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Aahara Vidhi Visheshaayatana – The Science of Dietetics in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Aahara (Balanced food), *Nidra* (sound sleep) and *Bramhacharya* (refrained from all the sexual acts) are described as *Trayopasthambas* (sub-pillars of body). Here *Aahara* has been placed first, which shows that it is most important to maintain and sustain the life. A man can live without clothes, without shelter but cannot live without *Aahara*. *Aahara* (food) is given the prime importance since Vedic period. All the beings originated from food, it is responsible for sustenance of life. It is possible to make a person disease free with just proper diet but proper food is not sufficient to be healthy. The nature of the food, method of food preparation, time, place, quantity and manner of food intake are also very important. Food consumed in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body on contrary if consumed in improper manner leads to various diseases. Thus *Aahara Vidhi Vidhana* (dietetic rules) plays a significant role in both causation and curing of various diseases. Consistent following of *Aahara Vidhi Vidhan* and diet as mentioned in *Ayurveda* will definitely minimizes the disturbances in equilibrium of *dosha*, keeps the body healthy and ultimately prevent the formation of diseases.

KEYWORDS

Ayurveda, Aahara, Aahara Vidhi Visheshaayatana, Dietetics rules



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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is a great Indian ancient science of life in existing sciences of Health system. In *Ayurveda*, *Aahara*, *Nidra* and *Bramhacharya* are described as *Trayopasthambas*¹. According to *Ayurveda* *Aahara* is one of the important factor for health as well as source for diseases i.e. Wholesome and unwholesome food is responsible for happiness and unhappiness respectively. It plays an important role in establishing the phenomena of wear and tear, process of growth, development and repair supply of energy for all physical activities and gives protection to body from decay and disease etc. It is for this reason, that the *Aahara* has been given the prime place and importance among all three *Trayopasthambas*. *Aahara* is considered to be vital for a human body as it provides the basic nutrients, which are very essential to carry out the basic activities of digestion and metabolism.

According to *Acharya Charak*, food helps in sustenance of the life of living beings. Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, intelligence, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect etc all these are dependent on food². According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the food enhances vitality, strength and makes the body sturdy.

Food increases enthusiasm, span of life, memory, luster, *Oja* and *Agni* (digestive fire)³. The proper *Aahara* consumed in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body. On other side if taken in improper manner leads to various kinds of diseases. According to *Charak Samhita*, if any human being follows proper code of conduct related to intake of wholesome food and life style then he lives for 36,000 nights (hundred years) free from diseases. He lives healthy life and gets blessing of good people⁴.

In *Charak Samhita*, it is clearly mentioned that most of the incurable diseases are arised due to improper food intake⁵. Thus one should observe the dietetic rules, to achieve proper digestion, assimilation and health of the body. Both healthy persons as well as patients should follow the dietetic rules. *Acharya Charak* has laid down eight factors, determining the utility of food, which are collectively known as *Ashta Aahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*.

Ashta Aahara Vidhi Vishesaayatanani (Eight Aspects of Dietetics)⁶

There are eight factors, which are most important from the point of causative, preventive and curative aspect of the disease. They are to be examined before food intake and also to be followed during and after food intake. When the *Aahara* is



taken judiciously and as per *Aahara Vidhi Vidhan* then only the benefits of *Aahara* can be achieved. Following eight factors should be considered before taking any type of food.

- 1) **Prakriti** - Nature of the food articles
- 2) **Karana** - Method of food preparation or processing
- 3) **Samyoga** - Combination
- 4) **Rashi** - Quantity of substance
- 5) **Desha** - Place
- 6) **Kala** - Time
- 7) **Upayogasanstha** - Rules governing the intake of food
- 8) **Upayokta** - The users or Considerations of the person consuming the food.

1) **Prakriti**⁷ - *Prakriti* denotes the natural properties (qualities) of food articles and medicine like *Guru* (heavy), *Laghu* (light), *Ushana* (heat), *Sheeta* (cold), *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Ruksha* (dry) etc. These are the innate properties of substances. Before consumption of food, the natural properties of food must be considered so that these may not hamper *Agni* (digestive fire) and three *Doshas*. On the basis of nature, green gram (*Vigna radiata*), common quail and grey partridge are *Laghu*, while black gram (*Vigna mungo*), meat of pig (pork), *Shukara* (boar) and

buffalo is *Guru* for digestion. *Laghu* (light) foods are naturally easy to digest and can be eaten in larger quantities. Thus the consideration of *Aahar Prakriti* greatly enhances utility of food articles.

2) **Karana**⁸ - *Karana* means the processing of the substances. Processing results in the transformation of the inherent characters or properties of the substances. This transformation of the characters is brought about by dilution with water, application of heat, cleaning, washing, churning, storing, maturing, flavoring, impregnation, preservation and through container etc. These all steps are very essential to suppresses *Ahita guna* of *Aahar*. In short we can say that *Samskara* transform food articles in eatable forms.

A. Heating – When milk is heated it becomes lighter, more readily digestible and is increased in relish.

B. Cleaning – When rice is cleaned in water it becomes lighter and easily digestible.

C. Dilution – When rice is diluted with water to form *peya* it becomes lighter and easily digestible.

D. Churning – Curd is having oedema aggravating property. It obstructs conveying channels. But when mixed with water and churned for 5 to 10 minutes. It is changed



into buttermilk (lassi). Buttermilk enhances *Agni* (digestive property). By churning oedema aggravating property of curd is transformed into oedema alleviating property.

E. Flavoring – By adding cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, saffron and related spices to rice, dal soups, milk, yogurt increases good smell, taste and palatability of these preparations.

F. Container - A container also helps in the transplantations of attributes e.g. *Triphala Rasayana* is described to be prepared in a new iron container smear with the paste of *Amalaki (Embelica officinalis)*.

3) *Samyoga*⁹ - *Samyoga* means combining together of two or more substances. This combination results in the manifestation of specific properties, which none of the constituent ever possessed. For example – fish is good for health. Milk is also good for health. Both are good for health if they are consumed separately. If they are consumed in combination, it is worst for health. This combination acts like a poison in the body and is responsible for various diseases. Similarly honey and ghee taken alone is wholesome to the body but combined together in equal proportion, they become toxic. Guda and *dahi* (curd) in combination are more useful as it is having

Snehana, Tarpana, Hridya and *Vataghna* effects. Compatible combination of various foods may enhance utility of food articles. Similarly incompatible food articles may cause harmful effect to body if taken together. So we can say that though *Samyoga* is very useful but it may be harmful too.

4) *Rashi*¹⁰ - *Rashi* means the quantity of food which is to be taken. It is of two types i.e., *Sarvagraha* and *Parigraha*. The quantity of food taken in its entirety is *Sarvagraha* and the quantity of each of its ingredients is known as *Parigraha*. *Matra* of food also plays important roles towards the *hita* and *ahita guna* of food articles. *Matra* of *Aahara* depends upon the *Agni* (digestive fire) of an individual¹¹. The *Agni* varies from person to person thus the food consumption capacity also differs person to person. Person with suppressed *Agni* should consume less quantity of food. The appropriate amount of foods easily gets digested without disturbing the equilibrium of *dhatu*s and *dosh*as. *Atimatra* (excessive intake) of food hampers the *Jatharagni* (digestive fire) whereas if the person consumes *Amatra bhojana* (less intake) than his body requirement then there will be loss of strength and finally he becomes a victim of various diseases. The food consumed in proper quantity at proper



time always enhances digestion. This digestion is also depending upon nature of food consumed. Always reambers heavy food should be consumed half of stomach and light food should not be consumed in excess. The amount of food consume should be so that it gets digested easily.

5) **Desha**¹² - *Desha* denotes the habitat. It determines the variations of the qualities of the substances according to their geographic region, due to different soil, use and their acclimatization to that particular region. It may be the place of growth, movement of a substance in a particular locality like drugs grown in Himalayas are more potent and drugs which are grown in desert are light. The specific habitant people prefer particular type of diet which also suit for their body but similar diet regimen may not be suitable for other habitant people. For example, a person who lives in a moist and marshy area should consume hot and non unctuous food items to balance the *kapha dosha* which is expected to be exaggerated in that area. While person living in dry, mountain places or in forests should not consume rough or sharp food. They should depend more on unctuous, soft and oily foods. If a person is in Rajasthan, he can easily digest a higher amount of *Ghritha* and other *Guru Dravyas* but when the same

person moves to south India, he cannot digest the same type of food items. Use of dry and sharp substances in deserts and unctuous in Marshy land is having antagonistic effect.

6) **Kala**¹³ - Time is considered in terms of season, age, daytime or nighttime and stage of disease. There are various food articles which are compatible and incompatible as per the *kala*. As per *Ayurveda* light food articles should be consumed in *ratri kala* two hours before the sleeping time. *Kala* greatly influences impact of *Aahara*. Therefore, one should consume food according to season as mentioned in *Ritucharya* (Seasonal regimen).

A. Seasons - In spring season, the *Kapha dosha* is more predominant. Therefore, ghee, milk, dairy products and sweets which will increase *Kapha dosha* should be avoided. Dry, rough, hot and pungent substances which decrease *Kapha dosha* may be better to eat. In summer and autumn, *Pitta dosha* is exaggerated. One may consume milk, ghee, cold drinks and unctuous foods to subside *Pitta dosha*. In rainy season, *Vata dosha* is exaggerated and therefore one should consume oils, ghee, rice, wheat, sweets, sour and salty substances to balance the *Vata dosha*. One



should avoid taking cold or dry foods, pungent, bitter and astringent tastes at this time.

B. Age - Childhood is predominant in *Kapha dosha*, youth is predominant in *Pitta dosha* and old age is predominant in *Vata dosha*. One should emphasize a *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Vata dosha* pacifying diet respective to these ages in order to create balance.

C. Day and night - In daytime, from about 6 to 10 a.m. *Kapha dosha* is predominant, from 10 to 2 p.m. *Pitta dosha* is predominant and from 2 to 6 p.m. *Vata dosha* is predominant. At night, from 6 to 10 p.m. *Kapha dosha* is predominant, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. *Pitta dosha* is predominant and from 2 to 6 a.m. again *Vata dosha* is predominant. Therefore, diet should be adjusted to the natural constitutions and to these timings. As per *Ayurveda*, light food articles should be consumed in *ratri kala* two hours before the sleeping time.

7) Upayogasantha¹⁴ - *Upayogasantha* simply means the dietetic rules. It contains everything related to diet, how to eat, what to eat, when to eat and when not to eat? These are the certain dietetic rules, which are needed to be followed by one and all, and these are usually determined by strength of the digestion of a person.

8) Upayokta¹⁵ - *Upayokta* is he who consumes food. He/she is the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things. The same food may have a different type of action on a different body. He is the one who must take into consideration all these facts of *Aahara* and consume food accordingly. One should consider the following points

1. Ushnamashniyat¹⁶ - (Intake of warm food) - The first requisite regarding prepared meal is that it should be taken in *Ushna* (hot) condition. If one's taking hot food, it enhances taste, *Jatharagni* (digestive power) which in turn helps in proper digestion of the food, helps in *Vatanulomana* (proper bowel movement). The specific sequence of *Aahara Vidhi Vidhan* is practically very important. Besides the whole meal being *Ushana*, it must begin with *Ushana Anna*, so that profuse flow of saliva and gastric Juices are achieved for the next food item.

2. Snigdhamsniyat¹⁷ (Intake of unctuous food) - The food taken should be *Snigdha* (*Unctuous*) in nature as this type of food causes feeling of proper taste, it stimulates the *Pachakaagni* (digestive fire), gets digested fastly, stimulates the peristaltic movements, pacifies the excess of *Vata dosha*, nourishes the body, promotes growth of the body, strengthens the sense organs,



promotes strength, brings out the brightness of complexion. For the proper digestion one part of the stomach should be left for the free movement of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. This type of food does not impair the power of digestion and it gets digested without any difficulty.

3. *Matravatasniyatmatravadashniyat*

¹⁸ (Intake of food in proper quantity) – Food taken in proper quantity adds strength, good color, well nourishment and prolongs life. It does not impair the power of digestion, gets digested without any difficulty and easily passes down to rectum. *Heena* and *ati* qualities of food create the disturbance in *Agni*. Therefore food should be taken in proper quantity. The *lakashana* by which a person can decide that food eaten is appropriate in amount are; freedom from distress in the stomach, one does not feel any obstruction in cardiac region, one does not feel any type of backache, freedom from excessive heaviness of the stomach, one feels that his special senses are fresh, subsidence of hunger and thirst, sense of ease in the standing posture, sitting posture, lying down, walking, inhaling, exhaling, laughing and talking¹⁹. One should not take too much and too less food. Food should be according to the need. If this principle is not

practiced it leads to various types of diseases.

4. *Jirne ashniyat*²⁰ (Intake of food

after complete digestion of previous meal) - It simply means one should eat food only when previous food is digested completely. Such food promotes the longevity of the body and keeps the *Doshas* in balanced state. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous food, the digestive product of the previous food, i.e., *Apakva Aahara rasa* (partially digested food) undigested gets mixed up with the *Aahara rasa* of food taken afterwards. This leads to instant vitiation of all three *Doshas* (humors) of the body. If one consumes food when the previous meal has been digested properly, then *doshas* are in their normal places and kindle the gastric fire. Hence food should be taken only after digestion of previous food.

5. *Viryaviruddhamshniyat*²¹ (Intake of

food which are not antagonistic) - One should consume those food articles which are not having antagonistic in *Virya* (potency). Eating the food that is not antagonistic in potency one will not be afflicted with disorders born of incompatible dietary. Intake of *Virya viruddha dravyas* causes *Tridosha prakopa*, skin diseases like *kushtha*, *visarpa* (a type of skin disease) etc.



Hence two opposite foods having strong qualities should be avoided to eat together.

6. *Ishte Deshe Ishta Sarva Upakarnam Ashniyata*²² - (Intake of food in favourable place with favourable accessories) – One should eat in a favourable or suitable place with favourable accessories. It is very important to strengthen the psychology of the individual to do so. *Acharya Charak* mentioned that even wholesome food articles consumed in proper quantity does not get digested when the consumer experiences anxiety, grief, fear, discomfort or unpleasantness of atmosphere. In *Sushruta Samhita*, *Acharya Sushruta* is advised to take food in such a place that is devoid of unwanted people, the place should be free from the defects of construction, the defect of ventilation and light can affect the health directly and indirectly. *Aahara* will produce its proper effect only when the mind and self of a person is free from any mental afflictions. Psychological effect of things is emphasized here

7. *Na atidrutum Ashniyat*²³ (Do not eat food too quickly) – Very fast eating is very harmful for health. If food is taken very fast, then food may enter into a wrong passage or it is not properly placed which results in choking and vomiting. Eating food quickly

doesn't give the opportunity to experience all the merits of the food like the good flavors, taste of food etc. Food taken in hurry can obviously affect the power of digestion by increasing the *Vata dosha*. The unwanted materials mixed with food like hair, nail and other things are eaten unnoticed while food is consumed in hurry. Therefore one should not take food too hurriedly.

8. *Na ativilambitam Ashniyat*²⁴ (Do not eat food too slowly) – One should not eat very slowly. Very slow eating does not give satisfaction even if he eats so much. Hence he eats more than required. The food becomes cold and there will be irregularity in digestion. For this reason one should not eat very slowly.

9. *Ajalpana, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjita*²⁵ - (Eat with concentration without talking and laughing) – Talking and laughing divert the attention from the food and the food is eaten too slowly or too fastly. This vitiates the *Doshas*. This type of eating does not allow smooth digestion and produces *Ama*. One who talks and laughs while eating is liable to suffer the same disorders as the one who eats too fastly. In this most important one is that the food should be eaten with concentration. This is



the reason why one should not eat while talking and laughing.

10. *Aatmanamabhisamiksha bhunjita*²⁶

(Intake of food with consideration for the self) - One should eat food in a prescribed manner, with due regard to his own self. The knowledge of usefulness of food, whether it is wholesome for him or not should be think while eating. Food intake is not merely to fill the cavity of the stomach but it is one type of *yagya*, action for evolution of consciousness. Therefore One should eat food in a prescribed manner with due regard to his own self.

CONCLUSION

The intake of *Aahara* in appropriate quantity is not enough to bestow good effects on the person's health. To receive the total benefits of the *Aahara* it is also necessary to have the knowledge about "*Ashtaaharavidhivishshaayatana*". Simply, following simple cautions and minute life style changes one can protect himself from various type of diseases. In the end we can say that the proper application of these rules is effective in maintenance of positive health as well as in the curative aspect for various diseases. From all above references we can conclude that everything depends on diet and Dietetics rules.



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