



IMPORTANCE OF AYURVEDIC DIETICS

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ABSTRACT

Ahara is one of the three supporting factors of life, plays a key role in the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. In Vedic literature it has been equated with nectar. There is much talk about balanced diet in present era. Modern Science states that the balanced diet is one which contains a variety of foods in such quantities and proportions that the need for energy, proteins, vitamins, minerals, fats, carbohydrates and other nutrients is adequately met for maintaining health, vitality and general well-being. The food articles which replenish the bodily dhatus and help in eliminating the disturbance of their equilibrium are to be regarded as wholesome. Apart from quantity of food, elemental constitution, mode of preparation, habitat, combination, time and season of intake, manner of intake, body constitution and Agnibala of consumer are also considered in the acceptability of wholesome diet.

KEYWORDS: Ahara, Dhatus, Agnibala

INTRODUCTION

Diet is one of the main factors provided by nature for healthy long life of human beings. In ancient classics much importance has been given to Ahara (Diet), for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases. The wholesome and unwholesome foods are responsible for happiness and misery respectively. Dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic therapy. Sometimes, dietary management in itself is a complete treatment. Ayurvedic dietetics is concerned primarily with the energetic of food as a means of balancing the Dosha.

Contrary to modern approach, Ayurvedic dietetics does not deal only with the specific nutritional contents of food - carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals etc. but it also takes into account the food we take in and the manner in which we take it, nature of food, Agnibala, rasa in food, its effects on Dosha, combination, season, place and environment etc. Field of Ayurvedic dietetics is vast and more scientific.

HISTORY OF DIETETICS

In Rigveda it is said that, Purusha is all that contains past, present and future. He is also the governor of Atma and which is manifested by Anna. In Taiteriyopanishad, the Anna has been regarded as 'Brahma', as all animates are produced from Anna, after production life is maintained by anna and at the end assimilate in the

Anna. In Bhagwat Geeta also diet has been accepted as a source for creation of life. Further to achieve success in yogic practices, there is clear cut emphasis on appropriate diet, along with other activities and regimen of life.

In Charaka Samhita, in context to the origin of Purusha and his diseases the concluding remark of Punarvasu Atreya to accept the 'Ahara' as a causative factor for both, carries the historical importance of dietetics. In Sushruta Samhita, a detailed description of dietetics by Lord Dhanwantari regarding the applicability and importance of diet in human life is self-sufficient to prove the historical significance of it. In Kashyapa Samhita, Ahara is called as "**Mahabhaisajya**".

DEFINITION OF AHARA

Defining the Ahara it has been said that, whatever material taken by mouth into the alimentary canal, which in long run after proper digestion transformed into the tissue elements and do the functions such as promotion of growth, recovery of loss, protection from diseases for survival of body, is termed as 'Ahara'. Charaka says that it is the Ahara which maintains the equilibrium of bodily dhatus and helps in promotion of health and prevention of diseases. According to Sushruta, Ahara is that which restores the vigour, provides strength immediately after taking, sustains body and increases the life-span, happiness, memory, power, ojas and digestive capacity.

IMPORTANCE OF DIET

Among *TRIUPASTAMBHA* of life, the Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya, the diet is an essential factor for maintenance of healthy life. Being supported by these three well-regulated factors of life, the body is endowed with strength, complexion and growth and continues until the full span of life. Acharya Charaka has mentioned that, Anna (food) is the best sustainer of life.

Taking in account the utility of food not only at individual but at universal level, it has been mentioned that whatever beneficial for worldly happiness, whatever pertains to the Vedic sacrifices leading to heaven, and whatever action leads to spiritual salvation are all said to be established in food. According to Acharya Sushruta Ahara determines the origin of beings and forms a chief source of bodily strength, complexion and ojas. Showing the importance of Pathya. It is also said that if wholesome diet is given in a planned way, there is no need for separate medical treatment and if unwholesome diet is being permitted, there is no benefit of any medication.

AYURVEDIC CONCEPT OF DIET

According to Ayurveda Body is said to be made up of Pancha Mahabhoota & hence the food also needs to be Panchbhautik then only food can get digested & be utilized for the growth of Panchamahabhuta which in turn results in growth of body. Tridosha i.e. Vata, Pitta & Kapha which constitutes the body is also made up of Panchamahabhoota. It is mentioned that; Vata is made up of Vayu and Akasha Mahabhoota, Pitta is made up of Agni Mahabhoota and Kapha is made up of Jala and Prithvi Mahabhoota. Each food article either has Dosha aggravating or pacifying or balancing action on human body. To keep the balance of Dosha (health) disturbed due to various factors like season, age etc., the Ayurveda prescribes specific diet.

Shadrasa- Six basic taste: The food contains six basic tastes and each taste has pre-dominance of particular elements of Panchamahabhoota which exerts specific effect on the Tridoshas & Dhatus.

- *Madhura* (Sweet) – Prithvi & Jala
- *Amla* (Sour) – Prithvi & Agni
- *Lavana* (Salt) – Jala & Agni
- *Katu* (Pungent) – Agni & Vayu
- *Tikta* (Bitter) – Vayu & Akash
- *Kashaya* (Astringent) – Prithvi & Vayu

It is mentioned that, drugs having sweet, sour and salty taste alleviate *Vata*, those having astringent, sweet and bitter tastes alleviate *Pitta* and those having astringent, pungent and bitter tastes alleviate *Kapha* Dosha.

DIET AND MIND

Diet plays an important role in keeping our mind healthy. Satva, Raja and Tama are the basic qualities of mind

Satvaguna is always strengthening, invigorating and vitalizing. Satvaguna expresses essence, understanding, purity, clarity, compassion and love. Satvaguna is a positive virtue and it strengthens and stabilizes mind. Rajoguna and Tamoguna are negative attributes which destabilize and weaken the mind Rajoguna implies movement, aggressiveness and extroversion and it operates on a sensual level. Tamoguna manifests ignorance, inertia, heaviness and dullness. Considering the effect of food on mind following 3 classifications have been made:

1. **Satvik** diet – Ideal diet containing vegetarian, non-oily, non-spicy food items which are congenial to the body
2. **Rajasik** diet – Too spicy, hot, sour, salty that excites the mind
3. **Tamasik** diet – Too oily, heavy food that leads to lethargic mind.

Seasonal Consideration of Dietetics

In Ayurvedic classics, there has been a thorough consideration for seasons, besides the dietetic regimens for days and nights. Whole year is divided into six seasons and detailed dietetic regimen for these seasons is prescribed. Diet should be taken according to Ritu as explained in ritucharya.

During winter season (Hemanta and Shisira) (December, January and February) due to the contact with cold wind, the digestive power of healthy people increases and capable of digesting any heavy food.

During spring (Vasanta) (march and April) out of the three Dosha, Kapha gets aggravated. Light and easily digestible food should be taken and heavy unctuous, sweet diets and day sleep should be avoided.

During Grishma (June-July) due to the extremely hot weather intake of sweet, cold, liquid and unctuous diet and drinks are prescribed. Salty, sour, pungent and hot foods should be avoided during summer.

During Varsha Ritu (August-September) the digestive power weakens and in order to maintain the normal power of digestion one should take old barley, wheat, shali rice along with meat of arid animals and vegetable soup.

The Sharada ritu starts during October- November. In this season sweet, light, bitter and cold food and drink which have potential to alleviate the vitiated pitta are advised.

IDEAL DIET

The ideal diet should have following properties:

- 1) It should increase the strength of body.
- 2) It should be tasty/it should be such that it should be liked by the one, who is taking it.
- 3) It should give energy instantaneously / immediately after taking it.

- 4) It should have the capacity to withhold the body & give its strength & energy to carry on its regular functions.
- 5) It should satisfy the one taking it.
- 6) It should be hot, unctuous, not dry when taken.
- 7) Should be taken in proper quantity.
- 8) It should not be incompatible.

FUNCTIONS OF DIET

- 1) Instantly satisfying.
- 2) Gives strength/energy.
- 3) Maintains the body & maintains the functions of the body.
- 4) Increases longevity.
- 5) Increases the Digestive fire, Vitality, Recollecting Power, & Ojas.

CONCLUSION

Human body requires food to provide energy for all life process, growth, repair and maintenance. Eating a well-balanced diet on a regular basis and staying at ideal weight are critical factors in maintaining emotional and physical well-being. In Ayurveda, diet forms the important component of life as it is included in the Tri-Upastambha. Each food article either has Dosha aggravating action or pacifying or balancing action on human body. To keep the homoeostasis of Dosha, Ayurveda has described specific diet. Proper planning and indulging of the diet can maintains our body. Physical, mental, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, these all dimensions of health could be balanced by taking congenial diet. In Ayurveda, many holistic and scientific approaches have been described about planning of the diet. The fundamental principles like Tridosha, Prakriti, Shadrasa, processing of food, the quality, quantity, and the rules regarding eating food if considered while incorporating the diet, one can keep away from many diseases of body and mind. There is no need of medication if the person is in proper diet.

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