Principle and Practice of Nutrition and Dietetics in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Human biological system requires diet or food to provide energy for all life process, growth, repair and maintenance. Ahara is very much emphasizes in Ayurveda for the prevention and management of a wide range of disorders. As per the view point of Ayurveda, both the living human body and the diseases afflicting it are the products of Ahara. Use of Hitahara (wholesome diet) promotes health and longevity and Ahita Ahara (unwholesome diet) promotes manifestation of different disorders. Therefore, Ahara is considered as Prana (basis of life). The principle of dietetics and nutrition in Ayurvedic system of medicine include different classes of Ahara i.e. eating and drinking items, principle of Pathyapathya (wholesome and unwholesome diet), discipline of eating (Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatan, Dvadasha Asana Vidhi etc.), Viruddha Ahara (incompatible diet). Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatan includes eight discipline of eating and Dvadasha Asana Vidhi includes the twelve discipline of eating as described by Acharya Charaka and Sushruta respectively and are very important in daily life for promotion of positive health. Eating balanced diet on a regular basis and staying at ideal weight are critical factors for maintaining emotional and physical well-being.

Keywords: Ahara, Diet, Dietetics, Dosha, Discipline of eating

INTRODUCTION

Anything that is taken for the purpose of nourishment and maintenance of the biological system in the form of solid or liquid is known as Aahara (food). Ahara is the best among the things which sustain life [1].

Ahara has described as one of the Trayopastambha (three subsidiary pillars) of life which are Ahara, Nidra (sleep) and Brahmacharya (celibacy). Here Ahara, has been enumerated first, which shows its more importance. Diet is considered as vital for a human body as it provides the basic nutrients and promotes longevity. Ayurveda always emphasizes on consuming healthy and nutritious diet for maintaining good health [2].

The categorization of food items in different ways in Ayurveda epitomizes their profound knowledge on food items, their source, quality, requirement and usage by human beings. A physician can distinguish the types of food and drink for a particular individual depending upon the Prakarti (psychosomatic constitution), etc.

Balanced diet in Ayurveda can be defined as “the diet enriched with Shadarasa (all six rasa), required Gunas (properties), Veerya and given to the individual after consideration of Prakrati, Agni (digestive power), Kostha (digestive system) and Ritu (season variation) [3].

THEORY OF TRIDOSHA AND AHARA

As per the view point of Ayurveda, any material in the universe is composed of five basic elements, the Pancha Mahabhootas, which are Earth (Prithwi) water (Apa), Fire (Teja), Air (Vayu) and Ether (Akasha) including human body and the food. Tridosha (biological humors) i.e. Vata, Pitta & Kapha is also composed of Panchmahabhootas like biological system. Vata is made up of Vayu and Akasha Mahabhoota, Pitta is made up of Agni Mahabhoota and Kapha is made up of Jala and Prithvi Mahabhoota. Each food article either has Dosha aggravating or pacifying or balancing action on human body. To restore the balance of Doshas which got disturbed due to various factors like season, age etc., the Ayurveda prescribes a specific diet. Modified from [4].

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Ahara (diet or food) is one of the important factors provided by nature for healthy living. The ancient classics emphasize more on Ahara for the promotion of positive health and prevention from a wide range of disorders. The wholesome and unwholesome diet is responsible for happiness and misery respectively. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic clinical practice. Sometimes, dietary management in itself is a complete treatment. Ayurvedic dietetics is concerned primarily with the energetic of food as a means of balancing the Dosha (biological humours).

Classification of Ahara Dravya

Acharya Charaka has classified the Ahara Dravya (diet/food articles) in different ways [5]. Diet is one, from the view point of intake, of two types according to source, animal origin and plant origin, Hitahara (wholesome) and Ahitahara (unwholesome) depending upon its effect on biological system. These are further classified into four categories depending upon way of intake which are Pan (drinkables), Asana (eatables), Bhakshya (chewable) and Lehya (lickable).

Acharya Kashyapa classified food articles into five categories as per the concept of Panchamahabhutas which are Akasheya, Vayavya, Agneya, Apya and Parthiva [6]. Acharya Sharangadhara [7] and Bhavaprakasha [8] further classified Food articles into six types

- Bhojya
- Bhakshya
- Charvya,
- Lehya
- Chusya and
- Peya

Ahara is also classified into six categories depending upon the Rasa it contains which are Madhur, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta and Kashaya. Acharya Charaka further classified into twenty types depending upon its twenty properties [9].

1. Guru 2. Laghu
3. Sheeta 4. Ushna
5. Snigdha 6. Ruksha
7. Manda 8. Tikshna
9. Sthira 10. Sara
17. Sukshma 18. Sthula
19. Sandra 20. Drava

Acharya Charaka furthermore classified the Ahara Dravya into twelve major Varga (classes) depending upon its various forms, which is as follows [10].

Shookdhanya Varga (class of corns and cereals): This class contains mainly cereals including different varieties of rice. Red variety (Rakta Shali) is best among the rice varieties and pacify the thirst and Tridoshas. The food items of this Varga are Sheet in Veerya, Madhur in Vipaka and vitiate the Vata Dosha.

Shamidhanya Varga (class of legumes and pulses): It contains different types of legumes and pulses like Moonga, Arhar, Kulattha, Tila, peas etc. Moonga is considered best among this class. It is Ruksha, Laghu, Vishada in Guna, Kashaya and Madhur in Rasa, Katu in Vipaka and Kapha-Pitta Shamaka.

Mansa Varga (class of meat): This class is source of animal origin food. It is further divided into eight groups depending upon the natural habitat of animals, their way of living and way of eating.
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which are Prasaha, Bhushaya, Aanooopa, Varishaya, Jalechar, Jangala, Viskira and Pratuda. The goat meat is similar to the body tissues, not vitiates the Tridoshas and increases the muscle mass.

Shaaka Varga (class of vegetables): It contains mainly the vegetables like Vastuka (commonly known as bathua), Makaya, Poi, Upodika (commonly known as chaurai). The Shaaka of bathua is Tridosh Shanamaka and leads to loose stool and the Shaaka of Chaurai is Ruksha in property, Madhura in Rasa and Vipaka, helpful to alleviate the Raktapitta (bleeding disorders) and all types of poisons.

Phala Varga (class of fruits): This Varga is enriched with different types of fruits like Draksha (grapes), Kharjur (dates), Narikela (coconut), Paravat (guava), mango, Jamuna, Bibhitaka (Terminalia belerica), Anara (pomegranate), almond, Bhlallatakasthi (Semecarpus anacardium). The fruit of grapes are Snigdha in Guna, Madhur in Rasa, Sheeta in Veerya, increases the amount of semen and muscle bulk. Dates are Guru, Sheeta, Madhur, increases the amount of semen and muscle bulk. Two types of guava fruits are described, Madhura and Amla, the Madhura one is Guru and Madhur in Rasa and Vipaka and Amla one is Ushna and alleviate Atyagni (a disorder lead to emaciation of body due to increase digestion and metabolism). The immature mango fruit vitiates the Rakta and Pitta and properly mature fruit pacify the Vata and promote the Mansa, Shukra and physical strength. The fruit of Jamuna is Kashaya and Madhur in Rasa, Guru, Sheet in Veerya, Kapha-Pitta Shamaka, Malagrah and vitiate the Vata.

Therapeutic importance of Bibhitaka is described as ‘Rasasragmansamedojana Doshan Hanti Bibhitakam’ i.e. it alleviates the disorders of Rasa, Rakta, Mansa and Meda Dhatu and also alleviates the hoarseness of voice, secretion of Kapha and Pittaja disorders. The fruit of almond is Guru, Snigdha, Madhur, Ushna, Vatashamaka, promote the physical strength, Shukra and Mansa and Vitiates the Kapha and Pitta Dosha. The seed of Bhlallataka is very Ushna like fire and its fruit pulp is Madhur and Sheet.

This class is very important than others, because it contains the fruit which are part of our daily routine life. Most of the fruits are also described as Rasayana (rejuvenative measures). Rasayana is an important class of drugs or dietary supplements as described in ayurveda. It rejuvenates the body by its pharmaceutical and or nutraceutical action.

Harita Varga (class of green leafy vegetables and tubers): It contains different green leafy vegetables and tubers like Moolaka (radish), Tulsi (ocimum), Yavani, Saunfa, coriander, Granjanaka (carrot), Palandu (onion) and Lasuna (garlic) etc.

Immature radish pacify all the Doshas, fully mature vitiates all the Doshas and dry radish pacify the Vata and Kapha Dosha. Tulsi has traditionally uses to alleviate hiccough, Kasa (cough), Swash (asthma), etc. It vitiates the Pitta Dosha and pacify the Vata and Kapha Dosha. Onion vitiates the Kapha and pacify Vata Dosha and used as adjuvant with food. It is Guru, aphrodisiac, increases the physical strength and alleviates the anorexia. The Lasuna is Snigdha, Katu, Ushna and aphrodisiac in nature and therapeutically has used in Krimi (worm infestation), dermatological disorders, vitiligo and Vataja disorders.

Maddha Varga (class of wines): This class contains different varieties of special wines which has used regularly with diet and therapeutically in different disorders. In general all the wines are Amla in Rasa and Vipaka and Ushna in Veerya. Different varieties of wines include Sura, Madira, Arishta, Sheedhu, Surashava, Amlakanjika (dhanyamla or aranala), etc.

Usually the freshly prepared wines are Guru and vitiates all the three Doshas and the old (one or more than one year old) wines are Lghu, improve the digestion, cleanse the Srotas (body channels) and improve appetite. These wines nourish the body, alleviate the fear, sorrow and general bodyache and please the mind when used properly.

Jala Varga (class of water): This Varga is enriched with different varieties and properties of water. The water is divided into three categories depending upon source of water which are as follows

1. Endra: the water which falls directly in the form of drops during rain.
2. Kaar: the water which falls directly in the form of ice stones during rain.
3. Hima: the water which is collected in the form of ice.
These varieties of water are tasteless. The *Endra Jala* is best among these three.

**Gorasa Varga (class of milk and milk products):** It contains different types of milk and milk products. Acharya Charaka described eight types of milk in this group which include cow, buffalo, camel, animal with single nail in foot like horse etc., goat, sheep, elephant and human milk. The different milk products include butter, buttermilk, *Ghrita* etc.

Among these milk and milk products cow milk and its products is best as it provide vital force, considered as *Rasayana* and enriched with ten important qualities which as follows-

1. Madhur  
2. Sheet  
3. Mridu  
4. Snigdha  
5. Bahala  
6. Slakshna  
7. Pichhila  
8. Guru  
9. Manda  
10. Prasanna

These ten properties of cow milk are similar to the ten properties of *Oja*. *Oja* is considered as *Vyadhi Pratirodhaka Bala* (immunity) in Ayurveda. Therefore, the regular use of cow milk promotes psychosomatic health and boost immunity.

**Ikshuvikara Varga (class of sugarcane and its products):** It contains the sugarcane and its various products like jaggery, *Matsyandika, Khanda*, sugar, etc. The juice from *Pondraka* variety of sugarcane is *Madhur* and *Sheet* and considered best among sugarcane.

Jaggery vitiates the *Rakta, Mansa, Meda and Majja Dhatu* on excess intake. In general all the sugars are used therapeutically in thirst, burning and *Raktapitta*. The sugar made from honey is *Ruksha*, alleviate the vomiting and diarrhea and scraped out the dry *Malas* and *Kapha*.

This class is enriched with a special product which is *Madhu* (honey). It is a natural substance produced by honeybees. Honey has used in Ayurveda for nutritional and therapeutic purposes since many centuries. Acharya Charaka mentioned four varieties of honey which are *Makshika, Bhramar, Chhaurda* and *Pautika* among these four, *Makshika* is best. In general all the honey are *Guru,Sheet, Ruksha, Kashaya & Madhur* in *Rasa* and *Kaphashamaka*.

Honey is used as *Anupaan* with principal drug in Ayurvedic clinical practice. Honey is described as best *Yogvahi* in Ayurvedic literature. *Yogvahi* drugs are believed to be increased the bio-availability and thus efficacy of principal drug [11].

Acharya Sushruta described eight varieties of honey which are as follows [12].

**Pauttika:** It is formed from poisonous flowers. It is *Ruksha* in *Guna* and *Ushna* in *Veerya*. It leads to vitiation of Vata, Pitta and Rakta.

**Bhramara:** It is *Guru* (heavy) being excess *Madhur*.

**Kshaudra:** It is especially *Sheet* (cold in potency) and having *Laghu* (light) property.

**Makshika:** It is best honey and especially used for the management of *Kasa* and *Shwas*.

**Chhatra:** It is especially used for the management of *Raktapitta* (bleeding disorders), *Shwitra* (vitiligo), diabetes mellitus and related disorders and worm infestation.

**Ardhya:** It is best for eyes and to alleviate *Kapha* and *Pitta*.

**Auddalaka:** It is beneficial for voice and used for the management of dermatological disorders, anorexia, etc.

**Dala:** It vitiates *Pitta* and used for the management of vomiting and diabetes mellitus & related disorders.

**Kritanna Varga (class of cooked foods):** This class contains different types of cooked food which are *Peya, Vilepi, Manda, Yusha, Sattu*, etc.

*Peya* promote sweating and *Mala* towards the anus for defecation. *Vilepi* is *laghu*, nourishes the *Dhatus* and beneficial for heart. *Manda* improves *Agni* (digestion), cleanses the body channels and provide energy for vital organs. Thus, this class is enriched with cooked food having nutritional and therapeutic importance. Therapeutically some of these cooked foods are used in *Sansarjan Krama*.
Sansarjan Krama is a special type of dietetic pattern advises to the individual after Vaman and Virechan therapy. After the completion of therapeutic procedures like Vamana and Virechan, normal diet should not be given immediately as the Agni got impaired and vulnerable to diet which is beyond its capacity to digest. Hence, the intention of Sansarjana Krama is resurgence of impaired Agni. During the Sanshodhan process after liquefaction, the Doshas reaches to Amashaya and hamper the strength of the Agni. Therefore, it is important to restore the strength of the Agni by using Sansarjan Krama [13].

Ahara Upayogi Varga (class of food adjuvants): This class contains different types of oils, daily useful dietary supplements like Pippali, Shunthi etc., different types of salts, etc.

In general all types of oils are Sukshma, Vyavayi, Madhura and Ushna, vitiate the Pitta Dosha, pacify the Vata, increases physical strength, beneficial for skin and improve the intellect and Agni. Saindhava Lavana (salt) is best among all salts. It is Tridosha Shamaka, slightly Madhur in Rasa, beneficial for eyes, aphrodisiac and improves the Agni.

PATHYAPATHYA

The Pathya is defined as, the food substances which are not harmful to the body channels and please the mind and those with apposite property are Apathya. But this can not be accepted as general rule or in other words the definition is not definite. The properties of Pathyapathya can be changed depending upon Matra (quantum), Kala (time), Kriya (processing), Bhoomi (habitat), Deha (body constitution) and Dosh (bio-humors). In today’s busy lifestyle many of the disorders are manifested due to improper and unhealthy food intake, so if one consumes Pathya (conducive food) in appropriate quantity, at proper time, and in a proper way than it results in promotion of positive health and prevention from a wide range of disorders. In this way, the health is always dependent on intake of conducive food, balanced diet and discipline of food intake. Ayurveda described some Pathya which is disease specific and designed as therapeutics for a particular disorder depending mostly upon the Dosha and the Srotas involved in etio-pathogenesis of disease. Some of the Pathya are specific for a particular disease depending on its Prabhava. Modified from [14].

Discipline of Eating

The ultimate impact of a food depends not only on its material qualities but largely on its processing, i.e., cooking and the discipline of eating. The foremost Ayurvedic classic Charaka Samhita describes the eight principles of Ahara vidhi [15].

1. Prakriti (natural quality) 2. Karana (preparation),
3. Samyoga (combinations) 4. Rashi (quantity)
5. Desha (habitat and climate) 6. Kala (temporal factor)
7. Upayoga Sanstha (rules of use) 8. Upayokta (the user)

Similarly, Susruta describes 12-fold considerations to be followed during the consumption of food and termed them Dwadasha Asana Vidhi [16].

1. Sheet Ahara: indicated in thirst, alcoholic, burning, Raktaipitta and in emaciated individuals.
2. Ushna Ahara: useful in the patients with Kaphaja and Pittaja disorders and after Virechan and Snehan (oleation therapy).
4. Ruksha Ahara: useful in obese, diabetics and individual with excess Kapha.
5. Drava Ahara: indicated in dehydrated and weak individuals.
7. Ek-kalika Ahara: Ek-kalika Ahara i.e. one time (once a day) is indicated in the individuals with impaired Agni (digestive power).
8. Dvi-kalika Ahara: Ahara, twice a day is indicated in individual with proper Agni.
9. **Aushadha Yukta Ahara**: the diet mixed with required drugs should be used in those patients, who are unable to take unpalatable drugs.

10. **Matraheen Ahara**: the individual with impaired *Agni* and the diseased individual should advise to take the diet in reduced quantum.

11. **Prashamaka Ahara**: the diet advised according to seasonal variation is *Dosha Prashamaka* i.e. pacify all the *Doshas*.

12. **Vratiprayojaka Ahara**: advised in healthy individuals to promote psychosomatic health.

**INCOMPATIBLE DIET**

Ayurveda also described some dietary incompatibility (*Viruddhahar*) which should be avoided by all individuals. The dietary incompatibility is of eighteen types, which are as follows [17,2].

1. **Desha viruddha** (contrary to climate)
2. **Kala viruddha** (contrary to season)
3. **Agni viruddha** (contrary to digestive power)
4. **Matra viruddha** (contrary to measure)
5. **Satmya viruddha** (contrary to adaptability)
6. **Dosh viruddha** (contrary to body humors)
7. **Sanskara viruddha** (contrary to processing)
8. **Virya viruddha** (contrary to potency)
9. **Koshtha viruddha** (contrary to bowel habits)
10. **Avastha viruddha** (contrary to patient’s state)
11. **Krama viruddha** (contrary to order of eating)
12. **Parihara viruddha** (contrary to restrictions)
13. **Upachara viruddha** (contrary to observances)
14. **Paka viruddha** (contrary to cooking)
15. **Samyoga viruddha** (contrary to combination)
16. **Hridaya viruddha** (contrary to palatability)
17. **Sampata viruddha** (contrary to rich quality)
18. **Vidhi viruddha** (contrary to mealtime rules)

For example, intake of milk and fish together considered as *Veerya Viruddha* (contrary to potency). Milk and fish together leads to vitiation of *Rakta* (blood) and *Srotorodha* (obstruction of body channels) and formation of *Ama* [18]. *Ama* is considered as a major culprit in the manifestation of a wide range of disorders. *Ama* may generate immunological reaction which is mainstay in the etiopathogenesis of many immune mediated disorders. Both milk and fish are the rich source of protein and the combination may generate new type of protein molecules which may exhibit molecular mimicry and generate auto-immunity.

**CONCLUSION**

Food or diet is the most essential requirement of all living beings. According to Ayurveda both the living human body and the diseases that afflict it are the products of food. The contemporary modern science has particularly described *Ahara* according to the nutritional value of its components and not described about *Hita, Ahita, Pathya, Apathya Ahara* etc. for each individual. Ayurveda described a wide range of dietetics and nutrition including the *Pathyapathyaa*, incompatible diets, discipline of food intake like Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayayan and Dvadasha Asana Vidhi. Thus, Ayurveda proposes an entirely different approach to food, diet, and nutrition that is in strong contrast to the conventional Western approach. Ayurvedic dietetics places greater emphasis on processing food, its compatibility and rules of food consumption.

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**Research Work**

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Published several research and review articles in several journals and also published chapter in book. Some of which are
