

Ahara: Foremost Pillar of Ayurveda

Pawar Jatved Janardanrao and Khendkar Jayashree Chandrakant

1,2 Department of Kriya Sharir, Government Ayurved College, Nanded, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

Ahara is one of the three basic pillars of Ayurveda. It is one of the fundamental principles upon which happiness, health and harmony along with the natural law rest. The term ‘Ahara’ is concerned with diet and lifestyle (ahara & vihara) and is basically preventive in nature. Ahara can be called as the life-supporting diet is the first and foremost pillar of Ayurveda. Ayurvedic understanding of nutrition is somewhat different from that of the Western lifestyle concept. The main focus of the Western lifestyle concept of nutrition is on the physical attributes of food like calorie values, it means the amount of all the nutrients should be in equal proportion. Ahara in Ayurveda, on the other hand is concerned with the effects of food on the quality of the mind, the digestion and balance of the doshas. On the physical level, almost all the diseases arise from improper and inadequate metabolism system which further leads to weakened and imbalanced functioning. Ayurveda recognizes the critical role of nutrition which it plays in the maintenance of mental sattva, which keeping the parts of life which is associated with their wholeness source. Ayurveda defines that, to improve the quality and prolong life and maintaining a good lifestyle, it is necessary to consume a healthy Ahara by human beings. Ayurveda says that when appetite, digestion and elimination are normal the body is with full of energy. So, a very significant role is played by Ahara in Ayurveda. We can say ‘Anna He Purnabrahma’, that means food is whole universe.

Keywords

Ayurveda, Ahara, Doshas, Sattva

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INTRODUCTION

‘Aahriyate eti aharah’ means whatever is ingested is called ‘Ahara’. Due to necessity of ‘swallowing act’ whatever is undergone process of deglutination is ‘Ahara’\(^1\). Living organisms get their life from food. All living creatures on the earth live on food. Food, which is prime requirement of each and every biotic entity and is taken as the greatest matter in the world. All type of medicines are found in food. Ayurveda word is made up of two words ayu (life) & veda (knowledge/science). It is science of life. Success of any science depends upon its basic principles. Traya Upastambha (Essential Triads of Health), a basic concept of Ayurveda comprises of Ahara (Balanced diet), Nidra (Sleep) and Bramhacharya (Controlled sex)\(^2\). The term upastambha is formed by combination of two words i.e. ‘Upa’ meaning support and ‘Stambha’ means base. The swasthya rakshana and vikara prashamana after the removal of the causative factor of disease is the principle goal of Ayurveda. In Ayurved, ahara is also called to as the life supporting diet. It is the first pillar of Ayurveda and Ahara relates with the proper dietary knowledge. This science focuses mostly on the strength of the patient and not on the vyadhi.

Ayurveda commonly refers to the knowledge of proper diet. It actually provides the first approach that can maintain one’s ideal health and to alleviate the symptoms of illness. It emphasizes that while diet does not cure any diseases but illness can be controlled by adjustments in diet and proper eating habits for example in case of diabetes mellitus. Ahara is defined as significant aspect of maintaining good and sound health. Ayurveda states, it is very important to determine a diet which is most appropriate for the particular constitutional type, vata, pitta or kapha pradhana constitution. Ahara is concerned with the effects of several types of food on balance of the doshas, the quality of the mind and the digestion. Ayurveda says that, most of the diseases arising on the physical level from inappropriate and inadequate metabolism system and it lead to weakened and imbalanced functioning. The diet plays critical role in the maintenance of mental sattva, keeping the parts of life associated with their wholeness source.

Man remains healthy with appropriate kind of food, he eats. Even if drugs are given to a diseased person he cannot get cured without food. This is the reason why physicians call
food as great medicine i.e. ‘Mahabhaishajya’\(^3\).
The importance of six types of tastes and the characteristics of liquid diet have also been provided in detail. For maintaining good health, knowledge of the benefits of food and its characteristics are essential. There is also need to follow a disciplined life or at least avoid bad habits hazardous for health. Man, disciplined to remain on wholesome diet lives for 36000 nights or hundred years. He lives healthy life and gets blessings of good people\(^4\).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Panchabhoutictva of Ahara**

Acharya Sushruta stated that the whole world is made up of *Panchamahabhutas* (five basic elements) i.e. *Aakasha* (Ether), *Vayu* (Air), *Agni* (Fire), *Jala* (Water) and *Prithvi* (Earth) and so as our body. Equilibrium between these five elements is essential for physiological functioning of the body. We are dependent upon *panchabhoutic tatva* from universe (*ahara dravya*) for nutrition of our *panchabhutatmaka* body.

**Ahara Matra (Food quantity)**

*Ahara Matra* means total quantity of food to be consumed and also to each item separately. *Aharamatra* depends upon digestive capacity of an individual. In general following concept is taken into account -

**Trividha kukshiya concept:** If one divides one’s stomach into 3 parts, we should fill 1 part with solid food, 1 part with liquid food and leave 1 part empty for *doshas* to play their role in digestion. This is the ideal quantity of food and drinks that should go into one’s body every time one has a meal\(^5\).

**Composition of Ahara according to Rasa**

The first interaction of a herb or food with the body starts with the tongue and the sense of taste, or *rasa*\(^6\). *Rasa* is basically *apya* and is perceived by taste sensation\(^7\). All food items can be generally categorized in six types of tastes, they are: 1) sweet, 2) sour, 3) salty, 4) bitter, 5) pungent, and 6) astringent. Each of these tastes has various effects on the body according to their *panchabhoutic* composition.

With the six tastes, we can balance vitiated *doshas* by choosing food items and herbs that have the characteristics opposite to that of characteristics of *doshas*. The six tastes are a way to keep senses alert and explore foods items and herbs that will balance body and mind of an individual.
Ahara administration according to dosha & prakruti

A complete nutritious diet is essential for maintenance of good health and also for fighting against various diseases. All diseases are caused by Aggravation of the three doshas i.e. vata, pitta and kapha causes diseases which is in turn due to the intake of improper diet. Intake of nutrient and sufficient quantity of food promotes longevity, also maintains the digestive capacity and does not aggravate the doshas.

Dietary intake of a person according to Ayurveda, depends upon his constitution otherwise he may suffer from various diseases.

Seasonal variation in ahara

The constitution of dosha of the body and the seasonal chaya, prakopa and prashama of doshas are related. Our health is affected by the qualities of the climate in which we live and our environment also influences our inner world. e.g. if air is damp and cold in winter it will cause more attack of colds, catarrh during this season. Also, there is predominance of particular rasa in different ritu, which leads to dosha-chaya, prakopa & prashama. So, food should be consumed accordingly.

Ritucharya is observance of diet and regimen according to the seasonal variations. Ayurveda recommends specific diet and lifestyle for each season under the heading ritucharya.

Types of Ahara

Bhagwatgita mentions relation of type of food with reaction of mind. Mind expresses three types of qualities, namely ‘satvik’, ‘rajsic’ and ‘tamsic’. If the food taken in, is in terms of Sattvika, Rajasika, and Tamsika bhojana, then all these food categories effect the mood, sense in different ways, as the

Sattvika bhojana increases span of life, it sharpens one’s intelligence and capacity to grasp, offers strength to body, brings comfort and happiness to life.

Rajasika bhojana adds to various movements, it facilitates emotions like sorrow, fears etc. and is less nourishing.

Tamasika bhojana is amedhya (bad for brain function), laziness and depression.

Rules governing the intake of food

Ashtawidha ahara vishesh ayatana

Eight types of direction for ingestion of food are given they are -

- Prakruti or svabhava (natural qualities)
- Karana or samskara (processing)
- Samyoga (combination)
- Rashi or Matra (quantity)
- Desha (habitat)
- Kala (time) and
- Upayoga vyavastha (mode of using)
- This is the cause of health or ill health.

- Upayokta is that who take food. He is the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things.

Ahara is food and vidhi means method. Ancient Ayurvedic text has given Dwadasha ashana vichara means 12 rules which should be followed to get maximum effect of food items consumed:\(^{10}\):

- Take food warm condition.
- Take unctuous food.
- Take in appropriate quantity.
- When the previous meal is digested, then only take next food.
- Do not take the food having any contradictory potency.
- Take Food at proper place and well equipped with all necessary accessories.
- Take food in relaxed condition.
- Don’t take food too fast.
- Don’t eat too slowly.
- Avoid talking and laughing during taking meal.

- Take food as per your requirement in prescribed manner.

**Order of eating in Ayurveda**

1\(^{st}\) liquid food / dry food and guru (heavy), madhura rasatmaka (sweet) and snigdha (fatty substances)

2\(^{nd}\) amla (sour) and lavana rasatmaka (salty) food

3\(^{rd}\) rooksha (dry food), katu (bitter), tikta (pungent), kashaya rasatmaka (astringent) food

If digestive capacity is weak, one should have hot semisolid / liquid food like soups. After having food one should take rest at least for one muhurta i.e. 48 minutes. This promotes digestion by augmenting the digestive fire.

**AIM**

To study the importance of ahara as it is one of the pillars of Ayurveda.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand concept of ahara by review of literature.
2. To understand importance of ahara in health and also in management of diseased condition.

**NEED OF STUDY**

Ahara is known to cause the prakopa (excitation) or shamana (allegation) of
doshas. Dosha get vitiated due to apathyahara-vihara causing khavaigunya and disease process occurs. So as to know the importance of ahara in health and in management of diseased condition, the review study was done.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Classical texts which were available in the library of Government Ayurved College, Nanded were reviewed. Database available from net surfing was also reviewed as per the title.

CONCLUSION
In order to stable a building, the role of the pillar is very critical. When three pillars of Ayurveda i.e. Ahara, Nidra and Branshmachrya are taken care of properly, the person is well endowed with strength; complexion and development throughout full life span. But, of trayopastambha (three pillars) the remaining two i.e. nidra (sleep) and brahmachaya (controlled sex) are invariably depends upon condition of mind (mana). Nutrition of mind ultimately depends upon the type food we eat. So, it is the most important pillars of Ayurveda. Food is prana i.e. life of all living beings. All living creatures on the earth require food, so it is called pranam means vital for life. Colour, luster, speech, life, innovation, happiness, longevity, intelligence, satisfaction, nourishment, strength & intellect are all present in food. Due to improper food, many incurable diseases are produced. So, as to prevent diseases, intelligent & self controlled man should consume food in right quantity, at the right time. Because ‘prevention is better than cure’. This paper suggests that how Ayurveda thought over ahara in different dimensions and proper ahara (diet) help to enhancing the spirituality for a longer and better quality of life.

REFERENCES
8. Shri Krishna, Bhagwatgita 17/8,9,10.