



Review Article

CONCEPT OF AHARA (DIET) IN AYURVEDA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ahara is first among the three significant pillars of *Ayurveda*. It means that it is one of the fundamental principles ahead which gives health, happiness and harmony along with the nature. One should regularly take such substances which are conducive to the preservation of good health and are able to avoid the attacks of sickness. Such type of diet is called naturally healthy diet. *Ayurveda* is science of life. Main aim of *Ayurveda* is to maintain health of a person. *Ahara* plays importance role to achieve this target. In the modern times, the ways in which the food is prepared and presented have changed drastically. Because of the rapid swiftness of life style towards urbanization, one can have less access to fresh food. Today, the dependency on packaged and processed food has also increased exceptionally. It definitely has some destructive effect on both mental and physical well-being. Today Due to consumption of unwholesome diet society facing so many types of disease. Here the concept of *Ahara* according to *Ayurveda* is described.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara is first among the three significant pillars of *Ayurveda*.¹ It means that it is one of the fundamental principles ahead which give health, happiness and harmony along with the nature. *Ahara* is concerned with diet and lifestyle and is essentially preventive in nature. *Ahara* is also known as the life-supporting diet and is the first and foremost pillar of *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* usually refers to the knowledge of proper diet and it actually provides the first approach that can create and maintain ideal health and to improve the symptoms of illness. *Ayurveda* call attention to that may be diet does not cure well-established diseases but with help of proper diet taking can controlled so many diseases.

Definition & Derivation of *Ahara*

According to *Chakrapani* *Ahara* means that which is ingested and thus it includes in itself both diet and drugs. This view of *Chakrapani* is also supported by *Gangadhara*. Therefore drugs are also included in *Ahara*.²

Modern Dictionary meaning of word *Ahara*

According to Taber's dictionary, food is defined as "any material that provides the nutritive

requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical well being.³

Ahara in general

One should regularly take such substances which are conducive to the preservation of good health and are able to avoid the attacks of sickness. Such type of diet is called naturally healthy diet.

Types of *Ahara*

Sushruta divided the *Ahara* in to 3 categories⁴

1. *Ekanta Hitakara*: Substances become *Ekanta Hitakara* because of their biological suitability such as water, *Ghrita*, milk, rice.

2. *Ekanta Ahitakara*: Substances which are always harmful for the body like *Visha*, *Agni* etc.

3. *Hitahitakara*: Substances which are compatible for the one & incompatible for other are stated as *Hitahitakara*. For example the one which is compatible for the *Vayu* is incompatible for *Pitta* and *Taila* is *Hitakara* for *Vata* but at the same time it is *Ahitakara* for *Pitta*. It occurs due to this reason the *Guna* of a *Dravya* which are similar to *Guna* of *Vata* and opposite

to that of Guna of *Pitta* causing raise of *Vata* and reduction in *Pitta* at the same time.

These categories of diet were deals with *Swastha* who is having *Samadosha*, *Samagni* & *Samadhatu*⁵. In *Vyadhit Avastha Hita-Ahitata* of *Dravya* alter accordingly, so in that condition *Hitakara Dravya* may act as *Ahitakara* and *Ahitakara* may act as *Hitakara*.

Role of Diet in *Pakriti*

The same food which is healthy for one person can be harmful for another one. Due to this reason behind this thing is *Prakriti* and that's why for getting the best out of food or wholesomeness of a diet, it must be used according to *Prakriti*.

According to *Shrimad Bagavata Geeta*⁶, diets can be divided into three types based on three *Manasika Prakriti*.

Satavika Ahara

Satavika Ahara is one that can be digested without difficulty, brings stability to one's mind, and helps in building immunity and improving the healing response. Its promote *Sattva* (a quality of mind which induces clarity, synchronization and sense of balance) Such as- fresh Cow's milk, freshly cooked Food, Fresh fruits, and Jaggery.

Rajasika Ahara

Rajaika Ahara is one that is greasy, scented, highly spiced and with attractive flavour. It promotes *Rajas* (a superiority of mind which induces command, aggression and accomplishment), this includes non-vegetarian food like meat, fish, eggs, Pickle, Garlic, Onion and salted foods.

Tamasika Ahara

Tamasika Ahara includes all kinds that are overcooked, not fresh, unnatural, decayed and multiple processed. It promotes *Tama* (value of mind which suggest darkness, inactivity and struggle etc.) Such as Alcohol, Beef, Pork, Eggs, Frozen food, Micro-waved food, Drugs, Tea, Coffee, etc.

The main aim of *Ayurveda* is to maintain the health of a person i.e. the preventive aspect & to cure the illness of a diseased person which is the therapeutic aspect.⁷ By *Prakriti* based diet, a person can achieve the first & prime aim of *Ayurveda* which is preventive aspect. As per *Charaka*, a person is more susceptible to the diseases caused by the same *Dosha* of his *Prakriti*.⁸ But, by following *Prakriti* based diet; a person can reduce the disease susceptibility. In this modern era, society consumes the diet according to calorie counting. But when one chooses a diet according to *Prakriti*, there is no need to do calorie calculation. *Charaka* described the list of useful diet which must be included in daily routine. According to *Ayurvedic* diet revolves around the six tastes in each meal to make it flavorsome, appetizing, and medicinal. *Acharya Chakrapani* says that the prescription of diets

consisting of all *Rasa* in proper quantity for individuals of *Sama Prakriti* needs further explanation. It will also not be helpful for the maintenance of health of a in the healthy person so the proportion of *Rasa* is to be determined according to the individual's taste and food value. A *Vata Prakriti* man may require more of diets having *Madhura*, *Amla* and *Lavana* taste during winter, whereas for a *Sama-Prakriti* man, diets having all the tastes.

Diet according to *Ritu*

- 1. In *Hemanta Ritu*:** In this *Ritu* the power of digestion and metabolism are proportionate in a healthy individual, because of its contact with the skin, restrain the outward movement of the inner heat and enhance the power of digestion and metabolism. Hence, the cold wind is transformed into fire & it enhances the inner heat only by obstructing its outward movement. During the winter one should take unctuous, sour and salt juices of the meat of the aquatic and marshy animals which are fatty. One should also eat the meat of burrow-dwelling animals and *Bhrta* prepared of animals of *Prasaha* type. Thereafter, one should drink *Madira* and *Sidhu* and honey. Intakes preparation of cow's milk, cane juice, fat, oil, new rice and hot water during the winter is good for health.⁹
- 2. In *Shishira Ritu*:** The *Hemanta* and *Shishira* seasons are almost analogous in nature. So the entire prescription for *Hemanta* is to be followed in the *Shishira*. Especially during this season, one should stay in a windless warm home and avoid to take such of the diets possessed of *Katu*, *Tikta* and *Kasaya Rasa*.¹⁰
- 3. In *Vasant Ritu*:** In this *Ritu* the accumulated *Kapha* is liquefied by the heat of the sun. Due to this reason there is disturbance the digestion capacity and it can cause many diseases. So, one should avoid taking such diets containing, *Snigdha*, *Amla* and *Madhura Rasa* & should manage elimination therapies of *Panchkarma* to eliminate the vitiated *Dosha*. Specially *Vamana Karma* to eliminate *Kapha Dosha*. One should to take food consisting of *Yava* and wheat, meat of *Sarabha*, *Shasha*, *Ena*, *Lava* and *Kapinjala*. One should drink *Sidhu* and *Mrdvika*.¹¹
- 4. In *Grisma Ritu*:** In this *Ritu*, the moisture of the earth is absorbed by sun. In this *Ritu*, one should have intake of sweet, cold liquid diets and drinks, cold *Mantha* along with sugar, meat of the animals or birds of *Jaangal* climate, ghee and milk along with *Shali* rice. One should either drink alcohol in little quantity or should not drink at all and even if one drinks, it should be taken along with plenty of water. One should avoid taking diets which are salty, sour, pungent or hot. Physical exercise is also included during this season.¹²
- 5. In *Varsa Ritu*:** In this *Ritu* the body and digestion power is weakened, increase of acidity in water.

One should generally use honey in all diets and drinks. One should take diets which are noticeably sour, salty and unctuous. In order to maintain normal power of digestion one should take old barley, wheat and *Shali* rice, along with the meat of arid animals and vegetable soup. Moreover, one should drink the *Madhvika* or *Arista*, pure rain water or water from the well or pond- boiled and cooled, mixed with little honey. Even though by nature, honey is responsible for the vitiation of *Vata*, its intake in small quantity is prescribed to overcome *Kleda* in the rainy season.¹³

6. Dietetics for *Sharada Ritu*: In this *Ritu*, sweet, bitter, light and cold foods and drinks which have

ability to subside *Pitta* are to be taken in proper quantity. Furthermore, the meat of *Lava*, *Kapinjala*, *Ena*, *Urabhra*, *Sarabha*, and *Shasha*, rice, barley, wheat, Intake of ghee prepared with bitter medicines and purgation should be done during this season. One should avoid taking fat, oil and meat of aquatic and marshy animals and curd in food. Use *Hamsodaka* for the purpose of bathing, drinking and swimming. It is a type of water which is heated by the sun during the day time and cooled by rays of the moon during night. It is also purified and detoxified by *Agastya* star.¹⁴

Table 1: Special opinions of *Vagbhata* about to diet¹⁵

S.No.	Ritu	Rasa	Guna
1.	<i>Hemanta</i>	<i>Madhura, Amla & Lavana</i>	<i>Snigdha, Ushna</i>
2.	<i>Shishira</i>	<i>Madhura, Amla & Lavana</i>	<i>Snigdha, Ushna</i>
3.	<i>Vasanta</i>	<i>Tikta, Katu & Kashaya</i>	<i>Ruksha</i>
4.	<i>Grishma</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Snigdha, Shita</i>
5.	<i>Varsha</i>	<i>Madhura, Amla & Lavana</i>	<i>Snigdha, Ushna</i>
6.	<i>Sharada</i>	<i>Madhura, Tikta & Kashya</i>	<i>Ruksha, Shita</i>

Importance of Diet in *Ayurveda*

The *Ahara* is a basic need of all living beings. It is an important cause to maintain health and stability of all living beings. *Ahara* is said to be *Mahabhaisajya* by *Kashyap*. It is proved medicinal effect of *Ahara*.¹⁶ Diet is said to be basis of life, Potency, facial appearance, nourishment of *Dhatu*, *Ojas*, growth and development, intelligence of *Indriyas*, pleasure, clearness of voice, shine, satisfaction, intelligence, fitness etc; whole life of individual depends upon food, all the activities of this world. The level of *Dosha* whether it increased, decreased or in normalcy stage; is dependent on the *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya* and *Vipaka* present in diet. According to *Sushruta*, the physicians should have knowledge of the articles of *Ahara*, *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya*, and *Vipaka* each one of them independently, which are arranged in the form of eatables, drinkables, likable and chewable, by the combination of many substances, adopting many processes and possessing different special effects. Without such knowledge they will not be able to advise others on maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. A self controlled man blessed by noble man lives for hundred years and free from diseases by the intake of healthy diet.

Quantity of *Ahara*

According to *Ayurveda* Quantity of *Ahara* depends upon *Agnibala* (digestion power), *Desh*, *Vaya* (age), *Prakriti* etc. of a person. *Charaka* says the *Kukshi* (stomach) divided in three parts, one part should be filled with solid food, second part with liquid and third part left empty for movement of *Dosha*.¹⁷

DISCUSSION

In *Ayurveda* *Ahara* mentioned as a real significant aspect of maintaining good and sound

health. *Ayurveda* articulate that the eating habits should be encouraging to health. So, it is very important to determine a diet that is most appropriate for the particular constitutional type. *Ayurvedic* understanding of nutrition is quite different from that of the Western concept. The primary focus of the Western concept of nutrition is on the physical attributes of food, it means the amount of all the nutrients should be in equal proportion. On the other hand, *Ahara* is concerned with the effects of several types of food on the quality of the mind, balance of the *Dosha* and the digestion. *Ayurveda* says that almost all the diseases arise on the physical level from improper and inadequate metabolism system and it generally leads to weak and imbalanced functioning.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear that *Ahara* is an important characteristic of today's dietary habits. This can lead to several dangerous diseases innocently to the person. Therefore, it is important to know about the ethics of *Ahara* describe in *Ayurveda*. The article also opens a new research window in the field of *Ayurvedic* dietetics to research upon a variety of factors to observe the effect.

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