

CONCEPT OF IMMUNITY IN AYURVEDA

The concept of immunity, *Vyadhi Ksamatva* or *Bala*, as it is known in *Ayurveda* is a fascinating and vast subject. The body's resistance is of tremendous importance in the daily welfare of living beings; for prevention and rapid recovery from diseases, immunity plays a key role.

It can be observed that among a group of people exposed to a given disease, only some will be afflicted, while others are left without any effect. This phenomenon itself illustrates two important points that the pathogenic factors require some essential favorable conditions to flourish and that the individual is susceptible to the disease. In the absence of such conditions, an individual's immunity or resistance can eradicate the disease, preserving and maintaining a balanced condition. This concept is akin to the principle explained in ancient Vedic literature: *Manusmruti*, *Mahabharata* and *Panchatantra* all explained that the seed sown in non-fertile soil will be destroyed, just as fire thrown in a fuel-less or air-fewer places subsides.

In *Ayurveda*, *Ojas* has been considered vital in the defense mechanism of the body. In conditions like diabetes mellitus and malnutrition, where loss of *Ojas* is a constant feature, people are known to be susceptible to various other interrelated and degenerative diseases or recurrent infections.

As a general rule, those who indulge in an irregular routine and eat unwholesome food tend to suffer ill

health. Conversely, those who maintain a regular, healthy routine and take wholesome food generally maintain good health. However, it can be observed that some people can tolerate and overcome disease even after indulging in irregular routine and unwholesome food, managing to live healthily and happily. It can also be noted that though some people follow a regular routine and eat wholesome food, they are still susceptible to disease and suffer ill health. These are unanswered questions that are worthy of investigation and analysis.

Ayurveda offers multi-faceted and profound explanations for this phenomenon. Intake of wholesome food and a regular routine alone are not enough to prevent disease. Additional factors such as mistaken intellect, constitution, moral conduct, karma and unsuitable contact of sensory perceptions like sound, touch, vision, taste and smell are also responsible for the onset of disease. Due to these factors, diseases manifest as mild or severe, acute or chronic, easily curable or difficult to cure/incurable.

Types of immunity in *Ayurveda*:

Bala or immunity can be classified into 3 types:

1. *Sahaja*: Congenital or Natural
2. *Kalaja*: Time, Season, Age
3. *Yuktikruta*: Acquired

Sahaja Bala comes from the parents and is inherited. Today in our modern society, many children have allergies to various foods and substances, and appear

to be less strong than their parents. These inherited qualities come from their ancestors. According to *Ayurveda*'s theory on genetics, genetic factors are defined at the cellular level. The entire cell is referred to as *beeja*; *beeja bhaga* is the nucleus, and *avayava* are the chromosomes. If two parents' genetic makeup is healthy, the same health is seen in the children, whereas if their genetic makeup includes susceptibility to certain diseases, those diseases will be carried over into the next generation. The effect will be at the cellular, nuclear or chromosomal level. As this immunity is inherited, there is not much one can do except to avert the defects through various modalities of *Ayurveda*.

According to *Kalaja Bala*, the time of day, season, and one's age are important factors for enhancing immunity: strength is greater in the early morning, spring, and youth than in evening, summer and old age. *Kalaja Bala* is inclusive of one's time, day of the week and place of birth and their impact, marked or subtle, on immunity. Certain places have stronger and healthier climatic and environmental conditions. For example, places with an abundance of water, ponds, cool and pleasant climatic conditions are *kapha*-dominating areas and contribute to stronger immunity.

Yuktikruta Bala represents acquired immunity, in which disease can be defended against through *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* focuses on three plans for acquiring or enhancing immunity:

□ *Rasayana* is health promoting and rejuvenates the whole physiology, producing resistance against disease both physically and mentally. If a person has a strong mind, even serious diseases can

be faced by the physiology as minor diseases.

□ *Vyayama* is exercise. Daily exercise of up to 50% of one's exertion capacity enhances digestion, strengthens tissue metabolism and promotes immunity.

□ *Satmya* is suitability. Adapting to wholesome substances and giving up unwholesome substances, to which the physiology has been addicted since birth, also promotes immunity. The classifications of *Satmya* are:

a. Universally Beneficial: Certain herbs, foods and behavior are beneficial for everyone, regardless of constitution, location, season or condition. Examples include water, rice, sleeping at night and moderate exercise.

b. Universally Harmful: Certain substances are considered harmful to everyone, including fire, alkalis, toxins, poison, mixing milk with sour foods, mixing milk and salt, honey and radish, honey and ghee mixed together in equal proportions, honey heated beyond 108° Fahrenheit.

c. Beneficial or Harmful: Some foods and exercises are good for one particular constitution but may be harmful for another. For example, ghee is good for *Vata* and *Pitta* constitution, but not for *Kapha*. In this classification of *Satmya*, foods should be administered in relation to individual constitution, season, location, food habits and health.

Additional factors which influence immunity in the body:

□ Uterine health of mother: A healthy uterus for a baby's growth can be likened to fertile and nourishing soil for a seed.

□ Nutrition after birth: Wholesome, adequate and timely nutrition in infancy plays an important role in developing immunity.

□ Constitution: Generally, *Kapha* constitution people have stronger immunity than *Pitta* and *Vata* constitutions.

□ Mind: A strong mind oriented toward positive thinking increases one's *Ojas* and therefore is a major factor in one's immunity.

□ *Karma*: In cases where an individual has a strong and healthy constitution, healthy genetic makeup, and lives in accordance with nature through intake of wholesome foods and regular routine, yet still succumbs to a severe illness, subtle *karmic* factors may reveal themselves as having a prominent impact on immunity.

□ Meditation for spiritual growth: Meditation is continuous thought on one subject. Orienting the mind towards spirituality naturally brings about greater self-awareness and positive thinking, thereby enhancing mental strength and overall immunity.

The following formulations enhance immunity:

- Honey + ghee in unequal quantities
- Water + milk + ghee
- Water + honey + ghee
- Water + honey + ghee + milk
- Water + milk
- Water + honey
- Water + ghee
- Milk + honey
- Milk + ghee
- Milk + honey + ghee
- Pure milk
- Pure honey
- Pure ghee
- Pure water
- *Triphala* with honey

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