

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'ASTAHARAVIDHIVISHESHAYATANA' IN THE UTILISATION OF DIET FROM AYURVEDA POINT OF VIEW

Viramgami Jasminkumar<sup>1</sup>, Trivedi Bharvi<sup>2</sup>, Mer Raksha<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>HOD & Assistant Prof., Dept. of Swasthavritta and Yoga, <sup>2</sup>HOD & Associate Prof., Dept. of Kaurmarabhritya, <sup>3</sup>Assistant Prof., Dept. of Kayachikitsa;  
Sheth J. P. Govt. Ayurved College, Bhavnagar, Gujarat, India

Email: [drjmv@gmail.com](mailto:drjmv@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Food is essential for living a healthy life. The Importance of food is not only limited to maintenance of health, but also in the management of various health conditions. Dietary factors play significant role in the pathogenesis of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. In the global campaign of Health for All, promotion of proper nutrition and diet is one of the eight elements of primary health care. In the modern times, the ways in which the food is prepared and utilized have changed drastically. *Ayurveda* provides set of rules for preparation and intake of food. To evaluate this ancient guideline of dietetics, this study was undertaken. In this paper, Core of our work is a review about the 'special considerations for the utilisation of food articles and diet' with special reference to "*Asta-aharavidhi visheshayatana*". This novel emerging areas of research may unfold future possibilities toward smart yet safe preventive and therapeutic possibilities of diet.

**Keywords:** Ahara, Aharavidhi visheshayatana, Ayurveda, Balanced diet, dietetics, dietetic rules

### INTRODUCTION

Medicine, as practiced today, has begun to be questioned and criticized. With increasing treatment costs, it has not increased benefits in terms of health. Even after continuously increasing expenses, the good health in term of WHO definition is far away from the reach.<sup>1</sup> Today, due to consumption of un-

wholesome diet, like Junk foods, communities are facing many serious health problems. The effects are both direct and indirect.<sup>2</sup> The direct effects are the occurrence of various nutritional and infectious diseases. The indirect effects are a high morbidity and mortality, retarded growth and development, lowered vital-

ity, lowered productivity and reduced life expectancy.

Prevention of a disease is always considered better than cure in our society. In modern science this preventive and promotive aspects is served by food, nutrition, behaviour change, education, community participation etc. Among these food/diet plays a central and significant role. Significant improvement in longevity can be achieved through improved food supplies. The suitable diet for a community is one that is cheap, conforms to people's habits and customs; and provides a balanced intake of nutrients. A mixed diet consisting of foodstuffs from different food groups is likely to be adequate in these needs. Focus on the dietetics is like a personalised healthcare if we follow the diet restructuring from the health aspect.

*Ayurveda* is an ancient science of life, which is evolved around the concept of preventive and personalized medicine. The chief purpose of *Ayurveda* is to maintain the health of a person.<sup>3,4</sup> *Ahara* (diet) plays important role to achieve this purpose. In *Ayurveda*, *ahara* is placed first among *Trayopastambha*<sup>5</sup> because of its great importance. This food has been said as *Mahabhaishajya*<sup>6</sup> (Chief medicine) by *Kashyapa*. In *Taittiriya upanishada*, *Ahara* has been considered as *Brahma* (the creator of universe) because every animate is dependent on it for survival. *Bhagwad Gita* acknowledged diet as a source for the creation of life (Bhag.G.-3/14). As per *Yoga*, the journey of our life starts with *annamaya kosa* (sheath of food or gross body) and transcends to reach *anandmaya Kosa*. Wholesome *ahara* maintains the balance of *doshas* (biological

humors) and *dhatu*s (body components) by promoting health and disease avoidance.<sup>7</sup>

In medical science, the diet is chiefly concerned with the nutritional requirements. But *ayurvedic* understanding of *ahara* (diet) is quite different from that of the Western concept. *Ayurveda* usually refers to the knowledge of appropriate diet. *Ayurveda* says that almost all the diseases arise from improper and inadequate metabolism and leads to weak and imbalanced functioning.<sup>8</sup> *Ayurvedic* dietetics not only deals with the detailed nutritional aspects of food, but also considers our food intake and manner of eating, *agni-bala* (digestive capacity), the process of cooking, time, habitat and settings, etc. The outcomes favour not only better health and food habits, but also a well balanced diet. *Ayurveda* sees the role of diet as one of the key factors towards holistic health. Diet which is conducive to health, if taken according to rules; provides fuel to digestive fire, promotes mental and physical strength, complexion and is pleasing to the senses.

Dietary consideration in terms of wholesome and unwholesome food is an important component of *ayurvedic* dietetics. It is an emerging field spreading through *Ayurveda*, where the selection of a suitable dietary regime is made on the basis of an individual. Our scriptures recommend '*Yuktahara*' not only balanced diet, but also an appropriate diet. Traditional concept of *ahara* and *pathya* (wholesome) is an integration of nutritional practices of *Ayurveda* for an individual's personalized dietetics. Sometimes, dietary management itself is a treatment. It is also said that in both the conditions, viz. health and disease, the wholesomeness and the unwhole-

someness is a prime factor to be thought, because without proper diet, the use of any drug is futile.<sup>9</sup>

In order to attain the positive qualities from the food and bring our mental dispositions closer to nature, eating is considered a sacred act. Any sacred act will have codes of conduct. *Ayurveda* also provides set of rules for preparation and intake of food. These can be considered in the utilisation of food articles we consume. Among these rules, important are *Ahara varga*, *Aharavidhi vidhana*, *Asta aharavidhi visheshayatana* and *Dwadasha ashana vicharana*.

This is the right time to give keen observation on the proper planning of a person's diet to maintain good health. Though it is a vast science, a small effort is made here with the focus on *Asta aharavidhi visheshayatana* a major head of this subject here.

## DISCUSSION

According to *Chakrapani*, *ahara* means that which is ingested and thus it includes both diet and drugs.<sup>10</sup> Therefore drugs are also included in *ahara* and *ahara* can also act as a medicine. '*Asta aharavidhi visheshayatana*' means 'factors for wholesomeness (or otherwise) of the type or method of food'.<sup>11</sup> The word '*vishesa*' implies especial circumstances. The word '*ayatana*' as explained by *Chakrapani*, means '*hetu*' or reasons. Hence, 'determinant factors' would be better. '*aharavidhi*' stands for 'rules of food consumption'. So, these are the eight determinant factors that plan the utility of food according to the special circumstances.

The food articles which are wholesome in normal circumstances may prove unwhole-

some to a person in relation to his constitution, age, processing method, health condition and season etc. *Aharavidhi visheshayatana* considers about such situations and helps in planning a wholesome and appropriate diet. These factors decide whether any specific food article will be wholesome or not to the consumer in certain circumstances. So they are very important in the utilisation of food articles and planning a diet as per *ayurveda*.

The eight factors are- *Prakriti*, *Karana*, *Samyoga*, *Rasi*, *Desa*, *Kala*, *Upayogasamstha* and *Upayoktr*.<sup>12</sup> Each of them is explained below. The English equivalents given express their senses approximately. They are not to be taken as exact renderings.

1. ***Prakriti*** (inherent nature) denotes the constitutional properties inheriting in a food article. This is the coherence of inherent properties like heaviness, lightness etc. existing in diet and drugs. Having a diet similar in natural qualities to ones *prakriti* will aggravate the *dosha* and result in imbalances within the body. E.g. eating sweet, moist and heavy foods will aggravate *kapha dosha*. A physician/dietician should consider *prakriti* of both- the individual and food article; before planning a diet. Opposite nature of diet and individual will be more helpful in balancing *dosha-dushya*.
2. ***Karana*** (processing methods) is method of transmutation or improvement of constitutional inherent qualities of the article. The superimposition of other attributes is said to be transmutation ('*gunantaradhana*') or improvement ('*gunadhana*').<sup>12</sup> Processing can replace only the non-inherent properties. Thus, the change in the properties can

be effected in two ways (a) by change in the substance itself, or (b) by replacing the non-inherent properties by other stronger ones. This is done with the help of *karana* (processing methods). This transformation is possible by *toya* (water), *agnisannikarsa* (by means of fire or heat), *saucha* (purification), *manthana* (churning), *desa* (place), *kala* (time), *vasana* (infusion), *bhavana* (saturation), *kalaprakarsa* (seasonal influence), *bhajana* (container), etc.<sup>12</sup>

An example is cited boiled rice. Raw rice is naturally heavy. By proper soaking and boiling, it becomes light and easy to digest; but when cooked in milk, becomes heavy. By churning, curd becomes light, which is naturally heavy. Place is the storing of an article to increase its potency as of *asava* & *arista*. As an example of *kala* (time), one year old rice becomes light to digest which is useful to low digestive power person or in *kleda* dominant obese person.

'*Vasana*' means the act of adding fragrant to a food article by admixture with some agreeable aromatic object. Such aromas act on sensory level and can increase the secretion of digestive enzymes and also make the diet adorable. Examples are use of spices and condiments; use of water infused with fragrant flowers or sandal for alleviation of pitta. '*Bhavana*' means the submersion of an article with its own juice, or of other substances having the equal property. The potency of a substance is increased by the submersion. *Amalaki* fruits are saturated in the juice of *amalaki* for better potency. The container (*bhajana*) used for cooking or storage, makes difference in

properties. Vessels also enhance some qualities. Food prepared in iron vessel fortifies the iron contents. Certain things are kept in earthen pots and jars. Non stick vessels containing Teflon coating generates toxic fumes in foods which can be carcinogen. Plastic storage containers interact with food substances which also harms body.

Cooking processes transform the nature of the food substances. Different kind of heat application like; boiling, roasting, simmering, frying, baking etc. effects differently on food articles. The quantity of the heat may enhance or destroy some characteristics in the food. So a suitable cooking method should be adopted. Undercooked and overcooked food affects digestion and produces *ma* (toxins). Heating food again kills nutrients. Studies have determined that some vitamins (A and C) are lost in high temperature cooking. Water soluble vitamins (1/3<sup>rd</sup> of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, 50% of vitamin C, 20% of mineral content and ½ of folic acid) are lost in soaking and boiling. Frying and baking destroys some vitamins (up to 50% of vitamin E). Frying produces free radicals, which increases the risk of cancer, heart disease and other degenerative diseases.

3. **Samyoga** (combination) is the union of two or more articles. It manifests a peculiar attribute, which cannot be manifested by the individual substances. The end product may be conducive or may be incompatible to user forming a chemistry of toxins. When food articles having incompatible characteristics (*rasa*-taste, *virya*-potency and *vip ka*-post digestive effect) are mixed, leads to notorious effects.

As cited in the example of honey and ghee; both are wholesome but if united together in equal portion, the combination acts as poison, producing adverse reactions. The concept of *viruddha ahara*<sup>14</sup> is an example of incompatible effects of *samyoga*, which may produce various acute and chronic diseases. At the time of planning a diet, this kind of *samyoga* (combinations and compatibility) should be kept in mind and food articles must be selected accordingly. The knowledge of compatible and incompatible combinations is essential for good health.

The combined articles change the nature of the total dish. For example, combination of *chaval* and *dal* provides both carbohydrates and protein in balanced quantity which they individually cannot provide. So combination should be considered when planning a diet. Do not mix hot and cold foods in the same meal, neither fresh food with leftovers. The *Ayurvedic* dietician should also assess the power of digestive fire, age etc. and recommend what may or may not be good for the individual.

4. **Rasi** is the measure (of food) in the aggregate and severally. In quantity of food, 'total quantity' as well as 'individual quantity of each item' is considered. The former is known as *Sarvagraha* (*sarvasya grahah*), and the later as *Parigraha* (*sarvatah grahah*).<sup>12</sup> Quantity of intake should be laid down by the physician, if he is to be of real service to men.

**Sarvagraha Rashi** depends upon the whole meal, like *dala*, rice and *roti* etc. combined. It depends upon person's intake

capacity and hunger. Quantity also depends upon *agni-bala* (digestion power), *desa*, *vaya* (age), *prakriti* etc. of a person. In modern science, *Sarvagraha* can be considered as total RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) of a person which can be different according to age, sex, type of work, health status etc. It shows the total energy requirement.

**Parigraha** is important from the concept of 'balanced diet' because each attribute is considered separately; such as carbohydrate, protein etc. as per their requirement to the body. Inappropriate amount of nutrients may cause nutritional problems. As per *Ayurveda*, heavy food should be eaten less and light food upto satisfaction.<sup>16</sup>

Quantity is also decided according to *Abhyavaharana* and *Jarana shakti*. *Abhyavaharana shakti* (total intake capacity) differs from person to person and time to time; and also according to moods and mental health. *Jarana shakti* is the mirror of digestive capacity which mostly depends upon the nature of food articles (*guru*, *laghu* etc) and status of *agni*. Even if a person's digestive capacity is very good, the quantity of food should be limited to 2/3rd of his stomach as per *trividkukshiya*.<sup>17</sup> A wholesome and sufficient diet must yield the required calories and provide all nutrients in satisfactory quantity to maintain health and proper. The modern dietetic science emphasizes more on *parigraha* aspect of *matra*; whereas, *ayurveda* gives equal importance to both.

5. **Desa** means Habitat. Habitat includes the place of origin, range and acclimatization

of both the food articles and the consumer. It is common to a larger mass of people but its effect on an individual will differ regarding the diet taken in accordance to *desa*. Modern science also says that the study of disease is really the study of man and his environment. Hundreds of people are affected by preventable diseases originate in the environment in which they live. *Desa* and *Kala* are said to be unavoidable causes for any individual in relation with *Ahara*.<sup>18</sup>

*Bhumi desa* is a region where the food articles or consumers are grown or where they are feed. They contain special properties according to their *desa*. The dietary pattern of an individual is in harmony of this particular *desa* also. Food articles belonging to person's own *desa* (terrain) are more wholesome to him. He will be more accustomed to those food articles.

The aspect of Human host is well defined in *ayurveda* when *acharyas* said about 'Vyadhita *desa* *pariksha*'.<sup>19</sup> The examination of a person should be done not only before treatment but also before taking the food. Hence one should always take *ahara* according to *bhumi desa* as well as *atura desa*. The same diet which was conducive to a healthy person may become unwholesome in diseased condition.

Another aspect is '*Desasatmya*' (acclimatization)<sup>12</sup> which means use of food articles which are contrary to the nature of that place; such as hot, rough etc. in marshy place; cold and unctuous in arid zone etc. One can be accustomed to the climatic condition of different localities by adopting things of opposite properties. Such articles

will help to maintain homeostasis (*doshadushya samya*) of an individual and preserve health status.

6. **Kala** (Time) is defined as *Nityaga* (that which pass continuously) and *Avasthika* (that which is conditional and depends upon changes in the physical organism).

**Nityaga kala** is concerned to the suitability (or otherwise) of season. *Nityaga kala* consists of days, seasons and years. It is well-known that certain kinds of food and drink are beneficial or baneful in certain seasons. Utilization of diet and food articles according to the season helps in maintaining the balance of *dosha*, and thus health. So the selection of food articles should be as per the seasonal influences (*nityaga kala*). E.g. cold food intake in *pitta dosha/ prakriti*, and in summer; dry and light diet in spring.

**Avasthika kala** is conditional to an individual's physical changes, such as Infancy, youth, old age, or disease and health. Food and drink should be utilized accordingly. A wholesome food can also become unwholesome as per the *avasthik kala* (individual's physical conditions). Milk which is wholesome to everyone in all ages, become contra indicated in new fever (*taruna jvara*). So an individual's present condition (*avastha*) must be observed before planning diet for him.

**Prapta kala**<sup>21</sup> is considered best time for taking food. If person is unable to take his food in that time, various types of *ajirna* (indigestions) may occur. The increased pace of life, changes in life style, competition mania etc. are the basic cause behind it. A health seeking individual must

take his diet as per the time he feels hungry (*prapta kala*) for proper assimilation of diet. Taking food in dawn and dusk has been prescribed in the traditional law.

*Kala* is the constant factor which is also the cause for *parinamana* (maturation). The impact of time is on each and every state of food articles as well as on all the stages of food consumption. Aging of food (maturity) will alter its properties and changes *rasa* (taste), *virya* (potency) and *vip ka* (post-digestive effect) of the food. Honey becomes more dry and hot when aged. Utilisation of old honey will be more beneficial in obesity. One year old rice will be easy to digest and beneficial to obese, diabetic person. So the *parinaman kala* (maturity) should also be considered in diet planning. Also Heavy food (foods rich in fat, protein) takes more time to digest (*parinama kala*), so they should be taken in less quantity and the next meal should be planned accordingly.

7. **Upayoga samstha** refers to, as dietetic rules which depend on the power of digestion (*jirna lakshan*).<sup>22</sup> Food has to be taken for sustaining the body. But then it cannot be taken at any time and every time. Intake of food after indigestion causing diseases of the duodenum and small intestine (elementary canal).<sup>23</sup> There are conditions or rules in respect of taking meals (*aharavidhidhan*).<sup>24</sup> These rules must be followed while eating a conducive diet otherwise a wholesome meal will become unwholesome.
8. **Upayoktr** is he who consumes food, upon whom depends the suitability (*satmya*) of diet. He is responsible for the homologation by the habitual intake (*ok-satmya*). The

last especial consideration is the person himself who takes the diet. All the diet planning is made keeping the consumer in the center. The planning changes with consumer or with every change in his condition. An individual may be one who is accustomed to heavy food, or one who has always abstained from such foods. He may be one that eats much at a time and frequently; or, he may eat sparingly and at long intervals. The kind of food and its quality, therefore, should be according to the habits (*prakriti*) of consumer.

By habit, individual can even make unwholesome food suitable to him. This is called '*ok-satmya*'. It is the process of making anything adaptable by habitual intake. Even if a food habit is considered harmful, he may become adjusted to, by regular consumption. Food, to which one is habituate over a long time, is also considered wholesome for him, since the body has adapted. One should take food with due regard for own self. The knowledge of the usefulness or otherwise of the food articles is the main thing for self-preservation. A person consuming diet comprising six types of tastes, they become strong, capable of enduring afflictions and long lived.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, as per modern science, a person taking balanced diet containing all nutrients in recommended range, achieves best health and immunity. So, this *satmya* (conduciveness) and *ok-satmya* (adaptability) should be considered when diet is planned to maintain health.

These are the eight especial considerations bearing upon the utilisation of food and

their exceptions. These factors are associated specifically with useful and harmful effects of food articles on the health and they are conditioned by one another. After knowing these factors, one should desire only for wholesome things. Due to infatuation or carelessness, one should not be inclined to such food articles which are instantaneously pleasing, but are unwholesome and bringing about sorrowful consequence in long run.<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear that the importance of food is not only confined to maintenance of health, but also in the prevention of various health related conditions. Therefore, it is important to know about the guidelines related to utilisation of food, describe in *ayurveda*. This *ayurveda* inspired concept of personalized nutrition is a novel concept in the realm of research for developing personalized and suitable diet to one's genetic makeup. It may help to develop a better understanding toward *ayurvedic* principles on nutrition and in the way forward for research. This review introduces and presents an emerging area of research, which may unfold future possibilities toward smart and helpful dietetics. Even though this is a vast subject and cannot be produced within this restricted work completely, we have tried in a best way to express the subject in present work and future reviews are recommended.

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