharagni*. The *Àhàra Dravyas* comprising of six *Rasas*, get transformed into three kinds of *Vipaka* (*Madhura*, *Amla* and *Katu*) by the action of *Jatharagni*. All living beings in the universe require food. The food is said to be cause of stability for all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living beings. Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, astuteness, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect are all conditioned by food. 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. Ahara 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. Hence, it is an important part of the treatment by avoiding the causative factors of a disease.

1. Factor Those Take Part In The Digestion

- *Ushma: Pachakagni* (Digestive enzymes)
- *Vata dosha / Cheshta prerak bhava* (Nervous mechanism of digestion)
- *Kleda / Shaithlykar bhava* (Hydrolysing agent)
- *Sneha / Mardavkar bhava* (Softening agent)
- *Kaala yoga / Samay* (Time factor)
- *Aharvidhi samayoga* (Rules for proper digestion)

1.1. Ushma / Jatharagni / Pachakagni: (Digestive Enzymes)

As in the environment, the fire is used to cook the raw food to make it edible; in that same manner, the *Jatharaagni* which is present in the *Koshtha* (*mahastrotasa*) is helpful to convert the food in the form of the *dhatu pushtikar bhava*. This results in increase the *Oja, bala, Varna*, etc.

To maintain the balance between *tridoshas*, *jaatharagni* plays an important role. To maintain the good

functioning of the body, the *Jatharagni* is must be conserved.

In charaka sutrasthana (27/342), *Agni* is said to be an important constituent of the body. Which is helpful to preserve the *Prana*, *Oja*, *Aayu*, *Bala*, *Varna*, *Utsaha*, *Upachaya*, *Prabha* and complete healthy status.

1.2. Vayu/ Vatadosha/ Cheshta prerak bhava [Nervous mechanism of digestion]

Vata dosha is the main controller of the kinetic functions which takes place within the body.

Vata dosha is responsible for the intake of food and to excrete the waste products which are formed during the digestive process.

The main three types of *vata dosha* (*Prana vayu*, *Saman vayu*, *Apan vayu*) take part in the digestive system.

1.2.1. Prana Vayu

Oral cavity and the throat is one of the locations where *prana vayu* is present. The food enters in oral cavity is masticated and then entered in the oesophagus. This process of swallowing/deglutition is takes place under influence of *Prana vayu*. (*Cha. Chi. 15/6*)

Charak samhita, sharir sthan, the commentary of *Chakrapani* explained that *vayu apakarshati* - *vayu* brought grinded food to *pachakagni* which helps to digest the food properly. (*Su. Ni. 1/12*)

Udgar: After complete digestion of the food, the air entered with the food is excreted as the *udgara*.

1.2.2. Samaan Vayu

Samaan vayu increases the digestive power of the *Jatharagni*. That is, the *samaan vayu* indirectly improves the digestion (*A. Hru. Su. 12/8*)

By keeping food in intestine, *Saman Vayu* breaks it into *Parthiv*, *Aapya*, *Aagneya*, *Vayavya*, *Nabhas* form. (*A.Hru.Su.12/8*)

Prutthkaran: (separation of useful and waste products)

Because of procedure of digestion there is formation of useful and waste products. This procedure is done by *Saman Vayu*. *Saman vayu* transport the useful part i.e. *annarasa* to *hridaya*, and the remaining waste products (*mutra*, *purish*) to the lower portion of the *koshtha*. *Indu*, *Ashtang sangraha Su. 20/4*:

Samirano Agnehe

Saman vayu also increase the *pachana Shakti* (digestive power) of the *jatharagni*. As in nature, the fine blow of air increases the power of fire; in the same manner, the *prakruti samana vayu* increases the power of the *jatharagni*. This function of the *samana vayu* is called as '*Agnisandhukshan*' (stimulation of the digestive juices).

Rasamutrapurishanam prathyakaranam

After complete digestion of the food, it is divided into *saara bhag* (useful part) and *kitta bhag* (waste products). The digested useful part is called as *Annarasa*. The *kitta bhaga* is differentiated into *purish* and the *mutra*. This differentiation is depend on the functioning of the *Vata dosha*.

1.2.3. Apana Vayu

Malanam Bahi kshepta

Ahara janya mala is of various types like *purish*, *mutra*, *payu* (*dushit vayu*). *Apan vayu* is mainly situated in the *Pakvashaya*, where the *purisha* and other *malas* are kept for some time before its *vegakala* (excretion). After the sensation of excretion, the *malas* are excreted through their routes of excretions.

This all process is run under influence of the *Apana vayu*.

1.3. Kleda & / Shaithilyakara Bhava: (Hydrolysing Agent)

They ease the process of digestion and protect the seat of digestion. Such a way they are essential factor for better digestion. These factors are represented by *bodhak* and *kledaka kapha* moistens or impregnates, soften and disintegrates the ingested food and redness it too easy for the *pachaka pitta* to act upon them. (*Cha. Sha. 6/15*) (*A. Hru. Su. 12/17*)

1.4. Sneha/ Mardavkara Bhava (Softening Agent)

Mucin is also present in saliva and gastric juices. Saliva and gastric juices also contain mucin which convert the food into liquid, smooth & soft which helps in working of *jatharagni*. (*Ch. Sha.6/15*).

1.4.1. Kaala Yoga / Samay (Time factor)

Time also contribute in proper digestion of eaten food. After eating food by chewing properly, it takes 1-2 hrs. To make chime in the stomach. It takes 4-5 hrs. For complete digestion of food in small intestine. After that most of the water is absorbed in large intestine which turn the remaining part of indigested, food in thick, form which is called as *pakwamala*. The paka in this avastha is called as *katu avsthapaka*.

It take 12-14 hrs for all these process

It means one should not have food until the eaten food is completely digested. hence, it is called '*yamadhe tu na bhoktavavyam*', means one should not eat for 3hrs. after having food. (*Ch.Sh. 6/15*) (*Ch. Chi. 5/7*)

1.5. Samayoga

Samayoga means *Samyakyoga* of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*. So, it indicates the importance about *Visheshayatana* along with *Agni*. *Agni* is proper but *Visheshayatana* is not maintain, it will surely lead to diseases related to *Agni* because *Agni is disturb*. When the food is taken properly and according to rules of food taking, then only the benefits of *Ahara* can be achieved.

Any defect in diet and even in their preparation leads to ill disease. The faulty dieting habit is an etiological factor for *dosha*. When an individual takes different types of food articles *without* paying due regards toward their *Prakruti*, mode of preparation, combination, quantity, *Desha*, *Kala*, dietetic rules and wholesomeness for the individual then the *Dosha* get disturbed, and these *dosha* are responsible for all the diseases.

2. Ahara Upyoga Niyama

Ahara Upyoga Niyama includes the rules and regulations of diet intake. *Ahara* i.e diet as well as the method of diet intake both have equal importance. In other medical sciences, food and nutrition is considered important, but not the dietary habits i.e. the etiquettes to be followed for eating. It is the heritage of our ancient Indian culture that can be clearly observed in *Ayurvedic* views. The dietetic rules can be considered as *Upaya* or *Adravabhuta Aushadhi* for *Vikaraprashamana*. *Ayurvedic* classics have emphasized on some examination methods, rules and regulations for taking diet. Even though a man consumes wholesome diet, it is necessary to consider the following points to achieve proper digestion, assimilation and ultimately nourishment to the body. Both healthy and unhealthy person should consider these points while selecting the food.

3. Ushnam Ashniyat

This includes intake of warm food. Here, it is made clear that the term *Ushna* refers to the temperature of the food and not the *ushna guna* of the food. If one follows this rule and eats warm food; it tastes well, also the eaten food stimulates the digestive fire and gets digested quickly. Intake of warm food helps in *vatanuloman*, stimulates and secretes pitta thereby increasing agni. Extreme hot food is also not advised as it may cause *mada*, *daha*, *trushna*, *bhrama* etc. Another food that is again made hot, after preparation which can be categorized under *Paryushita Anna*. The food is strictly contraindicated according to *Ayurveda*. Similar qualities are observed in the food that had kept for long time and then eaten. Even the working crowds, who use Tiffin for convenience at their working place are unable to have warm food. Hence it is also prohibited.

4. Snigdham Ashniyat

This context refers to consumption of unctuous food. Here, the term *Snigdha* does not exactly mean *Snehadravyas* like *ghrta*, *taila* but also *Godhuma*, *Shali* rice etc. are advised as *Snigdha*. *Snigdha aahar* tastes well, it stimulates the digestive fire, helps in *vatanuloman*, due to its *kledan* property stimulates *kledak kapha*, provides firmness to the sense organs, increases strength, produces clarity of complexion.

On the contrary, extreme *Snigdha* (*Atisnigdha*) or *Asnigdha* (*Ruksha*), both inhibit the process of digestion. *Atisnigdha* food is '*Guru*' by property and takes more time and energy for digestion, causing *Praseka*, *Hridayagaurava*, *Alasya*, *Aruchi*, etc. On this contrary,

asnigdha or *ruksha* food absorbs humidity of digestive tract and hampers digestion, decreases *Bala* and *Varna*, producing dryness of skin and constipation.

5. Laghu Ashniyat

Laghu ahara includes both quantity & quality of food. As per quality, meaning of word *Laghu* here means easy to digest. i.e which takes less time to digest. *Laghu Ahara* does not cause vitiation of *Doshas* and increase the *Agni*, undergoes digestion without causing any difficulty. Even the food slightly *Apathya* in nature do not aggravate *Doshas*.

6. Jirne Viryavirudham

One should take food only when previous meal is digested. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, the digestive product of previous food, i.e immature *rasa* gets mixed up with the product of food taken afterwards, resulting in the provocation of all the *doshas* instantaneously. Also one should take food having no contradictory potencies. By taking such food one does not get afflicted with such disease as may arise from the intake of food having mutually contradictory potencies. Therefore, one should take food having no contradictory potencies.

7. Ishta Deshe, Ishta Sarvopakaranam

This term refers to eating in a hygienic place provided with all the necessary things for sound psychological condition during meals. One should take food in proper equipped with all the accessories and should not produce disturbing emotions like *kama*, *krodha*, *chinta*, *bhaya* etc. By following this person does not get afflicted with such of the factors that would result to the disturbed mind.

Na Atidrutam Ashniyat

The food should not be taken too hurriedly. If food is taken too hurriedly it enters the wrong passage and does not enter into the stomach properly. In this situation, one can never determine the taste of food articles and defect foreign bodies, mixed with them. Also, the food when eaten with hurry violates its normal route. The *Annaja Hikka* is the best example of '*Vimargagamanam*'.

Na Ativilambitam Ashniyat

This concept refers to that one should not take food too slowly because this will not give satisfaction to the individual. In this situation he would take more than what is required, the food becomes cold and there will be irregularity indigestion. Therefore one should not take food very slowly. All these factors hamper *Agni* and the food can't be digested properly.

Ajalpan, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjita

One should not talk or laugh or be unmindful while taking food. The secretion of digestive juices gets disturbed and finally the system also gets affected which affects body as well as mind. Also one should take food in a prescribed manner, with due regard to his own self.

So one should take food in a prescribed manner with due regard to his own self. The most important statement is that the food should be eaten with enough concentration towards it as well as towards the eating process. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too hastily or too slowly. Thus the uniform speed of eating can't be maintained; hence both the above opinions are practically true. In one meal also, some food is eaten hurriedly while some slowly if the attention is diverted by other things.

8. DISCUSSION

Ayurveda has scientific approach in health management. The main aim of *Ayurveda* is to preserve the health of a healthy person and to treat the disease. The diet and regimen which is beneficial to the body and gives happiness to the mind. Lots of importance is given to the diet with regard to its processing, quality, quantity and so on. *Āhāra*, *Swapna (Nidra)* and *Brahmacarya* play an important role in the maintenance of "Swasthya" of an individual. *Āhāra* plays an important role in healthy, diseased and convalescent states. It is more important than the medicine itself. Wholesome diet is prime cause for the growth and development of the body, on the contrary, unwholesome diet causes several diseases. *Acharya Charaka* stated that the ideal diet is that, which rebuilds the worn-out systems, nourishes *dhātus* and maintains equilibrium of the body constituents. Irrational diet acts otherwise, producing disease. One should eat food, which is hot, unctuous, in due measure, after the digestion of previous food, and nonantagonistic in potency. It should be eaten in a hygienic place, provided with all accessories, neither too hurriedly, nor too leisurely, without talking or laughing with full concentration and having proper regard to oneself. Also fuel like coal is required to keep the fire continuously or enlighten. Similarly, the *Āhāra* acts as the *Indhana* (fuel) for the *Jatharagni* and other *Agnis* in the body. *Āhāra* alone sustains the properties of *Agni* in the body. This shows the mutual relationship of *Āhāra* and *Agni*. If the food is not taken at all or in less quantity, due to the lack of *Indhana*, the *Agni* starts digesting the *Dhātus* of the body and these *Dhātus* get depleted and the *Doṣas* become aggravated, resulting in the diseases.

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