

IMPORTANCE OF AHARA VIDHI VIDHAN(DIETETICS RULES) IN RELATION TO DIGESTION OF FOOD

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Human body requires food to provide energy for all life processes, growth, repair and maintains. A balanced diet contains different types of food in such quantities and proportions that needs of body is adequately met. But without knowing proper dietary guidelines one cannot gain optimum benefits from the food consumed. *Ayurveda* gives special emphasis on three important values which have been considered as the important conductive factor for maintenance of life and health. This important triune consists of *Aahara*, *Nidra* and *Bhramhacharya*. These three have been considered as *upsthambha* (basic of life and health). Among *Traya-upsthambha*, *Aahara* has been

considered as the first one which shows its importance. *Ayurveda* describes *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* in which many guidelines are given by *Acharyas* to modify digestion and to get the maximum benefit of the food that is being taken. **Aim and objective:** To evaluate the relation between *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* and digestion of food. **Materials:** The data has been collected from *Caraka samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, compiled and analysed for the discussion and attempt has been made to draw some conclusions. **Discussion:** Each factors mentioned in *Upayagasamstha* has some scientific reason behind it and has got direct impact on digestion of the food as well as on the health status of the person. It has found that improper taking of food has been directly mentioned as causative factors for certain diseases. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that in the field of dietetics especially digestion along with factors affecting it has been mentioned scientifically and at very minute level in *Ayurveda* by following this many kind of diseases arising in today`s era can be prevented.

KEYWORDS: *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan*, Digestion, *Upayagasamstha*.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara is the most essential requirements of all living beings. Now days there is increased prevalence of life style disorders, in which faulty dietary habits play an important role. Ayurveda is not only a medical science but also a complete science of life, which deals with health conservation and promotion, prevention and management of the diseases. It always instructs about how to live a healthy life by the adaptation of appropriate life style, food, conducts and avoidance of etiological factors. *Ahara*(diet), *Nidra*(sleep) and *Bhramcharya* (abstinence) are recognized as the three *Upasthambhas*(subpillars), essential for the smooth running of life. Among the three *Upstambhas*, *Ahara* is considered as the best sustainer of life. *Ahara* supplies bioenergy to the body. This bio-energy is supplied by proper and adequate nutrition in the form of it`s essential constituents (viz- protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, water). In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance. Food which are consumed according to the prescribed methods (in the scriptures) are the seat for the satisfaction for the life. *Ojas*, *Teja*(spender), *Dhatus*, senses, *Bala*(strength), *Tusthi* (satisfaction of mind). *Arogya* (health), are all dependent on food.^[1] They are fuel for the *Agni* (fire inside the body) which is the main basis for sustaining the body. The importance of food in Ayurveda can easily be understood is by the quote of *Charaka Samhita* which states that the whole world runs towards food, as complexion, happiness, beautiful voice, life, talent, health and satisfaction, maintenance of body, body strength and even intellectual capacities of the individual depends on food.^[2] It is the food habits which are the way to health or disease in the body. Due to such prime importance of food in the maintenance of health, *Acharya Charaka* has stated these *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan*(Dietary Guidelines) because healthy body is possible only if food is digested properly.

Modern science also states that Dietetics is essential for life, growth, energy, reproduction, protection from diseases and maintenance of body. In the present modern lifestyle, we do not take care of our health and the consequences of our eating habits and lifestyles of life, which are harmful for us.

Aim

To evaluate the relation between *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* and digestion of food.

Objective

1) To study the *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* from ayurvedic literature in details.

2) To Study about digestive process as per modern literature in details.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The data has been collected from *Caraka samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, compiled and analysed for the discussion and attempt has been made to draw some conclusions.

DISCUSSION

Ahara Vidhi Vidhan

Ahara Vidhi Vidhan described in our classics, which are the foundation of dietetics. This indicates the method of taking of *Ahara*.^[3] It contains everything related to Diet, how to eat, when to eat, what to eat. These are *Ushna*, *Snigdha*, *Matravat*, is consumed after the digestion of previously ingested food, *Viryā Aviruddha Ahara*, is to be taken into *Iste Dese* where it provided with *Ista Sarvopakarana*, not to be taken speedily, not taken slowly, taken without taking with others, taken without laughing, taken with the concentration of the mind.

Usnam Asniyat^[4]: (Food should be warm)

The first requisite regarding prepared meal is that it should be taken *Ushna*(hot). By taking hot food, *Vata Anulomaka* is achieved, pitta get stimulated and secreted, thereby, increasing *Agni* or power of digestion. *Kapha* in oral cavity, i.e. *Bodhaka kapha* is secreted to acknowledge proper taste of food. In above conditions, *Agni* gets activated and the digestion process completed in proper time. Besides the whole meal being *Ushna*, it must be with *Ushna Anna*, so that profuse flow of saliva and gastric juices are achieved for the next food items.

As per modern physiology hot meals aid proper digestion because of the time it takes to consume it. This enables the consumer to eat in adequate proportions which in turn gives less work to the organ that breaks down food. Also, during the preparation of the meal, the chemicals in the food would have been broken down before it is served and consumed; the body easily absorbs the nutrients as they diffuse into the system, increasing the nutritional value. It decrease the risk of bacterial contamination as it is difficult for micro-organisms to survive in hot foods. Micro-organisms die while cooking but allowing the food get cold will reintroduce the bacteria, if not careful; which makes eating the meal in a hot state healthier.

***Snigdham Asniyat*^[5]: (food should be unctuous)**

The meal taken should be *Snigdha*(unctuous), the *Snigdha Ahara* causes feel of proper taste, *Agnideepana*, facilitate early digestion, *Vata Anulomaka* and it makes the body plump, strengthens the sense organs, increases in the brightens the complexion.

As per modern physiology fat is essential for absorption of Vit. A, D, E and K. These vitamins are well known to increase immunity, are good for skin and eyes, Vit. E is an antioxidant, Vit. D is important for Calcium absorption which provides strength to bones. HDL is important as it reduces risk of heart dis-ease. Consuming fatty acids can boost metabolism. Dietary fat helps in breakdown of existing fat by activation of PRAR-alfa and fat burning pathways through liver.

***Matravat Asniyat*^[6]: (food in proper quantity)**

It means eat adequate amount. The *Lakshana* by which a person can decide that is *Matravat* are, freedom from distress is in stomach, gratification of the senses, absence of any cardiac discomfort, sense of ease in the standing, sitting, lying down walking, inhaling, exhaling., talking. Easeful digestion and assimilation of food in the evening and the morning, the imparting of strength, complexion and plumpness.

As per modern physiology when we eat more food than our stomach can accommodate, we cannot properly break it down. We also tend to produce more acid, thus causing reflux and indigestion. In addition, the amount of digestive enzymes produced may not be able to completely break down the volume of food ingested, which leads to more gas formation, discomfort, or bloating. *Ayurveda* recommends that we leave one-third to one-quarter of our stomach empty to allow space for our body to easily digest our meal.

***Jirne Asniyat*^[7]: (Intake after digestion of various meal)**

It means eat after digestion of the various meals. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous food, the digestive product of the previous food i.e. undigested *Ahara Rasa* of food taken afterwards it provokes all the *Doshas*.

As per modern physiology while the food taken when the previous meal has been fully digested, the humors have returned to their normal places, the gastric fire is kindle, hunger is born, the channels are clear and open, the eructation from the mouth is healthy, the stomach is clear, the peristaltic movement is normal and when the urges for evacuation of flatus, urine

and feces are well attended too, that food not vitiating any of the body elements, serve the sole purpose of promoting life.

***Virya Aviruddham Asniyata*^[8]: (In take food having no contradictory potencies)**

Virya is the poer of substance by which action takes place. Eat those food which are not antagonist in *virya*(potency)s.

As per modern physiology when two or more foods having different tastes, energy and post digestive effect are combined, digestion becomes overloaded inhibiting the enzyme system and resulting in the production of toxins. At the same time these foods, if eaten separately, might well stimulate digestion, be digested more quickly and even help to burn or remove toxins’.

***Iste Dese Ista Sarva Upakarnam Asniyata*^[9] (Intake in proper plce and with all accessories)**

Eat in congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances. One eating at congenial place does not get depressed in the mind depressing emotions produced in unpleasant environment. Therefore should eat in congenial place and circumstances.

As per modern physiology a complex, independent nervous system called the enteric nervous system (ENS) lines the gastrointestinal tract. Dubbed “the second brain” by Dr. Michael Gershon, a researcher and physician at Columbia University Medical Center, the ENS contains many of the major neurotransmitters that are found in the brain, including serotonin, dopamine glutamate, norepinephrine, and nitric oxide. In fact, about 95 percent of the serotonin contained in the body at any given time is in the ENS .This second brain controls our digestion and can work both independently and in conjunction with the brain in our head. One can briefly state that there is an intimate relationship between our brain and our gut, and our digestion responds to the thoughts and emotions. When we experience a situation that we interpret as stressful, signals from the brain can alter nerve function between the stomach and esophagus, resulting in heartburn. With extreme stress, the brain sends signals to the gut immune cells that release chemicals leading to inflammation. This inflammation can then lead to malabsorption, and even food sensitivities if the stress becomes chronic. Now days we can see special dining rooms in the houses of affluent class. Everyone always tries to keep the dining place pleasant.

***Na atidrutum Ashniya*^[10]: (Intake not in hurry)**

Do not eat hurriedly. If food is taken too hurriedly it enters into a wrong way and will not be properly placed. Food taken in hurry can obviously affect the power of digestion by increasing the vata.

As per modern physiology if a person eats too leisurely, naturally tend to eat more till satiety cannot be achieved. The temperature of food gets altered i.e; the hot items become cold. All these factors hamper digestion and the food is not digested properly. The taste of food is not properly felt whether it is bad or good. Good qualities like smell, taste and sight of food always help in digestion. When the taste, odours or sight of food is felt and enjoyed, it promotes the salivation and digestion. According to a new study accepted for publication in The Endocrine Society's Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism (JCEM), eating a meal quickly, as compared to slowly, curtails the release of hormones in the gut that induce feelings of being full. The decreased release of these hormones, can often lead to overeating.

***Na ativilambitam Ashniyat*^[12]: (Intake with not to slow)**

Do not eat too leisurely, that food would become cold and there will be irregularity in digestion.

As per modern physiology very slow eating does not give satisfaction even if he eats so much. Hence he eats more than required and this will hamper digestion.

***Ajalpana, Ahasan, Tanmana Bhunjita*^[12]: (Intake with concentration)**

Don't talk or laugh while eating, one who talks and laughs while eating is liable to suffer the same disorders as the one who eats too hastily. In this most important one is that the food should be eaten with concentration. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too slowly or too hastily.

As per modern physiology when we speak, air has to get out from our lungs, through the trachea and the vocal cords to our mouth and the outside environment. Because the trachea and the esophagus (food pipe) share the same entry there's a small tongue-like blocker called epiglottis which blocks the trachea when the food comes, and blocks the esophagus most of the time – when the air comes. When we speak, the trachea must be open (because speech, as we said, is basically air moving the vocal cords and different parts of the mouth). However, when we eat - it must be closed. The body "prefers" breathing over eating, so when we try to

do both, it opens the trachea, thus closing the esophagus. If the food comes down at this point, it falls right into our lungs. If it is a very small bit of food, it is the most dangerous, because it can actually enter into the lungs and probably do some damage (and quite possibly infection) in the lungs. Usually, it isn't such a small bit, and it gets stuck in way to our lungs - then we cough. This is the body's natural reflex which tries to get it out of the way ASAP. So we should avoid talking or laughing while eating.

***Aatanam Abhisamikshya Bhunjitam*^[13]: (Intake with self confidence)**

Eat rightly, considering your constitution. These were the dietetic rules for both healthy and unhealthy persons but *Sushruta* has given *Dwadasa Ashana Pravicharana* especially for unhealthy people. these *Pravicharana* facilitate the use of different type of *Ahara And Ahara Vidhi* according to the status of health of a person but whenever a person takes food.

Proper Time of Meal

In classics mentioned that the proper time for giving *Ahara* to a person is when he gets free of stool, urine, and eructation's, and feel his body and sense organs light and free. When he gets free action of heart as well as natural courses of his bodily *Vayu*, when he feels hungry and has got relish for food and when his *Kukshi* becomes light.^[14] Once food is taken, it should not be taken again before one *Yama*, as it infers with *Raso-utpatti* and creates *Ama*. But the food should be taken before two *Yama* because if person fast for more than two *Yama* he will experience *Bala Kshaya*. One who known the place, digestive power, strength and period when ever observes hungry, should give the food according to congeniality with the gap of one or two *Kala* (periods). After the digestion of *Rasa, Dosha* and *Mala* one should consume food without giving consideration to time. Proper belching, clarity, enthusiasm, proper evacuation of urges, lightness of body, hunger and thirst are the features of proper digestion.^[15] In seasons where the nights are lengthy, one should consume food in morning only and when days are lengthy food should be taken in first *Prahara* at night and in afternoon. Seasons where days and night are of same length food should be taken at indicated time.

Ahara Vidhi for taking different types of food items

Considering the sequence of taking different food items, *Acharyas* were very much particular. According to them, one should first take sweet dish, then food item containing *Amla Lavana, Katu* and other *Rasa*. The sweet food item firstly would naturally go to subdue the *vayu*

located in stomach, *Amla* or *Lavana rasa Pradhan aahara* taken in middle would rose up the *Agni* in *Agniyasaya*. While *Katu* rasa would tend to subdue the *Kapha*.^[16]

Item taken in the beginning of meal should be *Guru, Snigdha, Madhura*, food having *Manda* and *Sthira* properties like coconut, mango, and sweets. In the middle of meal, one should take *Shukta* etc. *Amla* food items at the end one should consume *Laghu, Ruksha, Katu, Tikshna* and food items which are of mild laxative in nature. *Saindhava lavana* and *Ardrika* are always palatable before meal as it is *Pathya* aggravates *Agni*, increases taste of food, cleans tongue and throat.

CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic concept of digestion takes into account many things viz. food, its quantity, place, time, factors affecting it, dietetic rules, digestive factors, *Agni* etc.; which is the most ideal than any other science. Along with *Agni* there are many other factors which are found useful for proper digestion and by taking care of which one can eliminate the causes of imbalance. All the rules mentioned under '*Upayogasamstha*' (dietetic rules) strengthen the '*Aharaparinamakar Bhavas*' (digestive factors). Hence these ten rules are directly related with the '*Aharaparinamakar Bhavas*' (digestive factors) and govern the digestion process.

It can be concluded that in the field of dietetics especially digestion along with factors affecting it has been mentioned scientifically and at very minute level in *Ayurveda* by following this many kind of diseases arising in today`s era can be prevented.

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