

ROLE OF AAHAR VIDHI VISHESHAYATANA IN PREVENTION OF LIFESTYLE DISORDERS – A REVIEW STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the world's ancient health care system. *Ayurveda* has always emphasized maintaining the health and prevention of the diseases by following proper diet and lifestyle regimen rather than treatment and cure of the diseases. *Ahara* has a prime role in maintaining health and also in treating various disorders. *Acharya Charak* has stated that diet sustains life if taken with discipline in a proper manner. According to *Acharya Kashyap*, *Ahara* is considered as the *Mahabhaishajya* i.e., the great medicine. Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, astuteness, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect are all conditioned by food. Diet supports the body constantly just like the house (is supported) by the pillars.

The food which passes through the process of *aharan* is called *ahara*. *Vidhi* means laws and *ahara vidhi* means laws of dietetics which are beautifully explained in Ayurvedic literature.

In the present lifestyle, where everyone is busy achieving their life goals, the people are escaping the normal routine of food habits, due to which they are facing various lifestyle disorders. This can be overcome by following detailed discipline and process to take the *Ahara* (food). Due to the constraints of a fast-paced lifestyle, not everyone can constantly follow all the regulations; therefore, awareness about the topic is necessary. As a result, it is crucial to the treatment of a lifestyle disorder by avoiding its causes.

Keywords: *aahar vidhi vidhan*, lifestyle disorders, *viruddha aahar*, dietetic rules, *Ayurveda*.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara (diet) & *Vihara* (lifestyle) are the main factors which influence on our health status and are responsible for generation of diseases. *Ahara* is the most important factor in life. Proper diet, taken in proper manner can lead to better health or else can lead to diseases. Food is the source of life, strength, complexion and *Oja* of living beings. Diet therapy is a broad term for the practical application of the concept of nutrition as a preventive or corrective treatment of diseases. It comprises food prescribed, regulated or restricted in kind and amount for therapeutic and other purposes. ⁽¹⁾ Complete nutritional diet or the wholesome food i.e., *pathya aahara* is responsible for the growth of the living beings while unwholesome food i.e., *apathya aahara* for the growth of diseases. Proper growth and maintenance of the body depends on the balanced diet.

Ahara and the dietetic rules are basic factors among the causes of disease. Due to improper or incomplete knowledge of culinary techniques, irregular mealtimes, consumption of an unbalanced diet, and disregard for the established guidelines for food preparation, preservation, and consumption, numerous lifestyle diseases are on the rise today. Most health issues in today's fast-paced world are the result of digestive distress of some kind. According to *Ayurveda*, the decreased power and process of our digestion i.e., *mandagni* is the root of all ailments. ⁽²⁾ The *Aharvidhivisheshayatana* places emphasis on the factors that affect *aahara*, including its characteristics, place of origin, environmental circumstances, time of year, and preparation techniques. They offer us advice on how to balance our diets in accordance with our *doshas*, *prakritis*, and physical requirements. Reviewing classical medical systems is necessary in order to put their principles to use in preventing a forthcoming epidemic of lifestyle disorders, which can be stopped with dietary, lifestyle, and environmental adjustments only.

Materials and methods –

All the relevant research papers published in various journals, Research papers available in PubMed central, Google scholar, Ayush, Dhara were searched out and taken into consideration. *Ayurveda Samhita*, *Nighantu* and few important *Ayurveda* books along with Modern literature relevant to topic were also studied out. After studying out all of these results and conclusions were obtained.

Ahara prashati –

1. 'प्राणाः प्राणाभूतामन्नं अन्नं लोकोऽभिधावति ।

वर्णः प्रसादः सौख्यं जीवितं प्रतिभा सुखम् ॥

तुष्टिः पुष्टिर्बलं मेधा सर्वमन्ने प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ (च.सू.27/349, 350)⁽³⁾

2. 'न रागान्नाप्यविज्ञानात् आहारानुपयोजयेत्

परीक्ष्य हितमश्रीयाद् देहोद्वाहाहारसंभवः' ॥ (च.सू.28/41)⁽⁴⁾

Charakacharya praises endorses the importance of food material in the above shloka saying that food is the *prāna* or the essence of life for all the living beings, which is why all the living beings aspire for food. Food material includes the attributes of imparting a good complexion, pleasant voice, intelligence, life or real, joy, satisfaction, health, strength and a good grasping power. But one should not devour this food with greed or ignorance. The food material should be properly inspected and only the nutritious part be feasted upon.

According to *Ayurveda*, *Ahara*, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance. According to one quotation of *Sushruta* “*Sankshepta Kriya Yogo Nidaan Parivarjanam*” i.e., treatment in short is to avoid the causative factors. ⁽⁵⁾ As explained above, *Ahara* and the dietetic rules are basic factors considered important in prevention and curation of lifestyle disorders. It can be readily agreed on the point of *Swasthyarakshana* i.e., promotion of health, but how it can be justified that by following these dietetic rules, it is possible to achieve *Vikaraprasamana* also. Unlike other medical sciences, instead of focusing on treatment of any particular disease, *Ayurveda* focuses more on the healthy living and well-being. For healthy living, *Ayurveda* emphasizes on consuming healthy and nutritious diet. Diet is considered to be

vital for a human body as it provides the basic nutrients. Ayurvēda has expounded a principle of "Aṣṭavidha Āhāra Vidhi Viśeṣāyatanaṇi". It explored *Rasa*, *Virya*, *Vipaka* of various food stuffs in context of their effects on *śarīra*, *dōṣa*.

To redevelop the *dosha*, *dhātu* and *mala* one should feed on food material which nourishes these bodily elements and help them develop or thrive. A diet with the opposite attributes would lead to the washing of the bodily tissues and hence be harmful for the growth and health of the body *dhātu* and *mala*. All the bodily tissues are expendable or perishable substances. These are continuously wasted with the passage of time. The emaciation of the bodily tissues with age is in accordance with the laws of universe. This is why there is the need of constant replenishment of the bodily tissues. This nourishment is available from the diet i.e., *aahar* and the activities i.e., *vihar* one engages in (for e.g., exercise). Therefore, it is very important to have a balanced diet in appropriate amounts.

Ahara Dravyas can be considered under the category *Dravyabhuta Aushadhi*. So, the dietetic rules can be considered as *Upaya* or *Adravyabhuta Aushadhi* for *Vikaraprasamana* i.e. lifestyle disorders. (6)

Physiological aspect of aahar –

All food goes through a complex process of digestion, absorption, assimilation and excretion. Food provides us with calories, which are metabolized in the body to provide energy. Energy is required for all the functions of the body including heartbeat, homeostasis, functioning of the brain and other vital organs the body. Food supplies the substances that help regulate the body's processes. Food provides the materials needed to build, repair and maintain body tissues. This is the physiological function of food.

Psychological aspect of aahar -

Ayurveda is the only medical science which equally furnish psychological facet for maintenance of good health. Food always gives us a feel of satiety or "satisfaction." A normal well-balanced individual human eats food for both physiological and psychological satisfaction. However, sometimes individuals' mis use food as they consider it a factor influencing their

self-esteem and become victims of diet/food related conditions like anorexia or bulimia. Some individuals also go on "bingeing sprees" and lose control over their eating habits.

Palatable food provides pleasant mood, strength, nourishment, energy, exhilaration and health whereas the unpalatable one produces opposite. Palatable food is that which desired again and again even after taking it. (7)

Professional activities leading to happiness in this world are all based on food. (8)

Spiritual aspect of aahar -

Yajyam is a holy ritual according to the Ancient Indian Sciences. In this one offers the particular herbs, Ghee and all other necessary needs for life to fire. By offering these items, one shows the gratitude of him towards the natural powers for this entire beautiful world and all the need full things available with the nature. Same we do while eating the foods. We offer the foods and drinks along with all the nutritive materials to the internal fire, known as *Jatharaagni*, for our vitality. Vedic rituals leading to above in heaven and observance of truth, *brahmacharya* leading to salvation are all based on food.

Ashtau aahar vidhi visheshayatana -

Ashtau: eight in number

Ahara Vidhi: A system, method, manner, way, arrangement, rule, law, command, conduct, condition or statement for diet intake.

Vishesha: Speciality, special property, distinguished effect (of Aharavidhi).

Ayatana: Cause, support, Hetu etc.

Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana* means, the causative factors responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the methods for diet intake. They are as follows: *Prakriti*, *Karna*, *Samyoga*, *Rashi*, *Desha*, *Kala*, *Upayogasamtha*, *Upyokta*. These factors explore each and every aspect of *Ahara*. Among these, the seventh factor is *Upayogasamtha*. These are the dietetic rules, i.e., *Ahara - Vidhi - Vidhana*. Thus, it can be said that these rules are specified for "How to eat?".

A balanced and nutritious diet which is also in accordance with the *aahar vidhi Visheshayatana* helps

in proper growth and nourishment of the bodily tissues.

Eight types of direction for ingestion of food are given they are – *Prakruti, Karan, Samyog, Rashi, Desha, Kala, Upayogsamstha* and *Upyokta*.

1. Prakruti (Natural Qualitative Characteristic of Food)

Prakruti is the first factor. It indicates the nature of substances i.e., inherent attributes of that substance. For e.g., *Masha* (black gram) is heavy and *Mudga* (green gram) is light by its nature also meat of *Shukar* (boar) is heavy and that of *Ena* (deer) is light in nature. ⁽⁹⁾ While consuming food items one should always keep in mind the properties of food & also the status of *agni, dosha, prakriti* of himself. For example, the person having *vata vridhhi* symptoms should not eat dry, cold and stale food. He should eat hot, heavy, oily, sweet food to pacify *vata*. Also, in case of lifestyle disorders such as diabetes mellitus one should eat less sweet, dry, light food. This is how one can follow this *vidhi* of “*prakriti*” to maintain health and for curative purpose for lifestyle disorders.

2. Karan (Processing of The Food)

Karana is the second factor. It is the alteration made while cooking of food to enhance the good qualities and to cut off the bad qualities of the food. Transformation of attributes or properties is done by various *Samskara*. Some *samskara* explained in ayurveda classicals are as follows.

Toya Sannikarsha (Treatment with liquid), *Agni Sannikarsha* (Heat application), *Shaucha* (Cleaning), *Manthana* (Churning), *Desha* (Place), *Kala* (Season / Atmospheric condition), *Bharjana* (roasting / frying) etc. ⁽¹⁰⁾

These *Sanskars* are capable of altering certain attributes of food material and thus making them more beneficial to the body. Like the process of steaming of raw rice grains makes them easily digestible and edible. Also, the curd is said to be *abhishyandi* but churning i.e., *manthan samskara* makes buttermilk *grahi* in *guna*. So, these *samskaras* are important to alter the attributes of food materials according to ones *prakriti, agni, koshtha* or *vyadhi avastha*.

3. Samyoga (Combination/ mixing)

The mixing of two different substances is called as *sanyoga*. The mixing of the substances may result into the recipe which can be beneficial or harmful to the body. ⁽¹¹⁾ Sometimes the action of combination of diet is different from the individual. Combination of two or more substances results in the induction of special qualities, which cannot be achieved by using the same food item separately. But while making combinations, the food items must be compatible to each other and also mixed in certain proportion otherwise it can be proved harmful to the body. The concept of incompatible food (*Viruddha Ahara*) is well explained in Ayurveda. Ingestion of this type of *viruddha ahara* i.e., food items with incompatible potency and properties over long period of time results in different lifestyle disorders like diabetes mellitus.

Some harmful examples of *samyoga* are; Honey and ghee when taken alone is wholesome to the body but combined in equal quantity, they become toxic. Also, Milk (*Sheetveerya*) and fish (*Ushnaveerya*) should not be taken together as their combination makes poison in body. A few examples of its usefulness are *Guda* and Curd in combination is more useful as it is having *Snehana, Tarpana, Hridya* and *Vataghna* effects. Milk with Ghee used regularly is the best *Rasayana*.

4. Rashi (Quantity)

Rashi is described to emphasize importance of amount of ingestion of food. This is observed in two ways- one way is to calculate total amount of food eaten and another way is to calculate each entity of food item consumed. *Rashi* is the quantum of total (*Sarvagraha*) or individual (*Parigraha*) substances which determines the results of their administration in proper and improper dosage. ⁽¹²⁾

Ayurveda states the importance of *Ahara matra*. Dose of *ahara* affects digestion. The quantity of food to be taken depends on the digestive capacity (*Agni*) of person. The amount of food which is digested in proper time, without disturbing the equilibrium of *Dhatu & Doshas* of the body is said to be of a proper quantity. This proper quantity of food activates Digestive functions. While less or excess quantity is

harmful to health. *Heena Matra* (less) *ahara* brings the impairment of strength, complexion and plumpness, in the impairment of functions of life, virility and vitality, in vitiation of the eight body elements and in the incidence of the eighty kinds of *Vata* disorders. *Ati Matra* (excess) *ahara* is considered as *Sarvadosha Prakopka*, it aggravates all the *Doshas*.⁽¹³⁾ The quantity (*rashi*) of food to be eaten depends on the nature (*prakriti*) of the food item. If the food is heavy; half of stomach capacity is to be filled up. Even in the case of light food, excessive intake is not conducive to maintain the power of digestion and metabolism.

5. Desha (Habitat)

Desha is fifth factor. It denotes place of origin of food stuff whether it is offspring of cool country or warm country; it also denotes body, which consumes it.⁽¹⁴⁾ It means habit of body to eat certain type of food is observed here. A habitat is a specific place. It illustrates changes in food substance characteristics brought on by diverse soil and climatic conditions. Foods produced in the desert or sand regions are light (*laghu*) compared to those produced in the Himalayan region. *Ahara* should be taken according to both *Bhoomi Desha & Deha desha*. *Bhumi Desha* too is grouped in three classes - *Jangla*, *Anoopa* and *Sadharana Desha*. *Charaka* says that in the *Jangala desha* the *Vata* and *Pitta* are in predominance, whereas in the *Anupa desha* the predominance of *Vata* and *Kapha* is witnessed.⁽¹⁵⁾ One can acclimatize to the different type of *desha* by using opposite qualities substances e.g., use of hot substances in marshy land and cold substances in deserts. *Deha desha* means examination of status of *dosha* of one's body. And planning your diet according to place you live and your body constitution can avoid lifestyle diseases.

6. Kala (Time and seasonal variation)

Kala is the sixth factor. *Kala* stands for both the time in the form of day and night and states of individual's body i.e., condition of health and age.⁽¹⁶⁾ Diet should be consumed in accordance with different seasons and also according to the *doshasthiti* in one's body. One should also decide the type and the proportion of

the diet to be had according to the different stages of childhood, youth and old age.

Nityag Kal is the one in which *ahara* is taken according to *rutu* or season. For example, in rainy season, sweet, sour and salty food is preferred to pacify increased *vata dosha* also *laghu* i.e., light food is consumed as strength of digestive fire is lowest in this season.

Avasthik Kal is related with intake of *ahara* according to condition of body i.e., *vyadhi avastha*. For example, *langhan* is advised in *atisara*. Spicy hot food should be avoided in hypertension also *kled Karak* food is avoided in *prameha vyadhi*.

7. Upayogsamstha (Dietetic rules)

Upayogsamstha is the seventh factor. *Upayogsamstha* or *upyog Niyam* are the rules or etiquettes which are followed during meals.⁽¹⁷⁾ These are habits which help in proper digestion and absorption of optimum nutrients from the consumed diet. These rules hold great importance while dining since a diet consumed in such pleasant atmosphere proves very nourishing and beneficial to the growth of the body. Onwards, these regulations are covered in detail.

Ushnam Asniyat:⁽¹⁸⁾ Meal should be taken *ushna* (hot) for feeling of proper taste, stimulation of *agni* (digestive power), *vatanulomana* and *kapha nashana*. Also, profuse flows of saliva, gastric Juices are achieved for next food items. Therefore, one should take warm food. Nowadays, fast food can be considered as *Ushnikrtam Punah*. It becomes *Vidahi* and *Paryushita* i.e., stale which causes various Lifestyle disorders. Even the people, who carry Tiffin for convenience at their working place, lack the *Ushna* food.

Snigdham Asniyat:⁽¹⁹⁾ The meal taken should be *snigdha* (Unctous) for *agni deepana*, early and easy digestion, *vatanuloman*, movement of digestive organs. It also strengthens the sense organs, gives complexion. Here, the term *Snigdha* does not only mean *Snehadravya* like *ghruta*, *taila* but also *Godhuma*, *Shali* rice etc. are advised as *Snigdha*.

On the contrary, extreme *Snigdha* (*Atisnigdha*) or *Asnigdha* (*Ruksha*), both inhibit the process of digestion. *Atisnigdha* food is 'Guru' by property and takes more time and energy for digestion, causing *Praseka*,

Hridayagaurava, Alasya, Aruchi, etc. On this contrary, *Asnigdha* or *ruksha* food absorbs humidity of digestive tract and hampers digestion, decreases *Bala* and *Varna*, producing dryness of skin and constipation.

Matravat Asniyat: ⁽²⁰⁾ It means eating in adequate amount. The *lakshana* by which a person can decide that this is *Matravat* are, lightness in the stomach, absence of any cardiac discomfort, non-distension of sides, gratification of the senses, subsidence of hunger and thirst, sense of ease in every activity, proper indulgence of natural urges. So, after appearance of these symptoms only, one should take next meal.

Jirneasniyata: ⁽²¹⁾ It simply means one should always eat after digestion of the previous meal. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, the previous undigested *ahararasa* gets mixed up with the next and imbalances doshas. On the contrary, when one eats after the previous meal is situated in their own location, *agni* is stimulated, appetite arose, the entrance of the channels is opened, the heart is normal, flatus passes down and urges of flatus, urine and faeces are attended to and it promotes longevity in its entirety. So, one should take food only after digestion of the previous meal.

Viryaavirudhamasniyata: ⁽²²⁾ One should take food having no contradictory potencies i.e., *virya*. The diseases that are caused by *Viruddha Ahara* are as; *Adhmana, Aamavisha, Grahani, Amlapitta, Raktavikara, kushtha, shotha* etc. and various GIT disorders which ultimately lead to Life style disorders. some examples of *viruddha virya* foods are Fish and milk, sour fruits and milk, hot water and honey etc. So, one should avoid food items having *viruddha virya*.

Ishte Deshe Ishta Sarva Upakarnam Ashniyat: ⁽²³⁾ Eat in a proper hygienic place provided with all the necessary appliances. So that one does not get depressed in the mind by negative environment. There is a huge psychological impact on *aahar*, in psychologically disturbed conditions, always overeating or less eating tendency is observed or even normal eating causes improper digestion. So, one should eat in a favourable place with favourable accessories.

Naatidrutam Asniyata: ⁽²⁴⁾ This means food should not be eaten very fast, otherwise this affects the power of digestion by increasing the *vata* and also it can enter the wrong passage and does not enter into the stomach properly. The *Annaja Hikka* is the best example of '*Vimargagamanam*' of food if taken hurriedly. So, eating with optimum speed prevents overeating and slowly taking of food improves appetite regulation, prevents overeating, decreases the food consumption, and well-absorbs essential nutrients.

Naativilambitam Asniyata: ⁽²⁵⁾ also, one should not eat too slowly, because it doesn't give satisfaction to the person and food becomes cold which in turn hampers digestive power and also will result in *adhyashana*. All these factors hamper *Agni* and the food can't be digested properly.

Ajalpana, Ahasana, Tanmanabhunjita: ⁽²⁶⁾ One should eat with concentration and while not talking or laughing. One who taking food while talking, laughing or with distracted mind subjects him to the same effects as the one eating too hurriedly. Eating food without talking laughing or any distraction with full concentration results in better satisfaction and gratification i.e., *Trupti*.

Atmanamabhisamiksya: ⁽²⁷⁾ One should take food in a prescribed manner; with due regard to his own self by analyzing his own body needs, hunger, digestive capacity, *prakriti, doshadi awastha*, etc. The knowledge of the wholesomeness or otherwise of food articles is important for self-preservation.

8. *Upyokta* (The person who consumes the food/User)

Upayokta is that who takes food. He is the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things. Every person must take into consideration his own constitution, capacity of digestive power, the season, time of day and whether the previously taken food has been digested or not and should take the food accordingly. ⁽²⁸⁾

Eating habits of present age and its effects

The modern diet and lifestyle, especially those of the younger age, are unhealthy from a health perspective. A man eats frequently, even when he is not really hungry. Overeating and an unbalanced diet are fre-

quent problems. Even though a meal should be had after a previous one has been digested, men now frequently consume food shortly after a meal. Today, we are more concerned with eating tasty, ready-to-eat food materials than we are with our digestive capacity, nutritional value of food products, and the timing of our meal intake. Refrigerated food, packed food, added preservatives, canning, frozen food is hard to digest, as it brings about *ama* (toxins) formation after digestion of food and alters its natural *prakriti* (properties) and benefits. Microwaving of food causes water molecules in it to resonate at very high frequency which cooks instantly and saves time; but at the same time, it alters chemical and nutritional properties of food. Use of cold drinks, chilled water, spicy, preserved and junk foods is also a matter of serious concern. Also, High amount of sodium, hydrogenated fats, and refined sugar causes a lot of lifestyle disorder like hypertension, diabetes mellitus and kidney related diseases.

DISCUSSION

Lifestyle diseases are defined as the diseases linked with the way people live their life. Obesity, Stroke, HT, some Cancers, Diabetes Mellitus are some of the lifestyle disorders. Ayurveda explained this phenomenon under the heading of “*Prajnaparadha*”, which is one of the three basic causes of any disease. Management of these lifestyle disorders include various aspects such as *Dinacharya*, *Rutucharya*, *Panchakarma* and *Rasayana*. As *ahara* is the main part of day-to-day life it has a great clinical importance in treatment of diseases. The proper use of diet not only prevents the disease but also play major role in the management of the disease.

A wholesome diet is essential for the body's growth and development, while an unwholesome diet contributes to a number of disorders. According to *Acharya Charaka*, the perfect diet is one that replenishes the body's depleted systems, nourishes the *dhatu*, and keeps the body's equilibrium. One should eat food, which is hot, unctuous, in due measure, after the digestion of previous food, and no antagonistic in potency. It should be eaten in a hygienic place,

provided with all accessories, neither too hurriedly, nor too leisurely, without talking or laughing with full concentration and having proper regard to oneself. *Annapana* is called as *yagyakarma* in our culture giving it utmost respect and attention as it sustains our life.

CONCLUSION

Many dietary regulations have been broken in today's fast-paced world, reflecting the general deterioration of social health. *Ahara's* norms and regulations have been forgotten. *Ayurveda* is a wealth of knowledge for a person's a healthy existence. There is a need to spread awareness about the concept of *Ahar Vidhi Visheshayatana* as Diet is considered as basic most need and as a supporting pillar of life. Not only diet but also method of food intake is important for healthy life. That's why *anna* is called as *maha-bhaishajya*. The aim of Ayurveda is *Swasthyarakshana* and *Vyadhiparimoksha* which can be fulfilled by these dietetic rules. Therefore, a lot of ailments that only develop because of poor eating habits can be avoided. Thus, adopting healthy dietary practises, or learning and practising *Ahar-vidhivisheshayatana*, can help reduce the risk for a variety of lifestyle disorders.

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