



IMPORTANCE OF AYURVEDIC DIET IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS OF CHILDREN

Vikash Kumar Gujral¹, Dinesh Kumar Rai², Prem Prakash Vyas³, Sonam Boyal⁴

¹MD Scholar, PG Department of Kaumarbhritya, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishanan Rajasthan Ayurved University Jodhpur (Raj.), India

²Assistant Professor, PG Department of Kaumarbhritya, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishanan Rajasthan Ayurved University Jodhpur (Raj.), India

³Associate Professor & HOD, PG Department of Kaumarbhritya, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishanan Rajasthan Ayurved University Jodhpur (Raj.), India

⁴MD Scholar, PG Department of Kaumarbhritya, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishanan Rajasthan Ayurved University Jodhpur (Raj.), India

Corresponding Author: luckygujral1992@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a science of life that focuses on promoting and maintaining people's health. Lifestyle and diet are key elements impacting an individual's health in this technological and competitive day. Diet and dietary habits play important role in the maintenance of health. Nutrition offers the building elements for the development of new *dhatu*s. *Dhatu*s are energy reservoirs that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. *Dhatu*s are continually being broken down to extract energy. So, replenishing good quality *Dhatu*s is essential. For this, balanced foods are important. In *Ayurveda*, eating foods are energizing the Mind. It's *Sattvic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic gunas* depend on the food we consume. Let my food be my medicine. Health depends solely on the food we intake. Strength, health, & life depend on *Agni*. But *Agni* is also constantly replenished from the nutrition. So, to maintain *Sama Agni* eating balanced foods are essential. Toddlers & Pre-schoolers need adequate intake to achieve full growth and develop-

mental potential. Undernutrition impairs children's cognitive development as well as their ability to explore their environments.

Keywords: *Aahar, Agni, Ayurveda, Dhatus, Growth, Nutrition,*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is a science of life that focuses on promoting and maintaining people's health¹. Nutrition plays a central role in *Ayurvedic* living. *Ahara* {Diet} *Nidra* {Sleep} and *Brahmacharya* {Abstinence} are recognized as the three *Upastambhas* {sub-pillars} essential for the smooth running of life². Among the three *Upastambhas*, *Ahara* is considered the best sustainer of life³. From the earliest stages of fetal development, at birth, through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and on into adulthood and old age, proper food and good nutrition are essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance & productivity, health, and well-being. In *Ayurveda* a balanced diet is planned in relation to the known *Panchabhautic* composition and *Tridoshic* impacts in the living human body. Food (*Ahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*) significantly affect one's overall health and the upsurge of metabolic and degenerative diseases are the results of adaptation of modern life style⁴. According to *Acharya Kashyap*, *Ahara* is considered as the *Mahabhaishajya* i.e., the great medicine. Showing the importance of food *Acharya Charaka* says that food sustains the life of all living beings and complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, genius, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment strength and intellect are all conditioned by food⁵. The right quantity is defined as the amount of food that is digested and processed in a timely manner without disrupting the body's equilibrium (of *dhatus* or *dohas*). *Chakrapani* the commentator of *Charaka samhita* opines those light foods are *Vayu Agnimahabhuta* predominant while heavy food substances are *Prithvi & Jala mahabhuta* predominant⁶. Nutrition provides building blocks to create new *Dhatus*. *Dhatus* are the reservoir of energy in different forms. *Dhatus* are constantly broken down to utilize energy. So, replenishing good quality *Dhatus* is essential. For this, balanced food is important. *Ahara* is categorized as *Hitahara* (whole-

some) and *Ahitahara* (unwholesome). In a similar context, the terms *Pathya* and *Apathya* are also used to denote the acceptability and adaptability of a particular food in each context. *Acharya Charaka* gives a list of dietetics that should be and should not be taken regularly⁷. Let my food be my medicine. Toddlers and Pre-schoolers need adequate intake to achieve full growth and developmental potential. Children's cognitive development and ability to explore their surroundings are both hampered by malnutrition. With sufficient nutrition and environmental assistance, the long-term repercussions of undernutrition (cognitive impairment) can be avoided or alleviated.

In Ayurveda importance of nutrition-

Acharya Charaka has said the source of life for all living beings is food & all living beings are food & all the world seeks food. Complexion, clarity, good voice, long life, understanding, happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength & intelligence are all established in nutrition. Whatever is beneficial for worldly happiness, whatever belongs to the *Vedic* sacrifices leading to heaven & whatever actions lead to spiritual salvation are said to be established through nutrition⁸. The child nutrition begins before birth only. Poor nutrition during pregnancy may stunt fetal growth and leads to poor brain development. Even after birth, the child growth depends on the mother diet, later period on own diet. So, the right diet and lifestyle from early years leave a permanent impact on the child physical and mental wellbeing. In *Ayurveda*, children are classified into 3 groups as per their diet⁹ which are as follows:

1. ***Ksheerap Awastha***- Up to 1 year of life-consuming only breast milk¹⁰.
2. ***Ksheerannada Awastha***- Up to 2 years of life along with milk child is consuming solid food¹¹.

3. **Annad Awastha-** After 2 years of life where child consumes all like adult¹².

Diet According to Different Age Group (Awastha) of Child

Ahara in Ksheerap Awastha-

For a newborn, breast milk (*Stanya*) is considered as *Amrita* and *Ayurveda* praise breastfeeding i.e., *Stan-yapana*. Most of the *Acharyas* told exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months. Mother milk contains the exact proportion of fat, cholesterol, protein, and carbohydrates for a baby. Mother's milk is not only the perfect nutritional choice; it also protects against several diseases. So, it is exclusively advised at the early age of the child. The mother should start feeding the child from the first day only¹³. First three days there is the secretion of *Piyush*, which is necessary for the development of immunity in children. According to *Acharya Kashyapa* breastfeed result in good growth, strength, longevity, and good health of the child as well as not causing any trouble or disease to the child¹⁴.

Ahara in Ksheerannada Awastha-

From 6 months up to 2 years are considered in *Ksheerannada awastha*. Around six months the baby begins to grow teeth. Once the teeth begin to come in the baby is given a sign that it is ready to eat food other than milk. Hence, *Acharya Kashyapa* told *Phalaprashana samskara* at the age of 6 months.

Phalaprashana Samskara-

It is performed at 6 months¹⁵ and fruits are given to newborns as a supplement. Vitamin C, D, and iron are lacking in mother's milk and must be supplemented by the infants. These nutrients are abundant in fruit juices. Fruit juices, in addition to *Agni vridhi*, help to supplement extra nourishment, ease constipation, and keep children hydrated.

Annaprashana Samskara-

After 6 months, children require concentrated energy-dense foods to maintain an adequate rate of growth. Child teeth begin to erupt, a biting movement begins, and the tendency to push solids out of the mouth decreases and the digestive system is mature enough to digest food. As the birth weight doubles, breast milk

alone is no longer sufficient to provide nutritional needs.¹⁶

Ahara in Annada Awastha-

A child from the age of 2 years is considered in *Annada Awastha*.¹⁷ In this *Awastha* child should be shifted on the cereals. All types of food with all forms i.e., *Lehya*, *Peya*, *Bhojya* etc can be given in this *Awastha* of children life.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF BASIC FOODS IN AYURVEDA: -

Ayurveda classifies food (*Ahara*) into 12 basic categories based on source, method of preparation and utility such as-

1. *Sukadhanya* (corns/ carbohydrate, polysaccharide)
2. *Samidhanya* (pulses/ vegetable proteins)
3. *Mamsa* (meat/ First class proteins)
4. *Saka* (vegetables/Minerals)
5. *Phala* (fruits/ Vitamins)
6. *Harita* (salads/ Food adjuvant)
7. *Madya* (fermented drinks/ Alcohol, carbohydrate, monosaccharide)
8. *Ambu* (water)
9. *Gorasa* (milk and milk products)
10. *Iksuvikara* (products of sugarcane)
11. *Krtanna* (food preparations)
12. *Aharayogi* (accessory food articles).

Also, the convenience of consumption shows the way to classify food articles into different forms as cited in *Charaka Samhita*¹⁸. The *Ayurvedic* texts give great emphasis on the compatibility and incompatibility of certain foods. *Charaka* describes in detail the 18-fold denominators of *Viruddhahara*, i.e., dietary incompatibility¹⁹. *Ahara dravyas* become incompatible due to their mutually contradictory qualities, by combinations (*Samyoga*), by the method of preparation (*Samskara*), by virtue of place (*Desha*), time (*kala*), dose (*Matra*) and some others by their inherent nature (*Swabhava*)²⁰. *Charaka* mentions that the intake of incompatible diet is responsible for the causation of sterility, blindness, *Visarpa* (Herpes), *Udara* (Ascites), insanity, fistula in ano or fainting, intoxication, abdominal distention, stiffness in neck, varieties of anemia, indigestions, various skin diseases, diseases

of intestines, swelling, gastritis, fever, rhinitis, and infertility²¹. *Ayurveda* emphasizes the material quality of food but places even greater emphasis on the selection of food, its processing and cooking, and rules for healthy eating. Thus, the Ayurvedic approach to food and dietetics is very different from the conventional Western approach. *Charaka samhita* describes the eight principles of *Ahara vidhi* i.e.,

- (1) *Prakriti* (nature of food articles)
- (2) *Karana* (preparation)
- (3) *Samyoga* (combinations)
- (4) *Rashi* (quantity)
- (5) *Desha* (habitat and climate)
- (6) *Kala* (time factor)
- (7) *Upayogasamstha* (rules of use)
- (8) *Upayokta* (the user)²²

While considering *Ahara matra*, *Acharya Charaka* says that food is to be taken depending upon the power of digestion and metabolism (*Agnibala and srotobala*), which varies according to season as well as the age of the individual. The quantity of the food to be taken directly depends on the digestive strength of a person (*Agnibala*). The stomach capacity is divided into three portions and two portions should be filled with solid and liquid food and one portion should be left for easy gastric movements and air, to aid the digestion process²³. During the process of eating, water taken in small quantity stimulates digestion, and when taken after a meal causes *Sthaulya* (obesity)²⁴.

Processing of food results in the transformation of attributes of the *dravya*. Methods of preparing different types of food items like *Manda* (rice water which is the clear supernatant watery portion (without rice) in which rice is boiled) *Peya* (rice soup), *Yavaagu* (semi-solid meal thicker than *Peya*), *Vilepi* (thick rice soup which thicker than *Yavaagu*) *Yusha* (Lentil soup), are mentioned in the *samhitas*. The different *Ahara kalpanas* of the same *dravya* differ in their properties and digestibility. The human body is the result of consumables taken in four forms i.e. *Ashita* (eatables), *Peeta* (liquid food), *Leedha* (masticable foods) & *Khadita* (linctus) and *leedha* (Masticable)²⁵.

DISCUSSION

Our health depends solely on the food we intake. Strength, health, & our life depend on *Agni*. But *Agni* is also constantly replenished from the food we eat. So, to maintain “*Sama Agni*” eating balanced food is essential. Balanced foods are important Let my food be my medicine Nutrition is a fundamental pillar of human life, health, and development across the entire life span. Most incurable diseases are produced due to improper nutrition. An intelligent and self-controlled person should consume conductive food in the right quantity and at right time to prevent diseases for proper maintenance of positive health, one should, first, eat food in proper quantity. The quantity of food to be taken again depends on the pattern of digestion. The powers of digestion and metabolism again vary according to the season as well as the age of the individual. The eating habits established now impact food habits and health later in life. The standard measurement of food for an individual is to be determined based on one's digestive capacity. Long-term effects of undernutrition (cognitive impairment) may be prevented or reduced with adequate nutrition and environmental support.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda lays a great deal of emphasis upon proper diet for the preservation & promotion of positive health, and prevention and cure of diseases. For all disease wholesome and unwholesome (*pathya* and *apathya*) food ingredients have been specified. If a person suffering from any disease follows strictly the regulations of diet. Food taken in proper quantity provides strength, vigour, good complexion and nurtures the health of the tissues. To live healthily, one must live in harmony with his surroundings and follow a diet suitable to one's bodily constitution. Up to the age of the 1-year child should exclusively on milk while up to the 2 years we should give the *Peya* and *Lehya Ahara* along with the milk and after the 2 years children can eat all the form of *Ahara* which is important in the growth and development of the child.

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