

ROLE OF AGNI IN LIFESTYLE DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. Each and every living being needs disease free life. But unfortunately one or the other day human being is expected to have some sort of disease or discomfort amongst which lifestyle disorders has a lead due to increasing sedentary life style and unhealthy eating. The qualities of healthy individual are narrated in *Ayurveda* as equilibrium of all three *Doshas*; Normal state of *Jataragni*, normal state and function of *Dhathus* (Tissues); Normal state and function of *Malas*; Pleasant soul, mind and sense objects. *Agni* is the sole cause for existence of life, and its Extinction leads to death; its proper maintenance helps to live a long life, and its impairment gives rise to lifestyle disorders. It is also cause for colour, strength, health, enthusiasm, plumpness, complexion, *Ojus*, *Tejas*, other varieties of *Agni* and *Prana*. There are four different states of *Jataragni*. *Vishama* (irregular), *Teekshana* (intense), *Manda* (weak or less powered) and *Sama* (well maintained and regular) states. Among the four different states of *Agni*, *Samagni* is considered as normal one, all others are considered as abnormal. *Samagni* is the only state which is beneficial to maintain health and thus prevent life style disorders. So the maintenance of *Samagni* State can be carried out by following *AshtaAharaVidhiVisheshaAyatanas* (Eight rules for eating). *Agni* is the one of the important and basic phenomena of the life. It should be maintained at any cost to live a disease free life. State of *Agni* is having dominant role in the manifestation of lifestyle disorders. Maintenance of *Samagni* is essential for the disease free life especially for diseases associated with lifestyle.

Keywords: Health, *Agni*, Maintenance, lifestyle diseases

INTRODUCTION

Background:

All the living beings aim for a disease free life. But fail to do so because of the sedentary life style and unhealthy eating habits which alters the normal state of *Agni* intern causing life style disorders. *Ayurveda* one of the ancient systems of medicine very specifi-

cally stated about importance of being healthy.¹ The qualities of healthy individual are narrated in *Ayurveda* as equilibrium of all three *Doshas* viz. *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*; Normal state of *Jataragni*, normal state and function of *Dhathus* (Tissues) Viz. *Rasa*, *Raktha*, *Mamsa*, *Medhas*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, *Shukra*;

Normal state and function of *Malas* viz. *Purisha* (faeces), *Mootra* (urine), *Sveda* (sweat); Pleasant soul, mind and sense objects.²

Life style disorders:

Lifestyle diseases are diseases linked with the way people live their life. This is commonly caused by alcohol, drug and smoking as well as lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating. Diseases that impact on our lifestyle are heart diseases, stroke, obesity and type 2 diabetes. They also include Alzheimer's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, atherosclerosis, asthma, cancer, chronic liver disease or cirrhosis, metabolic syndrome, osteoporosis and depression. With increasing prevalence of lifestyle disorders in India one out of four Indians is at risk of dying from non-communicable diseases before the age of 70.³ Even though a variety of medicines are available, the management is incomplete without lifestyle modifications. Healthy lifestyle includes various activities performed by an individual with an objective of physical and mental health along with longevity by means of proper hygiene, exercise for fitness, diet regulation etc.

Role of Agni in life style disorders:

Agni is given prime importance in the maintenance of health as well as causation of lifestyle disorders. Food which is consumed by the person is the major responsible factor for the state of health and manifestation of diseases.⁴ Food is ranked first for the maintenance of health or manifestation of lifestyle disorders. Consumed foods and drinks undergo metabolic transformation in the digestive system. After the process of digestion, it will produce effects on the body which may be agreeable or disagreeable. The process of digestion is mainly carried out by *Agni* (digestive fire). The food provides nourishment to bodily tissues which is reached to end organ by the action of *Agni*. It is the *Agni* that plays a vital role in this connection because tissue elements like, *rasa* etc. cannot originate from undigested food particles. Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular diseases etc are produced mainly due to *Medhodhatvagni*.

Agni is the sole cause for existence of life, and its Extinction leads to death; its proper maintenance helps to live a long life, and its impairment gives rise to diseases. It is also cause for color, strength, health, enthusiasm, plumpness, complexion, *Ojus*, *Tejas*, other varieties of *Agni* and *Prana*.⁵

Types of Agni:

There are 13 types of *Agni* present in the body.⁶

Type of <i>Agni</i>	Numbers
<i>Jataragni</i>	1
<i>Bhootagni</i>	5
<i>Dhathvagni</i>	7

Importance of Jataragni:

Jataragni, which is situated in *Jatara* (Stomach), is praised as god. It digests the food. Due to its subtle form, it is physically not evidenced but can be evidenced by its digestive functions.⁷ *Jataragni* maintains the functions of other types of *Agni*. Variations of *Jataragni* effects both *Bhootagni* and *Dhathvagni*.⁸

The states of Jataragni:

There are four different states of *Jataragni*. *Vishama* (irregular), *Teekshana* (intense), *Manda* (weak or less powered) and *Sama* (well maintained and regular) states.⁹

Vishamagni:

The word *Vishama* means irregular. *Vishamagni* digests the food at times properly and at times improperly. *Vishamagni* is influenced by *Vatadosha* and hence is unpredictable in nature. When it is not digesting food properly, it produces flatulence, colic pain, heaviness, upward movement of *Vayu*, diarrhoea, heaviness and gurgling sound in the abdomen and tenesmus.¹⁰ If a person suffers from these discomforts even after consuming regular and measured food, then the *Agni* is thought to be *Vishamagni*.

Teekshnagni:

The word *Teekshana* means intense or penetrate. *Teekshanagni* will digest even large amount of food quickly. It is capable of tolerating all types of irregularities in diet. It is influenced by *Pittadosha*

which is the cause for its intense nature. If the intensity of *Teekshnagni* is high and sufficient food is not supplied, it causes tissue destruction. Further, it has three varieties based on its degree of intensity viz., *Teekshna* which digests the food quickly; *Atyagni* or *Basmaka* caused by not levelling *Teekshnagni*; *Teekshnatamo* is the effect of not levelling *Atyagni* where the person is never satisfied with the quantity of food consumed. This produces burning sensation besides dryness in throat-palate-lips and pyrexia.¹¹

Mandagni:

The word *Manda* means mild. The strength of *Agni* is mild in this state. So even slightest variation in regular amount is felt heavy for its capacity of digestion impairing the functions of *Agni*. *Mandagni* is influenced by *Kaphadosha*. It is unable to digest small amount of food; creates heaviness in abdomen and head, cough, dyspnoea, excessive salivation, vomiting, pain all over body. It takes long time to digest the food even in small quantity. This is said to be the basic cause for all pathogenesis.¹²

Samagni:

The word meaning of *Sama* is regular or balanced. *Samagni* is influenced by the *Tridoshas* in a balanced state. It maintains the health so long as there is no irregularities in food consumption. It properly digests the food that is well measured and consumed in time. Minor irregularities too hamper the balanced status of *Agni* leading to impairment in health.¹³

Bhootagni and Dhathvagni:

The word meaning of *Bhoota* here is *Panchamahabhoota*. *Bhootagni* is responsible for the digestion of the 5 *Pancha mahabhoota* factors present in the food. *Dhatvagni* here refers to the *agni* present in the *Dhatu* i.e. the tissues which help them to absorb required nutrients. Life style disorders like obesity, diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular diseases etc are mainly produced due to impairment of *medhodhatvagni*. The *Jataragni* controls both *bhootagni* and *dhatvagni* thus balanced

state of *Jataragni* is essential to maintain health and prevent life style disorders.

DISCUSSION

Among the four different states of *Agni*, *Samagni* is considered as normal one, all others are considered as abnormal.¹⁴ By seeing the basic characteristics of different states of *Agni* the *Teekshnagni* should be the best because it is capable of tolerating all types of irregularities. In the present scenario the dietary and eating practices of people has changed a lot and the irregularity at times is expectable. It seems that *Teekshnagni* is better when compared to *Samagni* as *Samagni* will get disturbed even by small irregularities. But it is not true because the normal bodily functions can't be carried out with *Teekshnagni*. Also it indicates the *doshas* are not in a balanced status. This can be explained by a similitude of cooking food. The food gets cooked properly when the fire is in a normal level. Supplying high level of fire will burn off the food. Thus maintaining *Samagni* is one of the target while maintaining health. As discussed above the *Teekshnagni* has 3 different states as per its degree of intensity. Controlling the *Teekshnagni* in its first degree is difficult without proper assessment. *Teekshnagni* with increased intensity (other two varieties) is dreadful and cause destruction quickly. Medications consumed for the purpose of purification gets digested quickly by *Teekshnagni* and unable to produce desired effects also it rises chance of unwanted complications.¹⁵ So the *Samagni* state is crucial for being healthy and preventing life style disorders. Giving prime importance for healthy eating habits is vital.

Management:

The state of *Agni* is not only based on food quality and quantity it also has number of confounding factors like *Prakruti*, *Kala*, *Desa*, *Manasika Avastha*, etc. Depending on which the variation of the state of *Agni* is often expectable and unavoidable. All the human being in the world should come across all the different states of *Agni*. To avoid the disease

manifestation and to retain the healthy state one should always concentrate on state of *Agni* and its management.

Management of *Vishamagni*:

Vishamagni is treated with foods with the quality of *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *lavana rasa* (salty taste).¹⁶ As *Vishamagni* digest the food sometimes properly and sometimes improperly. It seems combined effect of *Teekshana* and *Manda* states of *Agni*. So the management carried out as per the condition. As *vishamagni* is caused by *Vata Dosha*, the simple *Sneha dravya* (unctuous substances) like oil is sufficient along with *Saindhva Lavana* (rock salt).

Management of *Teekshnagni*:

Teekshnagni is treated with foods with the quality of *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Sheeta* (cold) and *Madhurarasa* (sweet taste). *Virechana* (Purgation) is the optimum procedure to manage *Teekshnagni*.¹⁷ As *Teekshnagni* is caused by *pittadosha*, *Ghrita* (ghee) is the best substance to manage *Teekshnagni*.

Management of *Mandagni*:

Mandagni is treated with foods with the taste of *Katu* (Pungent), *Tiktha* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent). As *Mandagni* caused by *Kapha*, *Vamana* (Emesis) is the optimum procedure to treat *Mandagni*.¹⁸ *Pippali* (piper longum), *Maricha* (piper nigrum) is the good substances to manage *Mandagni*.

Maintanance of *Samagni*:

Samagni is the only state which is beneficial to maintain healthy state in the human beings and prevent lifestyle disorders. So the maintainance of *Samagni* State can be carried out by following *AshtaAharaVidhiViseshaAyatanas* (Eight rules for eating). In general *SamanaVata* is the main culprit for vitiation of *Agni*. As long as *Samanavata* is carrying out its normal functions, the state of *Agni* is also *Sama*. *Vishama* is caused by *Vimargagamana* of *Samanavata*. *Teekshnagni* is caused by combination of *Samanavata* with *pitta*. *Mandagni* is caused by combination of *Samanavata* with *Kapha*.¹⁹ In *Samanavata* vikruti the medications should be taken in *Madhyabhaktam* (middle of

meals).²⁰ Obviously daily use of ghee in proper quantity in the middle of meals is essential for the maintainance of *Samagni*.

CONCLUSION

Being healthy throughout the life span is not only the need of a person, also a basic right of a person. *Agni* is the one of the important and basic phenomena of the life. It should be maintained at any cost to live a disease free life. In the present scenario of the developed countries life style disorders are having more prevalence rate than infectious diseases. *Ayurveda* emphasizes on *Agni* for maintenance of health and considers diminished *Agni* as the chief etiological factor for all diseases. State of *Agni* is having dominant role in the manifestation of lifestyle disorders. Nature of food and optimum quantity of food, Maintainance of *Samagni* is essential for the disease free life especially for lifestyle disorders. Hence a healthy lifestyle is mandatory for normal *Agni* and prevention of lifestyle disorders through vitiated *Agni*.

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