



AYURVEDIC DIETETICS - A WAY TO GOOD HEALTH

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Abstract : Ahara is given much emphasis in Ayurveda for prevention and management of various ranges of disorders. In Ayurvedic literature the Triyopstambha i.e., Ahara, Nidra, Brahamcharya has been given very much importance, in which Ahara is mentioned primarily due to its importance in life. Life process in all living being is only possible by diet or food material, because of this; it is also called as fuel for living being. To maintain health in individual consumption of balance diet is given prime importance. The categorization of food items in different ways in Ayurveda epitomizes their profound knowledge on food, their source, quality, requirement and usage by human being. Balanced diet in Ayurveda can be defined as “The diet enriched with Shadrasa, required Guna and Veerya and given to the individual after consideration of Prakriti, Agni, Koshtha and Ritu.” The holistic approach of Ayurveda embraces various issues which are accessory in the fortitude of human’s health. Diet also plays an important role in intra uterine development of Prakriti, which is the unique or innate constitution of an individual. Ayurveda seems each human being as a distinct individual born with exclusive physiological and metabolic characteristic, which remains constant throughout life. Improper dietary habit is the primary reason for the increasing trend of health disorders in the current era. Every human being is unique with respect to his Prakriti, Agni and Koshtha etc.

Kew Words:

IndexTerms - Triyopstambha, Ahara, Nidra, Brahamcharya, Shadrasa, Guna, Veerya, Prakriti, Agni, Koshtha, Ritu, Health etc.

INTRODUCTION

Life process in all living being is only possible by diet or food material, because of this; it is also called as fuel for living being, which is responsible for growth i.e., “Annam Vrittikaranama Shreshtham”¹, repair and maintenance. Ahara is very much emphasized in Ayurveda for prevention and management of various ranges of disorders. In Ayurvedic literature the Trayopastambha^{2,3} i.e., Ahara, Nidra, Brahamcharya has been given very much importance, in which Ahara is mentioned primarily due to its importance in life. Further Acharyas gave importance to Ahara, as it is Prana of humen^{4,5,6}, it gives Varna (complexion), Prasada (clarity), Sauswaraya (pleasant voice), Jeevana (long life), Pratibha, Tushti-Pushti (happiness, satisfaction), Bala (strength), Medha (intellect)⁷. Nidra is the second among Triyopstambha, proper sleep will give Sukha (happiness), Pushti (completion), Bala (strength), Vrishta (potency), Gyan (knowledge), Deergha Jeevana (longevity of life)^{8,9}. Brahamcharya is the third among Triyopstambha, those who are following abstention will get Gramyasukha (interest in coitus), Santosh (satisfied) Tripta (completion), and proper Nidra¹⁰.

The diet is considered as vital for a human body as it provides the basic nutrients and promotes longevity^{11,12}. To maintain health in individual consumption of balance diet is given prime importance. The categorization of food items in different ways in Ayurveda epitomizes their profound knowledge on food, their source, quality, requirement and usage by human being. Balanced diet in Ayurveda can be defined as “The diet enriched with Shadrasa¹³, required Guna, Veerya and given to the individual after

consideration of *Prakriti, Agni, Koshta* and *Ritu*.” The holistic approach of *Ayurveda* embraces various issues which are accessory in the fortitude of human’s health. Diet also plays an important role in intra uterine development of *Prakriti*^{14,15}, which is the unique or innate constitution of an individual. *Ayurveda* seems each human being as a distinct individual born with exclusive physiological and metabolic characteristic which remains constant throughout life. In *Ayurveda* keeps balance between internal as well as the external surrounding¹⁶.

Ayurveda gives elaborated guiding principles for achieving health. Comprehensive directives are given on detailed food and dietary schedule for different period of days, different seasons, according to age and most decisively to outfit one’s *Prakriti*. The emphasis on wellness through appropriate dietary guiding principle is most lacking in current *Ayurvedic* practitioners. By considerate the individual constitution of every human being, physician can distinguish which food and drink is appropriate for maintaining their healthy life. The ultimate impact of food depends not only on its material qualities but largely on its processing and discipline of eating. The foremost *Ayurvedic* classic *Charak Samhita* describes eight principles of *Ahara Vidhi* i.e., *Prakriti* (Natural quality), *Karana* (Preparation), *Samyoga* (Combination), *Rashi* (Quantity), *Desha* (Habitat and climate), *Kala* (Temporal factor), *Upayoga Sanstha* (Rules of use) and *Upyokta* (The user)¹⁷.

DIETETICS IN AYURVEDA

Ahara is the one of the important factor provided by nature for healthy living. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in clinical practice. The *Satmya Ahara* (Wholesome diet) is intending to healthy life, but *Asatmya Ahara* (unwholesome diet) causes diseases¹⁸, due to this characteristic of dietetics sometimes plays the major role for management of certain disorders. The measured diet is not only impair one’s health but also promotes one’s strength, completion and life¹⁹. The daily diet is in the form, which helps to maintain present well-being, but serve as prophylactic against in future²⁰. The properly use of *Ahara* provides life, makes all the *Indriyas* happy, nourishes *Dhatus* also, increases *Smriti* (memory), *Mati* (intellect), *Sarva Bala* (all types of energies) and *Ojas, Varna Prasada* (increases completion)²¹. Health is depends on food by taken with proper method²².

PATHYAPATHYA

The *Pathya* is defined as the food substance, which are not harmful to the body channels, calm the mind and those with opposite property are *Apathya*, these are depending upon certain factors like *Matra, Kala, Kriya, Bhoomi, Deha* and *Dosha*. In today’s lifestyle majority disorders are manifested due to improper and unhealthy food intake so if one consumes *Pathya* in appropriate quantity, at proper time and in proper way that is results in promotion of positive health as well as prevention from a wide range of diseases²³.

There is no specific demarcation between *Pathya* and *Apathya*, but *Pathya* may be considered as *Apathya*, depending upon *Matra* (quantity), *Kala* (time), *Kriya* (physiological conditions), *Bhoomi* (habitat), *Deha* (body) and different stages of *Doshas*. Similarly *Apathya* may be act like *Pathya* if taken according to *Matra, Kala* etc²⁴.

DISCIPLINE OF EATING

The ultimate impact of food depends not only on its material qualities but largely on its processing and discipline of eating. The foremost *Ayurvedic* classic *Charak Samhita* describes eight principles of *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*²⁵.

1. *Prakriti* (Natural quality)
2. *Karana* (Preparation)
3. *Samyoga* (Combination)
4. *Rashi* (Quantity)
5. *Desha* (Habitat and climate)
6. *Kala* (Temporal factor)
7. *Upayoga Sanstha* (Rules of use)
8. *Upyokta* (The user)

INCOMPATABLE FOOD

Ayurveda also described some *Viruddhahara* (dietetic incompatibility), which should be avoided by all individuals²⁶. There are eighteen types of factors, which affect *Viruddhahara*²⁷. For example, intake of *Dugdha* (milk) and *Matsya* (fish) together considered as *Veerya Viruddha*. Milk and fish together lead to vitiation of *Rakta* and *Sroto-Avrodha* and formation of *Ama*^{28, 29, 30, 31}. *Ama* may generate immunological reaction, which is main stay in the etio-pathogenesis of many immune-mediated disorders. Both milk and fish are rich source of protein and the combination may generate certain new types of protein molecule, which may exhibits molecular mimicry and will generate disease.

WRONG HABITS

- Overeating
- Eating hurriedly
- Eating food one cannot digest
- Eating soon after a meal
- Eating when constipated
- Eating at wrong time of day
- Eating incompatible food combination

- Drinking cold or chilled water during a meal
- Too much water during meal
- Preserved and stale food
- Too spicy, sour, salty food

Adequate emphasis has been laid in the classics of Ayurveda regarding the way to eating food. Food consumed in the *Vidhipoorvaka* (right manner) serve as nectar to rejuvenation the body and maintaining health.

CLASSICAL AYURVEDIC WAY OF EATING FOOD

- *Kala Bhojana* (At appropriate time)³²
- One's *Prakriti* (Natural qualities)³³
- *Swachchha* and *Swasthaprada* (Pure and hygienic)³⁴
- *Rashi* (Proper quantity)³⁵
- *Sadarasayukta* (Containing all six taste)³⁶
- *Na-Atidruta Na-Ativilamba* (Neither very fast nor very slow)³⁷
- *Tanmana Bhunjeeta* (With full concentration in food)³⁸
- *Ushna Bhojanam* (Warm food)³⁹

Every food is not suitable for consumption. All *Ahitkara* (unhygienic) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) food is to be discarded.

AYURVEDIC ETIQUETTES OF SERVING THE FOOD

- *Gheeyukta* (clarified butter) and *Snigdha* (oily) food, prepared in utensils made of steel
- *Takra* (butter milk), prepared in utensils made of clay
- *Rooksha Ahara* (dry food) and *Dadhi* (curd), in utensils made of gold
- *Jala* (Water), stored in utensils made of copper
- *Mansa* (Meat) and liquid, prepared in utensils made of silver
- *Phala* (Fruits) and other eatables, on the leaves of banana or *Palash*.

Food articles consumed in proper sequence with respect to their specific quality help in digestion and assimilation.

AYURVEDIC SEQUENCE OF EATING FOOD

Considering the sequence of taking food items, *Acharyas* were very particular. According to them, one should first take *Madhura*, then food items containing *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu* and other *Rasas*. The *Madhura* (sweet) food items would naturally go to subdue the *Vayu*, *Amla* or *Lavana Rasa* in the middle rose up the *Agni*, while *Katu Rasa* would tend to subdue the *Kapha*. Hence the sequence is as follows-

- First liquid food/dry food and *Guru*, *Madhur* and *Snigdha*
- Second *Amla* and *Lavana*
- Third *Rooksha*, *Katu*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya* food

If *Jatharagni* (the digestive fire) is weak, one should have the hot semi solid/ liquid food like soup (*Yavagu*, *Vilepi*, *Mand* etc.). After having food one should take rest for at least 48 minutes. This promotes digestion by augmenting *Jatharagni* (the digestive fire). *Amaliki* is recommended for consumption before, after or during meal, it promotes appetite, aids in digestion and alleviates constipation.

DIET ACCORDING TO PRAKRITI

Diet for *Vata Prakriti*

Rasa (Taste of food) -Diet should contain *Madhura*, *Amla*, *Lavana* rasa. *Amla* (Sour) *Lavana* (salty) *Rasa* (taste) should prefer in Grisham Ritu (summer season). In winter should consume salty predominant food and sweet taste can consumed in both season as a supplement⁴⁰.

Guna (Properties of food) - Properties of the diet should be opposite of properties of *Vata* like *Snigdha*, *Guru*, *Ushna* etc⁴¹.

Veerya and Vipaka- Diet with *Ushnaveerya* and *Katuvipaka* are generally ideal foe *Vata Prakriti*⁴².

Persons of *Vata Prakriti* following types of food can take as regular food-

Cereals- Rice, wheat.

Pulses- Black gram, horse gram

Fruits- Gooseberry, grapes, banana, dates, apple, pineapple, pomegranate.

Spices- Clove, cardamom, cinnamon, pepper, cumin, garlic, coriander.

Dairy products- Milk, *Ghee*, curd, butter, oils like sesame oil, mustard oil, coconut oil etc.

Restricted- Should not take as regular food like barley, corn, cabbage, brinjal, bitter guard, melon, and pear. Pungent, astringent, cold food /drinks should also avoid.

Diet for *Pitta Prakriti*

Rasa (Taste of food) - Diet should contain *Madhura*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya Rasa*, *Madhura Rasa* can be taken throughout the year and other *Rasas* can be consumed according to *Desha*, *Kala* and *Prakriti* etc⁴³.

Guna (Properties of food)- Properties of the diet should be opposite of *Pitta Guna* i.e., *Rooksha, Sheeta* etc⁴⁴. **Veerya and Vipaka** – Foods with *Sheeta Veerya* and *Madhura Vipaka* are generally ideal⁴⁵.

Cereals- Rice, wheat, barley.

Pulses- Green gram, Bengal gram.

Fruits- Gooseberry, grapes, apple, dates, banana.

Spices- Coriander, turmeric.

Dairy products- *Ghee*, butter, fresh curd, milk.

Restricted- Should not take as regular food like cereals such as corn, pulses such as black gram, sour buttermilk and curd, onion, citrus food, garlic, pepper, clove. Better to avoid oily, hot, salty and heavy diet.

Diet for *Kapha Prakriti*

Rasa (Taste of food) – Diet should contain *Tikta, Katu, Kashaya Rasa*⁴⁶.

Guna (Properties of food) - Properties of the diet should be opposite of *Kapha Guna* i.e., *Ushna, Laghu, Rooksha* etc⁴⁷.

Veerya and Vipaka – Foods with *Ushna Veerya* and *Katu Vipaka* are generally ideal⁴⁸

Cereals and grains - Rice, barley, corn, green gram.

Vegetables - Brinjal, radish, bitter guard, cabbage, snake guard.

Spices - Black pepper, cloves, coriander, cumin, turmeric, cardamom.

Fruits - Grapes, pomegranate, papaya, lemon.

Dairy products – Butter milk

Restricted - Should not take as regular food like cereals like wheat, pulses like black gram, onion, apple, sweet potato, banana, *Ghee*, milk, butter, fish, and eggs. Avoid sweet, cold, heavy food/drink.

CONCLUSION

Improper dietary habit is the primary reason for the increasing trend of health related disorders in the current scenario. *Prakriti, Agni and Koshtha* of every human being is unique. Therefore consideration one's *Ahara* should also be done with specificity to the individual. *Ahara*, when taken in proper quantity, at proper time following all *Niyama* contribute health. By understanding the constitution of every human being, physicians can distinguish, which food and drink is appropriate for maintaining their healthy life. Moreover in this scenario of lifestyle disorders one should know his *Prakriti* and the diet suitable for him in order to improve the quality of life and bring down the cost of health care. Intake of wholesome food without *Niyama* shows the negative effect, while intake of unwholesome food with *Niyama* shows the positive effect⁴⁹.

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