AYUSHDHARA
ISSN: 2393-9583 (P)/ 2393-9591 (O)
An International Journal of Research in AYUSH and Allied Systems

Review Article

ROLE OF *AAHAR VIDHI VISHESHAYATANA* (EIGHT DETERMINANTS OF FOOD INTAKE) IN DIGESTION: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

Kajal[1]*, Shalini Prakash[2]
*[1]PG Scholar, [2]Associate Professor, Post Graduate Department of Kriya Sharir, CBPACS, New Delhi, India.

Article info
Article History:
Received: 06-02-2026
Accepted: 17-03-2026
Published: 06-05-2026

KEYWORDS:
Aahar Vidhi Visheshayatana, Digestive Health, *Agni*, Personalized Nutrition, Gut Microbiota, Dietary Behavior, Circadian rhythm, Mindful eating, Food processing.

ABSTRACT

Digestion is regarded as the foundation of health in Ayurveda, particularly influenced by the functional state of *Jatharagni* (digestive fire). *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*-the eight determinants of food intake described in Ayurvedic texts-plays a crucial role in regulating digestion. The present review aims to analyze the role of these eight factors-*Prakṛti, Karaṇa, Saṃyoga, Rashi, Desha, Kala, Upayoga-saṃstha,* and *Upayokta*-in modulating digestion and maintaining the balance of *Agni*. Each determinant is critically examined in relation to its effect on digestive processes and correlated with modern scientific concepts. The review highlights that digestion is a multifactorial process influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, encompassing these determinants-namely the nature of food *(Prakriti),* processing methods *(Karana),* combinations *(Samyoga),* quantity *(Rashi),* geographical and environmental context *(Desha),* time *(Kala),* rules of consumption *(Upayoga-saṃstha),* and individual characteristics *(Upayokta)*. The analysis demonstrates that *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* provides a holistic and personalized framework for dietary regulation. These principles show strong parallels with contemporary concepts such as personalized nutrition, circadian rhythm, gut microbiota, and mindful eating. In conclusion, *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* plays a vital role in maintaining optimal digestion and metabolism through the regulation of *Agni*. Its proper application can prevent digestive disorders and promote overall health, highlighting its continued relevance in both traditional and modern healthcare systems.

INTRODUCTION

Digestion occupies a central position in Ayurvedic physiology, serving as the foundation for both health and disease. The concept of *Agni*, particularly *Agni*, is regarded as the principal factor responsible for the digestion, absorption, and assimilation of food.[1] Proper functioning of *Agni* ensures the formation of healthy *Dhatus* (body tissues), whereas its impairment leads to the accumulation of *Ama*, considered the root cause of numerous pathological conditions.[2] Ayurvedic texts consistently emphasize that balanced digestion is essential for maintaining homeostasis and overall well-being.[3]

In Ayurveda, the method of food intake plays a crucial role in influencing digestion.[4] Factors such as overeating, incompatible food combinations (*Viruddhahara*), irregular eating patterns, and improper food processing are known to disturb *Agni*[5], leading to *Agnimandya* (diminished digestive capacity) and subsequent disease manifestation. In this context, *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* refers to the specific factors namely *Prakriti, Karana, Saṃyoga, Rashi, Desha, Kala, Upayoga-saṃstha,* and *Upayokta.*[6] that determine the proper intake and utilization of food. These determinants ensure that food is digested efficiently and contributes to the maintenance of health.

From a contemporary perspective, digestion is understood as a multifactorial process influenced not only by nutrient composition but also by behavioral, temporal, environmental, and individual-specific

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Quick Response Code
https://doi.org/10.47070/ayushdhara.v13i2.2636

factors.[7] Modern research highlights the role of meal timing (circadian rhythm), food processing, eating behavior, and personalized nutrition in regulating digestion and metabolism,[8-11] demonstrating a strong conceptual alignment with Ayurvedic principles.

Despite the availability of detailed descriptions of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* in Ayurvedic texts, its systematic role in the regulation of digestion has not been comprehensively analyzed in an integrative and structured manner. Existing literature often addresses individual determinants independently or remains descriptive without clearly explaining their mechanistic influence on *Agni* and digestion. Moreover, there is limited effort to correlate these principles with contemporary scientific understanding of digestive physiology and nutritional science.

This creates a significant research gap, wherein the multidimensional role of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* as a unified framework influencing digestion remains underexplored, particularly in terms of its effect on *Agni*, its functional mechanism in digestion and its correlation with modern scientific concepts.

Therefore, the present review aims to analyse the role of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* in regulating digestion through the balance of *Agni*, and to establish its relevance by correlating these classical principles with contemporary scientific understanding. This study attempts to provide a structured, integrative, and evidence-based interpretation of these determinants in the context of digestive physiology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review is based on a comprehensive and systematic analysis of both classical Ayurvedic literature and scientific research. Classical sources included the *Bṛuhattrayi* and *Laghutrayi*, along with their relevant commentaries and, to extract and contextualize the fundamental concepts of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana*. These were further supported by related scientific studies that explore analogous principles. Modern sources comprised peer-reviewed research articles retrieved from databases such as PubMed and Google Scholar, focusing on areas including digestion, metabolism, dietary behavior, circadian rhythm, and gut microbiota. This integrative approach enabled a critical correlation between classical Ayurvedic principles and current scientific evidence.

Methodology

A qualitative analytical approach was adopted to:

1. Extract references related to *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana.*
2. Interpret their role in digestion.
3. Correlate findings with modern scientific evidence.

Role of Each Factor in Digestion

1. *Prakriti* (Nature of Food)

Prakriti refers to the inherent qualities of food, such as *Guru* (heavy), *Laghu* (light), *Snigdha* (unctuous), and *Rukṣha* (dry). These properties determine the ease with which a food item is digested. Foods possessing *Guru* properties require stronger digestive capacity and a longer duration for digestion, whereas *Laghu* foods are digested more readily and impose less strain on *Agni*.[12]

From a modern scientific perspective, this concept can be understood in terms of the macronutrient composition of food. Foods rich in fats and proteins tend to delay gastric emptying and require more complex digestive processing, while lighter foods- particularly those rich in carbohydrates- are digested more rapidly. Thus, the intrinsic nature *(Prakriti)* of food directly determines the digestive load and influences the functional efficiency of *Agni*.[13]

2. *Karana* (Processing of Food)

Karaṇa refers to various methods of food processing, such as cooking, heating, fermentation, and churning. These processes alter the physical and chemical properties of food, thereby influencing its digestibility.[14] Proper processing enhances the ease of digestion and supports the optimal functioning of *Agni*, whereas improper processing may render food difficult to digest.[15] From a contemporary nutritional perspective, processing enhances nutrient bioavailability and helps reduce anti-nutritional factors.[16,17] For instance, cooking denatures proteins and softens dietary fibers, facilitating their breakdown and absorption. Thus, *Karaṇa* plays a crucial role in transforming food into a form that is more suitable for digestion and assimilation.

3. *Samyoga* (Combination of Food)

Samyoga refers to the combination of different food substances. [18] Ayurveda emphasizes that certain combinations of food may be incompatible (*Viruddhahara*) and can produce harmful effects on digestion. Such incompatible combinations disturb *Agni*, leading to improper digestion and the formation of metabolic toxins.[19] In modern terms, food combinations can influence digestive processes, enzyme activity, and gut microbiota. Some combinations may impair digestion or cause gastrointestinal discomfort.[20] Hence, appropriate food combinations are essential for maintaining balanced digestion and preventing metabolic disturbances.

4. *Rashi* (Quantity of Food)

Rashi refers to the quantity of food consumed, including both the total amount and the proportion of

different food components.[21] It implies that food should be consumed in an appropriate quantity according to one's digestive capacity.[22]

Consuming the right quantity of the food supports the normal functioning of *Agni*, whereas excessive intake overwhelms digestion and leads to *Agnimandya* (weakened digestive capacity). Modern research also shows that overeating delays gastric emptying, increases metabolic stress, and contributes to digestive disorders and obesity.[23] On the other hand inadequate quantity will fail to nourish the body. Therefore, maintaining an appropriate quantity of food is essential for preserving digestive balance.

5. *Desha* (Habitat/Place)

Desha refers to the geographical and environmental conditions in which an individual lives and consumes food. [24] These conditions influence the functioning of *Agni* and overall digestion.[25] Modern science similarly recognizes that environmental factors such as temperature, altitude, and seasonal changes can affect metabolism and digestive processes.[26] Thus, dietary practices should be adapted according to the surrounding environment to maintain optimal digestion.

6. *Kala* (Time of Food Intake)

Kala refers to both the timing of food intake and seasonal variations.[27] Ayurveda emphasizes that food should be consumed at appropriate times, aligned with the natural functioning of *Agni*.[28] Irregular eating habits can weaken *Agni*, disturb the digestion and can lead to formation of metabolic toxins.[29] Modern research supports this concept through the study of circadian rhythms, which regulate digestive enzyme secretion, hormone release, and metabolic activity. Disruption of these rhythms, such as through irregular meal timing, negatively affects digestion.[30-32] Therefore, proper timing of meals is crucial for maintaining digestive efficiency.

7. *Upayoga-samstha* (Rules of Eating)

Upayoga-saṃstha refers to the guidelines related to the proper method of eating, such as consuming warm food, eating at a moderate pace, and maintaining attention while eating.[33]

These practices support efficient digestion by promoting optimal functioning of *Agni*.[34] In modern science, similar concepts are described under mindful eating, which has been shown to improve digestion, regulate appetite, and enhance nutrient absorption. Mindful eating nurtures the parasympathetic nervous system which further supports digestion by increasing salivary secretions, and stimulating gastric juices, digestive enzymes, and bile to facilitate nutrient assimilation and extraction.[35,36] Thus, the way, the food is consumed plays a significant role in maintaining digestive health.

8. *Upayokta* (Individual Factors)

Upayokta refers to the individual consuming the food, considering, factors such as body constitution (*Prakṛiti*), digestive capacity, and current health status. The same food may have different effects on different individuals,[37] depending on these factors.

This concept aligns with modern personalized nutrition, which considers individual differences in digestive processes, genetics, and gut microbiota.[38] Therefore, dietary practices should be tailored to the individual to ensure optimal digestion and overall health.

DISCUSSION

Digestion, as conceptualized in Ayurveda, extends beyond the mere intake of food and represents a complex and dynamic physiological process influenced by multiple factors. In this context, *Ahara Vidhi Visheṣayatana*[39] provides a comprehensive and systematic framework that governs dietary intake through eight determinants reflecting a coordinated interaction among dietary, behavioral, environmental, and individual-specific factors. These factors collectively ensure the proper functioning of *agni*, which is regarded as the regulator of digestion and metabolism.[40] Several aspects of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* find strong parallels in contemporary research on digestion and metabolism.

The intrinsic nature of food (*Prakriti*) and its method of processing (*Karana*) directly influence the structural and biochemical characteristics of ingested substances, with cooking methods altering the structural composition of food components.[41] Appropriate combinations of food (*Samyoga*) ensure compatibility at the biochemical level, preventing adverse interactions that may hinder digestion. The concept of food combinations can be correlated with interactions affecting gastrointestinal function and gut microbiota composition, which are now recognized as key determinants of digestive health.[42] The regulation of food quantity (*Rashi*) represents a critical factor in maintaining digestive equilibrium. [43] Modern studies emphasize that excessive intake imposes metabolic strain, whereas inadequate intake compromises nutritional sufficiency. This highlights the importance of aligning food quantity with digestive capacity to preserve metabolic homeostasis.[44] External factors such as habitat (*Desha*) and temporal patterns (*Kala*) influence digestive function by modulating physiological responses to environmental and circadian variations.[45] Behavioral aspects of eating, described under *Upayoga-samstha*, play a pivotal role in coordinating the neurophysiological pathways of

digestion including mastication, salivary secretion, and neural regulation of digestion. The act of eating, when performed with attentiveness and appropriate practices, have been shown to influence satiety signals, digestive efficiency, and nutrient absorption. This aligns closely with current understandings of the gut–brain axis and the role of parasympathetic dominance in promoting efficient digestion. [46]

The concept of the individual (*Upayokta*) underscores the necessity of personalized dietary regulation. Ayurveda recognizes variability in digestive capacity and metabolic response based on constitution[47] and health status, a perspective that resonates strongly with the emerging field of personalized nutrition. Advances in nutrigenomics and microbiome research further validate that individual differences significantly influence nutrient metabolism and dietary outcomes.[48] These findings collectively support the relevance of the principles described under *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* and their applicability in modern nutritional science.

An important implication of this framework is its relevance in addressing contemporary lifestyle-related disorders. Modern dietary habits are often characterized by irregular meal timings, excessive intake, processed foods, and distracted eating, all of which can negatively impact digestion. The principles of *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* offer practical guidelines to counter these issues by promoting structured, mindful, and individualized eating practices. By ensuring proper regulation of *Agni*, these principles not only enhance digestion but also contribute to improved metabolic efficiency and overall health. This highlights the potential of integrating Ayurvedic dietary guidelines into modern healthcare systems as a preventive and therapeutic approach.

Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana* can be understood as a comprehensive model that regulates digestive processes through the regulation of *Agni*, thereby playing a fundamental role in the maintenance of health.

CONCLUSION

Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana provides a comprehensive Ayurvedic framework for regulating digestion through the balanced functioning of *Agni*. By incorporating factors such as food properties, processing methods, food combinations, quantity, timing, environmental context, eating behavior, and individual variability, it underscores a holistic and personalized approach to dietary intake. The correlation of these classical principles with contemporary concepts, including circadian rhythm, gut microbiota, mindful eating and personalized nutrition, highlights their continued scientific relevance. Proper application of these determinants supports optimal digestion, prevents the formation of *Ama* (metabolic toxins), and contributes to the maintenance of overall health.

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Cite this article as:
Kajal, Shalini Prakash. Role of Aahar Vidhi Visheshayatana (Eight Determinants of Food Intake) in Digestion: An Ayurvedic Perspective. AYUSHDHARA, 2026;13(2):472-477.
https://doi.org/10.47070/ayushdhara.v13i2.2636
Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared

***Address for correspondence**
Dr. Kajal
PG Scholar,
Post Graduate Department of Kriya Sharir, CBPACS, New Delhi.
Email: kajaldahiya114@gmail.com