

## CONCEPT OF AHARA IN AYURVEDA

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### ABSTRACT

Dietetics is the practical application of the principles of nutrition. It includes the planning of meal for both the normal and sick individuals. A set of satisfactory dietetic code has been identified and prescribed by *Ayurveda*. Any faults in diets and even in their preparation styles leads to ill health. It is a well known fact that the intake of proper diets is only means of survival. Thus, diet virtually constitutes the life of living beings. The correlation of diet with life can be very well inferred from the actual experiences in the life. Food has been recognized as an important component for human being, both in healthy and diseased state. *Ayurveda*, the science of life has not only emphasized on *Ahara* (food) but also entire quality of it. Good nutrition means “Maintaining a nutritional status that enables us to grow well and enjoy good health.” Proper maintenance of the power of digestion also depends upon the proper diet. It is true that researches in current knowledge about nutrition have made great contribution in medical field by denoting the deficiency diseases and in the treatment of diseases. But much progress has not yet been made in regard the code and conducts of diet is concerned, whereas *Ayurvedic* classics have described *Ahara* and *Ahara vidhi* in detail.

**Keywords:** *Ahara, Kala, Viruddha, Dhatu, Agni, Srotas, Rasa, Veerya, Vipaka, Ashana etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda* the science of life is a time-tested treasure of knowledge that has been handed down to us from our great ancestors. *Ayurveda* has given three sub pillars- *Ahara, Nidra* and *Brahmacarya*, which support the body itself. *Ahara* has been enumerated first, which shows its importance. Breast milk is the first and well-balanced food for the newly born baby. The milk that has got its more or less direct bearing on *Ahara* taken by the mother plays decisive role in development, sustenance, reproduction and termination of life. It is a well-known fact that, *Ahara*, supplies energy to body. This bio energy is supplied

by proper and adequate nutrition in the form of protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins and water.

#### CONCEPT OF AHARA

The word “*Ahara*” is very much familiar since time immemorial. Various classics / dictionaries describe *Ahara* in their own unique way. *Shabda Kalpa druma* explains that *Ahara* is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating<sup>9</sup>. *Vacaspatyam* states *Ahara* is as food. *Acharya Dalhana* opines that the substance which is swallowed through *Anna-nalika* is called *Ahara*. *Acharya Cak-*

*rapani* opines that *Ahara* means anything which is ingested and thus it includes both diet and drugs. *Acharya Gangadhara* says that anything which is ingested by the tongue down to the throat is called *Ahara*. Therefore, drugs are also included in *Ahara*. From the above statement, it can be concluded that the word *Ahara* means any substance which is taken in via the mouth and swallowed through throat.

**Modern Dictionary meaning of word *Ahara***<sup>13</sup>

1) Collins Dictionary defined the word food as “Any substance that can be ingested by a living

organism and metabolized into energy and body tissue is known as food.”

2) According to TABER’s Dictionary food is defined as “Any material that provides the nutritive requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical well-being.”

**SYNONYMS:**<sup>1, 2, 3, 5</sup>

*Jagdha, Bhojana, Lehya, Nighasa, Nyada, Jemana, Viddhasa, Pratyasanama, Bhaksanam, Abhyavara, Khadanam, Nigara.*

**Table 1:** Classification of *Ahara* According to Various Classics<sup>1, 2, 3, 5, 6</sup>

S.No.	<i>Charka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	
		<i>Drava varga</i>	<i>Annapanavarga</i>
01	<i>Sukadhanya</i>	<i>Jala</i>	<i>Dhanya</i>
02	<i>Samidhanya</i>	<i>Ksira</i>	<i>Mamsa</i>
03	<i>Mamsa</i>	<i>Dadhi</i>	<i>Phala</i>
04	<i>Harita</i>	<i>Takra</i>	<i>Saka</i>
05	<i>Phala</i>	<i>Ghrta</i>	<i>Lavana</i>
06	<i>Saka</i>	<i>Taila</i>	<i>Krtanna</i>
07	<i>Madya</i>	<i>Madhu</i>	<i>Bhaksya</i>
08	<i>Ambu</i>	<i>Iksu</i>	<i>Anupana</i>
09	<i>Gorasa</i>	<i>Madya</i>	-----
10	<i>Ikshuvikara</i>	<i>Mutra</i>	-----
11	<i>Krtanna</i>	-----	-----
12	<i>Aharayogi</i>	-----	-----

*Astanga Hridaya* has incorporated a group called *Bhaisajya-Varga* which includes *Marica, Pipalli* etc. medicinal herbs. He also included *Pureesha* under *Mutra Varga* which was his contribution to the classification.

**Table 2:** Classification according to *Acharya Vagbhata*<sup>3, 6</sup>

<i>ASTANGA SANGRAHA</i>		<i>ASTANGA HRUDAYA</i>	
<i>Panam</i>	<i>Annam</i>	<i>Dravam</i>	<i>Adravam</i>
<i>Toyam</i>	<i>Sukadhanyam</i>	<i>Toyam</i>	<i>Sukadhanyam</i>
<i>Ksiram</i>	<i>Simbidhanyam</i>	<i>Ksiram</i>	<i>Simbidhanyam</i>
<i>Iksu</i>	<i>Pakvannam</i>	<i>Iksu</i>	<i>Pakvannam</i>
<i>Tailam</i>	<i>Mamsam</i>	<i>Tailum</i>	<i>Mamsam</i>
<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Sakam</i>	<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Sakam</i>
<i>Mutram</i>	<i>Phalam</i>	<i>Mutram</i>	<i>Phalam</i>
			<i>Ausadhavarga</i>

**Table 3:** Classification According to *Acharya Charka*<sup>1,2</sup>

S.No.	Classification Basis	Types	Name
1	Edible	1	<i>Ahara</i>
2	Origin	2	<i>Sthavaram (Vegetable products), Jangama (Animal products)</i>
3	<i>Prabhava</i>	2	<i>Hitam (wholesome), Ahitam (unwholesome)</i>
4	Nature of intake	4	<i>Ashitam (Eatables), Khaditam (Masticable food), Pitam (Beverages), Lidham (Linctus)</i>
5	<i>Mahabhuta</i>	5	<i>Parthiva, Apya, Tejasiya, Vayaviya, Akasiya</i>
6	<i>Rasa</i>	6	<i>Madhura, Amla, Lavana, Katu, Tikta, Kashaya</i>
7	<i>Virya</i>	2	<i>Sita, Usna</i>
8	<i>Virya</i>	8	<i>Guru, Laghu, Sita, Ushna, Snigdha, Ruksha, Manda, Tikshna</i>

**Table 4:** Classification of *Ahara* according to various *Acharyas*:<sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</sup>

S.No.	Classification According To	Types of Ahara
1	<i>Acharya Sushruta, Bhavamishra, Yogratnakar, Kashyapa, Sarangdhar</i>	<i>Chusya, Peya, Lehya Bhojya, Bhaksya, Carvya</i>
2	<i>Shrimad Bhagavata Gita (As per the effect of Ahara on Manas)</i>	<i>Satvika, Rajsika, Tamsika</i>
3	<i>Shrimad Bhagavata Gita (Based on three modes of material nature)</i>	<i>Yajna, Tapa, Dana</i>
4	<i>Acharya Sushruta (Based on effect of Ahara)</i>	<i>Ekanta – Hitakara; Ekanta – Ahitkara; Hita - Ahitkara</i>

**Table 5:** Classification according to Modern Dietics: -

	Major Nutrients	Other Nutrients
<b>ENERGY RICH FOODS</b>	Carbohydrates & fats	
	Whole grain cereals, millets	Protein, fiber, Calcium, Iron & B-complex vitamins
	Vegetable oils, ghee, butter	Fat soluble vitamins, essential fatty acids
	Nuts and oilseeds	Proteins, vitamins / minerals
	Sugar	Nil
<b>BODY BUILDING FOODS</b>	Proteins	-----
	Pulses, nuts and oilseeds	B-complex vitamins, invisible fat, fiber
	Milk and Milk products	Calcium, Vitamin A, Riboflavin, Vitamin B <sub>12</sub>
	Meat, fish, poultry	B-complex Vitamins, Iron, Iodine, Fat
<b>PROTECTIVE FOODS</b>	Vitamins and Minerals	-----
	Green leafy vegetables	Antioxidants, fiber and other carotenoids
	Other vegetables/fruits	Fiber, sugar and antioxidants
	Eggs, milk & milk products	Protein and fat

**Table 6:** *Hita - Ahita Ahara*

S. No.	Type of Ahara	Description	Example
1	<i>Ekanta- Hita</i>	The food which does not harm the body even though used always	Water, Milk, Ghee and <i>Audana</i> ,
2	<i>Ekanta -Ahita</i>	The food which harms the body quickly and so cannot be used even for short period, which are always unsuitable and cause <i>Dahana, Pachana</i> and <i>Marana</i>	<i>Kshara</i> and <i>Visha</i>
3	<i>Hita - Ahita</i>	The foods which do not harm in certain conditions but cause harm in certain other conditions	-----

**Table 7: Ahita Ahara**

S. No.	Ahara Dravya	Hita Ahara Dravya	Ahita Ahara Dravya
1	Sukadhanya	Shali	Yavaka
2	Shami dhanya	Mudga	Mamsa
3	Udaka	Rain Water	River Water
4	Lavana	Saindhava	Ushra
5	Shakha	Jivanti	Mustard Oil
6	Mriga Mamsa	Ena	Gomamsa
7	Meat of birds	Lava	Kapota Mamsa
8	Vilesaya	Godha	Bheka
9	Matsya	Rohita	Cilcima
10	Sarpi	Goghrta	Avisarpi
11	Milk	Godugdha	Avidugdha
12	Sthawara Sneha	Tila Taila	Kusumbh oil
13	Anupamrga vasa	Varaha vasa	Mahisa vasa
14	Matsya vasa	Culuki vasa	Kumbhira vasa
15	Jalcara Vihanga vasa	Pakahamsa vasa	Kakamadgu vasa
16	Viskira Sakuni vasa	Kukkuta Vasa	Chataka vasa
17	Sakhada Medsam	Aja fat	Fat of elephant
18	Kandanam	Shringavera	Aluka
19	Phala	Mridvika	Nikuca
20	Iksu Vikara	Sharkara	Phanita

**Balanced Diet: -**

A balanced diet is one which provides all the nutrients in required amounts and proper proportions. The quantities of foods needed to meet the nutrient requirements vary with age, gender, physical activity and physiological status. A balanced diet should provide around 60-70% of total calories from carbohydrates, preferably starch; about 10-12% from protein and 20-25% from fat. It can easily be achieved through blend of four basic food groups. In addition,

a balanced diet should provide other non-nutrients such as dietary fiber, anti-oxidants and phytochemicals which bestow positive health benefits. Anti-oxidants such as vitamin C and E, beta-carotene, riboflavin and selenium protect the human body from free radical damage. Other phytochemicals such as polyphenols, flavones, etc., also afford protection against oxidant damage. Spices like turmeric, ginger, cumin, garlic and cloves are rich in antioxidants.

**Table 8:** Following Table shows the concept of Diet to be taken daily as per *Acharya Charka*<sup>1, 2</sup>

S.No.	As per Acharya Charka	Can be correlated to
1	Sashtika shali	Carbohydrate
2	Mudaga	Protein
3	Saindhava	Salt
4	Amlaka	Vitamin
5	Yava	-----
6	Rain water	Water
7	Milk	Protein, Fat, Sugar etc.

8	<i>Ghee</i>	Fat
9	<i>Jangala Mamsa</i>	Protein
10	<i>Madhu</i>	Sugar

**Table 9:** Eighteen types of *Viruddha* as described by *Acharya Charak*<sup>1,2</sup>

S.No.	Type of <i>Viruddha</i>	Description
1	<i>Desa Viruddha</i>	Intake of dry and sharp substance in deserts; unctuous and cold substance in marshy land.
2	<i>Kala Viruddha</i>	Intake of cold and dry substance in winter; pungent and hot substance in the summer.
3	<i>Agni Viruddha</i>	Intake of <i>Guru Dravya</i> when the power of digestion is mild ( <i>Mandagni</i> ); intake of <i>Laghu Dravya</i> or light food when the <i>Agni</i> is <i>Tikshna</i> .
4	<i>Matra Viruddha</i>	Intake of honey and ghee in equal quantity.
5	<i>Satmya Viruddha</i>	Intake of sweet and cold substance by persons accustomed to pungent and hot substance
6	<i>Dosa Viruddha</i>	Utilization of diets and regimen has similar qualities with <i>Dosas</i> but at variance with the <i>Satmya</i> of the individual.
7	<i>Samskara Viruddha</i>	Diets which when prepared in a way produce poisonous effects, for example meat of peacock roasted on a castor spit.
8	<i>Virya Viruddha</i>	Substances have Sheeta Virya in combination with these of <i>Ushna Virya</i> .
9	<i>Koshta Viruddha</i>	Administration of a mild purgative in a small dose for a person of <i>Krura Koshta</i> and administration of strong purgative in strong dose for a person having <i>Mridu Koshta</i> .
10	<i>Avastha Viruddha</i>	Intake of <i>Vata</i> aggravating food by a person after exhaustion, sexual act and physical exercise or intake of <i>Kapha</i> aggravating food by a person after sleep or drowsiness.
11	<i>Krama Viruddha</i>	If a person takes food before his bowel and urinary bladder is clear (empty) or when he does not have appetite or after his hunger has been aggravated.
12	<i>Parihara Viruddha</i>	Intake of hot thing after taking pork etc. and cold things after taking ghee.
13	<i>Upachara Viruddha</i>	-----Do-----
14	<i>Paka Viruddha</i>	Preparation of food etc. with bad or rotten fuel and under cooking, over cooking or burning during the process of preparation.
15	<i>Samyoga Viruddha</i>	Intake of sour substance with milk.
16	<i>Hrudya Viruddha</i>	Any substance which is not pleasant in taste.
17	<i>Sampada Viruddha</i>	Intake of substance that is not matured over matured or putrefied.
18	<i>Vidhi Viruddha</i>	Taking meal without follow the rules of eating.

**Table 10: *Viruddha Ahara* as per *Acharya Sushruta*<sup>5</sup>**

S.No.	Type of <i>Viruddha</i>	Description
1	<i>Samyoga Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by combinations come under this like <i>Mulaka</i> along with milk; Fruit of <i>Amra</i> and <i>Jambu</i> ; Products of sugarcane along with fish.
2	<i>Karma Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by processing, ex- ghee kept in a bronze vessel for ten days or more; honey either along with hot substances or in hot Seasons, etc.
3	<i>Mana Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by proportion, like honey and ghee or honey and water mixed in equal quantities should not be consumed.
4	<i>Rasa Viruddha</i>	Foods Which are incompatible by tastes sweet and salt are incompatible in respect of taste and potency.

**AHARA VIDHI VISHESA AYATANA:**

*Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani* consist three different words. Here, *Vishesa* relates to both word *Ahara* and *Vidhi* as:

1. **Ahara Vishesa:** It means specialty, special property, and distinguished effect of *Ahara*.
2. **Vidhi Vishesa:** It means a special system, special method, special manner, special way, special arrangement, special rule, special command or special statement for diet intake.

3. **Ayatana:** It means cause, support, Hetu etc. Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani* means the causative factors which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the food or of the method for the diet intake. These are the special factors in the science of diet and dietetics. *Ayurvedic* classical texts give due regards to these eight factors which determine the utility of various types of food i.e.

**Table 11:** *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani*

Name of The Factor	Description	Explanation with Example
<i>Prakrti</i>	Nature of the food substances. <i>Prakrti</i> indicates the nature of the substance, i.e. inherent attributes of diets and drugs.	<i>Masha</i> is heavy and <i>Mudga</i> is light and meat of <i>Sukara</i> is heavy and that of <i>Ena</i> is light.
<i>Karana</i>	Processing of food substances. Processing results in the transformation of the inherent attributes of substances.	Transformation of the food quality is effected by dilution, application of heat, cleansing, churning, etc.
<i>Samyoga</i>	Combination of two or more food substances.	Combination of honey & ghee or honey, fish and milk.
<i>Rashi</i>	Quantity of substances to be taken	Quantity of all things involved is <i>Sarvagraha</i> and that of each and everything individually is <i>Parigraha</i> .
<i>Desha</i>	<i>Desha</i> denotes the habitat of food substances.	It determines the variations of the qualities of the substances according to their geographic region, due to different soil etc.
<i>Kala</i>	Time as age, seasons and conditions	Time factor is described in dual context; one pertains with daily and seasonal variations while other deals with individual's conditions of age and disease.
<i>Upayoga Samstha</i>	It consists of dietetic rules	-----
<i>Upayokta</i>	Habit and state of individual	It means the person who takes food.

However, *Ahstanga Samgrahakara, Acharya Vagbhata* has illustrated only seven types of *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanas*. He stated them as “**Sapta Vidh Ahara Kalpana.**” He has combined *Upayoga Samstha* and *Upayokta* together and counted them as “**Upayoga Vyavastha.**” “*Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatana* is indicative of wholesome and unwholesome diet whereas *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* indicates the method of intake of diet. Health is dependent upon food. There are the dietetic rules which are to

be followed while taking the food. One should consume only that in proper quantity which is –

1. **Ushna.**
2. **Snigdha.**
3. **Matravat.**
4. After the digestion of previous eaten food.
5. Avoiding **Viruddha Ahara.**

This description given by the *Acharya Charak* is both for the healthy and unhealthy persons and *Acharya Sushruta* has described it for unhealthy persons and called it as “**Dwadasha Asana Vichara.**”

**Table 12: Dwadasha Asana Vichara**<sup>5</sup>

S.No.	Type of Asana	Description
1	<i>Sheeta Anna</i>	Persons afflicted with thirst, heat, alcoholism, burning sensation, <i>Rakta - Pitta</i> , poisoning etc. should be treated with cold food.
2	<i>Ushna Anna</i>	Persons afflicted with the aggravation of <i>Kapha</i> and <i>Vata</i> as well as those already treated with purgatives of <i>Sneha</i> and those whose body is full of <i>Kleda</i> should be treated with warm food.
3	<i>Snigdha Anna</i>	Persons suffering from the aggravation of <i>Vata</i> , have <i>Rukshata</i> and those accustomed to physical exercise should be treated with <i>Snigdha</i> food
4	<i>Ruksha Anna</i>	Persons with an excess of <i>Medas</i> and <i>Kapha</i> as well as those suffering from <i>Meha</i> and those previously treated with a <i>Sneha</i> should be treated with <i>Ruksha</i> food.
5	<i>Drava Anna</i>	Weak, parched and thirsty persons should be given <i>Drava</i> food.
6	<i>Sushka Anna</i>	Those suffering from <i>Meha</i> and ulcers as well as those whose bodies are full of <i>Kleda</i> should be given dry food.
7	<i>Eka-Kala Anna</i>	Persons with impaired digestion should be given only one meal every day, so that the digestion fire may have opportunities be rekindled
8	<i>Dwi-Kala Anna</i>	Persons with the proper amount of digestion should be given two meals a day.
9	<i>Matra Hina Anna</i>	Food and drink in smaller quantity would be beneficial to persons suffering from impaired digestion or any other disease.
10	<i>Ausadha Yukta</i>	Medicine should be given with food and drink to a person a verse to it.
11	<i>Dosa Prasamana</i>	Foods consumed appropriate- suitable to season is <i>Dosa</i> .
12	<i>Vritiartha</i>	All foods consumed by the healthy person is meant to maintain health and life.

## DISCUSSION

The food is said to be cause of stability for all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living beings. *Ahara* is said to be *Mahabhaisajya* by Acharya Kashyap. In other words, one is capable to make man disease free only with the food (congenial diet). One is not able to sustain life without diet even when endowed with medicine that is why the diet is said to be the great medicament by physician. Diet is said to be basis of life, strength, complexion, *Ojas*, growth and development, functioning of *Indriyas*, happiness, clarity of voice, luster, pleasure, increase of *Dhatu*s, intellect, health etc. Satisfaction, nutrition, patience, *Buddhi* (critical understanding) enthusiasm, virility, strength, good voice, *Ojas*, glare, life, geniuses and radiance etc. are developed only from diet that is why the person desirous of long life should eat the diet which is congenial, appropriate in quantity and time having six *Rasas*. Food is the cause of strength, color and vitality of all living beings. Food is abode for six tastes and these tastes are a cause for in-

crease, decrease and normalcy of the *Doshas*. The articles of food, the taste, properties, potency, taste after digestion and actions of each one of them separately, prepared in the form of eatables, drinkables, likable and chewable, by the combination of many substances, adopting many processes and possessing different special effects; maintains of health and prevents diseases. So, all living beings are dependent on food.

A self-controlled man can have life for hundred years free from diseases by the intake of wholesome food. Food sustains the life of living beings. All living beings in the universe require food. Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, geniuses' happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect are all conditioned by food. Professional activities leading to happiness in the world, Vedic rituals leading to abode in heaven and observance of truth, *Brahmacarya* leading to salvation are all based on food. Only the individual having a healthy body can afford to perform all activities leading to happiness, heaven and salvation and for the preservation of

health intake of food is essential. Hence food is the basic factor for the attainment of all of them and should be taken cautiously.

## CONCLUSION

*Ahara* is that substance which is swallowed through throat; hence even *Ausadha* (medicine) can be considered as *Ahara* and the norms for *Ahara* can be applicable to *Ausadha* also. The *Ayurvedic* description of *Ahara* according to *Gunas*, *Satmya*, *Dosa*, *Kala* etc. seems to be more logical & scientific as compared to the modern aspect. Every factor described in *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* has a functional logic and is responsible for maintaining health. The emphasis is not only on its importance at the somatic level but also at the psychic as well as spiritual level. *Ayurvedic* dietetics does not follow the modern norms of fixing a constant amount of *Ahara* for all individuals in general but instead relies on the status of *Agni Bala* for each & every individual respectively. Out of all the factors described for *Ahara*, *Kala* is the most important. As the other factors, e.g. *Matra*, *Ahara Parinama*, *Bala* and even *Agni* also depend upon *Kala*. When days are shorter the sun-rises late than usual, hence *Ahara Kala* is said to be *Pratah*. But when the days are longer sun raises early, hence *Apranah* is told as *Ahara Kala*. The health depends on these three factors. For the maintenance of health at least any two of the factors needs to be considered and when even one more of this factor is compromised the health of the person is lost and disease is caused.

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