

Ahara: Foremost Pillar of Ayurveda

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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 people⁴.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Panchabhoutictva of Ahara

Acharya Sushruta stated that the whole world is made up of *Panchamahabhutas* (five basic elements) i.e. *Aakashha* (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 meal⁵.

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 sensation⁷. 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'⁸. 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*⁹
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 consumed¹⁰:

- 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

1st liquid food / dry food and *guru* (heavy), *madhura rasatmaka* (sweet) and *snigdha* (fatty substances)

2nd *amla* (sour) and *lavana rasatmaka* (salty) food

3rd *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* (allevation) of

doshas. *Dosha* get vitiated due to *apathya ahara-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 *Brahmacharya* 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 *brahmacharya* (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 food¹¹.

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.

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