

## SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF CHARAK'S AHARA -VIDHI VIDHAN (DIETARY GUIDELINES)

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### ABSTRACT

Adequate nutrition is the basic need for healthy life but without knowing proper dietary guidelines one cannot gain optimum benefit from the food consumed. There are many guidelines related to diet and its contents in modern aspect but the *Ayurvedic* approach has its unique importance. Acharya Charak has given *ahara vidhi vidhan* (dietary guidelines) which can prevent many diseases arising merely due to faulty dietary habits. Scientific explanation for each factor is explained.

**Key words:** *ahara vidhi vidhan*, diet, dietary guidelines, dietary rules

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is increased prevalence of life style disorders in which faulty dietary habits play an important role. Acharya Charak mentions food as *prana* or life of living beings if taken properly but if taken in a faulty manner may cause death.<sup>1</sup> In present era, due to change in lifestyle, man is giving least importance to his diet and dietary rules. If Ayurvedic dietary guidelines are followed, many diseases can be prevented arising merely due to faulty dietary habits.

### SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF AHARA VIDHI VIDHAN

Acharya Charak has given *ahara vidhi vidhan*<sup>2</sup> (dietary guidelines) for which scientific explanation is explained in following points.

**Ushnamashniyat (consuming warm food)** Warm food tastes good and doesn't pacify *Jatharagni*. Food is easily digested as food has to come to body temperature for digestion.<sup>3</sup> *Vata* and *kapha* are pacified on taking warm food. Heating also kills

microbes. On taking cold food more energy will be use for digestion which may lead lethargy. So, warm food should be consumed.

**Snigdhamashniyat (Diet should include fat)** Fat improves the taste of diet, increases *agni* so food easily digested, pacifies *vata* due to *snigdha guna*, enhances body growth, provides strength to senses, improves strength and also improves complexion and glow of the body. Fat provides a concentrate source of energy and essential fatty acids are needed for growth and development, building of nerve cells and brain. Fat is essential for absorption of Vit. A, D, E and K. These vitamins are well known to increase immunity, are good for skin and eyes, Vit. E is an antioxidant, Vit. D is important for Calcium absorption which provides strength to bones. HDL is important as it reduces risk of heart disease. Consuming fatty acids can boost metabolism. Dietary fat helps in breakdown

of existing fat by activation of PRAR-alfa and fat burning pathways through liver.<sup>4</sup>

*Ruksha ahara* may cause obstruction in *srotas*. *Ghrita* is best *vata-pitta shamak* and *tail* is best *vata-kapha sahamak*<sup>5</sup> so if diet contains both then it pacifies *tridosh*. Acharya Charak mentions *ksheergritabh-yaso rasaynanam*.<sup>5</sup> Monounsaturated fatty acids help in stabilizing blood sugar level. Omega -3 fatty acid create a greater sense of fullness for longer periods so that stomach doesn't want food again, preventing obesity, it also boosts serotonin level in brain helping improvement in mood and motivation. It also stimulates muscle protein synthesis in older adults.

#### **Matravatashniyat ( Balanced Diet )**

According to Ayurveda *matra* (amount) is of two type one is *sarvagraha* (whole amount) another *parigrah* (amount of individual ingredient) so the diet must consist of variety of food items in proper amount from different groups so that it contains all micro and macro nutrients. Balanced diet does not disturb Doshik status of body, enhances longevity, gets digested and passes out without any problem, Amount of the diet should be according to *agni* and *bala* of the body.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Jeerneashniyat (Meal taken after digestion of previous meal)**

Next meal should be taken after digestion of previous meal. This prevents *adhyashan* which leads to *ama* formation, which is the root cause of majority of diseases. On taking meal in *ajeernavastha*, *grahanidosh* and vitiation of all *doshas* occurs. So the diet should be taken after digestion of previous diet as Charak says *kaalbhojnam arogyakaranam*.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Veeryaviruddhamashniyat**

It is essential to take *veerya-aviruddha ahara* to prevent problems arising due to

*viruddhavedhya* ahara such as impotency, blindness, *raktavikar*, *grahani*, *amavisha*, hypersensitivity, *kustha* (skin disorders), *shotha*, fever, etc and may even cause death.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Ishtadeshe ishtasarvopkarnam chashniyat (Meal taken at proper place and with proper instruments)**

Meal should be taken in proper place and with proper utensils so that hygiene is maintained and no stress arises during meal. In stressful condition, cortisol level increases.

In a study conducted on 59 healthy women, they were exposed to both a stress session and a control session on different days, stress increases cortisol level, so they consumed more calories on stress day than on control day. More sweet food was consumed. Increase in negative mood in response to stress lead to greater food consumption.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Naatidrutamashniyat (Not eating too fast)**

Too fast eating can produce various problems. If food particle goes in respiratory tract it can cause choking or other respiratory tract infections or problems like GERD. If food is taken in proper speed, enzymatic juices mix properly so food gets easily digested. Brain takes about 20 minutes to recognize that stomach is full, so eating with optimum speed prevents over eating. In a study on 30 young women of normal weight ate same lunch on two separate occasions. 1<sup>st</sup> time they ate as quickly as possible and 2<sup>nd</sup> time slowly. When they ate quickly, consumed 646 calories in nine minutes and were less satisfied and felt hungry as compared to when they eat slowly consumed only 579 calories in 29 minutes with more satisfaction and fullness.<sup>9</sup> Eating slowly can decrease food

consumption preventing over eating, better absorption of nutrients, better appetite regulation and better satiety.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Naativilambitamashniyat (Not eating too slowly)**

If food is taken too slowly, it is not properly digested as enzymatic secretions do not mix properly with the food leading to improper digestion, one doesn't get satisfied, eats more and food gets cold.

#### **Ajalpanahasan tanmanabhunjeet (Eating without talking or laughing, Mindful eating)**

No talking or laughing during meal but it should be taken with full concentration. Acharya Charak says that the even *pathya-ahar* taken in proper amount does not get digested, due to *chinta* (worry), *shok*(sorrow), *bhaya* (fear), *krodh* (anger), *dukh* (sadness) and in improper bedding and sleep.<sup>11</sup> There are chances to ingest unjustified food items by mistake. Indriyas also intake food through senses, so food must be of good *rupa*, *rasa*, *gandha* and *sparsh*. We can only sense these when we concentrate on food while eating. Children and adults too these days eat while running to school, tuition or office resulting in no relaxation, poor digestion or nutrition, poor performance and finally depression counts. Watching television while eating, accounts for more food consumption as no attention is paid on food.

#### **Atmanamabhisamikshya bhunjeet samyak ( Eating after analyzing one's needs )**

Diet should be taken according to *satmya*, *prakruti*, *agni* and *bala*. It should be taken according to self energy and nutrient requirement as in case of pregnancy, child, laborer, intellectual, old people or sick people. Old have small appetite but need nutritious food. Energy requirement in-

creased during puberty, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation. Diet of sick people should be according to disease.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Viewing the above points it can be conclude that *ahara* should be taken according to *ahara vidhi vidhan* (dietary guidelines) which are truly scientific as mentioned by our Acharyas. Many diseases can be prevented arising merely due to faulty dietary habits. Healthier eating habits may help lower risk for type-2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, infertility and many other health problems.

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