



AYURVEDIC CONCEPTS OF DIET AND DIETETICS

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ABSTRACT

Food is considered to be a source of personalized nutrition for the health & well-being of the body and mind since antiquity. Food is required for all life processes, for its growth, repair and maintenance. It is included in the context of *Tri-Upastambha* (three sub-pillars of life). It is not simply a substitute for carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and other essential minerals. The human body is the result of food and the lifestyle acquired by it. Ayurvedic diet and dietetics are considered to be the key factor in the field of health and wellness. Every material in the universe is made up of five basic elements (*Pancha Mahabhootas*). The *Tridoshas* (bio-humors), which constitutes the body, is also made up of *Pancha-Mahabhootas* (Five basic elements). The *Doshas* (Bio-humors) aggravating or pacifying or balancing action on the human body depend upon the nature of food articles to be consumed. To keep the homeostasis of *Doshas* (Bio-humors), Ayurveda has described specific diet and dietetics practices for the maintenance of physiological functions of the body, known as *Ahara Vidhi-Vidhana* (Rules for taking food).

Keywords: Ayurveda, Diet, dietetics, lifestyle, food, nutrition.

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is a basic component of health and wellness. It plays a central role in Ayurvedic living. In the last decades, the role of trace elements and dietary fibre in human health and disease has attracted considerable attention. Since all foods are not of the same quality from the nutritional point of view. Man's ability to meet his nutritional needs and maintain good health depends upon the type and quantity of food stuffs. The healthy body, as well as the diseases, are nothing but the outcome of *Ahara* [1]. Out of all the factors for the maintenance of positive health, properly food taking occupies an important place because diet (*Ahara*) is the basic component of the life process. In Ayurveda, the basic concept of health and nutrition moves around *Ahara*, *Vihara* and *Acharya* i.e., diet, lifestyle and behaviour respectively. This is extremely important nowadays for good life, health and wellness [2]. Ayurveda specified the characteristics of food in terms of quality, quantity and time that varies with age, constitution, digestive power, season, disease and also from person to person. Regarding diet, Charaka has pointed out that the biological body is born out of the *Ahara* (diet) and all the diseases are the outcome of intake of faulty dietary errors, i.e. *Ahara Dosha*. It is an important tri-sub-pillar of life, which sustained life [3]. It is the foundation of human life and helpful in strength, complexion and growth [4]. A diet, which is advantageous for persons, the same is *Pathya* (wholesome diet) for him and in reverse, it is *Apathya* (unwholesome diet). *Pathya* is a diet, which promotes health and brings about happiness in the body and mind and together corrects the *Panchabhautika* constitution without obstructing the macro & microchannels [5]. Besides the elemental constitution of food, the following factors are also played a significant role in the acceptability of a wholesome diet (*Pathya*) such as *Matra*- quantity of food/balanced diet, *Kala*-Time or season of food intake, *Kriya*- Mode of cooking, *Bhumi*- Place/climate-related to diet and dietetics, *Deha*- Body constitution who has to eat, *Desha*- The body and the environment about food. [6]

Factors determining the utility of food/diet

In Ayurvedic texts, eight factors are mainly related to food intake, which is described by *Charaka* in *Vimanasthana*[7]. All these factors are complementary to each other and are the markers of a wholesome diet. They are given below:

1. *Prakriti*: Nature of food articles.
2. *Karana*: Method of their processing
3. *Samyoga*: Combination.
4. *Rashi*: Quantity
5. *Desha*: Habitat and climate.
6. *Kala*: Time about food intake and the individual itself.
7. *Upayoga samstha*: Rules governing the intake of food.
8. *Upayokta*: Wholesomeness of individual who takes it.

Factors influencing the total nutritional requirement:

The nutritional need is determined by the nature and duration of physical activity. Sedentary work calls for lesser nutrition than moderate work (such as nursing, homemaking, or gardening). A still greater amount of nutrition is required by those individuals who are involved in heavy work [8]. The factors which influence energy needs are as follows-

- ❖ Age
- ❖ Sex
- ❖ Body Size
- ❖ Climate
- ❖ Secretion of Endocrine Glands
- ❖ Status of health
- ❖ The altered Physiological States
- ❖ Effect of food
- ❖ The extent of Physical activity

Rules governing food intake

Charaka in *Vimanasthana* has described ten rules in the context of *Upayoga Samstha* [9]. They are –

1. Take warm food. It is delicious and provokes digestive fires.
2. Take unctuous food: It is delicious and provokes partially reduced digestive power.
3. Taking food in proper quantity-It promotes

- longevity and vitality.
4. Take meals only when the previous meal is digested: It prevents the formation of Ama like reactive species and its related disorders.
 5. Take food having no contradictory potencies.
 6. Take food in the proper place equipped with all the accessories.
 7. Should not take food too hurriedly: It enters into the wrong passage and alter thus functions.
 8. Should not take food very slowly: Because this will not give satisfaction to the individual and

he should take more diet.

9. Should not talk or laugh during food intake and should take food with full concentration.
10. Take food in a prescribed manner, with due regard to oneself^[10].

Things to be kept in mind at the time of food intake

Sushruta has described twelve important considerations for food intake. This is known as *Dvadasha Ashana Vichara*^[11]

S. No.	Types of diet	Indications
1.	<i>Shita Guna Ahara</i> (diet having cold property)	It is suitable for patients with thirst, burning, alcoholism diathesis, emaciated person & <i>Pitta Prakrti</i> patients.
2.	<i>Ushna Guna Ahara</i> (diet having hot property)	It is suitable for <i>Kapha-Vata</i> disorders and during purificatory therapy
3.	<i>Snigdha Guna Ahara</i> (diet with unctuous property)	It is suitable for <i>Vata Prakrti</i> patients & <i>Vatika</i> disorder, in old age & excess sexual contact.
4.	<i>Ruksha Ahara</i> (rough & coarse diet)	It is suitable for patients with diabetes mellitus, obesity & <i>Kaphaja Prakrti</i> patients.
5.	<i>Drava Guna Ahara</i> (liquid diet)	It is indicated in diarrhoea, dysentery, vomiting, thirst & emaciation
6.	<i>Shushka Ahara</i> (dry and rough food items)	It is advised for Diabetes mellitus skin disorders, etc.
7.	<i>Ekakalika Ahara</i> (Single diet in a day)	Those having weak digestive power
8.	<i>Dvikalik Ahara</i> (Diet twice a day)	Those having normal digestive power.
9.	<i>Aushadha-Yukta</i> (Diet containing medicine)	It is useful for those persons who do not want to take medicine alone.
10.	<i>Mitahara</i> (Diet in small quantity)	It is indicated in patients with weak digestive capacity
11.	<i>Shamana Ahara</i> (Palliative diet)	It is based on <i>Tridoshic</i> considerations of the season & climate etc.
12.	<i>Samanya Ahara</i> (Average normal diet)	It is indicated in healthy persons

Dietetic incompatibility (*Viruddha-Ahara*)

Viruddha-Ahara (incompatible diet) is a very important issue described in the Ayurveda text. It may lead to many metabolic and auto-immune disorders. Recently, improper modernized food habits and intake of incompatibility diets are increasing in the present era. Ayurveda mentioned that consumption of an incompatible combination of food (*Viruddh-Ahara*) lead to the initiation of a variety of pathological events. Charaka has described eighteen important factors, known as dietetics incompatibility (*Viruddh-Ahara*). Hence, everybody should avoid consuming such types of dietary articles to protect oneself from ailments^[12]. The factors of *Viruddha Ahara* are as follows-

1. *Desha Viruddha* – Consumption of those substances which are against place or land region. For example- Using rough, coarse & spicy food items in a hot climate. Using cold & oily food items in a cold climate.
2. *Kala Viruddha* – Consumption of those substances which are against time or season. For example - The use of cold and rough food in the winter season. Pungent and hot food in the summer season.
3. *Agni Viruddha* - Consumption of those substances which are against digestive power. Diet not related as per *Agni* (bio fire) status. For example – Intake of *Guru* food (heavy to digest) when there is *Mandagni* (low bio fire)

4. *Matra Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against quantity. For example -The use of *Madhu* and *Ghrita* in equal quantity.
5. *Satmya Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are unwholesome. For example - The persons who homologate to pungent & hot potency diet by its continuous use. In such a person sweat & cold potency diet are incompatible.
6. *Dosha Viruddha*- Continuous use of diet and drugs similar to properties of *Doshas*, like rough, cold & light diet in *Vatika* person, oily, hot, pungent diet in *Paittika* person, heavy, oily & slimy diet in *Kaphaja* person.
7. *Samskara Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against a mode of preparation. For example - Peacock meat is roasted in *Eranda* woods.
8. *Viryā Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against potency. For example - the use of hot potency drugs with cold potency.
9. *Koshtha Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against the nature of bowels. For example - a heavy diet in *Mridukoshtha* like *Ghrita*, *Masha*, *Rajama* etc.
10. *Avastha Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against states or conditions. For example - the use of *Vata* aggravating diet after excessive coitus and old age.
11. *Krama Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against sequence. For example – intake of food without passing the natural urges.
12. *Parihara Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against things that relieve the symptoms. For example - using cold water immediately after having hot tea or coffee.
13. *Upachara Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against treatment. Using a cold diet and drugs after intake of oily substances.
14. *Paka Viruddha* - Consumption of those substances which are against cooking. Use of semi boiled and burnt food items.
15. *Samyoga Viruddha*- Consumption of those substances which are against the combination. all kinds of *Amla Dravya* with milk.
16. *Hridaya Viruddha*- Intake of unpleasant food.
17. *Sampat Viruddha*- Consumption of diet and drugs which do not have desired quantity of taste or have a deranged form of taste.
18. *Vidhi Viruddha*- Consumption of food against dietetics,
Some examples of Food combinations must be avoided i.e.,
 - *Dadhi* (Curd) should not be consumed at the night. Because curd is heavy and acidic. It aggravates *Pitta* and *Kapha Doshas* which later on produces a lot of heat in the stomach.
 - Avoid consuming cold water immediately during or after a meal with hot tea or coffee. Because it diminishes the *Agni* and causes various digestive problems.
 - Avoid eating bananas with milk. Because it can diminish *Agni*, change the intestinal flora producing excess toxins in the body. The combination may also cause cold, cough and even produce allergies.
 - After eating *Muli* (radish), *Lasuna* (garlic), *Tulsi* (basil) one should not be consumed milk because of the risk of skin disorders (Leprosy).
 - Avoid eating raw and cooked foods together. One can have the salad first and then proceed to dinner after a short gap.
 Hence, these combinations of drugs are avoided in all age groups, especially in old age. Regular consumption of *Viruddha Ahara* can induce inflammation at a molecular level. It disturbs cellular metabolism. *Agni-mandya*, *Ama* and metabolic disorders are developed. It increases the risk and exacerbation of acute and chronic diseases due to inflammatory pathology. A large number of studies have demonstrated that some dietary components affect gene transcription, through multiple mechanisms. To mention a few examples, fatty acids can act as ligands of membrane and

nuclear receptors, thus regulating intracellular signaling and gene expression while polyphenols, present in a large number of food sources, exhibit anti-inflammatory activities by interfering at multiple levels with the activation cascade of nuclear factor- κ B, a key regulator of the inflammatory response. The adverse effect of regular intake of incompatible food is on the gastrointestinal tract and also affects all systems of

the body. Sometimes it can be fatal [13,14].

Shadrasas (Six types of Tastes) and its Biological Effects

The dietary articles are especially *Rasa Pradhana* & they also affect the *Tridosha* in the body, because the origin of *Rasa* is based on *Panchabhautika* composition. The following table gives an idea about *Rasas* and their *Bhautika* composition and their biological effect [15,16].

Shad Rasa	Panchabhautika composition	Biological effect
<i>Madhura</i> – Sweet	<i>Jala</i> + <i>Prithvi</i>	↑↑ <i>Kapha</i> , ↓ <i>Vata</i> & <i>Pitta</i>
<i>Amla</i> - Sour	<i>Prithvi</i> + <i>Agni</i>	↑↑ <i>Kapha</i> & <i>Pitta</i> , ↓ <i>Vata</i>
<i>Lavana</i> - Salt	<i>Agni</i> + <i>Jala</i>	↑↑ <i>Kapha</i> & <i>Pitta</i> , ↓ <i>Vata</i>
<i>Katu</i> - Pungent	<i>Vayu</i> + <i>Agni</i>	↓ <i>Kapha</i> , ↑↑ <i>Pitta</i> & <i>Vata</i>
<i>Tikta</i> - Bitter	<i>Akasha</i> + <i>Vayu</i>	↓ <i>Kapha</i> , ↑↑ <i>Vata</i> & <i>Pitta</i>
<i>Kashaya</i> - Astringent	<i>Vayu</i> + <i>Prithvi</i>	↓↓ <i>Kapha</i> & <i>Pitta</i> , ↑↑ <i>Vata</i>

These *Rasas* are not only improving the digestive fire & tissue metabolism but also provides the nutritional requirement to the body for the wellbeing of the tissues in general. With these effects, persons attain good health & devoid of diseases for prolong period. For a healthy functioning of the body and mind, all the tastes should be consumed in requisite amounts, depending on the bodily constitution (about the humors). Taking an excess of any taste can result in harmful effects.

Benefits of Balance Diet & Dietetics

According to Ayurveda, the diet which nourishes both mental and physical built is called a balanced diet. Ayurveda had a clear concept of malnutrition and overnutrition and their effect which are explained mainly in the context of *Santarpana* and *Apatarpana Janya Vyadhi*. Ayurveda explains the concept of *Ashtaahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*, *Viruddha Ahara*, *Satmya Ahara*, *Nityasevaniya Dravyas*. If a person consumes a balanced diet under consideration of the rules of dietary intake as mentioned in Ayurveda, he should achieve the following health benefits.

- ❖ It empowers longevity
- ❖ It promotes memory and intelligence
- ❖ Freedom from diseases
- ❖ Youthful age and excellence of lustre, complexion and voice

- ❖ Optimum strength
- ❖ Good and proper functioning of sense organs
- ❖ Getting power to the words, respectability, brilliance and potency
- ❖ It creates new tissues in the body having optimum quality and it prevents ageing
- ❖ It is considered a great medicine [17].

DISCUSSION

Ayurveda explains the functioning of the body based on *Tridosha Siddhant* i.e., *Vaat*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, which are also formed by the combination of *Panchmahabhootas* and the formation of these elements take place in the body through our food. Normal equilibrium of *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha* and *Panchbhautika* constitution of the body is necessary for the proper and ideal functioning of all body systems. But the status of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* changes from time to time, which may be normal or pathological. Pathologically imbalanced *Dosha* spreads all over the body and when they get localized in the macro & micro channels then leads to various diseases. The different status of these *Doshas* is very well described in *Ayurvedic* texts with relation to today and night, mealtime, age factors, etc. Thus, each food article is composed of its unique combination of five basic elements

depending on which its effect on *Dosha* is determined. Diet plays an important role in our lives as it provides nourishment through various nutrients. *Ayurveda* recommends the consumption of a balanced diet with a dietary regimen through *Shadrasatmak Ahara* to maintain a balance of *Doshas* in our body. Foods are required for all life processes, growth, repair and maintenance. A *Shadrasa* diet contains different types of food items to meet the bodily need. *Ayurveda* has stated that if a person eats a balanced and compatible diet with dietary rules, he will not need any medicine, because he will not fall ill. While if the diet is unbalanced, he will not require any medicine because the physician will not help him without a proper diet. Hence, diet is very important in *Ayurvedic* medicine for the prevention as well as treatment of diseases in all age groups. Sometimes, dietary management in itself is a complete treatment. The best dietary recommendations will reduce the risk of disease and stop pathogenesis and improve protective mechanisms, immune systems, ultimately health.

In *Ayurveda*, diet forms an important component of life, and it is included in the *Tri-Upastambha* (three pillars of life). To keep the homeostasis of *Doshas* (health), *Dhatus* (tissues) and *Malas* (wastes), *Ayurveda* has described specific diet, rules of eating etc. *Ayurveda* had a clear concept about nutrition i.e., malnutrition and overnutrition and their effect which are explained mainly in the context of *Santarpana* and *Apatarpana Janya Vyadhi*.

In *Ayurveda*, many holistic and scientific approaches have been described to the planning of the diet. The fundamental principles like *Tridosha*, *Prakriti*, tastes, processing of food, the quality, quantity, and the rules regarding eating food have been described in detail in the classical text of *Ayurveda*. If these things are kept in mind while incorporating the diet, one can keep our body fit and healthy and devoid of diseases of body and mind. [18] If a person is on a proper diet, then there is no need for any medication, it is well said in *Vaidyajeivanam* as *Pathyasati Gadaartasya Kim*

Aushadha Nishevanam [19]. The need of the day is to increase awareness among the general public about the menace of Incompatible Food and require them to follow *Ayurvedic* diet and dietetics in the field of health and wellness.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a complete and systemic understanding of diet and dietetics. So, a balanced diet taken properly provides good health (physical, mental, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, these are all dimensions of health), good quality of life and provides natural disease prevention. have to improve the health of every people. physical, mental, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, these all dimensions of health could be balanced by taking a balanced diet with proper dietary rules. Every human being should be aware of their own *Prakriti*, own *Agni Bala*, state of *Doshas* in the body, characteristics of different food articles, their mode of preparation and rules of intake. Proper knowledge of *Ayurvedic* dietetics and its application in our daily routine is essential for healthy long life.

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