



Concept of diet in Ayurveda and its importance

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Abstract

According to *Ayurveda Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep), *Bramhacharya* (regulated sexual life) are recognized as *thrayopasthambhas* (3 sub pillars) for life. Here *Ahara* is enumerated first which shows its importance.

Dietary habits and choices play a significant role in the quality of life, health and longevity. But unfortunately today's generation has adopted to unhealthy eating habits and consumption of food which has several adverse effects on human health.

The aims and objectives of *Ayurveda* are to maintain the health of a healthy person and to cure the disease of the patient. As evident the first and foremost aim of *Ayurveda* is preventive in nature rather than curative.

So *Ayurvedic* classics emphasizes more on *Ahara* for the promotion of positive health and prevention from a wide range of disorders. Even in diseased condition dietary management is important component in every prescription in *Ayurvedic* clinical practice. Sometimes dietary management itself is a complete treatment.

Key words: Pathya, Ashtavidha ahara visheshayatana, Dwadasha ashana vichara, Viruddhaahra, Anupana

Introduction

According to *Ayurveda Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep), *Bramhacharya* (regulated sexual life) are recognized as *thrayopasthambhas* (3 sub pillars) for life. Here *Ahara* is enumerated first which shows its importance.¹

Ahara not only influence physical health but also on mental health. *Acharya charaka* says that food sustains the life of all living beings and complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, genius, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect are all conditioned by *Ahara* ²

Today modern world has been adopted to unhealthy eating habits and consumption of food that has least dietic values and which has several adverse effects on human health. Incidence of diseases such as obesity, diabetes mellitus, fatty liver, hyperlipidemia, cardiac problems, arthritis etc are raising because of consumption of modern diet.

As *Ayurveda* is a Holistic system of medicine, its primary aim and objective is to maintain the health of a healthy person rather than curing the disease. So *Ayurvedic* classics emphasizes more on *Ahara* for the promotion of positive health and prevention from a wide range of disorders. For this purpose *Ayurveda* advocates personalized diet as each and every person is different in their constituents, in their habitat etc. Even in diseased condition dietary management is important component in every prescription in *Ayurvedic* clinical practice. Sometimes dietary management itself is a complete treatment.

CONCEPT OF PATHYA –APATHYA AHARA IN AYURVEDA

The *Pathya* is defined as the food substance which are not harmful to the body channels and please the mind and those with opposite property are considered as *Apathya*.³

- *Pathya* is equally important for both healthy and diseased persons.
- Ie, 1. *SwasthyaSamrakshanartha Pathya* (for healthy)
- 2. *Rogakalina Pathya* (for diseased)⁴

Lakshana of *Dravya* is not fixed, the same *Dravya* becomes *Pathya* and *Apathya* for the same individual depending upon the influence of *Matra* (Quantity), *Kaala* (Season, Ritu, Ahoratra), *Samskara* (the methods of preparations), *Bhumi* (Habitat) and different stages of *Doshas* (bio-humors) and *Deha* (body constitution).Hence *Matradi* factors should be considered for the selection of *Pathya*.

Criteria to know the quantity of Ahara

One must take food in proper quantity, which depends on the strength of *Agni* (digestive power). That shall be known as the proper quantity of food which is digested in due time without disturbing the normalcy.⁵

The right quantity always depends upon the substance itself. Based on the food-article itself, it is advised that heavy articles should be taken upto one third or one half of the saturation point (of capacity of stomach); even light ones should not be taken in surfeit in order to maintain the strength of *Agni*.⁶

Forbidden food articles for habitual consumption

One should not be habitual to take *Vallur* (dried meat), *Shushkashakha* (dried vegetables), *Shaluka* (tuber of lotus-Nymphaea alba Linn.) and *Bisa* (stalk of lotus-Nymphaea alba Linn.) as these are heavy to digest. One should never eat meat of emaciated animal.

Similarly one should not take continuously *Kurchika* (boiled buttermilk) and *Kilata* (inspissated milk products), Meat of *Shoukar* (pork), *Gavya* (Cow), *Mahisha* (buffalo), *Matsya* (fish), *Dadhi* (curd), *Masha* (black gram) and *Yavaka* (wild-barley).⁷

Food articles for regular consumption and preservation of health

One should regularly consume *Shashtika* rice (*Oryzasativum*), *Shali* rice (varieties of *Oryzasativum* rice), *Mudga* (green gram), *Saindhavalavana* (rocksalt), *Amalaka* (Indian gooseberry), *Yava* (barley), *Antarikshajala* (rain water), *Dugdha* (milk), *Sarpi* (ghee), *Jangalamamsa* (flesh of animals of arid habitat) and *Madhu* (honey).

One should follow those in the daily regimen, which maintain health as well as prevent onset of diseases.⁸

Pathya-apathya in diseased persons

Ayurveda says if a person follows the dietary rules for particular disease there is very little significance of drug treatment and when a person is exposed to *Apathya* the drug treatment has no value, Because the taken drug cannot cure the disease.

As *Acharya Charaka* has stated if one take *Pathyaahara*, there is no chance for disease pathogenesis.⁹

It is presumed that all diseases according to *Ayurveda* are believed to have their root of origin in improper *Aahara*. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic clinical practice. Some times dietary management itself is a complete treatment. So *Pathya* is said to be *Mahabheshaja* (supreme medicine) by *Acharya Kashyapa*.¹⁰

Some examples of disease specific diet

Pathya ahara in Jwara (pyrexia) – *Yavagu* (gruel), *Odana* (boiled rice), *Lajja* (fried paddy) are used for patient suffering from *Jwara*. *Raktashali* etc, along with *Shashtika* type of rice should be used only after they have become *purana* (preserved for over an year).¹¹

Pathya ahara in Prameha (Diabetes)– Barley should constitute the principal ingredient of food of patient suffering from *prameha*. Old *Shali* rice cooked and mixed with the soup of *Mudga* etc, preparation of bitter vegetables, cooked *Shashtika* rice and *Trunadhanyas* mixed with oil of *Danti*, *Ingudi*, *Atasi* and *Sarshapa*.¹²

Pathya ahara in kushta (skin disease)–Light and wholesome food, vegetables having bitter taste, food preparations and medicated ghee prepared by boiling *Bhallataka*, *Triphala*, and *Nimba*, Old cereals, *Jangalamamsa*.¹³

SEASON WISE DIET

Ayurveda describes seasonal diet. If a person follows seasonal diet & regimen his *balavarnavruddhi* will take place.¹⁴

Ritucharya consists of lifestyle and Ayurvedic diet routine to cope with the bodily and mental impacts caused by seasonal changes as recommended by *Ayurveda*.

Ritucharya enables us to build our physical strength and mental capability to battle ailments that may happen due to seasonal changes. In addition to that, it balances all the three *doshas* in our body and keeps us fit and healthy throughout the year.

HEMANTHA RITU –*snigdha*, *amla*, *lavana* *rasayuktha ahara*. *Oudaka* (marshy), *Anupa* (aquatic) *mamsa* and also meat of burrow dwelling, *prasaha* (snatching), *madhira*, *sidhu* type of wines, *madhu* (honey) *gorasa* (milk products), *ikshuvikruthi* (sugarcane products), *vasa* (fats), *taila* (oils), *navaoudhana* (new rice) and warm water.¹⁵

SHISHIRA RITU–Hemanta and Shishira seasons are almost similar in characteristics with some specific features in this ritu therefore the diet advised for Hemanta ritu should be followed in Shishira ritu.¹⁶

VASANTHA RITU – Yava (barley), Godhuma (wheat), meat of Sharaba (wapiti), Sasa (hare), Ena (antelope), Lava (common quail) and Kapinjala (grey partridge) and drink Sidhu (harmless alcoholic drinks) and Madvika (a type of wine) should be taken.¹⁶

GRISHMA RITU – cold and sweet Mantha (unctuous drink), meat of wild animals and birds, ghee and milk along with Shali should be consumed in summer. Wine should be taken in a little quantity or should not be consumed at all, or if taken should be added with plenty of water.¹⁷

VARSHA RITU – Diet having predominance of Amla (sour), Lavana (salty), Snigdhaahara (unctuous food), and Old Yava, Godhuma, shali and Yusha (soup) prepared with Jangalamamsa (meat of wild animals), whenever Mardvika or other arishtas (fermented liquors) and water are consumed, they are mixed with a little amount of Kshoudra (honey).¹⁸

SHARAD RITU – food and drinks having Madhura (sweet), Laghu (light), Sheetala, (cold), Tikta rasa pradhana (bitter taste), pitta alleviating properties should be taken in proper quantity. Meats of Lava (common quail), kapinjala (grey partridge), Ena (antelope), Urabha (sheep), Saraba (wapiti), Sasa (rabbit), Yava, Godhuma, Shali should be taken.¹⁹

DIET ACC TO DEHA PRAKRITI

The diet of a person should contain the Gunas (characteristics) and Rasas (taste) which will keep the Doshik balance of the body in equilibrium. The food consumed by a person should comprise of those Rasas and gunas in large quantity that are opposite to the innate nature of Dosha that forms his Prakruti

For example, VATA PRAKRUTI person will have dominance of Tikta, Katu, Kashaya Rasa in him so his diet should be consisting of Madhura, Amla, Lavana Rasa. Vataprakruti person will have dominance of Ruksha, Laghu, Sheeta etc Gunas in him so his diet should be consisting of Snigdha, Guru, Ushna etc Gunas.

PITTA PRAKRUTI person will have dominance of Katu, Amla, Lavana Rasa so his diet should be rich in Madhura, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa. Pitta prakruti person will have dominance of Snigdha, Teekshna, Ushna etc Gunas so his diet should be rich in Ruksha, Manda, Ushna etc Gunas.

KAPHA PRAKRUTI person will have dominance of Madhura, Amla, Lavana in him so balanced diet for Kapha Prakruti should be one that is rich in Katu, Tikta, Kashaya Rasa. person will have dominance of Snigdha, Sheeta, Guru etc Gunas in him so balanced diet for Kapha Prakruti should be one that is rich in Ruksha, Ushna, Laghu etc Gunas²⁰

PRINCIPLES OF DIET IN AYURVEDA

Ashtavidha Aahara VidhiVisheshayana-

These are indicative of guidelines for diet and are causative factors which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the food and of the method for diet intake.

1) Prakriti (Natural qualities of Dravya), 2) Karana (Preparations), 3) Samyoga (Combinations), 4) Rashi (Quantum), 5) Desha (Habitat-Place of origin), 6) Kaala (Time), 7) UpayogaSamstha (Rules of use), 8) Upayokta (User)²¹

AharaVidhiVidhana (Rules & Regulations for Diet Intake)

Following points are to be kept in mind while consuming diet by healthy or diseased persons.

1. Food should be fresh, warm, tasty and should be eaten in good company of friends and well wishers.
2. Sweet should be eaten first, sour and salty stuff in between and spicy stuff should be consumed in the last.
3. The food should contain limited quantity of fats especially cow's ghee.
4. The diet must contain all 6 Rasas (Shad-Rasas)
5. Quantity of food to be consumed should be decided according to ones Agni (appetite).
6. It is advisable that one should eat half of his capacity. Incompatible food or contradictory diet should not be consumed as it may lead to various diseases.
7. One should avoid eating food hurriedly or slowly.
8. Eat after digestion of previously taken food.
9. Sit in a good and comfortable place and posture.

10. One should take food without talking and laughing.
11. Eat with full concentration on food and with the *Hitakara Upakaranas* ²²

Dwadasha ashana vichara

1. **Sheeta ahara**- Indicated in persons suffering from *Ushnata*, *Mada* and *Trisna*.
2. **Ushna ahara**- Indicated in *Kapha* and *Vataja Rogas*, *Snehapeeta*, *Virikta* persons.
3. **Snigdha ahara**- Indicated in *Vataja Prakriti*, *VataVyadhi*, *Krishna* and *Durbala* persons .
4. **Ruksha ahara**- Indicated in *Medasvi*, *Kaphaja Rogas*, *Pramehi*, *Kapha Prakriti* persons.
5. **Drava ahara**- Indicated in persons with *Sushka Sharira*, *Trishna Peedita*, *Durbala Sharira*.
6. **Sushka ahara**- Indicated in *Pramehi*, in patients with *klinna Sharira* due to *Kusta* and *Visarpa*.
7. **EkaKalika ahara**- To improve the status of *Agni* in persons with *Mandagni*, *Aahara* should be given once in 24 hours.
8. **DwiKalika ahara**- Indicated for persons with *Sama Agni*.
9. **OusadhaYukta ahara**- For the patients who do not like the intake of medicines, *Aahara* mixed with *Ousadha* is advised.
10. **Matra Hina ahara**- For the Rogi and patients of *Agnimandhya* small quantity of food is advised as compared to normal individuals.
11. **Prashamana Karaka ahara**- *Ahara* which can help in normalising the naturally vitiated *Doshas* due to *Dosha Sanchaya* and *Prakopa* in that particular *Ritu*.
12. **SwasthaVritti Prayojaka ahara**- For the maintenance of good health of healthy persons *Sarva rasa yukta Aahara* should be consumed. ²³

VIRUDDHA AAHARA (INCOMPATIBLE DIET)

Ayurveda also explains about incompatible diet which aggravates *doshas* and gives rise to so many disorders.

1. *Desha Viruddha* (Contrary to climate), 2. *Kaala Viruddha* (Contrary to seasons), 3. *Agni Viruddha* (Contrary to digestive power), 4. *Matra Viruddha* (Contrary to measure), 5. *Satmya Viruddha* (Contrary to adoptability), 6. *Dosha Viruddha* (Contrary to body humours), 7. *Samskara Viruddha* (Contrary to Preparations) 8. *Virya Viruddha* (contrary to potency), 9. *Koshta Viruddha* (contrary to bowel habit), 10. *Avastha Viruddha* (contrary to state of patient), 11. *Krama Viruddha* (contrary to order of eating), 12. *Parihara Viruddha* (contrary to avoided things), 13. *Upachara Viruddha* (contrary to treatment), 14. *Paka Viruddha* (contrary to cooking), 15. *Samyoga Viruddha* (contrary to combination), 16. *Hridaya Viruddha* (contrary to palatability), 17. *Sampada Viruddha* (contrary to richness of quality), 18. *Vidhi Viruddha* (contrary to rules of meals)-²⁴

Viruddha ahara sevanajanya rogas

Generally intake of *Viruddha Aahara* causes *Napumsakata*, *Andata*, *Visarpa*, *Jalodara*, *Visphota*, *Unmada*, *Bhagandara*, *Murcha*, *Mada*, *Adhmana*, *Galagraha*, *Pandu*, *Amavisha*, *Kilasa*, *Kustha*, *Grahani*, *Shotha*, *Amlapitta*, *Jwara*, *Pinasa* and deformity in offsprings etc. ²⁵

CONCEPT OF ANUPANA

After meals there is a unique concept of *Anupana* is also present in *Ayurvedic* science with aimed to proper digestion of food. Acc to our *Acharyas* *Anupana* should be dissimilar to the qualities of food. But it should not be opposite to the qualities of *Dhatus*.²⁶

According to *Maharshi Sushruta* food which cause aggravation of *doshas* which are guru and food consumed in more quantity get digested easily by *anupana*. ²⁷

In *Susrutha Samhitha*, *Acharya* specially mentioned about the effect of *Anupana* according to the time of administration in relation to the food. i.e., *Anupana* taken before food causes *Karshana*, taken along with food causes *Sthiratha*, and after food causes *Brimhana*. ²⁸

Some examples of *Anupana* – cold water is advised while eating food articles prepared with Barley, wheat, while consuming curds, wine, honey. Hot water is ideal after drink while consuming food articles prepared from liquid part of curds, fat rich buttermilk, ghee, oil, fats, vegetable dishes, green gram dishes and legumes.

CONCLUSION

- In *Ayurveda* many holistic and scientific approaches have been described about planning of the diet. The fundamental principles like, *Tridosha*, *prakriti*, the tastes, processing of food, the quality, quantity, and the rules regarding eating food if considered while incorporating the diet, one keep away from many diseases of body and mind. As it is said in *Vaidyajeewanam* that, there is no need of medication if the person is in proper diet.

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