

ROLE OF DIETETICS IN PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF DISEASES

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ABSTRACT

Ahara is the best preventive medicine and solely responsible for health and illness, sorrow and happiness. Almost all diseases occur due to unwholesome diets and dietary habits. Although specific drugs are required for the management of specific diseases, *Ahara* is the best of all. It has been considered equally essential to follow the dietetics rules and regulations for a successful treatment. Many instance food itself are used as a curative measure and hence prescribe specific diet patterns in the diseased conditions, besides prescribing the medicines. Ayurveda also offered a number of nutritional preparations. 28 *Yavagus* (gruels), and 24 *Sneha Kalpanas* and a variety of food preparations were mentioned in classical texts considering the different needs of healthy and diseased. So having a rich knowledge pertaining to the dietetics, *Ayurveda* can contribute promising attributes for the restoration of health through prophylactic and interventional dietetics. The need of the hour is to explore the potential of the science of dietetics in *Ayurveda* and find ways and means to adopt the recommendation of our ancient sages to achieve the ever cherished target of health for all.

Keywords: Dietetics, *Ahara*, Prevention, Management

INTRODUCTION

Food has been considered as one of the three supports¹ of life in *Ayurveda*. Being supported by these three well regulated factors of life, the body is bestowed with strength, complexion and growth till full span of life provided a person follows the regimen prescribed. Among those three factors, sustenance of living beings is mainly depends on food only. It can be considered as the greatest medicine due to possibilities of management various diseases solely through diet. On the contrary medication only cannot become the person free from disease, if diet is ignored. On a critical study it is observed that dietetics mentioned in *Ayurveda* is having a definite role in the prevention and management of diseases.

Science of dietetics in *Ayurveda*

Ayurveda offers some basic dietary guidelines that include choosing appropriate food, combinations of food and utensils for serving the food, eating atmosphere, hygiene and etiquette. *Anna* is '*Brahma*'. It is not only meant for fulfilling the appetite but it should be considered as equal to *Yajya-karma*². Thus, before eating, our great culture reminds us about humanity, the difference from rest of the animals. *Jatharagni* is considered as God and the food is *Ahuti* given for God. These rituals definitely affect the psychology; give a feeling of satisfaction and this in turn affects the physiology of digestion.

Time of meal

Once in the morning (between 10am to 12noon) and once in the evening, after the morning meal has completely been digested and lightness pervades the body, only hunger has been keenly felt, the meal to be eaten at a quietly pleasant, un-crowded, illuminated holy place³. Most of our population rarely gets proper time at proper place with proper accessories.

Aahar vidhi vidhan (the conducts and rules for taking food)⁴:

Warm: When taken warm it is delicious; it provokes the enzymes in the abdomen responsible for digestion. Extreme hot is not advisable, if consumed it causes, intoxication, burning sensation, excessive thirst, loss of strength, giddiness and bleeding disorder. Even extreme cold food should not be taken. Eating the food prepared before a long time causes *Stambha* (stiffness), *Agnimandya* (loss of digestive power), loss of taste, nausea etc.

Unctuous: By taking unctuous food, obviously *Vata* is alleviated (*Anulomana*), For *Agnidipana*, *Sneha* is required as is seen practically in the outer world, as well as in body, Due to *Kledana* property, *Kledaka Kapha* gets stimulated which helps in *Madhura Avasthapaka* of food, also *Bodhaka Kapha* is secreted which aids to feel the proper taste. It increases the plumpness of the body, strengthens the sense faculties, promote the strength. *Ruksha Guna* (dryness) aggravates *Vata* which results in hampering the digestive power.

Proper quantity of food: The amount of food which, without disturbing the equilibrium, gets digested as well as metabolized in proper time is to be regarded as the proper quantity. For the purpose of taking food the

stomach capacity should be divided into four parts in which two parts filled with solid foods and one part for liquids and the remaining part should be kept vacant for the movement for *Vata* etc⁵. One who takes food with due regard to this principle, does not affect with any diseases. It promotes longevity in its entirety without afflicting *Tridosha*. Intake of food in excessive quantity causes serious type of indigestion.⁶ Intake of irregular meals causes irregularity in digestive power.

Intake of food after digestion of previous meal: If diet is taken before digestion of previous food, the food lies undigested in the stomach, mixes with the semi digested *Ahara Rasa* and provokes all the *Doshas* immediately. This is a major cause for most of the diseases. Exactly opposite to this condition, i.e., if person does not consumes food even after the digestion of previous food, is also not favorable. Thus *Kala Bhojana* (timely consuming food) should be practiced. Food which is taken before the proper digestion of previous food is considered to be poisonous. This is a major cause for most of the diseases like *Grahani* (I.B.S), *Atisara* (diarrhea), *Udara* (ascitis), fever, tuberculosis, *Alasaka*, *Visuchika* etc. Exactly opposite to this condition i.e. if required quantity of food is not taken even after the digestion of previous food is also not favorable. Intake of food before the digestion of previous meals causes vitiation of *Grahani*. Intake of heavy food causes improper digestion.

Viruddha Ahara (incompatibility food)⁷: Correspondingly intake of incompatibility food articles are seen much often in this era. The diseases that are caused by *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatibility food) are listed by *Acharyas* like *Adhmana* (distension of ab-

domen), *Grahani* (I.B.S), *Amlapitta* (gastritis) *Kushta* (leprosy), *Pandu* (Anaemia), *Shotha* (swelling), *Jwara* (fever), *Andhata* (blindness), *Indriya Dourbalyam* (weakness of sense organs) and even death. Some examples of the Viruddhashana which is commonly seen nowadays are - Having milk with food items containing salt (e.g. Biscuit, bread), combination of milk with fruits (fruit salad), regular usage of milk preparations like *paneer*, *malai* etc. Intake of food having mutually contradictory properties causes eight incurable diseases⁸.

Na-Atidrutam will lead to improper mixing of *Bodhaka Kapha* which hampers the *Sanghat* leading to indigestion. The food when eaten with hurry violates its normal route that can be understood by an example i.e. "*Hikka*". The *Annaja Hikka* is the best example of '*Vimargagamanam*'. Due to hurry, *Vata* gets stimulated which misleads the food, producing the symptoms like '*Hiccup*'.

Na-Ativilambitam i.e. by taking food very slowly, enzymes responsible for digestion will come in contact of food in irregular manner and this will result in improper digestion.

Intake in proper place and with all accessories: In desired place and desired vessel, not only favoured but also beneficial is expected. One should take food in proper place equipped with all the accessories. By this one not gets afflicted with such factors which result in emotional strain. Appropriate appliances for dining are needed and indicated in detail by *Acharyas*. There is a large list of utensils required for preparation, serving, storage and dining etc. For specific kind of food, specific material is mentioned⁹ e.g.

- Ghee and oily foods- Steel/ iron which improve eye sight and cure anemia and edema
- Liquids, meat, fruit juices- Silver which is *Kaphavatanasaka*, improve eye sight
- Water (cooled after boiling) - Copper which promote intelligence, *Raktapitta nasaka*.

This specification may be due to some chemical reactions between the food material and utensils. This reaction can be helpful for longer preservation of food as well as its healthy effect on body. Some materials are strictly contraindicated for specific foods, e.g., sour foods should not be kept in copper utensils, as the chemical reaction produces poison like substances and leads to many disorders.

Taken after paying due regard to oneself:

One should know his capacity that how much to eat? What is good and bad for him? Considering the factor one has to decide the quantity and the type of food to be consumed. On contrary, if he takes food whatever he gets it may not be good for his health.

Classical Ayurvedic way of eating food:

Some methods of partaking diet like prayers before meal etc. are advised to connect mind to the meal. The concentration of mind is needed for every work, as body-mind relationship is well proved.

- Containing all six *Rasas*
- Preferably sitting alone
- After offered a part of food to birds/ animals to check any poison
- After guests, elders and younger have taken food
- Keep the dry foods like fruits and other edibles- in the right side

- Juice, water, milk, butter milk, and other liquids- in the left side
- Food made up of jaggery, *Raga-Shadava*- in front of
- Food articles consumed in proper sequence with respect to their specific quality help in the digestion and assimilation
- Food consumed in the righteous manner serves as nectar to rejuvenate the body and maintaining health
- Intake of food according to the power of digestion is the best one for promoting digestion
- Intake of food only once in a day is the best one for bringing about happiness
- Intake of food in time is the best one for healthy practices

Best Ayurvedic diets¹⁰:

- Water –The best for revive, withhold and moisten
- Milk –The best among the invigorating substance
- Meat-The best one among the nourishing substance
- Meat soup- The best one among the refreshing substance
- Salt - The best one which increases the deliciousness of food substance
- Chicken- The best for strength promoting
- Habitual use of Ghee and milk-The best for causing rejuvenation effect
- Habitual use of equal quantity of ghee and corn flour-The best for aphrodisiac effect and to relieve the upward movement.

Types of food to be discarded:

Similar to unwholesome food, the following four types of food also to be discarded;

- *Samashana* - Taking wholesome and unwholesome foods together
- *Adhyashana*- Taking second meal without digesting to previous one

- *Amatrashana*- Not taking food in the proper quantity. The quantity of the food varies from person to person and also the types of food substances as well as the power of digestion.
- *Vishamashana*-Taking food too early or too late than prescribed time.

Ayurvedic order of eating food¹¹:

Acharya has clearly stated that firstly meal should be started with liquid food/dry food and *Guru*, *Madhura* and *Snigdha*, in between the meal *Amla* and *Lavana* and at the end of the food *Ruksha*, *Katu*, *Tikta*, *Kashaya* food. *Acharya Bhavaprakasha* emphatically recommends the commencement of the meals with some pieces of ginger coated with small quantity of rock salt. This enhances the tasting power, increases the salivary secretions and purifies the tongue and the throat, it stokes the digestive fire, and it enhances the digestive secretions.

Water intake during meals¹²: *Ayurveda* has given detailed scientific instructions as to when, how and how much water to be taken during the course of the meals.

- Drinking water at the beginning of meals causes weight loss
 - During the meals-weight constancy
 - At the end of meals-increases weight
- Therefore those desirous of losing weight may drink a glass of lukewarm water just before commencing the meals.

Anupana (postprandial drinks):

Administration of wholesome postprandial drink refreshes instantaneously and helps in individual in easy digestion resulting in the promotion of longevity and strength. Generally postprandial drinks should have the properties opposite to those of the food taken. But the same time, such

drinks should not be harmful to the tissue element of the body.

Table 1: Best Anupana (Postprandial drinks)¹³

Sl. No.	Type of food substances	Best Anupana
1.	Curds, honey, wheat products and barely	Cold water
2.	Foods causing burning sensation- <i>Grisma & Sharada Ritu</i>	Cold water
3.	Fasting, long walk, speaking, long time sexual intercourse, exercise, aged and children	Milk
4.	Emaciated person	Meat soup
5.	Obese	Madhu +water
6.	Insomnia, yawning, <i>Mandagni</i>	<i>Madya</i>
7.	<i>Vata</i> disorders	<i>Snigdha</i> and hot
8.	<i>Pitta</i> disorders	<i>Madhura</i> and cold
9.	<i>Kapha</i> disorders	<i>Ruksha</i> and hot

After meals activity:

- Wash the hands and touch the eyes it removes the eye diseases such as *Timira* etc¹⁴.
- Chanting the name of *Mangala, Agasti, Agni, Surya,* and *Ashvini* for good digestion of food¹⁵.
- Remove the residue of food by cleaning the teeth with tooth pricks
- Mouth gargle
- *Pan* chewing
- One should sit comfortably like king till strain of food is over
- Walk about hundred yards

After meal, one should sleep supine for eight breaths, thereafter for sixteen breaths with right side to the bed, thereafter with the left side to the bed for thirty two minutes, thereafter one may sleep as one desires¹⁶.

Prophylactic nutrition: The main purpose of preventive attributes prescribed in *Ayurveda* is to improve the immunity. In the *Ayurvedic* paediatrics various rituals, such as mixture of honey and ghee immediately after birth to alarm the immunity mechanism, have been mentioned for the recognition of milestones and to extend the required nutrition and immunity during the process of growth and development. According to *Ay-*

urveda the constitution or *Dosha* of the body and the seasons are intimately related. Our health is affected by the qualities of the climate in which we live our outer environment influences our inner world. *Ritucharya* is the observance of diet and regimen according to the seasonal changes.

Nutritional interventions: *Ayurveda* mentions congenial and non congenial diet in respect of particular diseases and stress that by the non observance of those rules, the disease may not be cured easily even with effective medications. *Ayurveda* prescribe specific diet patterns in the diseased conditions. Some example of *Pathya* in diseased conditions:

- Food containing sufficient fat content, easily digestible, warm food, wheat, black gram, milk and milk products, garlic etc. are *Pathya* in Diseases related to nervous system (*Vata Vyadhi*)
- Barely, old wheat, horse gram, green gram, bitter gourd, garlic, *Piper longum*, unripe banana, *Takra*, dates, lotus root, drums-tick are beneficial in Diabetes type-2
- Old barely, wheat, green gram, old ghee, honey, garlic, oil of sesame mustard should be advised in the skin diseases.

- Old horse gram, barely, honey, butter-milk, garlic, ginger, castor oil, pointed gourd, bitter gourd, drumstick, cow's and goat's milk may be given in Abdominal disorders.

- Barely, wheat, horse gram, red variety of rice, buttermilk, black pepper, cow's milk, rice gruel, garlic, ginger, *Haritiki*, mustard oil etc. are helpful in Hemorrhoids.

Pathya kalpana (clinical nutrition): According to the principles of Ayurveda, derangement of the digestive power occurs in many diseases and hence it is important to restore normalcy of the digestive power. Gruels or *Yavagu* is prepared by boiling the rice in the specific amount of the water and reducing to make a liquid/semisolid form. A number of gruels prepared with various drugs for alleviation of various disorders like¹⁷

- Gruel prepared with Sunthi, root of long pepper, *Chavya*, *Chitraka* and dry ginger promotes appetites and relieves colic pains.

- Gruel prepared with *Gokshura* and *Kantakari*, mixed with *Phanita* should be given in dysuria.

- Gruel prepared with *Vidanga*, root of long pepper, *Shigru*, *Maricha*, Whey and *Suvarchika* Lavana is used as an antihelminthic and vermifuge.

- Gruel prepared with *Mridwika*, *Sariva*, fried paddy, long pepper, honey and dry ginger allays thirst.

Epilogue: It is known very well that inadequate food or partial starvation leads to malnutrition, but of the same time a single foodstuff in adequate amount also leads to malnutrition. Our ancestors were aware of this fact and hence with the help of long standing experience and wisdom they have established a diet pattern for the society.

In view of the association of painful diseases with irregular dieting, a wise person who has control over his senses should take wholesome food in proper quantity and in proper time¹⁸. So, after considering the above facts, one should eat the *Matravata* and *Hitakara- Ahara*, and then person can attain his proper vigour, complexion, healthy and happy long life. Hence one can consume various preparations according to the need. The whole world is turning to the nature for promotion of health as well as prevention and cure of the diseases. *Ayurveda* having a rich knowledge pertaining to the dietetics can contribute promising attributes for the restoration of health through prophylactic and interventional dietetics.

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