

A CRITICAL REVIEW ON THE ASSESSMENT OF AHARAMATRA IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

A wholesome diet is essential for good health and the prevention of disease. The importance of the quantity of diet related with health is considered from time immemorial. The concept of proper quantity of diet which can be included in daily regimen is discussed in *Ayurveda* giving utmost importance. Diet is the only factor which is responsible for normal health as well as disease. The ideal quantity of food articles and determination of measurement of food articles concerning their quality of *Gurutva* (heaviness) and *Laghutva* (lightness) is being explained in this regard in *Ayurveda*. The study gives an understanding of the ideal diet to be consumed by an individual in a lifetime for getting a normal healthy life span.

Key words: Wholesome, Ayurveda, Health, Gurutva, Laghutva

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, the quantity of daily diet is considered as one of the factors for maintaining health. Also, one must take food in proper quantity, which depends on the strength of *Agni* (digestive power) ¹. The required quantity of food shall be known as the quantity of food that is digested in due time without disturbing the normalcy of body functions ².

Understanding this fact, one should not conclude that *Gurutva* (heaviness) or *Laghutva* (lightness) quality in a food article is mentioned in the science. The light-to-digest substances have a predominance of the qualities of *Vayu* and *Agni* elements. The others have a predominance of the qualities of *Pruthvee* and *Jala* elements ³. It is understood that the light food-articles are stimulants of *Agni* owing to their innate quality

and are said to be less harmful even if they are consumed more. On the other hand, the heavy food articles are non-stimulant of *Agni* by nature due to their dissimilarity of qualities. Hence, they cause harm if taken in excess quantity, unless there is a strong digestive capacity achieved by physical exercise. Thus, the right quantity of diet is determined by the strength of *Agni* or the innate digestive power in an individual.

Review of Literature

The quantity of food

The right quantity always depends upon the substance itself. Based on the food article it is advised that heavy food articles should be consumed to one-third or one half of the saturation point (capacity of the stomach); even light ones should not be taken in excess in order to maintain the strength of *Agni* (digestion factor) ⁴.

Benefits of proper intake of food

The food taken in the right quantity certainly provides strength, complexion, happiness, and longevity to the person; without disturbing the normalcy ⁵.

Food articles are not to be consumed on a regular basis.

One should not be habitual to take dried meat, dried vegetables, *Shaaluka* (tuber of lotus), and *Bisa* (stalk of lotus) as these are heavy to digest. One should never eat the meat of emaciated anima ⁶.

One should not be habitual in taking coagulated milk, cream-cheese, pork flesh, meat of cow and buffalo, fish, curd, black gram, and wild variety of *Yava* ⁶.

Food articles are to be followed for regular consumption and preservation of health.

One should regularly consume *Shaashtika* rice (one rice variety), *Shaali* rice (another rice variety), *Mudga* (green gram), *Saindava* (rock-salt), *Aamalaka* (Indian gooseberry), *Yava* (barley), rainwater, milk, ghee, the flesh of *Jangala* (arid habitat) animals and honey ⁷.

Also, one should follow those things in the daily regimen, which maintains health as well as prevention of diseases ⁸.

Study methodology

The data collected for the study is from different available scriptures and Ayurvedic literature which discussed the concept of *Aharamatra*.

Ashtavidha Aharavidhi Visheshaayatana ⁹ (eight specific factors for diet), These are eight specific factors of the method of dieting. *Prakruti* (nature), *Karana* (processing), *Samyoga* (combination), *Rashi* (quantity), *Desha* (place), *Kaala* (time/ stage of the disease), *Upayogasamstha* (rules for use) and *Upayoktra* (consumer).

- a. *Prakruti* is *Svabhava*, or the natural attribute or trait of a substance, such as heaviness, etc. For example, the *Prakruti* of black gram or pork is *Guru* (heavy), while that of green gram or deer meat is *Laghu* (light).
- b. *Karana* (processing) is the making or refinement of the *Dravya*, or the *Samskara* that are added to the properties of those substances through different processing. These properties are imparted by contact of water and fire, by cleansing, churning, place, time, infusing, steeping, etc., and also by the medium used for storage or processing (for example copper vessel, earthen pot, etc.)
- c. *Samyoga* (combination) is the aggregation or combination of two or more *Dravya*. This exhibits peculiarities that are not seen in the case of individual substances, such as a combination of honey and ghee, and that of honey, fish, and milk.
- d. *Rashi* (quantity) consists of *Sarvagraha* (account of a whole amount or unit) and *Parigraha* (account of part of a substance, or of individual parts (in case the substance is a combination of multiple ingredients or parts)) which ascertain the effect of any food article taken in proper or improper quantity.
- e. *Desha* denotes the geographic region relating to the food substances that are local or endemic and thus are suitable for maintaining health.
- f. *Kaala* is time. It can be taken to be the ever-moving time, as in seasons (suitable to seasons), or as the duration from the standpoint of a condi-

- tion (for example if not treated in proper time becomes incurable)
- g. *Upayoga samastha* denotes the rules for dieting. This depends on the digestion aspects of food.
 - h. *Upayokta* is the one who consumes the food. For him depends on the *Oka satmya* (habituation developed by practice).
 - i. The characteristics of the eight factors mentioned are interdependent (for example, a substance of

optimum quantity taken in the right season and in the right place). Any regimen prescribed should be done after gaining a thorough understanding of the food articles from these eight aspects for them to be wholesome or not. Food or any other *Dravya* that is liked but is unwholesome and likely to produce unpleasant consequences should not be used by ignorance or carelessness.

Table 1 – Details of *Ashta Aharavidhi Viseshayatana* (eight specific factors for diet)

No.	Factor	Understanding
1	<i>Prakruti</i>	By Nature,
2	<i>Karana</i>	By Processing
3	<i>Samyoga</i>	By Combining
4	<i>Rashi</i>	By Quantity
5	<i>Desha</i>	By Habitat/ Geographic region
6	<i>Kaala</i>	By Time/ Duration
7	<i>Upaoga samstha</i>	By following the rules
8	<i>Upayokta</i>	Consumer himself

Results

Methods of taking meals (*Aharavidhi Vidhaana*)¹⁰

The prescribed method of eating habits for the healthy and the sick that takes wholesome food timely and habitually is also explained in Ayurveda giving more importance. The habits mentioned are one should eat warm, unctuous food in proper quantity, after the previously consumed food is digested, the food eaten should be non-antagonistic (not unsuitable to one's constitution or habit) and should be consumed in a favourable place, with all the favourable accessories, not too fast, not too slow, not while talking or laughing, and with full concentration.

a) Eat warm and freshly cooked food: One should eat warm (freshly cooked food) because it tastes well and the food consumed stimulates the digestive process, gets digested quickly, normalizes functions of Vata dosha, and reduces Kapha dosha (which obstructs the digestion process)

b) Eat unctuous food

One should eat unctuous because it tastes well, the food consumed stimulates any dormant digestive process, gets digested quickly, normalizes functions

of *Vata*, nourishes the body, provides firmness to sense organs, increases strength, and enhances complexion.

c) Eat in proper quantity

One should eat in proper quantity without disturbing *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* because that only helps promote one's lifespan, easily passes down the bowels, does not disturb the *Agni* (digestive fire), and gets digested without discomfort.

d) Eat after complete digestion of the previous meal

One should eat when the previous meal is digested because if one eats before the earlier meal is digested, mixing with undigested food will vitiate all the *Dosha* quickly. On the other hand, when one eats after the previous meal is well digested, the *Dosha* do not get vitiated or unsettled from their natural locations, *Agni* is stimulated, appetite is increased, entrances of the channels get cleared, eructation is pure, the heart is normal, there are natural urges to pass bodily wastes and there is no obstruction to their passage, and the eaten food enhances one's life without afflicting any *Dhaatu*

e) Eat a suitable combination of food

One should take food consisting of items that are non-antagonistic in nature to ensure one is not afflicted with the disorders caused by food that is unsuitable to the individual.

f) Eat at the right place and with the right accessories

One should eat in a favourable place and with favourable accessories because it is important to feel comfortable and satisfied while eating.

g) Do not eat too fast

One should not eat too quickly to ensure the food does not get into the wrong passage, and that the person is able to ascertain the qualities and taste of the food or even detect any defects in the food.

Do not eat too slowly.

One should not eat too slowly, because by eating too slowly one does not get satisfaction, eats much, and the food becomes cold and is digested irregularly.

h) Eat with proper concentration on eating and with a normal mental state

One should eat with utmost concentration on the food, while not talking or laughing. By taking food while talking or laughing or with mind elsewhere, he is inflicted with the same defects as by eating too fast.

Eat with self-awareness.

One should eat with due consideration to self, i.e., knowing one's own constitution and tastes. He/she should take food that is suitable to him or her. The principles of food and dietary intake for healthy living with special emphasis on the quantum of food ingested. It is advised that one must eat in accordance with the capacity of one's stomach and the quantity of food is determined by the strength of one's digestion capacity (*Agni*). *Ayurveda* regards *Aama*, or undigested food, as the cause of vitiation of *Dosha* and consequently various disorders. A proper quantity of food is digested in time without disturbing one's health. Diet taken with proper consideration of *Agni* positively promotes one's strength, complexion, health, and life, while improper quantity (*Amaatra*) of food less (*Heena*) or excess (*Adhika*) - leads to various disorders. *Ama* is the undigested food material which remains inside the body and produces toxic effects. The clinical presentation of *Aama* has two variations *Visoochika* and *Alasaka* with primarily gastro-intestinal and few systemic features.

Table 2 – Description of *Aharavidhi Vidhaana* (rules to be followed on taking food)

Rule to be followed	Understanding
<i>Ushnam</i>	Eat warm and freshly cooked food
<i>Snigdham</i>	Eat unctuous food
<i>Matravat</i>	Eat in proper quantity
<i>Jeernam</i>	Eat after complete digestion of previous meal
<i>Veerya-aviruddham</i>	Eat a suitable combination of food
<i>Ishte Deshe, Ishta upakaranam</i>	Eat at the right place and with the right accessories
<i>Na Ati Drutam, Na Ati Vilambhitam</i>	Do not eat too fast and too slow
<i>Ajalpan, Ahasan</i>	Do not take food while talking or laughing
<i>Tanmana Bhunjeeta, Atmanam Abhisameekshya</i>	Eat with a proper concentration on eating and with a normal mental state

Three divisions of *Aamashaya*

The consumer of the food should divide the total capacity of his stomach into three parts, a third of the portion of the space should be allocated to solid food articles, a third to liquid food substances and the remaining third should be left for the (movement of *Vata*, *Pitta*. and *Kapha* ¹¹. One, who keeps this basic

thumb-rule during dietary intake, does not get affected by any adverse effect arising out of improper quantity of diet for determining the appropriate and inappropriate quantities of intake of food these factors are considered for deciding the proper and improper quantity of food. Features after consuming the proper quantity of food¹².

Any quantity of food to be consumed can be considered appropriate if it does not exert undue pressure on the abdomen, does not cause obstruction in the proper functioning of the heart, does not exert any pressure on the sides of the chest, does not leave a feeling of excessive heaviness in the abdomen, properly nourishes (satisfies) the sense organs, subsides hunger and thirst, after consuming which the person is able to perform activities such as standing, sitting, walking, exhaling, inhaling, laughing, and talking with ease, and is easy to digest when taken in the morning and evening hours. Food consumed in the appropriate quantity enhances strength, complexion, and nourishment of tissues.

Features after consuming an improper quantity of food¹³.

Inappropriate quantity of food is of two types, deficient or excessive in quantity as briefly mentioned earlier. The food taken in deficient quantity is said to be the cause of reduction in strength, complexion, and nourishment of body tissues, non-satisfaction, altered peristalsis and misplacement of *Vayu*, impairments in life-functions, quality of body tissues (*Saara*), sexual stamina (virility) and *Ojas* (vitality), damage to the body, mind, intellect, and sense organs, inducing inauspiciousness and also making the person home to a variety of disorders of *Vata*. One who eats solid foods in excess and also drinks beyond satiation will have all three *Dosha* - *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* - in his stomach vitiated simultaneously due to their getting compressed by all the excess food. Thus, vitiated *Dosha* in the undigested food mass gets localized into a part of the stomach, which then either obstructs the movements in the abdomen or suddenly gets eliminated through the upper and lower channels of the alimentary tract. They produce distinct features in the person as follows: *Vata* causes colic pain, distension of the abdomen, body ache, dryness of the mouth, fainting, giddiness, variability in digestive power, rigidity in flanks, back, and waist, and contraction (spasm) and hardening of vessels. *Pitta* causes fever, diarrhea, burning sensation inside the body, thirst, intoxicated state, giddiness, and delirium, and *Kapha* causes vomiting, anorexia, indigestion, fever

with cold, laziness, and heaviness in the body. Other causative factors for *Aama* formation¹⁴ The quantum of food is not the only cause of the formation of *Aama* (undigested and non-metabolized food) in the body but also the use of diet and drinks which are heavy to digest, and with properties like dry, cold, dehydrated, disliked by the consumer, constipation-causing, causing a burning sensation, unclean, incompatible, and/or consumed untimely. Intake of food, while the mind is afflicted with passion/desires, anger, greed, infatuation, envy, bashfulness, grief, conceit, excitement, and fear, is also the cause of the formation of *Aama*.

Influence of mental condition on digestion

Thus, it can be said that any wholesome food, even if taken in the right quantity, does not get digested if the mental state of the person is riddled with anxiety, grief, fear, anger, or restless and irritable due to lack of sleep.¹⁵

Aama disorders

There are two types of diseases caused by *Aama dosha*, *Visoochika* (non-infectious gastroenteritis) and *Alasaka* (sluggish bowels).¹⁶

Visoochika

The expulsion of *Aama dosha* (undigested food) through both upper and lower passages of the gastrointestinal tract with the features already described above is *Visoochika*.¹⁷

Alasaka

If a frail person having weak digestive power and excess of *Kapha* in the body, habitually suppresses the urges of passing flatulence, micturition, and bowel movement and at the same time consumes solid, heavy, excessively dry, and cold, dehydrated foods in excessive quantities, his ingested food gets afflicted by *Vayu*. Even exerting pressure does not push the undigested food out of the passage since it is obstructed by *Kapha*, by excreta accumulated already, and also because of sluggishness caused by all these factors. This condition is called *Alasaka*. All the characteristic features of *Ama dosha*, devoid of vomiting and diarrhoea, are manifested severely in *Alasaka*.¹⁸

The extremely vitiated *Dosha* moves towards oblique passages as the other passages are blocked by aggravated *Aama*. This will sometimes cause the body to become rigid, like a wooden rod/staff. This incurable clinical condition is known as *Dandalasaka*. The *Aama dosha* of an individual who regularly consumes an incompatible diet, multiple heavy meals (in short intervals), and eats even before the previous meal is digested is called *Aama visha* (clinical state of indigestion characterized by manifestation of toxic symptoms) because of resemblance of manifested symptoms to that of poisoning. It is considered incurable because of its acute presentation and also because of its contradictory line of management.¹⁸

DISCUSSION

There are three substances contra-indicated for long term consumption and their effects on the body whose excessive use is strictly prohibited in comparison to other ones are *Pippali* (long pepper), *Kshara* (alkali), and *Lavana* (salt).¹⁹ Long peppers are pungent but sweet in *Vipaka*, heavy, not too unctuous, hot, and moistening. They are considered to be among the most effective drugs and exhibit their good or bad effect fairly quickly. If used properly and sparingly, they are beneficial but still lead to consequent accumulation of *Doshas*. If used regularly, however, they aggravate *Kapha* due to their heaviness and moistening properties, *Pitta* due to their hotness while they are unable to pacify *Vata* because of little unctuousness and hotness. Hence one should not use long peppers excessively.²⁰ *Kshara* (alkali) endowed with hotness, sharpness, and lightness at first acts like a liquid, but dries up subsequently. It is used for digestion, burning, and tearing but if used excessively, damages hair, eyes, heart, and virility. The people of villages, cities, communes, and districts who use it continuously suffer from blindness, impotency, baldness, and grey hair, and constricting pain in the cardiac region, such as the inhabitants of the eastern region and China. Hence one should not use alkali excessively.²¹ *Lavana* (salt) is endowed with hotness, sharpness, moistening, laxative, and relishing qualities and is not so heavy and unctuous.

Quite like long peppers, it has apparent benefits when used properly and sparingly, but causes accumulation of *Doshas* when used habitually or excessively. Its excessive usage causes malaise, laxity, and debility in the body. The people of villages, cities, communes, and districts who use it continuously are exceedingly depressed, have loose muscles and blood, and low tolerance for pain. Such inhabitants as those of *Bahlika*, *Saurashtra*, *Sindhu*, and *Sauveera* (regions in ancient India) even take salt with milk. Moreover, such regions of the world have barren, saline soil and plants – herbs, shrubs, trees, and big trees – that do not grow or are stunted because of damage by salt. Hence one should not use salt too much. Even the persons who tend to use excessive salt fall victims to untimely baldness, greying of hair, and wrinkles.²²

CONCLUSION

The total ingredients to be included in daily consumption of food can be understood as the proper quantity of food intake. The factors like heaviness and lightness of food related to the qualities of food articles and the Agni factor (digestive power) of the individual should be considered for determining the food intake. The habituation (*Oka satmyata*) happening on the consumption of certain food starting from birth and the habitat of residence (*Desha*) plays important roles in the proper quantity of food which will be promoting a healthy life. The factors like methods of taking food and rules to be followed for deciding a diet have supporting role which will enhance the knowledge of daily consumption of food in required quantity as instructed in Ayurveda should take into consideration for maintaining proper health. The balanced diet as mentioned in modern medical science for a healthy and sick individual will also come under the heading of quantity of food to be followed for a healthy life.

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