



AAHARA: THE (SIDE-TRACKED) IMMUNITY BOOSTER, A REVIEW

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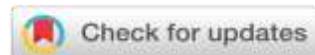
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ABSTRACT

When the question-mark pops-up in mind about what should be done to enhance immunity, all that one could recollect or think about is nothing but various medicinal sources like nutritional supplements, various medicated decoction, physical exercises, inculcation of various *Rasayanas* (rejuvenation therapy) like *Chyavanpraash*, etc. in their diet. But none of us reminds of the most natural and regularly consumed food as the small packets of immunity booster doses taken on an everyday basis at regular intervals. Through this article, efforts have been made to let everyone be aware of HOW, WHEN, WHAT, and WHERE should one consume a proper diet having nutritious food, rich in all its components like vitamins, minerals, etc. required to support optimal function of an immune system according to the rules mentioned in ancient medicine.

Keywords: *Aahara, Vyadhikshamatva, Immunity Trayopstambha, Mahabhaishjya*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda describes various classifications of diseases and one of which among classifications is accord-

ing to the nature of causative factor i.e. *Nija* (endogenous) and *Agantuja* (exogenous).^[1] When the exoge-

nous factors come into contact with the body through various communicable means, they try to invade the body and produce disease, to which our body tries to resist the disease. This defensive power of the body which prevents the development of disease or resisting the already developed disease is called *Vyadhikshamatva* (immunity) in Ayurveda.^[2] The term *Vyadhikshamatva* is formed by two words i.e., ‘*Vyadhi*’ and ‘*Kshamatva*’, where ‘*Vyadhi*’ means ‘disease’ and ‘*Kshamatva*’ means ‘*Resistance*’. Thus, it can be defined as the capacity of the body to resist the disease. *Acharya Chakradatta* describes immunity in two terms: *Vyadhi bala Virodhitvam*- the strength of the body to fight against the manifested diseases. *Vyadhi utpadaka Pratibandhakatvam*- prevention of the diseases to be yet manifested.^[3]

Immunity mostly depends on *Bala* (strength) that opposes the disordered state of *Doshas* (bio-energies).^[4] The maintenance of health depends entirely upon *Bala* (strength) and its attainable from three sources:^[5]

- i. *Sahaja bala* (innate immunity)^[5]- this is the natural capacity to fight against disease and its entirely inherited from the qualities of ancestors.^[6]
- ii. *Kalaja bala* (adaptive immunity)^[5]- it is acquired according to the favourable time of day, one's age, and season.^[7]
- iii. *Yuktija bala* (passive immunity)^[5]- this is acquired by means of a nutritious diet, *Rasayana* (rejuvenation therapy), and regular exercise.^[5]

Immunity is a slow and gradual process, and it can't be built in a day. Practicing a healthy lifestyle daily is very crucial for building immunity. Ayurveda describes *Trayopstambha* (three sub-pillars of health/triads of health) and they are *Aahara* (food/diet), *Nidra* (sleep), *Brahamacarya* (abstinence).^[8] When the body is supported by these *Trayopstambha* (triads of health), it is endowed with strength, complexion, growth, and a full span of life provided a person does not indulge in *ahita* (wrong activity) and maintains rules prescribed for that.^[8] These three sub-pillars are the major contributors to both mortality and morbidity of various diseases and a number of health issues with their consequences

globally. Of these triads of health *Aahara* (food) is the first and foremost sub-pillar and thus proper eating habits come into consideration.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, *aahara* is considered as *Mahabhaishjya* (*maha*-superior, *bhaishjya*-medicine).^[9] That means a healthy diet can be the most powerful medicine for providing adequate nutrition and nourishment for the body and mind.

➤ Rules of Eating:^[10]

One should always indulge in the following habits while eating and should always consume:

1. Warm food- Stimulates *Agni* (digestive fire), digests quickly, carminates flatus, reduces mucus.
2. Unctuous food- It tastes good, stimulates the unstimulated *Agni*, gets digested quickly, carminates flatus, develops the body, provides firmness to sense organs, increases strength, produces clarity of complexion,
3. In Proper Quantity- Without disturbing *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*, i.e., bio-energies of the body, it promotes life span, easily passes down to the anus, doesn't disturb *Agni* (digestive fire), gets digested without discomfort.
4. When a previous meal is digested- *Doshas* (bio-energies) are situated in their own locations, *Agni* (digestive fire) is stimulated appetite has arisen, the entrance of the channels is open, eructation is pure, the heart is normal, flatus passes down and urges of flatus, urine, and feces are attended to, the eaten food promotes only the life-span without afflicting any *dhatu* (tissue). (On the contrary, when eating during indigestion, the newly eaten food mixes with the product of the previous meal and vitiates all the *doshas* quickly and can cause disease.)
5. Items non-antagonistic in potency: Avoid food items in which one is hot in potency (e.g., hot chocolate) and the other is cold (e.g., ice-cream). Such combinations should not be mixed and had at the same time. (e.g., lava brownie)

6. Eat in a favorable place, with favorable accessories: No mental/ emotional disturbance interrupts one while eating thus.
7. Not eating too fast- So that it does not lead to choking, it does not lead to a state of depression of mind, and food is established in its place properly i.e., stomach.
8. Not eating too slow- Eating too slowly, one doesn't get satisfaction, eats too much, food is cold and digested irregularly.
9. Should not talk/ laugh/ or concentrate on things other than food while eating- As it can also lead to the choking of food particles or expelling those through nostrils, etc.

➤ **The volume of food to be eaten:**^[11]

One should eat in such quantity that fills the stomach 1/3 with solid food, 1/3 with liquid food, and the rest 1/3 should be kept empty.

➤ **Eat according to the capacity of Agni/digestion:**^[12]

Whatever quantity gets digested in time without disturbing normalcy should be regarded as the proper measure.

➤ **Importance of food when taken in proper quantity:**

Food when taken in appropriate quantity there is no obstruction in the heart, no pain in sides/ flanks, no excessive heaviness in the abdomen, a saturation of sense organs, cessation of hunger and thirst, ease in every movement of the body like sitting, standing and lying, proper inspiration and expiration, easy digestion in evening and morning, promotion of strength, complexion, development.^[13]

It definitely provides strength, complexion, and happy life, without causing any health problems.^[14]

➤ **Avoiding taking incompatible foods:**

Food substances that are contrary to body tissues behave with antagonism to them. This antagonism may be due to properties of the substances themselves, combination, processing, place, time, dose, etc., or natural composition.^[15]

For e.g., One should not take fish with milk. A combination of both of them is *madhura rasa* (sweet taste); *madhura vipaka* (the result of digestion), "*Mah*

abhisyandi" (great obstructor for the channels), because milk has *sheeta virya* (cold potency) and fish has *ushna* (hot) *virya* (potency) the result is "*viruddha virya*" (antagonistic in terms of potency), due to conflicting virya; it vitiates blood and due to being *Mah abhisyandi*, creates obstruction in channels.^[16]

➤ **Importance of timely food consumption:**

- While explaining *akalabhojana* (timely food intake), it is said in ayurveda that the time of meal is as suited to the individual. However, generally, the second meal is taken after seven & half hours after the first meal & night meal three hours in the night.
- A person should take a meal only when he feels hungry.
- Lunch should be taken early between 12 noon and 1 p.m. This coincides with the peak *Pitta* period; *Pitta* is responsible for digestion.
- Ayurveda recommends that lunch should be the largest meal of the day and dinner should be lesser and lighter than lunch.

➤ **Importance & sequence of Rasa (taste) in Aahar (food) consumption:**

One should have a balanced intake of all six types of *rasa* (taste) in the diet. *Madhur rasa aahar* (food substances that are sweet in taste) like (*halwa*/sweet dish) are advisable to take at the beginning of a meal as it activates taste buds and can keep the food material moist due to their properties. Food with *Amla and Lavana* (sour and salty taste) *rasa* in the middle as it maintains the acid levels normal in the stomach and duodenum and also activates digestive enzymes. *Katu, Tikta, Kashay* (bitter, astringent, and pungent) *aahar* (food) should be taken at the end of the meal for a healthy one as it helps in enhancing the digestion process and also its absorption.^[17]

➤ **Importance of drinking water during meals:**

Ayurveda recommends drinking small amounts of water during the meal as it loosens the food that is ingested and helps in digestion.

Drinking water right before and after meals is denied as it affects the *agni* (digestive fire) and thus can hamper the digestion process leading to indigestion.

(One can make a habit of drinking water half an hour before or after meals).^[18]

➤ **Importance of light and heavy food in diet:**

The qualities of lightness and heaviness in food articles are not merely due to the density of the food articles. In ayurveda, it is said that light articles are predominant in the properties of *vayu* (air element) and *agni* (fire element), while heavy articles are predominant in *prithvi* (earth element) and *soma* (water element). So, by their properties, these light articles are stimulants of digestion and even when taken up to the saturation point (full stomach), they produce little derangement. On the contrary, the heavy articles are dissimilar in nature to the nature of the body's digestive fire. Thus, heavy foods are not by nature stimulants of digestion. If the heavy foods are taken up to saturation point, they cause considerable derangement.^[19] Thus one should not eat foods out of either attachment or ignorance; rather should eat the wholesome food after examination, because the body is a product of food.^[20]

Light foods:

Food substances that are easily digestible are referred to as light foods. It consists of *Sali-swastika* (types of rice), *moonga* (pulse-green gram), green *moong* beans, fruit, barley, rain water, non-root vegetables, ghee, roasted grain flour, the meat of desert animals, or animals born in the dessert or of active animals, or animals who eat light food, the meat of female animals, old grains (stored for at least 1 yr), food taken in little quantity, salt. Also, processing food substances like roasting makes them light to digest. Light food substances activate *Agni* (digestive fire) and thus act as a stimulant of digestion.^[21]

Heavy foods:

Food substances like wheat, dairy, the meat of domestic, sedentary, and marshy animals, or animals born in the marshy lands, or animals who eat heavy food, black gram, sesame and nut butters, sugar, the meat of male animals, new grains, food are taken in large quantity, flour, sugarcane, milk, sesame, lotus tubers, cheese, fish, yogurt. Such food substances when taken in excess, hampers digestion and cause

considerable derangement if taken up to saturation point.^[22]

➤ **The Foods which Are Wholesome and can be included every day in diet:**

One should take usually *shastika-sali* (type of rice), *mudga* (pulse-green gram), *saindhava* (rock salt), *amalaka* (fruit-Indian gooseberry), barley, rain water, milk, ghee, the meat of animals having dessert type of habitat and honey,^[23] pomegranate, wheat, resins (*manuka*). All these food substances have peculiar qualities which enhance immunity when consumed on a daily basis and adequately constitute a properly balanced diet. This can be classified according to modern as follows:

- Carbohydrates- *shastika-sali* (type of rice), *mudga* (pulse-green gram), wheat, barley
- Protein- *shastika-sali* (type of rice), *mudga* (pulse-green gram), wheat, the meat of animals having a dessert type of habitat.
- Fats- Ghee, Milk
- Vitamins- Indian Gooseberry, Resins (*Manuka*), Pomegranate
- Minerals- Indian Gooseberry, Haritaki (Chebulic Myrobalan)
- Water

CONCLUSION

In short, a proper diet is not only just HOW MUCH you eat, but WHAT you eat, WHEN you eat, WHERE you eat, and HOW you eat matters equally. It is considered that wholesome food produces good effects and unwholesome food produces bad effects respectively. But even wholesome food when taken in improper quantity or taken with emotions like anxiety, grief, fear, anger, and uncomfortable posture does not get properly digested. *Acharya Kashyap* considered *aahara* (food) as *Maha-bhaishjya* (maha-superior, bhaishjya-medicine) which means that one is capable to keep oneself disease free even only with the intake of wholesome food taken with all the rules described. There is nothing else except food that sustains the life of living beings and it's the only natural and daily consuming substance that can be the cause of strength

and also enhance the immunity of living being. One will not be able to sustain life without diet even when endowed with medicine and thus proper diet is said to be the great medicament advised by the physician practicing Ayurveda.

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