

## ROLE OF AGNI IN MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH – A LITERARY REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial human beings desire is to live long and happy life of hundred years, to achieve this desire Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of life has prescribed important principles to be followed by every individual in strict manner under the heading of Swasthavritta. *Agni* is one of the principles which maintains normal state the health and prevents the diseases. The term “*Agni*” is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. *Agni* converts food in the form of biological energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that *Dehagni* is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, luster, *oja*, *teja* (energy) and *prana* (life energy). About the importance of *Agni*, Acharya Charaka has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of *Agni*, the individual dies, and when the *Agni* of an individual is *samagni*, then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, happy, healthy life. But, if the *Agni* of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, *Agni* is said to be the base (*moola*) of life. *Vagbhata* says that root of all diseases is *Mandagni* and *Samagni* is for health. In this paper an honest attempt is made to review the literature from all possible sources regarding role of *samagni* in maintenance of health.

**Keywords:** *agni, health, pathya, apathya*

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life has two objectives namely protection of health of an individual and treating the diseases of diseased person<sup>1</sup>. To fulfil the first objective, Ayurveda described all the preventive measures under the subject of Swasthavritta which includes definition of *swastha* (healthy), *swasthavritta* (preventive measures), *dinacharya* (daily regimen), *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), *ratricharya* (night regimen), *sadvritta* (code or conducts) and *trayopasthamba* (three supporting pillars of life).<sup>2</sup> The definition of *swastha* given by Ayurveda is comprehensive and has all the parameters of QOL (quality of life) of WHO. Definition given by Susrutaacharya as follows: the state of the equilibrium and proper functioning of

*Doshas*, *Dhatus*, *Agni* and *Malas* in parallel with satiated soul, mind, and sense of organs<sup>3</sup>. Ayurveda believes the human body is composed of *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala*,<sup>4</sup> these three types of factors together build, develop and maintain the human body in a healthy condition through their mutual interactions. The biological functions of anabolism, catabolism and movement are performed by the triad of *kapha*, *pitta* and *vata*.

**Aims & Objective:** To review the literature regarding *samagni*

To review the literature regarding *pathya* & *apathy* in maintenance of *samagni*

**Materials & Methods:** Systematic review has been made from possible texts of Ayurveda to gather information regarding

role of *agni* maintenance of health and to mention the *pathya* & *apathya* for proper maintenance of *agni*

**The *samagni* (balanced state of *agni* or the physiological limits of *agni*):** *Agni* is the core concept of Ayurvedic medical practice; it governs all the principles and attributes of digestive and metabolic activity in our body. In other words, whether it is food or medicine has to come across with any form of *agni*. If the substance is administered orally, the principal form of *agni* viz, *jatharagni* comes directly into play.

In Ayurveda *agni* denotes a group of factors, which are responsible for digestion of nutrient food, metabolization of various digested food components into appropriate tissue element and utilization of various digested food components to release energy needed for vital activity. For the proper maintenance of the life process the nourishment of all these factors is needed at a particular degree and level. The *agni* is the factor which converts food into *dosha*, *dhatu* and *malas*, thus helping in all the life processes. According to the place and nature of the body elements that should be nourished, the *agni* has been divided subtypes viz., *jatharagni*, *bhutagni*, and

*dhatvagni* <sup>5</sup>. But generally, all the terms with a suffix *agni* can be included in the *pitta* group of substances and among them *jatharagni* is considered to have a supreme role. *Agni* in the context of *swsatha lakshana* can be considered as *jatharagni*, which is having a power to control all the *agnis* mentioned in Ayurveda<sup>6</sup>. But the line of demarcation between the normal and abnormal functioning of *jatharagni* is very delicate, even though it seems very much simple at the sight. This delicate nature of *agni* can be best understood from the references of the state of *agni* in the physiological and pathological contexts. The state of *agni* can be *sama*, *manda*, *teekshna* or *vishama*<sup>7</sup> depending upon the several internal and external factors. Again, it is highlighters that of the four types, except *samagni* all are responsible for the pathological changes also. So it is the same four states of *jatharagni*, which are held responsible for the normal and abnormal changes in the human body. There are certain states of *agni* depending on the influence of *tridosha* on it. These states and their functions can be kept in following manner.

**Types of *Agni* and their properties**

State	Dosha	Property	Susceptibility to diseases
<i>Vishamagni</i>	<i>vata</i>	<i>Agni</i> varies with periods of strong appetite alternating with loss of appetite and hence no limit can be fixed for the completion of digestion	Prone to <i>vata</i> diseases
<i>Teekshhagni</i>	<i>pitta</i>	<i>Agni</i> digests even large quantities of food easier to the scheduled time i.e one <i>yama</i>	Prone to <i>pitta</i> diseases
<i>Mandagni</i>	<i>kapha</i>	<i>Agni</i> cannot digest even little quantity of food in scheduled time or it may even take 2yaama to digest the food	Prone to <i>kapha</i> diseases
<i>Smaagni</i>	<i>tridosha</i>	Normal <i>agni</i> , ensures complete digestion of food in scheduled	Resistant to diseases

	time i.e, 1 yama	
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Of the various factors that are having a direct impact on *jatharagni*. The primary ones are the *prakriti* of the individual and the *ahara vihara*, he or she is following. There is a definite type of *jatharagni* for a particular *prakriti* which is predetermined. There should be a grade for these states of *manda*, *teekshna* and *vishama* forms of *jatharagni*. Again, such individuals also, a slight variation in the status of *jatharagni* may occur as a result of the *ahara-viharas* followed. Here, this change should be reversed as quickly as possible by following exactly opposite regimen, So that change in the status of *jatharagni* does not make a pathological concern. Moving forward, these grades are again changed and resulted in various disease conditions. An operational method that we can implement to assess the state of *samagni* is the *jeerna ahara lakshana*<sup>8</sup> and *aharakaala*<sup>9</sup> along with above mentioned *dosha dhatu mala samya lakshana*.

From the health point of view slight variation in the status of *Agni* can be compromise, but a long term changes makes the individual unhealthy. To maintain the proper *agni*, firstly we have to find out the determinants of *samagni* and a proper control of those factors will help to maintain the state of *samagni*.

#### Physiological factors affecting *jatharagni*

**Prakriti-** *prakriti* makes a difference in the rage of the *agni*. *kapha prakriti* man has diminished state, *pitta prakriti* man comparatively illuminated and *vata prakriti* person has uncertain increase and decrease of *Agni*<sup>10</sup>.

**Diurnal variation** – according to *yogaratnakara*, *agni* performs best functions in second *Prahara* of day and first *prahara* (3hours) of night. So food should be taken in these timings only. Moreover,

it tells us about the rhythmic increase and decrease in the range of *agni*.

**Age:** during childhood, it increases. In adult state, it is on the peak and in old age, it diminishes gradually<sup>11</sup>.

**Ritu :** *agni* is at peak level in *hemanta* and lowest in *varsha*<sup>12</sup>

**Nutrients:** *agni* gets increased or decreased on the basis of nutrients it has to digest, just like increase or decrease of fire is dependent upon the type of fuel<sup>13</sup>.

**Physical activity:** sleep decreases and exercise elevate *agni*<sup>14</sup>

**Psychological factors:** fear, anxiety, grief, and other emotional situations vitiate *agni*<sup>15</sup>

**Bala:** rate of digestion and metabolism depends upon *bala* or body strength just like expulsion of water from the well largely depends upon the strength of the puller<sup>16</sup>

**Requirement of nutrition by *dhatu* :** rate of digestion and metabolism is directly affected by thirst of *dhatu* for nutrients for their normal status<sup>17</sup>

**Srotosuddhi :** *agni* does their function at best, when *srotas* remain unobstructed.

So, to maintain a state of *samagni*, one should adopt proper *ahara* and *vihara*, so as to keep the above mentioned determinants within control.

#### PATHYA AHARA (wholesome food)

- ✓ Consumption of *ahara* (food) increases the *agni*<sup>18</sup> (su.chi.24/67)
- ✓ Follow the *Ashta Ahara Vidhivishesha Ayatana* mainly *upayoga samstha* – Ayurveda has been mentioned eight factors which should be followed every individual before taking food, they are *prakriti* (natural qualities of food article), *karana* (proceesing), *samyoga* (combination), *rasi*(quantum), *desha*(,place), *ka-*

la(time )*upayogasamstha*( dietetic rules) and *upayokta* (person who takes food)<sup>19</sup>(c.vi.1/11)

- ✓ Intake of balanced diet daily ( *nitya sevaniya dravyas*)- "*shastikan shalin mudgan saindava....*"<sup>20</sup>(*ch.su.5/12*)
- ✓ Intake of ghee and milk daily (*nitya rasayana*)-"*nityam ksheera ghrutashinam*"<sup>21</sup> (c.chi1/4/32)
- ✓ Intake of rock salt + fresh ginger ( *lavana ardraka sevana*) before *bhojana*<sup>22</sup> (B.P. Purva .5/130)

**PATHYA VIHARA (wholesome regimen):** *Dinacharayapalana palana* (observation of proper daily regimen), especially, *Vyayama* (physical exercise)<sup>25</sup>(c.su5/32), and following proper *ritu charya* ( seasonal regimen)

**PATHYA MANASIKA VICHARA (wholesome mental status):** *Achara rasayana*<sup>26</sup> (c.chi1/4/30-35)*Dharana* of *dharaniyavegas*<sup>27</sup> c.su. 6/76) – following of these *sadvrittis* will enhance the *agni*)

**APATHYA AHARA (unwholesome food)**

- ✓ *Gramyahara*(junk food ),*ati snigdha*(more oily food) ,*guru ahara*( heavy to digest ).
- ✓ *Akala bhogana*(not taking food in time)(su.su46/476),
- ✓ *adhyashana*(taking food before getting digested pervious food),
- ✓ *vishamashana*(frequently intake food),
- ✓ *samashana*(mixing of patyha and apathy ahara)<sup>23</sup> (c.chi 25/234)
- ✓ *Na bhojanam*(not takinf food at all or fasting for longer period or starvation) and *ati bhojanam*( excessive intake of food)<sup>24</sup> (c.chi 24/97)

**APATHYA VIHARA (unwholesome regimen):**

- ✓ *Jagarana* ( *night awakening* ),
- ✓ *Divaswapna* ( *sleeping day time* ),
- ✓ *Ativyavaya*(*excessive physical exercise*),

- ✓ *Ativyayama* ( *excessive sexual intercourse* ),
- ✓ *Atinidra*( *excessive sleeping* )

**APATHYA MANASIKAVICHAR (unwholesome mental status) :**

- ✓ *Dashavidhapapakarma*, *Chintha*, *Krodha* and *Bhaya* – these psychological factors will decrease the functions of *agni*.

## CONCLUSION

*Agni* may be correlated with digestive & metabolic fire in the body .It is the substance secreted in our body, which is directly responsible for chemical changes in the body. The proper function of the *agni* is an important factor in maintenance of normalcy of the *doshas* thus lead to healthy and happy life. To keep the *agni* in proper one must follow the rules of *Swasthavritta* especially regarding *pathya-apathya*.

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