



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Concept of Ashtau Ahara Vidhivisheshayatanani – Code and Conducts of Dietetics in Ayurveda

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Abstract:

Background: The health is the supreme foundation for the achievements of life. Therefore Ayurveda aims to maintain the condition of health i.e., swasthya raksana. health as well as diseases are dependent on various factors. Among these, Ahara is the most important one. Ahara plays an important role in maintenance of health. If ahara is not consumed in prescribed way it may leads to diseases. Wholesome diet is prime cause for the growth and development of the body, on the contrary, unwholesome diet causes several diseases. Wholesomeness of ahara is varies as person to person.

In this era of modernization and civilization, the popularity of fast food is greater due to the fast life. According to Ayurveda this can be classified as "prajnaparadha". Due to the demand of time, most of the people are bound to do such things, which adversely affect the health. The people who are health conscious mostly know about "what to eat?" but least about "how to eat?" the dietetic code or the rules for diet intake are preserved by our traditions upto some extent, but there is a big question about their awareness in today's society.

Aims and objects: (1) To study each factor of Ashtau ahara vidhi visheshayatanani separately

(2) To study the contribution of ahara vidhi visheshayatanani in maintenance and promotion of the health.

Materials & methods : Review of the available literature concerned with this concept. The term ahara vidhi vidhana is used first by Charaka in vimanasthana 1st chapter¹. These are the dietetic regulations and procedure for those, who are healthy as well as for certain types of patients. Even other medical sciences are very little aware about the point of dietetic rules. The practical importance of the rules is a proven fact for a long time, but today it is the need of time to prove this again. Each and every one need a proper education about the code of diet intake. The present study is carried out to study conceptually and elaborate its utility and importance.

Keywords: Ahar, Ahar vidhi visheshayatanani, Dietetic Code & Conduct

Introduction:

The health is the supreme foundation for the achievements of life. Therefore Ayurveda aims to maintain the condition of health i.e., swasthya raksana. Health as well as diseases are dependent on various factors. Ahara, swapna (nidra) and brahmacharya are play an important role in the maintenance of "swasthya" of an individual. that is why these are called as trayopastambha of life². Vagbhatta compare the trayopastambha to the sub-pillars that support or are capable of supporting a mansion for prolonged period³. Among the trayopastambha, much importance is given to ahara since it is primarily responsible for the growth, development and protection of the body, from decay and disease. It is not only needed for the continuity of life, but for bala, varna, upachaya etc. also.

Ahara is a substance which builds up the body this also includes the intake of water as well as medicine. dalhana has stated that which is swallowed through annalikà (esophagus) is called ahara⁴. While commenting on the description of ahara, Chakrapani has said that ahara means that which is ingested and thus

it includes in itself both diet and drugs⁵. In TABER's dictionary food is defined as "any material that provides the nutritive requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical wellbeing"⁶.

Ayurveda offers some basic dietary guidelines that include choosing appropriate food, combinations of food, cooking methods, quality & quantity of food, nature of consumer, geographical and environmental conditions etc. Ayurveda classics describe all these aspects in a very systematic and scientific manner which is called as ahara vidhi visheshayatanani. These are 8 factors can be called as code & conducts of dietetics. Also ahara vidhi means the method for diet intake and vidhana means statement, code, rules etc. Thus ahara vidhi vidhana means the rules for diet intake mentioned by charakacharya in vimanasthana⁷.

The proper diet, taken in proper manner can lead to better health. On the contrary, proper diet if not taken in proper manner can lead to diseases. In this era of modernization and civilization, the popularity of fast food is greater due to the fast life. According to Ayurveda this can be classified as "Prajnaparadha". Due to the demand of time, most of the people are bound to do such things, which adversely affect the health. Though all the people can't always follow all the rules due to the bindings of fast and forward life, the awareness is needed regarding the subject. Even other medical sciences are very little aware about the point of dietetic rules.

The practical importance of the rules is a proven fact for a long time, but today it is the need of time to prove this again to uplift the quality of health as well as with a curative purpose in many diseases. Each and every one need a proper education about the code of diet intake.

Ahara vidhi visheshayatanani are the factors, which are guidelines for the selection of wholesome diet. These are the dietetic regulations and procedure for those, who are healthy as well as for certain types of patients. Though many other classics have elaborately mentioned the same rules, they have explained them under different headings like bhojana vidhi, annavidhi etc.

Acharya charaka described 8 factors as ahara vidhi visheshayatanani⁷ as

1. Prakriti: natural qualities of the àhàra
2. Karana: the process or preparation
3. Samyoga : the combination of individual things
4. Rashi : the quantity of food
5. Desha : desha denotes the habitat
6. Kala : time factor
7. Upayoga samstha : it consists of dietetic rules.
8. Upayokta : the person who takes food

These are the 8 factors, which are most important from the preventive and curative aspect of health. They are to be examined before food intake and are to be followed during food intake.

Whereas acharya charaka mentioned ashtau ahara vidhivisheshayatanani in vimana sthana, on the other hand acharya sushruta has not clearly mentioned Ahara vidhi visheshayatanani, but he emphasized the examination of àhàra dravya in same way as Ashtau àhàra vidhi visheshayatanani as mentioned by Charaka and Vagbhata⁸. However, Astanga Samgrahakara Vagbhata has illustrated only seven types of aṣṭau àhàra vidhivisheshayatanani⁹. He has explained upayoga samstha and upayokta together and counted them as "upayogavyavastha". So there is no major difference between these two references. These 8 factors are the basic factors, on which hitakara or ahitakara effect of dravyas are depend.

The present study is carried out to study conceptually and elaborate its utility and importance of these 8 factors. Even though a man takes wholesome ahara, he should have to observe the following dietetic rules, to achieve proper digestion, assimilation and health of the body. both healthy persons as well as patients should follow these rules.

1. Prakriti (Qualitative characteristic of food)¹⁰

It indicates the nature of ahar dravyas i.e. the inherent attributes (laghu, guru etc.) of diet. It is known that each & every individual has got specific physical & mental temperament (i.e. prakriti), in the same way each food & drug substances has also got its prakriti which depends on the heaviness, hotness etc. qualities of particular articles. Before taking any food articles a person has to think about the nature of natural qualities of ahara dravyas. For example, masha is guru in nature. Likewise mudga is laghu in nature. Similarly the meat of shukara is guru and of yena is laghu. By nature green gram is light to digest and also common quail and grey partridge. Likewise, black gram and the meat of pig and buffalo are heavy.

Nowadays, many hybrid food articles are in use e.g. corn, mango etc. These hybrid food articles are now cultivated in any land, in any seasons with short time duration for procreation. So they are not having all natural qualities. Therefore, before taking these food items a person should know about their prakriti. Hence, it could be said that, the prakriti is most important factor, that's why it has been given first place among the eight factors.

2. Karana:

There are some food which cannot be consumed directly and demand a change in certain attributes. Karana means the processing of the inherent attributes of substances the transformation or alteration in the natural attributes of food is known as karana or sanskaara.

Transformation of the attribute is caused by application of heat, cleansing, churning, storing, flavoring, dilution, impregnation, preservation and through container etc. thus there is a change of qualities of the dravyas due to the processing. By processing, the heavy ones become light and vice versa. such as vrihi which is heavy to digest, becomes light when transformed into laja after frying; on the other hand, the flour of roasted grains becomes heavy when processed into cooked bolus.

Masha is prakriti guru to digest, because it is jala and pruthvi mahabhuta dominant substance. But when it processed with agni (roasted), jala and pruthvi mahabhuta get decreased and there is increase in agni, vayu and akasha mahabhuta and after process it becomes laghu to digest in nature.

3. Samyoga (Combination/ mixing):

Sometimes the action of combination of diet is different from the individual effect i.e., combination of two or more substances results in the manifestation of special qualities, which cannot be achieved by using the same article separately. The combination of individual things with one or more things is known as samyoga. This results in the manifestation of specific attributes, which can't be manifested by individual substances, for example, a) madhu and ghrita are individually non-toxic, but a combination of these in equal proportion becomes toxic to the individual. b) though both milk (sheeta virya) and fish (ushna virya) have sweet taste, but due to opposite potencies the consumption of their combination gives rise to kustha. 3) Regular use of milk with ghrita is the best rasayana (health –promotive regiments)¹¹.

The combination altogether produces new qualities so, it should be taken in to consideration that while preparing the food; the ingredient must be compatible to each other and should be properly mixed together. The knowledge of samayoga facilitates in identification of virudh aahar. Samayoga is the basic principle behind the synergistic and antagonistic action of drugs.

4. Rashi :

The quantity of food which is to be taken in is known as rashi. in the context of rashi; the terms sarvagraha & parigraha have been explained by Ayurveda.

- Sarvagraha: Total measurement of the entire meal as a whole i.e., the combined quantity of the rice, meat, pulses, condiments etc.
- Parigraha: Detailed measurement of each article of diet separately.

The modern dietetic science emphasizes more on parigraha type of matra. As, it specifies the quantity of carbohydrates, fats, proteins etc. in form of calories whereas Ayurveda gives equal importance to both types of matras i.e., sarvagraha & parigraha.

The amount of food which, without disturbing the equilibrium of dhatus and doṣhas of the body, gets digested as well as metabolized in proper time is to be regarded as the proper quantity of food. It means the

quantity of food can be known only by correlating with its proper digestion within a time limit. if food taken in evening does not disturb the equilibrium of doṣhas as well as dhatus and get digested and metabolized by the morning then that would be the standard measurement of food quantity to be taken by the individual. This measurement will certainly vary from person to person.

So, a wise physician should have to use ahariya dravya properly in proper doses in order to obtain good results. Consequently, the timely digestion of food as a whole will also be effective.

5.Desha :

Desha represents the habitat. it determines the variations of the qualities of the substances according to their geographic region, due to different soil, use and their acclimatization to that particular region. The acclimatisation in a particular habitat is determined by the growth and migration of the substance. A person is acclimatized to the substances grown in the area from where the individual natively belongs to. But when a person consumes a substance from a different habitat, then it becomes unhealthy for him.e.g.traveler's diarrhoea (popularly known as delhi belly) which occurs by change of desha. Substance grown in the region of himalayas are heavy in property while those grown in the dessert or sandy region are light.

6.Kala :

Kala is a time factor which is a basic cause for the parinaman of immature substance to get its maturity and maturity to its destruction i.e., uttpati-sthithi-laya. in swasthavastha, kala is described in dual context, one particular with daily and seasonal variations called as nityaga kala while other deals with individuals conditions of age and disease called as avasthika kala.

In nityaga type of kala ,àhara should be taken as per dinacharya and rutucharya. this type of diet acclimatized body function with the external environment e.g. in summer the external environment is too hot, so to acclimatized to it sheeta, madhura, snigdha àhàra should be taken, while ushna is indicated for hemanta and shishira rutu.

In rugnavastha, avasthika kala is considered where time is considered by vyadhi avastha, i.e. in the condition of jwara, langhana should be done for 7 days.

7) Upayoga samsthà (Dietetic rules) :

These are the dietetic rules which are to be followed while taking the food. The prior 6 factors prakriti to kala are related with object as àhàra –whereas 7th factor upayoga samsthà is related with process of eating i.e. how to eat? as àhàra vidhi vidhana.

one should consume only that in proper quantity which is –

- Ushnamashniyat (Consuming warm food)
- Snigdhamashniyat (Diet should include fat)
- Matravatashniyat (Balanced diet)
- Jeerneashniyat (Meal taken after digestion of previous meal)
- Veeryaviruddhamashniyat
- Ishtadeshe ishtasarvopkarnam chashniyat (Meal taken at proper place and with proper instruments)
- Naatidrutamashniyat (Not eating too fast)
- Naativilambitamashniyat (Not eating too slowly)
- Ajalpanahasan tanmanabhunjeet (Eating without talking or laughing, mindful eating)
- Atmanamabhisamikshya bhunjeet samyak (Eating after analyzing one's needs)

8) Upayokta (Habit of the individual) :

The person who takes the food is the upayokta. it is he who is mainly responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things (okasatmya). He is the one who must take in to consideration all this facts of ahara and consume food accordingly. Every person must take into consideration his own constitution, capacity of digestive power, the season, time of day and whether the previously taken food has been digested or not.

Discussion:

From the time of conception the body grows, develops strength, and gradually matures. kala yoga, swabhava samsiddhi, ahara saushthava and avighata are the factors responsible for the growth of the body. Excellence of the ingested food is one among the causative factors which are responsible for the growth. Ahara, swapna (nidra) and brahmacharya are play an important role in the maintenance of "swasthya" of an individual. That is why these are called as Trayopastambha ,supporter of life¹².

Ahara, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance, according to ayurveda. in other medical sciences, food is considered important, but not the manner of eating. vagbhatta stresses upon the same point, when he states that if the ahara is properly ingested, it acts as amruta (nectar) to the body, but the same ahara if imperfectly ingested,acts as poison. According to one quotation of susruta¹³ ahara and the dietetic rules are basic factors among the causes for disease. so it obviously becomes an important part of the treatment by avoiding the causative factors.

Ayurveda dealt with the concept of metabolism in a surprisingly greater detail, than one would expect. But the references are scattered through the entire classics like Charaka samhita,Sushruta samhita, Ashtang hriday etc.charaka while explaining the importance of ahara states that food sustains the life of all living beings. All living beings require food. these 8 ahara vidhi visheshayatan are most important from the preventive and curative aspect of health. They are to be examined before food intake and are to be followed during food intake.By using these 8 factors one can maintained complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, geniusness, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect

Conclusion:

Ashtau ahara vidhi visheshayatanani are the guide lines for selection of food. It is so important in prevention of health as well as in treatment so all the main ayurvedic classical texts give due regard to these factors. People basically know very little about them and they who know are little bothered to obey such rules, even they do not have trust enough to consider the code of diet as an important health matter. Many diseases like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, infertility and many other health problems can be prevented arising merely due to faulty dietary habits. The practical importance of the rules is a proven fact for a long time, but today it is the need of time to prove this again. Each and every one need a proper education about the code of diet thus the awareness is needed regarding the subject.

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