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IJAPC
Vol 13 Iss 2

2020

G.G.P





Understanding Importance of Diet and Dietary Habits According to Ayurveda- A Review

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ABSTRACT

Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya are recognizing as three *Upstambha* (Sub pillars) essential for the smooth running of life. *Ahara* is most important factor for life. The human body is the produce from *Ahara* (food) and it is considered as the supporter of life. According to Charaka our health and disease both are dependent on *Ahara*. If we take diet in proper manner, it can lead to better health or else can lead to disease. The contents or substances in food by any person, their specific tastes (*Rasa*), qualities (*Guna*), potencies are responsible for balance of the *Dosha* and *Dhatu*. Conventional Western approach is very different from the *Ayurvedic* approach to food and manner of food. Today's food substances and method of taking food are very different from *Ayurvedic* approach. This can lead to different disease so there is need to understand role of *Ahara* in health or in diseases. *Ayurvedic* principles are concerned about every part of the body, mentally and physically through about *Ahara, Nidra* and all basic needs.

KEYWORDS

Ahara, Health, Diseases, Aharavidhi, Dietary Habits



Greentree Group Publishers

Received 12/06/2020 Accepted 10/08/2020 Published 10/09/2020



INTRODUCTION

Ahara is one of the *Upstambha* of life. Among the three *Upstambhas*, *Ahara* is considered as the best maintainer of life. Different *Acharyas* in *Ayurveda* describes the importance of *Ahara*¹. *Acharya Charaka* has stated that health and diseases both are dependent on *Ahara* but they also described proper manner of taking food². *Acharya Kashyapa* mentioned that *Ahara* is considered as the *Mahabhaishyaja* (great medicine)³. Power, fitness, endurance and vital breath are dependent upon the power of *Agni* (digestion) including metabolism. *Ahara* is act as a fuel of this power of digestion when supplied in the form of food and drinks, this power of digest is sustained⁴. Proper *Ahara* (food) taken in a proper manner can lead to better health or else can lead to diseases². Nowadays, everyone cannot follow all the rules due to fast and forwarded life but awareness is needed regarding to this subject. Everyone has to know importance of *Ahara* and to know how our body and diseases are dependent on *Ahara* (food) taken by us. And we can see this by following points:-

A) How *Prakrut Ahara* (wholesome food) is responsible for Health?

1) Formation or Balance of *Tridosha* by *Ahara*

2) Formation of *Dhatu*s from *Ahara*

3) Formation of *Mala* from *Ahara*

4) Effect of *Ahara* on *Agni*

5) Importance of *Ahara* in physiological function

6) *Ahara* as *Upstambha*

B) How *Vikrit Ahara* (unwholesome food) is responsible for diseases ?

1) Effect of Unwholesome *Ahara* on *Dosha*.

2) Effect of *Ahara* on *Rakta*.

3) Effect of Unwholesome *Ahara* on *Strotas*.

4) Effect *Viruddhara* on body.

1) Formation or balance of *Tridoshas* by *Ahara*

Healthy and Unhealthy state of human being depends on normal and abnormal functional state of *Tridosha*, considering the physiological importance of *Dosha* in maintenance of homeostat of the body *Tridosha* have been called as root. (*Dosha Dhatu Mala Moolam hi Shariram*)⁵. *Charaka* describes two types of *Dosha* i.e. *Prakriti* (Natural) and *Vaikrit* (Abnormal). In normal state they are responsible for physiological functions of body like growth, strength and good complexion but abnormally results in various type of diseases⁶. So it is important to balance these *Doshas*.

Formation of *Doshas* from *Avasthapaka*

The three *Doshas* of our body i.e. *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are produced and balanced



by food we take. These three *Doshas* are established at various stages of *Avasthapaka* (Digestion of food).⁷

a) *Madhura Avastha* and *Kapha*

As soon as *Ahara* (food) is taken, it goes to stomach and *Madhura Bhava* (sweetness) is manifested during the 1st *Avasthapaka* (stage of digestion).

b) *Amla Avastha Paka* and *Pitta*

During the second *Avasthapaka* (stage of digestion), the food remains in half digested from which results in sourness. In this stage food is moving downwards from *Amashaya* (stomach), this stimulates the production of a transparent liquid called *Pitta*.

c) *Katu Avastha Paka* and *Vata*

After 1st and 2nd stage, this food product reaches *Pakvashaya* (large intestine), it gets completely digested and dehydrated by the *Agni*. And here *Utpatti* (formation) of *Vata* occurs.

2) Formation of *Dhatu* from *Ahara*

After *Avasthapaka* digested food is subjected to *Dhatu Paka*. According to *Vagbhata* there are 7 types of *Dhatu* in our body, *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja* and *Shukra*⁸. Every *Dhatu* has its own *Agni* (digestion power). After digestion of food by *Agni* food gets divided into *Sara Bhaga* (essence part). This *Sara Bhaga* nourishes the respective *Dhatu* and *Kitta Bhaga* (waste product), this forms the waste product (*mala*) of the respective *Dhatu*⁹.

Charaka has described these *Dhatu Utpatti* in *Grahani Adhyaya*¹⁰. The nutrient part of previous *Dhatu* provides nutrition to next *Dhatu* like *Rasa Dhatu* provides nourishment to *Rakta*, *Rakta* to *Mamsa*, *Mamsa* to *Meda*, *Meda* to *Asthi*, *Asthi* to *Majja*, *Majja* to *Shukra*¹¹.

But main part is *Ahararasa* which get from food (*Ahara*) we take and converted into *Rasa Dhatu*. So for *Dhatu Utpatti* *Ahara* is most important¹².

3) Formation of *Malas* from food

Digested food is divided into *Sara Bhaga* (essence part), this nourishes the respective *Dhatu* and *Kitta Bhagas* (waste product) of the respective *Dhatu*. *Rasa* produce *Kapha* as waste products. *Rakta* gives out *Pitta*. *Mamsa* gives *Kha-mala* (waste-products excreted from the cavities like ears, eyes, nose, mouth and genital organs). *Medas* gives *Sweat*. *Asthi* gives *Kesa* and *Loma*. *Majja* gives the unctuous substance present in the eyes, stool and skin^[13]. Hence *Malas* also produce from *Ahara* and they are also root of body so *Ahara* is important.

The essence and waste products (of digestion and metabolism) enter into the various *Strotasas* and circulate through them. These *Strotasa* carrying specific nutrient material provide nourishment in required quantity to various *Dhatu*. Thus the body is the result of nourishment drawn (



in unfold manner) from *Ashita* (eatables), *Peeta* (beverages), *Leedha* (licious) and *Khadita* (masticables). Diseases are also manifested in the body by the food taken in four-fold manner *Ashita* (eating), *Peeta* (drinking), *Leeda* (licking) and *Khadita* (masticating). Intake of healthy and unhealthy food is responsible for the maintenance of health and production of disease respectively¹⁴.

4) Ahara for Prakrut Agni

Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the important physiological functions of our body. Therefore, *Ayurveda* considers that *Dehagni* is the cause of life *Prabha* (complexion), power, health, lusture, *Oja*, *Teja*, and *Prana*. About the importance of *Agni*, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned if there is stoppage of the function of *Agni* the individual dies and when *Agni* of an individual is *Prakruta* then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, healthy life¹⁵. According to *Charaka* food is fuel to the fire of digestion. So for *Prakruta Agni*, *Ahara* is important.

5) Importance of Ahara

By *Acharya Charaka*-
Such diets and drinks whose *Varna* (colour), *Gandha* (smell), *Rasa* (taste) and *Sparsha* (touch) are satisfying to the senses and conducive to the health, if taken in

accordance with the *Vidhi* (proper manner), in fact represent the life of living beings. The effect of the use of such diets and drinks can be admitted directly. If consumed according to proper method, they provide fuel to the *Agni* (fire of digestion); they promote mental and physical power, strength of tissue elements and complexion and they are pleasing to senses. If not taken in proper method then they are harmful¹⁶. *Bala* (Strength), *Arogya* (health), *Ayu* (longevity) and *Prana* (vital breath) are dependent upon the *Agni* (power of digestion). When supplied with fuel in the form of *Ahara* (food), this power of digestion is sustained; it decreases when deprived of it¹⁷. A *Jitmatma* (self controlled man), blessed by noble man lives for hundred years free diseases by the intake of healthy food¹⁸. Food sustains the life of living beings. All living beings in the universe require *Ahara* (food), *Varna* (complexion), *Prasad* (clarity), *Sauswarya* (good voice), *Jivit* (longevity), *Pratibha* (geniusness), *Sukham* (happiness), *Tusti* (satisfaction), *Pusti* (nourishment), *Bala* (strength) and *Medha* (intellect) are all conditioned by food¹⁹.

B) How *Vikrit Ahara* (unhealthy food) is responsible for diseases?

1) Effect of unwholesome Ahara on Tridosha



VataDosha aggravated by the over indulgence in the intake of unctuous, light and cold things²⁰. *Pitta* gets aggravated by the excessive intake of hot, sour, saline alkaline and pungent food²¹, *Kapha* gets aggravated by the excessive intake of unctuous, heavy, sweet, cold and saline food²².

2) Effect of unwholesome *Ahara* on *Rakta*

Unwholesome, hot food in large quantity; exceedingly saline, alkaline, acidic and pungent food; *Kulattha*, *Masa*, *Nispava* and *Tiltaila*; *Pindalu*, and all green eatables like radish etc; meat of aquatic, marshy and prasha types of animal and animals living holes; curd, vinegar, *Sauwiraka* type of liquor; rotten, putrified food articles and those having mutually contradictory qualities and any other types of food in excessive quantity vitiate *Rakta*²³.

3) Effect of *Ahara* on *Strotasa*

Ahara (food) and *Vihara* (regimens) that promote the morbidity of *Dosas* and go contrary to the well being of *Dhatu*s vitiate the *Strotasa*²⁴.

In following table we can see what type of food cause which type of *Strotodusti*:²⁵

Sr No	<i>Strotas</i>	Causes (food related)
1.	<i>Udakavaha</i>	<i>Atisushka Anna Sevan</i> (intake of excessively dry food)
2.	<i>Annavaha</i>	<i>Atimatrasya Chakale Chahitasya Cha Bhojnat</i> (untimely intake of large quantity of unwholesome food)

3.	<i>Rasavaha</i>	Excessive intake of <i>Guru</i> (heavy), <i>Sheet</i> (cold) and <i>Atisnigdha</i> (excessively unctuous food)
4.	<i>Raktavaha</i>	Intake of food like <i>Vidahi</i> (irritant), <i>snigdha</i> (unctuous), <i>Ushna</i> (Hot), <i>Drava</i> (Liquid)
5.	<i>Mamsavaha</i>	Intake of <i>Abhishyandibhojana</i> (deliquescent), <i>Sthoola</i> (gross) and <i>Guru</i> (Heavy) food
6.	<i>Medovaha</i>	Excessive intake of <i>Medhya</i> (Fatty Things), <i>Varuni</i> (type of wine)
7.	<i>Asthivaha</i>	Intake of <i>Vata</i> provoking food.
8.	<i>Majjavaha</i>	Intake of <i>Viruddha Anna</i> (mutually contradictory food)
9.	<i>Varchavaha</i>	<i>Atyashan</i> (Intake of food in large quantity), <i>Ajeeradhyashana</i> (Intake of food before the digestion of the previous meal)

4) Effect of *Viruddha Ahara* on body

According to *Charaka*, *Ahara* (food) is unhealthy for the normal *Dhatu*s and *Doshas* of the body, are in fact opposed to the proper growth of such *Dhatu*s and *Dosas*. Some act due to their opposite *Gunas* (qualities), some by *Sanyoga* (combination), some by *Sanskara* (method of preparation), some by virtue of the *Desha* (place), *Kala* (time) and *Matra* (dose), some others by their *Swabhava* (nature)²⁶.

Intake of unwholesome food is responsible for the causation of *Shandhya* (sterility), *Andhya* (blindness), *Visarpa* (an obstinate skin disease characterized by an acute spread), *Dakodara* (ascites), *Visphotaka* (eruption), *Unmada* (insanity), *Bhagandara* (fistula), *Moorcha* (fainting) and even death²⁷.



Ahara Vidhi

As we know our health and diseases both are depend on *Agni* and *Ahara*². *Agni* is proper but method of taking food is wrong, it surely lead to diseases. When the food is taken properly and according to *Vidhi* (rules) of food taking, then only the benefits of *Ahara* can be attained. Any defect in diet ,their preparation and even method of taking food leads to disease. Acharya *Charaka* mentioned *Astoahara Vidhivisheshayatane* in *Vimana sthana* and also described what is the effect of food if we taking it in proper manner²⁸.

1)*Ushnam Ashniyat (Food should be warm):*

We all have to take *Ushna Ahara* (warm food) always. When food is taken warm, it is delicious; when we consume warm food, it produce the factors in the abdomen responsible for digestion; it gets digested quickly and helps in the downward passage of *Vata* and reduces of *Kapha*. Therefore , we have to take warm food.

2)*SnigdamAshniyat (Food should be unctuous)*

One should take *Snigdam Ahara* (unctuous food) .It is delicious,when we take it, it provokes the subdued power of *Agni* (digestion);it gets digested quickly; it helps in *Vatanulomana*,it increases the stoutness of the body, strengthens the sense faculties,promotes power and brings

out the *Varnaprasada*(brightness and complexion).Hence we have to take unctuous food.

3)*Matravat Ashniyat (Food in proper quantity)*

We have to take food in proper *Matra* (quantity). When we take it in proper quantity, it promotes *Ayu* (longevity) in its entirety without afflicting *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*;it easily passes down to gets digested without any difficulty.

4)*Jeerne Ashniyat (Intake after digestion of previous meal)*

We have to take food only when previous meal is digested.i.e *JeernaAshniyat* .If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal.i.e *Adhyashan* the digestive product of the previous *Apachit Ahara* (food), i.e.immature *Rasa* gets mixed up with the product of food taken afterwards, resulting in the provocation of all the *Dosas* instantaneously. If food is taken after the digestion of the previous food while the *Dosas* are in their proper places and *Agni* is increased, there is appetite,*Strotasamukha* (the entrances of the channels of circulation) are open, eructation is purified, there is *Hrudaye Vishudhe* (unimpaired cardiac function), downward passage of the *Vata* (wind) and proper manifestation of the urges for voiding *Vata* (flatus), *Mootra* (urine) and *Purisha* (stool), then the product of food



does not vitiate the *Dhatus* of body, but on the other hand it promotes *Ayu* (longevity) in its entirety. So one should take food only after digestion of the previous meal.

5) *Veerya Avirudha Ashniyat* (Intake of food having no contradictory potencies)

We have to take having *Veerya Aviruddha Ahara* (no contradictory potencies). By taking such food from one does not get troubled with such diseases which arise from the intake of food having mutually contradictory potencies. Therefore, we have to take food having no contradictory potencies.

6) *Ista Deshe Ista Sarvopakarane Cha Ashniyat* (Intake in proper place and with all accessories)

We have to take food with *Ista Deshe Ista Sarvopakarane* (in proper place equipped with all the accessories). By doing so one does not get afflicted with such of the factors as would result in emotional strain which occurs when one take his food in improper places without all *Ista Sarvopakarane* (the required accessories). Therefore, we have to take food in proper place equipped with all accessories.

7) *Na Atidrutam Ashniyat* (Intake not in hurry)

One should not take food too hurriedly. If food is taken hurriedly then there is *Utsnehanam* of *Ahara* i.e. it enters in to a

wrong passage ; it does not enter into the stomach properly. In this situation one can never decide the taste of food articles and can never observed foreign bodies like hair etc, mixed with them. Thus, one should not take food too hurriedly.

8) *Na Ativilambitam Ashniyat* (Intake not in slow)

One should not take food *Ativilambitam* (very slowly) because this will not give *Trupti* (satisfaction) to the individual. In this situation one would take more food than what is required; the food would become *Sheeta* (cold) and there will be irregularly in digestion. Therefore, one should not take food very slowly.

9) *Ajalpan Ahasan Tanmana Bhunjita* (Intake with Concentration)

One should not talk or laugh or be unmindful while taking food. i.e. *Ajalpan Ahasan Tanmana Bhunjita*. One, taking food while *Jalpan* (talking), *Hasan* (laughing) or with *Amanasa* (distracted mind) subjects himself to the same trouble as the one eating *Atidrutam* (too hurriedly). So one should not talk, laugh or be unmindful while taking food.

10) *Atmanambhi Samikshya Bhunjita Samyaka* (Intake with self confidence)

One should take food in a prescribed manner, with due regard to his own self. The



knowledge of the functionality or otherwise of food articles is the sine qua non for self preservation .So one should take food in a prescribed manner with due regard to his ownself.

DISCUSSION

In current era, dietary habits which is not in proper manner are primary reason for the increasing trend of health disorders. So its important thing to awake and alert the people about importance of food and the method of food taking. Today many newer food processing methods are in practice or in market. The methods of making food bring about chemicals and physical changes in use of the food substances. By these western or newer food making processes which are now in trend, definitely there is improvement in the appearance, taste, flavor, preservation of food but at the same time they are changing the good properties of food and this is not good for our health. Many diseases can be prevented which are caused by faulty dietary habits.

CONCLUSION

According to *Ayurveda*, food is considered as need of life. Not only *Ahara* (food) but also *Vidhi* (method of food intake) has an important role in continuity of healthy

life. These rules and methods of diet intake are mentioned in *Charak Samhita* as *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatanani*. We have seen that *Doshas*, *Dhatus* and all physiological functions are depend on *Ahara* and etiological factors, pathogenesis of diseases are also depend on *Ahara*. From above all points we can concluded that health as well as Diseases are depend on *Ahara* (food). And there is need to awake people about the importance of *Ahara* (food) and method to take it.



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