



## EFFECT OF SATTVIK AHAR IN DEALING WITH ANXIETY

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## ABSTRACT

“Let food be thy medicine”- Hippocrates. Unfortunately, today’s world has adapted to a system of consumption of foods which has several adverse effects on health. In this pandemic era, everyone is preoccupied with a lot of stress leading to anxiety and anxiety disorders. Globalization and urbanization have greatly affected one’s eating habits. The increased consumption of junk foods and improper eating habits leads to mental stress and then further manifests in anxiety and depression. Hurry worry and curry then gives rise to heartburns, burping, constipation, bloating and everything in between. If you eat *Satvik Ahar* (food) you will be healthy, if you eat *Rajasik*, *Tamasik Ahar* (food) you will be unhealthy physically and mentally. So, it is of utmost importance to consume *Satvik Ahar* (food) and stay fit physically and mentally which helps in preventing anxiety. Matter was collected from virtual platforms like pubmed, research gate, google scholar etc. Samhitas and other ayurvedic texts were also studied. This study aims at explaining effect of *Satvik Ahar* (food) in dealing with anxiety.

**Keywords:** *Satvik Ahar* (food), anxiety, *Rajasik Ahar*, *Tamasik Ahar*.

## INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic is drastically changing the lives of people. Today, anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses. Globally the world health organization (WHO) says that almost 300 million people have an anxiety disorder. Unfortunately, no one seems to have an exact answer to why anxiety is so common, but the many attributes which contribute to this can be social media, poor sleep habits, lowered stigma and underreporting in the past. It is thought that the various social media effects on mental health are largely negative. Comparing lifestyles depicted in social media and a fear of missing out (FOMO) are likely causes of anxiety as well as the way social media is addictive, producing the same increase in dopamine that drugs give you. With the rise in technology also came an increase in artificial lighting, bad sleep habits and bad food habits. Years ago, mental health disorders and anxiety were taboo topics, but now anxiety has become a constant topic of discussion.

Anxiety is so common and often linked to co-occurring disorders. Anxiety can cause a paradigm shift in the eating habits of an individual. Some people tend to overeat and therefore, consume a lot of unhealthy food. While some people, face anorexia. People having persistent anxiety, or an anxiety disorder are more likely to have long-term heightened levels of corticotrophin-releasing factor (CRF) hormones in their system.

As a result, these individuals maybe more likely to experience a prolonged loss of appetite<sup>[1]</sup>. On the other hand, people who experience anxiety less frequently may be more likely to seek comfort from food and overeat and may consume excessive unhealthy food. These effects are primarily due to hormonal changes in the body, but some people may also avoid eating as a result of the physical sensations of anxiety.

*Ahara* (food) is the most important factor in the sustenance of life. It is described as foremost pillar among the three pillars of life<sup>[2]</sup>. Various lifestyle disorders and numerous diseases occur due to faulty dietary habits which may be prevented by taking

proper *Ahar* (food) and maintaining proper eating habits. *Ahara* (food) is considered as the *Mahabhaishajya* (the superior medicine). Incompatibility or *Viruddha* is a unique concept in *Ayurveda*. The drugs and diet that provoke *Doshas*, dislodges from their normal bio-rhythm and not eliminated out are called *Viruddha*. *Viruddha Ahar* is defined as certain diet and its combinations which hinders the metabolism of tissue, and which have the opposite property to the tissue. The food which is wrong in combination, has undergone wrong processing, consumed in incorrect quantity, with food of opposite qualities, consumed in incorrect time of the day and in wrong season can become *Viruddha Ahar*<sup>[3]</sup>. The etiological factors of almost all *Manorogas* (mental disorders) enlist *Viruddha Ahar* as a major cause.

Also, eating habits are perhaps of great importance, as nourishment of the body's tissues form a foundation for nourishment of the mind and emotions. By properly managing our food eating habits and the foods we eat, it is easy to achieve a calm state of mind and thus helps in coping with anxiety. Serotonin is related to brain functions and is also called as happy hormone. Serotonin, a hormone secreted by certain enterochromaffin cells in the intestinal mucosa, inhibits gastric secretion<sup>[4]</sup>. Reduced levels of serotonin in the brain may lead to memory problems, mood disorders and may drop a person into anxiety and depression. Eating a healthy and balanced diet is an essential way to support mental as well as physical health. This can have positive benefits on energy levels, mood and sleep.

Food replenishes and supports the *Doshas*, *Dhatus* and *Malas* and stabilizes life. The effect of food not only lies on the body, but it equally affects the mind. There is a famous saying, the food you eat reflects your state of mind. But today, in this pandemic era where people are busy doing their work at home, junk food, which can be classified as *Tamasik Ahar* (food) is preferred more which has adverse effects on health. Junk foods allow people to eat without planning, it allows them to eat at their spare times. Ingredients of

junk foods give great taste and make them addictive [5]. Regular consumption of junk foods also contributes to the hampering of concentration, feelings and behavior. It may lead to increased irritability. On the other hand, *Satvik Ahar* (food) promotes clarity and calmness of mind. It is sweet, fresh and agreeable. It ultimately helps in dealing with anxiety.

It is for sure, in this pandemic era, people are pre-occupied with their own kind of anxiety and stress. People don't realize that having trouble sleeping and eating improper foods is leading cause in the occurrence of their anxiety attacks. Perhaps, people don't seek treatment for it. Therefore, an attempt is made to arrest anxiety and its further impacts on health by improving the quality and quantity foods to eat and introducing people the very own concept of *Satvik Ahar* (food).

Aims and objectives:

- 1) To study the conceptual studies on anxiety
- 2) To evaluate anxiolytic effects of *Sattvik Ahar*
- 3) To study what is *Satvik Ahar* (food)?
- 4) To study what is *Rajasik Ahar* (food)?
- 5) To study what is *Tamasik Ahar* (food)?

### **Anxiety**

Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state associated with uneasiness, worry, tension and concern for the future<sup>[6]</sup>.

Anxiety is an emotional state, unpleasant in nature, associated with uneasiness, discomfort and concern or fear about some defined or undefined future threat. Somatic symptoms like anorexia, breathlessness, palpitation, paraesthesias, etc. often accompany. Some degree of anxiety is a part of normal life. Anxiety is something that it seems like almost everyone is dealing within the current age. The social pressures of staying informed, working on yourself and the increased demands in your carrier can all contribute to feeling of anxiety.

*Chittodvega* also known as anxiety

In Ayurveda various psychological disorders are mentioned, which show similarity with the anxiety disorders. *Chittodvega*<sup>[7]</sup>, seems to be the nearest term for anxiety, which is one of the psychological disorder described by *Charaka*. Various texts have described

many terms related to mental status viz, *Chittavibhramsha*, *Chittanasa*, *Chittavibhrama*, *Chittaviparyaya*, *Anavasthit Chitta*, etc. *Chittodvega* (anxious state of mind) = *Chitta* (mind)+ *udvega* (anxiety) the etiology of *Chittodvega* clearly indicates the anxious state of mind. *Chittodvega* is caused due to vitiation of *Manogunas-Rajas and Tamas* and *Sharirik Gunas- Vata and Pitta*. *Chittodvega* has been used by *Charaka* more classically and listed under *Manas Dosha Vikara. Rajah and Tamah Manas Doshas* are vitiated in *Chittodvega* and person having *Alpa Satva* are more prone to the disease as *Alpa Satva* indulges *Prajnaparadha* (misuse of intellect).

*Mana/ Chitta* (mind) is *Annamaya*<sup>[8]</sup>

In the Vedanta philosophy, there are said to be five elements. The first two- *akasa* (pace or ether) and *Vayu* (air) are not visible to us. The other three-*Prithvi* (earth) – referred as *Annam* (food), *Apa* (water) and *Agni* (fire or energy) - are visible and this is why they have been discussed. These three elements are never found in their pure form. When we perceive them they are always in combined state. For instance, the water that we see always has some earth and other elements mixed with it. The *Mana/ Chitta* (mind) is the finest product of food, the *Prana* is the finest product of water and the *Vak* (speech) is the finest product of fire. This proves that if we consume *Satvik Ahar* (food) our *Mana* becomes *Satvik*. If we eat *Rajasik Ahar* (food) our *Mana* becomes *Rajasik* and if we consume *Tamasik Ahar* our *Mana* becomes *Tamasik*. Food for mind<sup>[9]</sup>

In Ayurveda, foods are used to support and bring out the three qualities of mind. Foods which support *Satva* are called *Satvik* foods. Foods which draw out *Raja* are called *Rajasik* foods and the foods which increase *Tamas* are called *Tamasik* foods.

*Satvik Ahar* (food)

*Satvik* means pure essence. This is the purest diet for a consciously spiritual and healthy life. It nourishes the body and mind and maintains it in a peaceful state. According to *Ayurveda*, this is the best diet for physical strength, a good mind, good health and longevity. And it calms and purifies the mind, enabling it to function at its maximum potential.

*Satvik Ahar* (food) establishes a peaceful state of mind. *Satvik Ahar* (food) thus leads to true health, a peaceful mind in control of a fit body, with a balanced flow of energy between them. *Satvik Ahar* (food) is excellent for those individuals who wish to live a quiet, peaceful and meditative life. *Satvik Ahar* includes sprouted whole grains, fresh fruits, land and sea vegetables, pure fruit juices, nut and seed milk and cheese, legumes, nuts, seeds, sprouted seeds, honey and herbal teas.

#### **Rajasik Ahar (food):**

According to *Ayurveda*, the foods which aggravate *Pitta* and *Vata doshas* and that which increase anger and restlessness is called *Rajasik Ahar* (food). These foods stimulate more fire, outward motion, creativity, aggression and passion. It consists of too much of spicy, salty and sour food. Also, it consists of sour and spicy preparations like pickles, tea, coffee, alcohol and vegetables like onion, garlic, etc. are said to be *Rajasik* in nature.

#### **Tamasik Ahar:**

Food which increases the inner darkness and confusion is called *Tamasik Ahar* (food). *Tamasik Ahar* includes fried and frozen foods, fast foods, microwaved foods, processed foods, let overnight foods, meat, fish, eggs, onion, alcohol, etc. these foods effects the speed of our activities. These foods slow down our activity, these foods contribute to numbing us, depressing us and enhancing inertia. This type of food can be considered as unhealthiest food of all.

## DISCUSSION

The three types of *Ahar* (food), as mentioned in *Bhagvad Gita* are *Satvik Ahar*, *Rajasik Ahar* and *Tamasik Ahar*<sup>[10]</sup>. *Satvik Ahar* is easily digestible, helps to build immunity, rapid healthy response and brings harmony between physical and mental health. *Satvik ahar* does not agitate the stomach at all. By maintaining the peaceful state of mind and preventing it from any kind of agitation *Satvik Ahar* thus helps in dealing with anxiety. *Rajasik Ahar* stimulates more fire and makes one angrier. The mind-body equilibrium is destroyed by *Rajasik Ahar* (foods) and they make the mind restless and uncontrollable.

*Tamasik Ahar* is the unprocessed food and unhealthy food which slows down our activities and prevents us from performing our activities. As explained earlier, *Mana is Annamaya*. Taking hot meals, which is categorized under *Satvik Ahar*, can avoid *Aam* formation which is the basic cause of vitiation of *Doshas*. *Ahara Rasa* directly acts on dosha samya accordingly, as *Mana is Annamaya* and maintains the calm state of mind which helps prevent anxiety.

Also, through *Satvik Ahar* we can get serotonin. Serotonin is a chemical the brain produces from tryptophan which we get from proteins in the foods. Brain serotonin, controls many different types of bodily functions including appetite, body temperature, libido, mood, etc. These neurotransmitters are present in our foods and therefore can directly influence our brain chemistry<sup>[11]</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In this pandemic era, people are already pre-occupied with lots of fear and worries giving rise to anxiety. In anxious state of mind, they end up feeding themselves with unhealthy foods which not only deteriorates their physical health but also deteriorates their mental health too. *Ahar* (food) is an essential requirement of life and one can attain good health by following proper eating habits and consuming *Satvik ahar*. Food when used properly and wisely helps us live healthier lives. Consumption of *Satvik ahar* indeed affects mood and health. It helps in attaining a calm state of mind which helps in dealing with anxiety.

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