



RIGHT TIME OF MEAL FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, every individual is busy in his or her daily routine activities causing ignorance of the proper timing of the meal. In *Ayurvedic* literature, *Dincharya* (Lifestyle) is explained according to our needs. Health will achieve easily by following those instructions. The meal is a major part of our life. The meal is beneficial when eaten at the right time while causing adverse effects when not consumed by rules and regulations. To enhance our health and protect it from side effects due to changing lifestyles. This article is a small effect to illuminate the *Shastrokta* knowledge that already exists in our *Samhita*. That shows the Ideal time for taking food is when hunger is at its peak.

Keywords: *Dincharya*, hunger

INTRODUCTION

Vata, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* are three *Dosa*, who is responsible for the formation of the body. Likewise, pillars supporting the building, three *Dosa* act and support the body, called three pillars of body. *Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) are considered the *Upastambha* (sub-pillars). They support

the main pillars for their proper functioning. Conclusion normal and abnormal activities of *Tridosha* depend upon these *Upastambha*. *Ahara* is the first *Upastambha*. Food is a very important and primary factor on which all living beings are dependent. Wholesome food is responsible for the formation of

the body and happiness and in contrast to that, unwholesome food gives rise to diseases and unhappiness. Food imparts the nourishment and formation of the body tissues and enhances the life span, color and complexion, memory, immunity, and the digestive fire. The person follows dietary guidelines according to need and time they would not require medicines, in the same way, a person consumes the good medication, will work only when you take a healthy and Wholesome diet. Hence, Food is superior to medicine. Skillful use of the *Ahara* helps to improve the strength, color, complexion & nourishment of the body. If the diet is not taken in proper time, food consumed on time in limited quantity gets digested very easily. If there is indigestion, potent vitiation of *Vata* and other *Dosas* may take place due to which, there may be edematous swelling, pain, suppuration, burning sensation, and abdominal distention.

Literature of review

According to *Sushruta*,

A person should take a meal twice daily in the morning and evening. Consumption of meal in between is contraindicated like *Agnihotri*. After the evacuation of bowels, when senses are clear, the body is light, clear belching, the heart is devoid of blemishes, *Vayu* is normal, interest for intake of food is present, and emptiness in the stomach and hunger flares up, one should consume food.

According to *Sushruta* in seasons where the nights are lengthy, one should consume a meal in the morning only; in seasons, where days are a lengthy one, should consume a meal indicated in the first *Prahara* at night and in the afternoon itself. In seasons, where day and nights are the same length, the meal should be taken at the indicated time. One should not consume a meal after the prescribed time, or a meal should not be consumed in less or more quantity. Consumption of a meal before the feeling of lightness produces *Mandagni* (poor digestive fire), indigestion, or even death.^[1]

Meal taken at the proper time bestows satisfaction. The accustomed meal does not give troubles to the body, light foods get digested quickly, unctuous and warm food bestows strength to the body and digestive

fire, meal taken quickly gets digested properly, a meal with more of liquids does not aggravate *Dosas*; a meal of proper quantity gets digested comfortably and bestows normalcy of the *dhatu*s.^[2]

The meal should not be partaken either before the usual time or after the lapse of the usual time. Neither in inadequate nor in excess quantity. The persons who eat before the usual time though stouts become a victim of many diseases or even of death; he who eats after the lapse of the usual time, his digestive power getting affected by *Vata*, the food gets digested with difficulty and the persons do not desire to partake the second meal.^[3]

According to *Bhavapraksha*

The meal should be taken in early in the night. So, food will be digested properly. One shouldn't eat for three hours and after eating shouldn't last more than six hours. In the first three hours digestion will be taking place and after six hours body strength is lost if he does not do it. Appetite is stimulated when food and *Dosas* are digested. That is why, whenever a man perceives appetite, it is his good time.^[4]

According to *Vagbhat*

One should know when to eat. Our body and mind should be prepared well to receive and digest the food we eat. There are some parameters to assess the exact time when to eat. When naturals urge like urination and defecation are relieved. When clarity is felt in the chest, when *Dosas* are on the correct path, when belching is very clear, when appetite is felt, when bowels are moving freely, when the digestive fire is active, when the sensory function is clear and normal and when the body is felt tight, that is the exact time to eat food.^[5] The meal should not be taken without an unctuous substance. Eating food up to satisfaction is to be avoided. The meal should not be taken at dawn or dusk. The meal should not be taken at night if the morning food is not properly digested. A meal without milk derivative should not be taken because unctuous food nourishes the body. Eating excessive food is harmful because it suppresses the power of digestion. Early in the morning (at dawn) and late in the night (at dusk) meals should not be taken because; *Dosas* specifically *Kapha* and *Vata* are vitiated at this

time. If the lunch is not digested properly, dinner should be avoided because; the meal is taken after indigestion causes ama, which increases the risk of various foodborne diseases or eating disorders. [6]. The Hindu scripture recommended a meal for an individual to be taken in the morning and evening only. There should be no meal in between the mid-time, and one should remain too fast. The time of meal for human beings as recommended in Vedas in morning and evening only by observing the rules of Agnihotra (during the period of offering oblations into the sacrificial fire). There should be no food in between the two. If the hunger occurs in the interval between morning and evening, that may equally regard at the time of taking food. [7] The meal should be given once a day for the stimulation of poor digestion. A person with normal digestive power should be allowed food twice a day, taking a meal only once a day confers easy digestion. [8]

The disease does not spread over the body, one who takes a meal after digestion. Generally, food and medicine get digested within four and two *Yamas* or *Prāharas* (one Yama is equal to a period of three hours) respectively in normal persons, who are possessing *Samagni* (normal state of digestive fire), rapidly in persons possessing *Tikshnagni* (strong digestive fire) and persons with *Mandagni* (poor digestive fire) is affected with the slow digestive process. [9] Taking a meal once a day promotes good health, twice a day improves strength, thrice a day inflicts diseases and four times a day causes certain death. [10] The sages say that the appropriate time for eating is (feeling of) hunger and time for drinking is (feeling of) thirst. [11] Proper excretion of feces, urine, and flatus, lightness of body, clarity of eructation, purity and limpidity of heart, the desire for food, and laxity of the abdomen are the features of periods of meals. [12]

Factors leading to the transformation of food, are the factors leading to the transformation of food such as heat, *Vayu* (air), moisture, unctuousness, time, and balanced use. [13] Heat digests, *Vayu* absorbs, moisture produces looseness, unctuousness generates softness, time brings sufficiency, and balanced use brings about the equilibrium of *Dhatu*s, which are the products of di-

gestion. The components under transformation, if they are not contradictory, are converted into the respective body parts but, in case they are contradictory or damaged by antagonistic ones, they inflict on the body. To get all the benefits of a meal one should consume it at right time. Adhering to mealtimes, as prescribed in the Ayurvedic texts, will help maintain health and immunity. Regarding meals, there is the right time to consume them. Daily one should not follow the same routine, like per day, night, and *Rutu* (season) they can have a meal at the proper time. According to *Vagbhat* proper digestion of food, mainly depends upon the digestive fire and the digestive capability of the *pitta Dosa*. Individuals get hungry when there will be dominance of the *pitta Dosa*. Here, dominance of *pitta Dosa* indicates that, dominance within the physiological limit. This dominant *pitta Dosa* helps in proper digestion and assimilation of the consumed food. Normally, in healthy individual *Pitta Dosa* will be dominant in the mid of the day and mid of night. So, according to this principal meal should be consumed during *Pitta* dominance i.e., in the afternoon. But taking a meal is not recommended at night, even after *Pitta* dominant time, because of *Tamo Guna Pradhanya*, which may interfere with the *Pitta Dosa* activities. The person who consumes the food **once a day** should accept following rules,

Sushruta said,

- ❖ From October to January (*Hemant* and *Shishir*), nights are long, where the individual will feel the hunger in the morning, in this season person should take a meal in the morning (*Prataha Kala*).
- ❖ Here *Prataha Kala* indicates to *Pratareetee sapaadyaame Yaama* + 1/4 *Yaama* - 3 hours 45 minutes after sunrise. During the summer season (*Grishma* & *Pravrut*) when days are long, the individual should consume a meal in the late afternoon (*Aparanna Kala*) i.e., 1.30 pm is the suitable time for taking a meal.
- ❖ During the rainy season (*Vasanta* & *Varsha*) where days & nights are equal then the person should take a meal in *Madyahna Kala* indicates mid of the day i.e., 12 pm onwards. [14]

A person who consumes a meal **twice a day** should accept the following rules, *Yogratnakar* said, A healthy individual should consume the meal twice a day i.e., in the morning and late evening (or night). The first meal should take at 10:00 am and the second meal at 4:30 pm. ^[15]

Benefits of the timely taking meal

“*Kala Bhojanam Aarogyakaranam* // “(Cha. Su. 25/40)

Timely intake of the Wholesome meal and Safe and hygienic meals prevents the occurrence of the diseases. Diet is very important for maintaining good health and taking it at the right time is even more important. It is important to be aware of hunger to eat at the right time. A meal should be consumed as soon as you feel hungry. This means that it will be digested at the right time and produce nutritious food juice, which will be beneficial for body growth. ^[16]

DISCUSSION

If we are on taking a diet at the proper time, it will be more beneficial to our health. Time is as important as the ingredients, cooking methods, and wholesomeness of a meal. There are different opinions about the time of meal taken according to different *Samhitas*. Everyone explains *Pitta Dosa* dominance and its effects on the digestive system. Digestion of food depends upon the digestive fire. As *Pitta Dosa* directly affects *Amashayagat Agni* (digestive fire), Digestive fire is at its peak means food will digest smoothly. Extract a particular food, we will get after its proper digestion.

- ❖ A healthy individual should not take a meal within 1 *Prahara* (3 hours) of the previous meal and should not delay beyond 2 *Prahara* (6 hours).
- ❖ 6 AM - 12 PM (2 *Yama*) (Meal should be taken between 9 am to 12 PM) (Lunch)
- ❖ 6 PM - 12 PM (2 *Yama*) (Meal should be taken between 9-12 AM) (Dinner/supper)
- ❖ 12 AM-6 AM (2 *Yama*) (Should not take Meal at midnight because of *Tamo Guna Pradhanya* which interfere with the digestion).

It has been mentioned in *Samhitas* that, the meal should not be consume within the 3 hours of the previous meal and should not wait beyond the 6 hours of

the previous meal. If the person consumes the meal within 3 hours of the previous food intake may lead to a condition like indigestion and waiting beyond the 6 hours of previous food intake may lead to conditions like emaciation, loss of strength & energy. Weakness of the digestive capacity, digestion or emaciation of the body tissues, and decrease of *Prana* (Lifeforce) are the symptoms of an untimely having meal. The review shows every *Acharya's* opinion that; a meal should be taken at the time when *Pitta Dosa* is dominant. Day, night, and season affect the state of *Dosa*, we have to change the time of meal according to seasonal changes. One should not follow the same routine every day it must be changed according to digestive power. the meal should be given once a day for the stimulation of poor digestion. A person with normal digestive power should be allowed food twice a day, taking a meal only once a day confers easy digestion.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the right time of taking a meal is according to the state of *Pitta Dosa* which gets affected by lifestyle (sleeping time, physical work), seasonal changes. While thinking of the right time of having a meal we have to consider the state of *Pitta Dosa*, which affects the digestive fire and digestion of a particular person. According to *Ayurvedic* literature, every individual has a different lifestyle, and different digestive power so, the timing of having a meal also differs according to their state of *Dosa*.

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