IMPORTANCE OF AHARA (DIET) WITH RESPECT TO DIFFERENT DIETETIC PRINCIPLES IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT
Ahara is one of the Upasthambha described in Ayurveda. Ahara is one of the main factors provided by nature for healthy long life of human beings. In ancient classics much significance has been given to Ahara, for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. Physical, mental, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, these all proportions of health could be balanced by taking genial diet. According to Ayurveda the diet which nourishes both the mental and physical built is called "balanced diet". Apart from this, Ayurveda has described many more dietetic principles about Ahara, like quantity for different individual, manner to take Ahara, manner of serving Ahara, elemental constitution, and mode of preparation, habitat, combination, time and season of intake, body constitution and Agnibala etc.

KEYWORDS: Ahara, Ayurveda, balanced diet, Upasthambha.

INTRODUCTION
Ahara is the basic principle, upon which health, happiness and harmony lies. It plays a key role in the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. In Vedic literature it has been equated with nectar. Modern science states that so much carbohydrate, fat, proteins, vitamins and minerals are required for well balanced diet. In every food there are certain factors developing the mental qualities and certain other factors developing the physical built of the body. According to Ayurveda, the diet which nourishes both mental and physical built is
 called ‘balanced diet’. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic therapy. Sometimes it becomes as complete treatment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To understand concept and importance of Ahara by review of literature as it is one of the pillars of Ayurveda.
2. To describe the different dietetic principles mentioned in Ayurveda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

References related to above mentioned topic are collected from the Ayurvedic classics as well as from the contemporary sciences. These references are analysed critically to draw a fruitful conclusion.

Importance of Ahara (Diet)

Acharya Charaka has mentioned in Agrya prakrana that Anna is the best sustainer of life. He also described that the life of all living things is food and the entire world seeks food. Complexion, clarity, good voice, long life, understanding, happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength and intelligence all are established in Ahara. Acharya Sushruta has also mentioned that diet is nourishing, gives strength immediately, sustains body and promotes life span, energy, memory, Ojas and digestive power. He also said that diet is the causative factor for maintenance, origin and destruction of Universe. It is only due to diet that strength, immunity, clarity of complexion and sense organs develops and there can be diseases due to irregularity of diet. In this way our Acharya described the importance of Ahara.

Classification of Ahara

Acharya Charaka has classified the Ahara in different ways. He described.[1]

✓ One type from the point of intake.
✓ Two types according to source-animal and plant origin.
✓ Two types according to effect-wholesome (Pathya) and unwholesome (Apathya).
✓ Four types according to way of intake-Pana (drinkable), ashana (eatable), bhakshya (chewable) and lehya (liakable).
✓ Six types as per taste-Madhura, amla, lavana, katu, tikta and kashaya.
✓ Twenty types as per Gunas (properties).

Acharya Kashyapa mentioned five types according to Panchmahabhuta.[2]

Acharya Sushruta described twenty one groups.
Dietetic principles in Ayurveda

1. Pancha Mahabhoota theory (Theory of five elements)

Any material in the universe, according to Ayurveda is composed of five basic elements, the Pancha Mahabhootas, namely Earth (Prithvi), Water (Apa), Fire (Teja), Air (Vayu) and Ether (Akasha) including human body and the food. Planning and indulging in the diet balancing these elements maintain the homoeostasis of body.

2. Tridoshas (Theory of three biological humors)

The human body is similarly constituted from Panchamahabhootas. The Biological Humors (Tridoshas) i.e. Vata, Pitta & Kapha which constitutes the body is also made up of Panchamahabhootas. As it is mentioned that; Vata is made up of Vayu and Akasha mahabhoota, Pitta is made up of Agni mahabhoota and Kapha is made up of Jala and Pruthvi mahabhoota. Each food article either has Dosha aggravating or pacifying or balancing action on human body. To keep the balance of Doshas (health) disturbed due to various factors like season, age etc., the Ayurveda prescribes specific diet.

3. Triguna

The Trigunas – Sattva-rajas-tamasa, are the initiating causal qualities responsible for the creation of the material world, including food.

4. Shadrasa (Six basic tastes)

The food contains six basic tastes and each taste has pre-dominance of particular elements of Panchamahabhoota which exerts specific effect on the Tridoshas & Dhatus.

- Madhura (Sweet) – Prithvi & Apa
- Amla (Sour) – Prithvi & Agni
- Lavana (Salt) – Apa & Agni
- Katu (Pungent) – Agni & Vayu
- Tikta (Bitter) – Vayu & Akash
- Kashaya (Astringent) – Prithvi & Vayu
It is mentioned that, drugs having sweet, sour and salty taste alleviate Vata, those having astringent, sweet and bitter tastes alleviate Pitta and those having astringent, pungent and bitter tastes alleviate Kapha dosha.\[^{[6,7]}\]

5. **Gunas/ physical properties and their attributes**

The Ayurvedic classics describe 20 basic properties of physical materials constituting the whole range of living and nonliving objects in this world, such as articles of food, drugs, bodily cells and tissues. The following 20 Gunas form the basic matrix of the transformation of the Panchabhaetic matter into living biologic factors in a living body\[^{[8]}\]:


These physical properties, as found in various articles of food and drugs, produce similar effects on the body when administered and deplete the opposite properties in accordance with the theory of Samanya and Vishesha, i.e., homologous versus heterologous, as described in Ayurvedic texts.

6. **Sources of food described in Ayurveda**

The Ayurvedic texts describe 12 categories of food sources reflecting the then available varieties of food in historical perspective. These 12 categories of food are as follows.\[^{[9]}\]

1. Shukadhanya (corn) 7. Madya Varga (wines)
2. Shamidhanya (pulses) 8. Ambu Varga (water)
3. Mamsa Varga (meat) 9. Gorasa Varga (milk and milk products)
4. Shaka Varga (vegetables) 10. Ikshu Vikara (sugar cane and related products)
5. Phala Varga (fruits) 11. Kritanna Varga (cooked products)

7. **Measures of Ahara (diet)**

In addition to these above qualities, Ayurveda lays equal stress over the amount of food which one should take every day. According to Charaka one must eat in measure and the measure of food is determined by the power of digestion and his strength.\[^{[10]}\] He has further stated that ‘A proper measure of food, when taken is digested in the time without impairing
one’s health’.\textsuperscript{[11]} Measured diet does not impair one’s health; it positively promotes strength, complexion, health and life. He also stated that one third of the stomach should be filled with solid food, one third with liquids and one third should be left empty for Vata, pitta and kapha.\textsuperscript{[12]} Considering the property of food, intake of heavy one (Guru ahara) is advised as one third or half of the saturation point and not excessive saturation even in case of light food (Laghu ahara) in order to maintain the proper Agni.\textsuperscript{[13]} On the other hand our Acharya have clearly stated that a diet should be of such quality which not only helps to maintain present well being but serves as a prophylactic against upcoming diseases.\textsuperscript{[14]}

8. Well balanced diet

In Ayurveda, it is mentioned that any food can have its maximum effect if all the five Bhutas (elements) are present in proportionate quantity. A proper balanced diet corrects imbalances by pacifying the excessive Doshas and strengthening the weak ones. Ayurveda recommends that all six Rasas should be in every diet to enhance the Bala. These six Rasas directly influence the Tridosha and also influence the nutrition and transformation of bodily tissues (Dhatu). The most important is that the food should not only be nutritious from physical point of view but it should be such that it develops the intellectual and spiritual aspects of human.

9. Ashta ahara vidhi visheshayatana

According to Acharya Charaka, the eight factors which determine the utility of the various types of food are\textsuperscript{[15]}:

i) Prakruti - It indicates the nature of substances i.e. inherent attributes (heaviness etc.) of diets and drugs, such as Masha (black gram) is heavy and Mudga is light.

ii) Karan (Processing of Food) - Processing results in the transformation of attributes. Transformation of the attributes is effected by dilution, application of heat, cleansing, churning, storing, maturing, flavoring, impregnation, preservation, container etc.

iii) Samyoga - It is the combination of two or more substances. This results is the manifestation of specific attributes which cannot be manifested by individual substances e.g. combination of honey and Ghee etc.

iv) Rashi - Rashi is the quantum of total (Sarvagraha) or individual (Parigraha) substances which determines the results of their administration in proper and improper dosage. The quantity of food in its entirety is “Sarvagraha” and the quantity of each of its ingredients is “Parigraha”.
Singh et al. 

v) **Desha** - Desha relates to the habitat. It determines attributes due to procreation (growth) or movement of substances in particular locality or their acclimatization to that region.

vi) **Kala** - Kala stands for both the time in the form of day and night and states of individual (viz. condition of health and age). The latter is relevant to the diseases e.g. manifestation of diseases due to *Kapha* during childhood and fever etc. due to dietetics error, whereas the former for the determination of the wholesome to different types of seasons.

vii) **Upayogasamstha** - Upayogasamstha stands for dietetic rules. They are for the most part dependent on the symptoms of digestion.

viii) **Upayokta** - Upayokta is that who take food. He is in the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of thing.

10. **Dvadasha ashana pravicharana**

Acharya Sushruta has mentioned twelve dietary considerations. These are *Shita, ushna, snigdha, ruksha, shushka, drava*, single diet a day, twice daily, *Aushadhi yukta ahara, matraheena, prashamanakaraka* and *Vrittiprayojaka ahara*. In this way he stated that which type of *Ahara* is suitable for which individual.\textsuperscript{16}

**Shita ahara** - Foods with cold potency and in cold condition are recommended in conditions like, *Trishna* (excessive thirst), *Mada, Ushna* (excessive heat), *Daha* (burning sensation), *Raktapitta* (bleeding disorders), *Visha* (poisoned), *Murcha* (unconsciousness) and *Vyavaya upahata* (emaciated due to excessive copulation). Such foods are *Shaali* (rice), *Yava* (barley), *Mudga* (green gram), *Ksheera* (milk), *Dhanyaka* (coriander), *Dadima* (pomogranate), *Amalaki* (Indian gooseberry) and *Sharkara* (sugar).

**Ushna ahara** - Foods with hot potency and serving hot are recommended in conditions like, *Kapha- Vataamaya* (diseases predominant of *Kapha* and *Vata dosha*), *Viriktaan* (after purgation therapy), *Snehapayi* (after *Snehapana*/oleation therapy), *Aklinna kaaya* (less *kapha* and *Dravaroopi pitta* predominant condition). Such foods are *Kulattha* (horse gram), *Shunti* (ginger), *Haridra* (turmeric), *Jeeraka* (cumin seeds), *Hingu* (hing/Asafetida).

**Snigdha ahara** - Foods which are unctuous are recommended in conditions like, *Vatika* (body constitution predominant of *vata* /condition predominant of *vata dosha*), *Ruksha deha* (dryness of body), *Vyavaya upahata* (emaciated due to excessive copulation), *Vyayamina* (one who performs regular physical activity). Such foods are *Ksheera* (milk), *Grita* (ghee), *Mamsa* (meat).
**Ruksha ahara** - Foods which are dry in nature are recommended in conditions like, *Medasaabhipareeta* (covered with excessive fat), *Snigdha* (excessive unctuousness), *Meha* (Diabetes mellitus with obesity), *Kaphaabhipanna* (excessive kapha). Such foods are, *Yava* (barley), *Godhuma* (wheat), *Kudhanya* (millets), *Madhu* (honey).

**Drava ahara** - Liquid foods are recommended in conditions like, *Shushka deha* (dehydrated), *Pipasarta* (excessive thirst) and in *Durbala* (weakness due to dehydration).

**Shushka ahara** - Foods which are dry (devoid of liquid/moisture) are recommended in, *Praklinna kaya* (*dravaroopi pitta* and *kaphayukta sharira*), *Vrani* (*Dushtavrana* – ulcers) and *Shushka mehi* (Diabetes mellitus with emaciation).

**Ekakalika ahara** - One meal a day is recommended in *Durbalagni* (very less digestive capacity). This is to facilitate easy digestion and to kindle the digestive fire slowly.

**Dwikalika ahara** - Two meals a day is recommended in *Samagni* (optimum digestive capacity) nothing but in healthy individuals.

**Aoushadhayukta ahara** - Foods prepared or added with medicines are recommended in persons who are averted to take medicines.

**Matraheena ahara** - Less quantity of food is recommended in *Mandagni* (week digestive capacity) and in *Rogi* (suffering with diseases).

**Doshaprashamana ahara** - There is change in state of *Tridoshas* according to change in seasons as *Chaya* (abnormal increase), *Prakopa* (aggravation) and *Prashama* (subside) of *Tridosha*. To avoid the ill effects from this abnormal state of *Doshas* and to bring them back to normalcy, specific diet has to be prescribed in specific seasons; this is called *Doshaprashamana ahara*.

**Vrityartha ahara** - This is recommended for *Sharira dharanartha* (maintaining the health of individual). This includes *Ahara* with *Shadrasa* (*Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta* and *Kashaya*) and consumed as per one’s *Prakruti, Agni, Satmya* and *Asatmya*.

11. **Ahara vidhi vidhana**<sup>17</sup>

**Ushnam asniyata** - One should take warm food. If one’s taking hot food, feel of proper taste, Stimulate the *Agni* (digestive power), *Vata Anulomana* and reduction of *Kapha* are achieved.
**Snigdham asniyata** - The Snigdha Ahara causes feel of proper taste, Agnidepana, facilitate early digestion, Vata anulomna and it makes the body plump, strengthens the sense organs, increases in the brightens the complexion.

**Matravat asniyata** - It means eat in 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.

**Jirne asniyata** - One should take food only when previous meal is digested. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, the digestive product of the previous food gets mixed up with the product of food taken afterwards, resulting in the provocation of all the Dosha instantaneously.

**Viryaavirudham asniyata** - One should take food having no contradictory potencies. By taking such food one does not get afflicted with such diseases as may arise from the intake of food having mutually contradictory potencies.

**Istedese, Istasarvopkaranam asniyata** - One should take food in proper place equipped with all the accessories. By doing so he does not get afflicted with such of the factors as would result in emotional strain which (normally) occurs when one takes his food in improper places without the required accessories.

**Naatidrutam asniyata** - One should not take food too hurriedly; if food is taken too hurriedly it enters into a wrong passage; it gets depressed and it does not enter into the stomach properly. In this situation one can never determine the taste of food articles and detect foreign bodies like hair etc., mixed with them.

**Naativilambitam asniyata** - One should not take food very slowly because this will not give satisfaction to the individual. In this situation he would take more than what is required; the food would become cold and there will be irregularity indigestion.

**Ajalpan, Ahasan, Tanmanabhunjita** - One should not talk or laugh or be unmindful while taking food. One who taking food while talking, laughing or with detracted mind subjects him to the same trouble as the one eating too hurriedly.
**Atmanamabhisamiksya** - One should take food in a prescribed manner; with due regard to his own self.

12. **Daily regimen Ahara**

According to Acharya Charaka one should regularly take Shashtika rice, Shali rice, Mudga, Saindhava Lavana, Amalaki, Yava, rain water collected before falling on the ground, Milk, Ghee, Jangala Mamsa (meat of animals dwelling in arid climate) and honey.\[^{18}\] A scientific analysis of this above said ingredient of food stuff rightly justifies the entire requirements of the body in a better way than the modern prescription. The Shashtika and Shali varieties are examples of the carbohydrate food. Rakta Shali (red rice) which is classed as glutinous rice is specially recommended. The green gram (Mudga), which represents the protein content of food, is considered the best of all pulses. Masha (black gram) which is known to be more nutritious, was not preferred, because it was comparatively too hard to digest. Though both are rich in protein, light and digestible protein has been preferred to a heavy one. Amalaki represents the vitamin content of a balanced diet in addition to milk and vegetable. Yava (barley) again represent the carbohydrates and it is easily digested and is a diuretic.

13. **Daily Contraindicated Ahara**

Acharya Charaka says that one should not regularly take heavy articles such as Vallura (dried meat), dry vegetables, lotus rhizomes, lotus stalk. One should never take the meat of a diseased animal.\[^{19}\] Moreover one should not regularly take Kurchika (boiled butter milk), Kilata (inspissated milk), meat of pig, cow and buffalo, fish, curd, Masha, Yavaka.\[^{20}\]

14. **Seasonal consideration of diet**

In Ayurveda the whole year is divided into six seasons. According to each season different dietetic regimen is prescribed.

**Hemanta Ritu:** In this *Ritu* the power of digestion and metabolism are proportionate in a healthy individual. During the winter one should take unctuous, sour and salt juices of the meat of the aquatic and marshy animals which are fatty. One should also eat the meat of burrow-dwelling animals. Thereafter, one should drink Madira, Sidhu and honey. Intakes preparation of cow’s milk, cane juice, fat, oil, new rice and hot water during the winter is good for health.\[^{21}\]
**Shishira Ritu:** The Hemanta and Shishira seasons are almost analogous in nature. So the entire prescription for Hemanta is to be followed in the Shishira. Especially during this season, one should stay in a windless warm home and avoid taking such of the diets possessed of Katu, Tikta and Kashaya Rasa.[22]

**Vasant Ritu:** In this Ritu the accumulated Kapha is liquefied by the heat of the sun. Due to this reason there is disturbance of digestive capacity and it can cause many diseases. So, one should manage elimination therapies of Panchkarma to eliminate the vitiated Dosha.[23] One should avoid taking Guru, amla, snigdha ahara. One should take food consisting of Yava and wheat, meat of Sarabha, Shasha, Ena, Lava and Kapinjala. One should drink Sidhu and Mrdvika.[24]

**Grisma Ritu:** In this Ritu, the moisture of the earth is absorbed by sun. In this Ritu, one should have intake of sweet, cold liquid diets and drinks, cold Mantha along with sugar, meat of the animals or birds of Jaangal climate, ghee and milk along with Shali rice.[25] One should either drink alcohol in little quantity or should not drink at all and even if one drinks, it should be taken along with plenty of water. One should avoid taking diets which are salty, sour, pungent or hot. Physical exercise is also included during this season.[26]

**Varsha Ritu:** In this Ritu the body and digestion power is weakened, increase of acidity in water. One should generally use honey in all diets and drinks. One should take diets which are noticeably sour, salty and unctuous. In order to maintain normal power of digestion one should take old barley, wheat and Shali rice, along with the meat of arid animals and vegetable soup. Moreover, one should drink the Madhvika or Arista, pure rain water or water from the well or pond- boiled and cooled, mixed with little honey. Even though by nature, honey is responsible for the vitiation of Vata, its intake in small quantity is prescribed to overcome Kleda in the rainy season.[27]

**Sharada Ritu:** In this Ritu, sweet, bitter, light and cold foods and drinks which have ability to subside Pitta are to be taken in proper quantity. Furthermore, the meat of Lava, Kapinjala, Ena, Urabhra, Sarabha, and Shasha, rice, barley, wheat, intake of ghee prepared with bitter medicines and purgation should be done during this season.[28] One should avoid taking fat, oil and meat of aquatic and marshy animals and curd in food. Use Hamsodaka for the purpose of bathing, drinking and swimming. It is a type of water which is heated by the sun.
during the day time and cooled by rays of the moon during night. It is also purified and detoxified by Agastya star.[29]

15. Diet for different Prakruti
Ayurveda provides unique classification of human being based on psychosomatic constitution i.e. Prakruti of individuals according to the variation of Tridoshas. They are of 7 type viz., Vata predominant Prakruti, Pitta predominant Prakruti, Kapha predominant Prakruti, Vata-pitta prakruti, Vata-kapha prakruti, Pitta-kapha prakruti and Sama prakruti. Ayurveda gives importance to Prakruti or body constitution in concern of food intake. In this world each person is a unique being of unique heredity, unique environment, unique biochemical structure and unique mental status. For this reason all the food items can’t be valuable with all the individuals to the same extent. Every individual should take a diet suitable to his predominant constitutional Doshas to balance them.

16. Viruddhahara (Dietetic incompatibility)
The diet which excites the Doshas but does not eliminate it out of the body, becomes harmful is mentioned as Viruddhahara.[30] These are responsible for various disorders in human beings. Acharya Charaka described 18 factors responsible for this dietetic incompatibility. These factors are Desha, kala, agni, matra, satmya, dosha, samskara, virya, koshtha, awastha, karma, parihar, upchara, paka, sanyoga, hridya, sampad and vidhi.[31]

17. Some other principles
Acharya Sushruta described the method of serving in Sutra sthana. Apart from elemental constitution of food various dietary rules and other factors like Matra, kala, kriya, bhumi, deha, desha etc. also play a significant role in the acceptability of wholesome diet. At the outset, one should take sweet, in the middle sour and salty and afterwards the remaining Rasas in the food should be taken.[32] In the beginning one should eat fruits, than liquids thereafter various soft and hard edibles.[33] One should not take food before or after the appropriate time or in quantity less or more. Taking food after time, the food is digested with difficulty and produces loss of appetite.

CONCLUSION
Healthy citizens are the roots for development of any nation. So we have to improve the health of every people. The wellbeing of the individual chiefly depends upon the kind of food he consumes. The maximum benefits of Ahara (food) can be achieved only by following the
healthy dietary guidelines mentioned in classics of Ayurveda whereas wrong dietary pattern can be hazardous to health. Ayurvedic dietetics does not deal only with the precise dietary contents of food - carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals etc, but it also takes into account the food we take in and the manner in which we take it, nature of food, Agnibala, mode of preparation, place and environment etc. The fundamental principles like Tridosha, Prakruti, the tastes, processing of food, the quality, quantity, and the rules regarding eating food if considered while incorporating the diet, one can keep away from many diseases of body and mind. It is said in Vaidyajeevanam that there is no need of medication if the person is on proper diet.

REFERENCES


