

## AAHARA (WHOLESOME FOOD) AND HEALTH: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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Article Received on  
26 Dec 2017,

Revised on 15 Jan. 2018,  
Accepted on 05 Feb. 2018,

DOI: 10.20959/wjpr20184-11054

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### ABSTRACT

To maintain the health of a healthy individual is the primary objective of Ayurveda. The science of ayurveda has described a lot of dietary and lifestyle managements which plays a major role in prevention of diseases thereby maintaining the health of the person. A healthy diet is a big part of any successful self care plan. The Ayurvedic approach of food and dietetics is quite different from western approach. According to ayurveda, the type and quantity of food articles to be consumed depends on the age/ *prakriti*/season/power of digestion of the individual. The primary focus of the western concept of nutrition is on the physical attributes of food. A balanced diet in ayurveda is planned in relation to the known *panchabhautic* composition and *tridoshic* impacts of the diet constituents on the living body. *Acharya Charaka*,

the founder of Indian medicine, mentioned the *aahara*(wholesome food) as the foremost significant pillar out of three pillars of good health-*Aahara*(wholesome food), *nidra*(proper sleep) and *brahmacharya* (regulated sex). The modern science explains the role of food for physical and mental development but the science of ayurveda explains that *aahara*(food) affects not only the physical, mental but also the spiritual well being of a person.

**KEYWORDS:** Ayurveda, prakriti, panchbhautic, tridoshic, aahara, nidra, brahmacharya.

### INTRODUCTION

The term Ayurveda is the combination of 2 words –*Ayu*(life) and *veda* (science/authoritative texts). It is the science which teaches us the art of living. There is nothing more important in life in making a radical change within the body, mind and consciousness than establishing a healthy routine in daily life. *Acharya Charaka* has summed up beautifully the importance of

*aahara* in promoting a healthy lifestyle saying that if a person practices regularly a wholesome lifestyle and eats wholesome food will remain unaffected by disease.<sup>[1]</sup>

*Acharya Sushruta* has described the *tridosha* (*vata, pitta and kapha*) in the body as the three main pillars which stabilizes the building which is equated to human body.<sup>[2]</sup> For a stable and strong building, the stability of the pillars is of utmost importance. While mentioning the three sub-pillars (*aahara, nidra, brahmacharya*) of the human body, *Acharya Charaka* has described that if a person follows a wholesome and balanced diet, proper sleep and regulated sex, the person is well endowed with strength, complexion and development throughout full life span.<sup>[3]</sup> Thus Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of *Aahara*(food)for a healthy body by describing it as the foremost pillar for good health of human body.

#### **A review on the importance of *Aahara*(food) for human body according to ayurvedic texts**

1. From the time of conception, the body grows, develops strength, and gradually matures. *Aahara Sausthava* (Excellence of properties of food) is one of the factors responsible for the growth of the body.<sup>[4]</sup>
2. Ayurveda describes *Aahara* (food) as the best sustainer of life, therefore the type of food items we consume should be chosen carefully.<sup>[5]</sup>
3. Our human body is a product of *Aahara*(food). This *Aahara*(food) is harbinger of happiness and suffering to humans in the form of health and disease respectively. *Hitahara*(wholesome food) is responsible for state of health while *Ahitahara* (unwholesome food) is responsible for diseased state of the body.<sup>[6]</sup>
4. *Aahara* is defined as any material which nourishes the *dhatu*s(seven essential tissues-*rasa* (plasma), *rakta*(blood), *mamsa*(muscles), *meda*(fat tissue), *asthi*(bone tissue), *majja*(bone marrow), *shukra* (reproductive tissue) of the body.<sup>[7]</sup> According to ayurvedic theory, for a person to be physically healthy, the one should have his *dhatu*s functioning normally; his *doshas* (*vata, pitta, kapha*)and *agni* (digestive power) must be in equilibrium and his *malas*(waste products i.e. *mutra* (urine), *purisha* (stool), *sweda*(sweat) to be excreted out regularly in proper quantity.<sup>[8]</sup> The food articles we consume act on *doshas, dhatu*s, *agni, malas* on the basis of *rasa, guna, virya, vipaka* of those articles.
5. In ayurveda, *Aahara* (wholesome food) has been called as *mahabhaisaja*. The word *bhaisaja* means ‘medicine.’<sup>[9]</sup>

If a patient follows wholesome food regimen, his disease can be cured without any medicine whereas if a patient consumes an unwholesome food regimen during the course of treatment, medicines will not be proved effective to cure the disease.

Hence it is very clear that the role of *Aahara* towards maintaining a healthy state of the body is of utmost importance. When we define health, we generally considers only physical and mental well being of a person but it is the science of ayurveda which mentions the role of *Aahara*, not only for physical and mental fitness but also for spiritual well being of an individual. If a person consumes wholesome diet according to *prakriti*, season, and his power of digestion (*agni*) and follows the rules of food intake, he can attain physical, mental and spiritual health.<sup>[10]</sup>

### Physical health

- *Varna*- Color
- *Prasada*- Complexion
- *Sauswaryam*-Clear voice
- *Pushti*-Nourishment
- *Bala*-Strength

### Mental health

- *Jeeveetam*- Longevity
- *Pratibha*-Genius
- *Sukham*-Happiness
- *Tushti*-Satisfaction

### Spiritual health

Broadly, three types of *Manasika Prakriti* (*Sattvika*, *Rajasika*, *Tamasika*) are mentioned in ayurveda. According to *Shrimad Bhagvada Geeta*, diets can be divided into three types based on these three.<sup>[11]</sup> If a person consumes *Sattvika Aahara*, it promotes *Sattva guna* of mind i.e. a quality of mind which induces clarity, synchronization and sense of balance between body and mind. This *sattva guna* helps the person to achieve the goal of *moksha*(freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth).

- **Sattvika Aahara:** Such as fresh cow's milk, freshly cooked food, fresh fruits, and jaggery.
- **Rajasika Aahara:** It promotes *Rajas* (a superiority of mind which induces command, aggression and accomplishment). Such as meat, fish, eggs, pickles, garlic, onion and salted foods.
- **Tamasika Aahara:** It includes all types of overcooked, decayed, multiple processed foods which promotes *tama guna* i.e. value of mind which suggest darkness and inactivity. Such as alcohol, beef, pork, eggs, frozen food, micro waved food, tea, coffee.

### Diet plan in ayurveda

- A balanced diet in Ayurveda is planned in relation to the known *panchbhautic* composition and *tridoshic* impacts of the food articles on the living body.

According to ayurveda, the human body is made up of five elements (*panchmahabhutas*) and *tridoshas*. Similarly, the every somatic component in this world is the result of *panchbhautic* association.<sup>[12]</sup> To follow the nature's law of equilibrium, consumption of *panchbhautic* substances is essential to maintain the status of *panchbhautic* components of body for normal physiological functions of the body. These substances are used in the form of dietary food articles. The *panchbhautic* composition according to different taste constituents of food is as below:<sup>[13]</sup>

- *Madhura rasa aahara* : *jala mahabhuta*+*prithvi mahabhuta* *Amla rasa aahara* : *prithvi mahabhuta*+*agni mahabhuta*
- *Lavana rasa aahara* : *jala mahabhuta* +*agni mahabhuta*
- *Katu rasa aahara* : *vayu mahabhuta* +*agni mahabhuta*
- *Tikta rasa aahara* : *vayu mahabhuta* +*aakash mahabhuta*
- *Kashaya rasa aahara* : *vayu mahabhuta* +*prithvi mahabhuta*

- Effect of taste constituents of food on the *tridoshas* (*vata,pitta,kapha*) of body:<sup>[14]</sup>

The central concept of ayurveda is the theory that health exists when there is a balance between three bodily humors or doshas of the body-*Vatta, Pitta and Kapha*.

<b>DOSHA</b>	<b>VITIATED BY</b>	<b>PACIFIED BY</b>
<i>Vata</i>	<i>Katu, tikta, kashaya rasa</i>	<i>Madhura, amla, lavana rasa</i>
<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Katu, amla, lavana rasa</i>	<i>Madhura, tikta, kashaya rasa</i>
<i>Kapha</i>	<i>Madhura, Amla, lavana rasa</i>	<i>Katu, tikta, kashaya rasa</i>

A person is more susceptible to the diseases caused by the same *dosha* of his *prakriti*. If a person follows *prakriti* based diet, the susceptibility to diseases gets reduced.

- According to ayurveda, a year consists of six *ritus*(seasons)and two *kaals* (*Aadaan kaal* and *visarga kaal*). This division is done according to the position of sun. Each *ritu* is two *masas* (months) long. *Aadana kaal* comprises three *ritus* –*Sishira*, *vasanta*, *grishma* and *Visarga kaal* comprises three *ritus* –*Varsha*, *Sharada*, *Hemanta*. According to the predominance of doshas(*vata*, *pitta* or *kapha*) in different seasons, *acharyas* have mentioned the following *rasa* dominant diet which should be followed if a person wants to be healthy.<sup>[15]</sup>

S.No.	Ritu	Rasa
1.	Hemanta(mid November-mid January)	Madhura, Amla, Lavana
2.	Shishira(mid January-mid March)	Madhura, Amla, Lavana
3.	Vasanta(mid March-mid May)	Tikta, Katu, Kashaya
4.	Grishma(mid May - mid July)	Madhura
5.	Varsha(mid July-mid September)	Madhura, Amla, Lavana
6.	Sharada(mid September-mid November)	Madhura, Tikta, Kashaya

- Ayurveda mentions that the quantity of *Aahara*(food) to be taken, depends on the power of digestion and metabolism(*Agnibala* and *Srotobala*), which varies according to season as well as the age of the individual. The stomach capacity is divided into three portions out of which two portions should be filled by solid and liquid food and one portion should be left for the easy gastric movements and air, to aid the digestion process.<sup>[16]</sup> The improper digestion produces toxin (*Ama*)<sup>[17]</sup> which leads to majority of diseases, e.g.it causes Rheumatoid arthritis (*Amavata*) when it afflicts the joints. Nowadays, the diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, obesity are highly prevalent and are labeled as lifestyle disorders. A faulty diet habit is one of the causes for these lifestyle disorders.
- Concept of Ayurvedic dietetics is unique in sense of its individualized approach. It considers following factors:<sup>[18]</sup>
- *Prakriti* - *Doshika* status of the food articles.
  - *Karana* – Method of preparation.
  - *Samyoga* – Combination of food articles.
  - *Rashi* – Quantity.
  - *Desha* – Environmental considerations.

- *Kala* – Time (Seasonal and day time variations).
  - *Upyokta-Nature/Prakriti* of the consumer.
- Some rules of eating have been mentioned:<sup>[19]</sup>
1. The food should be tasty, warm, qualitative, unctuous, and easily digestible.
  2. It should be eaten neither too fast nor too slow.
  3. The food should be taken only when hungry, after the last meal has been digested.
  4. Should include all the tastes namely sweet, salt, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent in daily diet.
  5. It is best to focus on food while eating.
  6. One should eat in comfortably sitting posture.
  7. Food should be taken in pleasant surroundings with utensils and preparation of individual's choice.
  8. Too much intake of any of 6 tastes namely sweet, salt, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent is not conducive for health.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ayurveda offers a complete system to live a long healthy life and to rejuvenate the body through diet and nutrition. Ayurveda considers the multidimensional aspects of health. The approach of Ayurveda to life and living is holistic. True to its holistic approach, Ayurveda addresses the preventive as well as the curative aspects of medicine. Its definition of health is so comprehensive that it outdoes the WHO definition, by incorporating the spiritual dimension of health with the physical, mental and social aspects. Ayurveda specifies *pathya* (wholesome) and *apathya* (unwholesome) food items for each and every disease. The *pathya* food articles are designed as therapeutics for a particular disorder depending mostly upon the *dosha* and the *srotas* involved in etiopathogenesis of disease.

*Aahara* is considered as *Prana*(basis of life) in ayurveda. A proper diet plays a crucial role behind a healthy life; it remains all the more important to have the diet in accordance with one's constitution. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic clinical practice. Sometimes, dietary management in itself is a complete treatment.

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