

A LIGHT ON DIETETIC RULES IN AYURVEDA

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Abstract

Ayurveda is a holistic system of natural health care that originated from Vedas, most ancient Indian literature of human civilization. As it deals with various aspects of life it is not merely the system of treatment but is an “Ideal way of Life”. The main aim of Ayurveda is to maintain the health in a healthy person and to cure the disease. To attain this Ayurveda mainly concentrates on various rules and regulations. Dietetic Rule is one among that. If the dietetic rule is followed properly, it helps to increase health and enhance the life span.

In Ayurvedic classics, food is mentioned as one among the three Upasthambas (Sub-pillars) which supports the three main Sthambas (Pillars) of the body viz. Tridosha. It shows the credibility of food. Mere proper food is not sufficient to be healthy. The time, place, quantity and manner of food intake are also necessary. Food taken in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body on contrary if taken in improper manner leads to various diseases. Thus Dietetic rules play a significant task in both causation and curing of the disease. Nidanaparivarjana (avoiding the causative factors) is considered to be the main line of treatment. Properly followed dietetic rules and diet keeps the body healthy and prevents the diseases.

Key words: Ahara; Ahara vidhi vidhana; Rules; Health; Causative; Curative.

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda – Science of life due to its simplicity and scientific nature has drawn the attention of global population. It is well known for its role in the management of various diseases which are chronic, incurable and degenerative. Only the management of disease is not the premise of Ayurveda but preventing the disease before their production and maintenance of physical, mental, social and spiritual well being of the mortal is the prime intent of Ayurveda.^{[1][2]} To achieve this

goal the Acharyas stress to follow various rules and regimens.^{[3][4][5]} Today in many ways people has great opportunity to lead better life than ever before. Still it is clear that they need to evolve some new strategies as to follow the golden old rules which are proved for millenniums in each and every field of life. The dietetic field is one such most important field of life.

Importance of Ahara:

Regarding the importance of food, Ayurveda quotes various references in each and every step. Acharya Charaka mentioned food is the root cause of both body as well as disease. Wholesome food leads to happiness and unwholesomeness leads to unhappiness. One should consume food after the proper analysis, since body is originated from the food.^[6] Even Sushruthacharya opines the same.^[7] Acharya says that healthy food alone is responsible for the development of the body tissues on the other hand the unhealthy practice of diet is the root cause for all the diseases.^{[8][9]}

An ideal food not only nourishes the body but also the mind.^[10] Here the ideal food symbolizes the food articles taken by considering the factors like time, place, quantity and manner of food intake. In this regard Ahara (food) has been declared first among the Trayopasthambha (three pillars)^[11] in classics without which life cannot exist. Not only for maintenance of life and growth but also it has a pivotal role in restorative state of diseased condition.

Aahara Vidhi Vidhana (Dietetic Rules):

As wholesome diet plays a crucial task in growth and development of the body, person has to patently know which is wholesome and which is unwholesome to him. Wholesome varies from person to person. The food which is Saatmya (wholesome) to one person may be Asatmya (unwholesome) to other. Regarding the Saatmya-Asatmya qualities of food, Ayurvedic classics have laid down some rules and regulations. A man taking wholesome food, but without pursuing the rules may

become a victim of various discomforts. Unwholesome food if taken also bestows the same effect. On the other hand the wholesome food taken with proper rules aid to restore the dynamism in sick. 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. Charakacharya has laid down eight factors, determining the utility of food, which are collectively known as "Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana".^[12] (Table 1)

There are 8 factors, which are most important from the point of causative, preventive and curative aspect of disease. They are to be examined before food intake and also to be followed during and after food intake. All the eight factors are equally important. Among the 8 factors the first 6 factors from Prakriti to Kala are related with article i.e Ahara whereas the 7th factor Upayoga Samstha is related with process of eating. It is called Ahara Vidhi Vidhana.^[13] (Table 1)

*Upayoga Samstha tu Upayoga niyamaha/
Aharopayogah Kartavya Evam Na Kartavya
Iti Upayoganiyamaha ||^[13]*

These rules specify How to eat? When to eat? It is for Swasthya (healthy) aspect. Similarly in many diseases Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (dietetic rules) is mentioned. So the advice of Pathyasevana (intake of wholesome articles) and Nidana Parivarjana (avoiding unwholesome) in the form of Ahara Vidhi Vidhana also helps to cure the disease. Even Sushruta^[14] and Vagbhata^[15] also mentioned the same factors under the heading of Aharavidhi, Annavidhi, Bhojanavidhi etc.

Table 1: Ashta ahara vidhi visheshayatana

Sl. No.	Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana	Description
1	Prakrti	It denotes the natural qualities of the food articles i.e. the inherent attributes like Guru (heavy), Laghu (light) etc.
2	Karana	The process or preparation. The method of preparation and processing changes the natural properties of the substances.
3	Samyoga	The combination of individual thing with one or more things
4	Rashi	The quantity of food which is to be taken
5	Desha	It 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.
6	Kala	It is the time factor which is described in two ways i.e. daily and seasonal variations and individuals conditions of age and disease.
7	Upayoga Samstha	It consists of dietetic rules.
8	Upayoktr	The person who takes food

Following are the dietetic rules which are to be considered while taking food:

- **Ushnam (Hot):**

One should take fresh food and in hot condition. Here it should be clear that Ushna (hot) not refers to the quality of food but the temperature of the food. Ushna guna of food helps in Vatanulomana (proper bowel movement) and increases the Pachakagni (digestive power), which in turn helps in proper digestion of the food taken.^[16] Extreme hot (Ati Usna) is not advisable. If consumed it causes, Mada (intoxication), Daha (burning sensation), Trishna (excessive thirst), Balanasha (loss of strength), Bhrama (giddiness) and Raktapitta (bleeding disorder).^[17] Even extreme cold food should not be taken. Eating the food prepared before a long time (Chirasiddam) causes Stambhana (stiffness), Agnimandya (loss of digestive power), Aruchi (loss of taste), Hrullasa (nausea) etc.^[17] In Bhagavad Geeta it is clearly mentioned that Tamasa Ahara (food kept overnight) leads to various discomforts if consumed.^[18]

- **Snigdham (unctuous):**

Food should be unctuous in nature. This type of food helps in pacifying Vata and aids the Pachakagni (digestive power).^[19] On contrary, extreme unctuousness (Atisnigdha) should not to be consumed. Both Asnigdha (dry) and Atisnigdha inhibit the process of digestion.^[20] Ruksha guna (dryness) aggravates Vata which results in hampering the digestive power, where Atisnigdha food is Guru (heavy) by its properties and take more time, energy to get digested resulting in laziness, anorexia, excessive salivation etc.

- **Matravat (proper quantity):**

Principle of the Matravat Ahara is - '*Ahara Matra tu Agni Bala Apekshini*'^[21] means always to have the food as per the power of digestion or power of the bio-fire of each and every individual. Amatra (improper quantity) is of two types, viz. Hina (less) and Adhika (excess).^[22] 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 diseases.

- **Jirne Ashniyat (intake of food after proper digestion of previous food):**

Diet should be taken only after the proper digestion of previous food.^[23] Following are the symptoms which suggest proper digestion of food - Udgara shuddhi (cleared belching), Utsaha (enthusiasm), Yathochita vegotsarga (proper evacuation of urges), Kshut (hunger), Pipasa (thirst) and Laghuta (lightness).^[24] If diet is taken irrespective of above symptoms, the food lies undigested in the stomach, mixes with the semi digested Ahara Rasa and provokes all the Doshas immediately.^[25] This is a major cause for most of the diseases. Exactly opposite to this condition, i.e., if person does not consumes food even after the digestion of previous food, is also not favorable. Thus Kala bhojana (timely consuming food) should be practiced as mentioned by Charakacharya.^[26]

- **Virya Aviruddha (compability):**

Diet articles that are opposite to the body elements tend to conflict with the system and they are termed as Viruddha Ahara (incompability). Charakacharya mentioned it is of 18 types.^[27] The term Virya viruddham is used with broad view, including all other types of Viruddha Ahara (Incompatible food).

- **Ishta Deshe & Ishta Sarvopakarana (desired place & vessels):**

To eat in a congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances is needed for a sound psychological condition during meals.

On the other hand the unpleasant place and atmosphere leads to the disturbance of mind, which directly influence the function of body.^[24, 28] The place should be clean, hygienic and should not produce disturbing emotions like Kama (desire),

Krodha (anger), Cinta (excessive thinking), Bhaya (fear), Vishada (sadness) etc.

- **Na ati drutam (not in hurry):**

The food should not be taken in hurry.^[29] Food when eaten with hurry violates its normal route entering into other route. The unwanted materials like hair, nail and such other things are eaten unnoticed while food is consumed in hurry.

- **Na ati vilambitam (not too late):**

Persons who eat too slowly, naturally tend to eat more, still satiety cannot be achieved. The temperature of food gets altered i.e. the hot items becomes cold. All these factors hamper the Agni and the food will not be digested properly.^[29]

- **Ajalpan, Ahasan, Tanmana bhunjita (without talking, laughing & with due concentration):**

Food should be consumed without much talking and laughing.^[29] The most important point to be considered here is that the food should be eaten with enough concentration.

- **Atmana Abhisamikshya Bhunjita (Taken after paying due regard to oneself):**

One should know his capacity that how much to eat? What is good and bad for him? Considering the factor one has to decide the quantity and the type of food to be consumed. On contrary, if he takes food whatever he gets it may not be good for his health.^[29]

DISCUSSION

Ahara Vidhi Vidhana is the term used by Charakacharya to mention the rules for diet intake. The diet and dietetic conventions are inter-related and inseparable. Ahara is not only

meant for maintenance of health but is also very important in the curative aspect while treating a disease. Ahara Vidhi Vidhana is one part among the eight factors of diet i.e. Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani.^[29] The Upayogasamstha comprises the dietetic rules, these dietetic regulations and procedures are applicable for healthy ones along with the diseased ones. Ahara Vidhi Vidhana is equally important as Ahara in maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. Regarding all the rules of diet intake, an optimistic way of thinking and application should be adopted.

Ushna is the first rule of Ahara Vidhi Vidhana. The food should be neither too cold nor too hot. Both extremes i.e. Atiyoga (excessive usage) and Hina Yoga (less usage) are not advisable. Even the food which is heated again and again is not good for health. It is considered as Mithyayoga (improper usage). The Paryusita Anna (stale food or food of previous day) is the improper usage of food. The fast food, food which is added with preservatives, tiffin carriers filled at morning etc are also improper usage of food articles. It becomes Vidahi (charred) and causes unwholesome effects on body.

Similarly one should not take the food which is not having unctuousness and also which is more unctous. Atisnigdha (excessive unctuousness) food is Guru (heavy) by properties and takes more time and energy to get digested, causing Praseka (salivation), Hrdgaurava (heaviness in the cardiac region), Alasya (laziness), Aruci (Anorexia) etc. It is considered as the main cause for Prameha (diabetes).^[30] Ativyayama (excessive exertion) immediately after intake of Snigdha bhojana (unctuous food) is said to be the main cause of Amavata (rhumatoid arthritis).^[31] Ati Gorasa Sevana (excessive consumption of milk and milk products) which is considered as Atisnigdha is a causative factor for Agnimandya (debility in digestive power), quoted by Kashyapa in the causative factors of Amlapitta (gastritis).^[32] On contrary to this the excessive Ruksha (dry) food leads to decrease

in strength and complexion, dryness of skin and complaints of constipation.^[33] People who carry tiffins to their working places usually prefer dry food for the convenience to carry. To swallow this food, extra water is needed during meals, which hampers Agni, dilutes the digestive secretions and prepares a soil for many GIT diseases.

Excessive intake of food hampers the Agni (digestive power), where as if person takes less food than required quantity there will be lose of strength and becomes victim for various diseases. While explaining the causative factors of most of the diseases Acharyas mentioned Ajirna bhojana as one of the main causative factor for eg. Grahani (Irritable bowel Syndrome – I.B.S),^[34] Kushta (leprosy)^[35] etc. That is why Jirne ashniyat (intake of food only after the digestion of previous food) factor is included under dietetic rules. Food which is taken before the proper digestion of previous food is considered to be poisonous. This is a major cause for most of the diseases like Grahani (I.B.S), Atisara (diarrhea), Udara (ascitis), Jwara (fever), Yaksma (tuberculosis), Alasaka, Visuchika etc.^[36] Exactly opposite to this condition i.e. if required quantity of food is not taken even after the digestion of previous food is also not favorable. Thus Kalabhोजना (timely food) is given due importance. Ksudha (hunger) is considered as one of the Adharaniya Vegas (Non suppressible urge). Udirana (excessive voiding) as well as Dharana (suppressing) of these urges is contraindicated because it is the root cause of almost all the diseases.^[37] In this day of civilization, Ajirna Bhojana and Ksudha Vegavarodha (not taking food even after Jirna Ahara lakshana) both conditions are commonly seen among the people separately as well as in combined way. People are very busy in their work schedule so that they don't find proper time to take proper food. Some people due to their economic condition skip their meals. Due to the suppression of urge of hunger the symptoms like debility, paleness, weakness, body ache, anorexia and giddiness are observed.^[38] Another category is of

housewives who wait for the family members, adjust the food timings according to others. They do not have fixed rules for meals. Thus, actually when they feel the hunger they do not eat and they eat when there is no strong feeling of hunger.

Correspondingly intake of incompatibility food articles are seen much often in this era. The diseases that are caused by Viruddha Ahara (incompatibility food) are listed by Acharyas like Adhmana (distension of abdomen), Grahani (I.B.S), Amlapitta (gastritis) Kushta (leprosy), Pandu (Anaemia), Shotha (swelling), Jwara (fever), Andhata (blindness), Indriya Daurbalya (weakness of sense organs) and even death.^[39] Some examples of the Viruddhashana which is commonly seen nowadays are - Having milk with food items containing salt (eg. Biscuit, bread), combination of milk with fruits (fruit salad), regular usage of milk preparations like paneer, malai etc, preserved food items irrespective of their original tastes contain excess of oil or salt for better preservation, butter that is preserved by adding plenty of salt, consumption of extremely hot or cold beverages before or after the meals, e.g., coffee, chilled water, cold drinks (aerated), ice creams, drinking water before or after tea, coffee etc. These are some of the examples, but if listed it is possible to find a hundred of such things commonly seen among the population.

In Ishta desha (desired place) and Ista sarvopakarana (desired vessel), not only favored but also beneficial is expected. One should take food in proper place equipped with all the accessories. By this one not gets afflicted with such factors which result in emotional strain. In classics particular vessels are mentioned for particular food items like, ghee is taken in black iron vessel, water in copper vessel, juices in mud vessel etc.^[40] Now a days in mega cities, due to metropolitan culture and growing industrialization, people eat while travelling in buses or local trains, they eat while standing or

even while walking and anywhere according to their convenience. Eating at the working places is the commonest trend that includes Tiffin or least utensils available for meals. Most of our population rarely gets proper time at proper place with proper accessories. Eating the food articles (like Pav bhaji, Pani puri etc) at the road side is the good example of this. These shops are made near the drainage area only where unpleasant smell is perceived. All these factors affect mind as well as body since the olfactory sense is having a close relation with digestion. Good smell of the food as well as the place provokes the salivation as well as secretion of digestive juice. The same is true with other senses.

Food eaten with appetite and pleasure is normal and useful, while food eaten for the order of others or for the sake of convenience with hesitation and without any desire becomes harmful for the health. For good digestion, the appreciation of qualities of food is needed, which cannot be achieved if person takes food in hurry or slowly or in unwanted place. Talking and laughing diverts the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too hastily or too slowly. Thus the uniform speed of eating is not maintained. The secretion of digestive juices gets disturbed; finally the system also gets affected. The taste of food is not properly felt whether it is bad or good. Practically, an example of people who watch television while eating can be taken for this point. These people often forget to eat with concentration and get involved in the television or other entertainment. For this reason Tanmana bhunjita is mentioned as a dietetic rule. The people under tension or any worries who are involved in various thoughts are not aware of their speed of eating. Acharyas were much concerned regarding this factor and explained that, one should take food after getting proper knowledge regarding the food article whether it is good for him or bad for him. Only after proper examination he has to take the food since the body is originated from food itself.^[41]

Among all these points the most imperative factor is Atmana Abhisamikshya bhunjita i.e, one should properly know the nature of the food article he is taking. It should be according to his constitution. Even in diseased state it plays an important role. A person who is suffering from Kaphaja disorders like diabetes etc intakes food which is guru (heavy) may worsen the condition of health. Similarly person suffering from Pittaja and Vataja disorders like constipation, paralysis etc, if indulge in food articles which is dry, cold, in more quantity will suffer more. In total one should properly take food by following all the dietetic rules. Then only he can prefer a good healthy life.

CONCLUSION

- Ahara vidhi Vidhana is one of the most important rules and regulations put forth by Ayurvedic classics for the attainment of the main aim i.e. maintenance of health in healthy person and curing the disease in diseased.
- These dietetic rules should be applied along with proper diet. Wholesome diet if taken in improper way can lead to diseases. In the same way improper diet taken in proper manner leads to disorders. Hence, the equal importance of Ahara along with Ahara Vidhi Vidhana should always be considered, in maintenance of health and prevention of diseases.
- Diet or Anna can be considered as Samavayi Karana where as Ahara Vidhi Vidhana being a kind of Karma or method is considered as Asamavayi Karana for the life entity. Both Ahara and Ahara Vidhi vidhana are helpful in getting good health and prevention of diseases. Thus Ahara is the Dravyabhuta Chikitsa where as Ahara vidhi vidhana is the Adravya bhuta chikitsa.
- All the dietetic rules are dependent on each other and they should be considered

collectively. By following of only one of these rules one cannot achieve the expected results. E.g. Ushna, Snigdha etc food articles should be used by considering the Matra. Both Atimatra and Hinamatra lead to ill health. Similarly Matravat Ahara if taken without concentration, with incompatibility etc does not give desired result. Thus importance of each statement should be considered, along with the collective effect, of all the statements.

- Thus both Ahara (Diet) and Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (Dietetic rules) are equally important. Proper utilization of both maintains healthy condition on contrary improper utilization leads to various diseases.

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