

Importance of Ayurvedic Dietetics – A Review

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Abstract:

Aahar also referred to as food or diet is our basic requirement in life. It provides nourishment to body and is responsible for growth and development of body tissues and performing various actions throughout our life. In *ayurvedic* texts *pathyahar* is advised in almost all diseases as it plays important role in its management. *Panchbhautik siddhant* of *ayurved* explains the presence of *panchmahabhoot* in universe and in body formation. Consuming *pathyahar* promotes health whereas *apathyahar* is responsible for health disorders. Therefore *ayurved* lays too much importance on *aahar* as it forms the basis of life. *Ayurved* gives detail description on types of *aahar*, classification of *aahar dravya*, rules of *aahar* preparation and consumption and its importance in maintaining overall health. According to *ayurved* a balance state of *dosha*, *agni*, mala results in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing which is termed as health and so is WHO's definition of health that health is a state of physical, social, mental and spiritual wellbeing and not merely absence of disease. Adoption of sedentary lifestyle, lack of knowledge and attraction towards fast food has led to lack of nutrition and made way to various lifestyle disorders. Mention of *ashtaaharvidhivisheshayatan* explains about properties of food, their right combination, time when it should be consumed etc. which gives answer to all the which, what, why, when and how to consume food to remain healthy. So a proper knowledge of these factors is important to remain disease free. This article focuses on the basics of diet as per *ayurvedic* view.

Keywords: *Aahar*, *Ashtaaharvidhivisheshayatan*, Lifestyle Disorder, *Pathyahar*

Introduction:

Aahar, *Nidra* and *brahmacharya* forms the basic tripod of *Ayurved*¹. These are the basic three pillars on which health depends. In *charak samhita* in *swasthchatushka*², the very first mention is of *aahar matra* which clearly indicates that to remain *swastha* or healthy the most important governing factor is the amount of *aahar* consumed by an individual. Anything that we consume to nourish our body is categorized as *aahar*. As everything is *panchbhautik*³ so is our *aahar dravya* and so is our body constitution. *Panchbhautik* principle of *ayurved* explains the formation of universe with the five basic elements i.e. *Agni*, *vayu*, *jal*, *akash* and *prithvi*. These are present in all the material existing which includes humans and food consumed by them.

Ayurved explains functioning of body on the basis of *tridosha siddhant*⁴ 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. Thus each food article is composed of its own unique combination of five basic elements depending on which its effect on *dosha* is determined. Diet plays an important in our lives as it provides nourishment through various nutrients. *Ayurved* recommends consumption of balanced diet through *shadrasatmak aahar* to maintain a balance of *dosha* in our body. The classification mentioned in *ayurvedic* classics itself signifies the deep knowledge of *aahar dravya*, be it in solid or liquid form that constitutes the part of diet. Thus we can conclude each food article has some action on *dosha* by its aggravating, pacifying or balancing action. To maintain balance of *dosha* in our body, which gets disturbed by age and season *ayurveda* provides a very individualistic approach of specific diet to suit one's body type. Therefore recommending proper diet plays an important role in *ayurvedic* practice.

Ayurvedic Review:

Classification of *aahar dravya*⁵:

In different classics different types of classification is mentioned of *aahar dravya* in *drava/liquid* and *dravya/solid* forms.

The very first type of *aahar* as per *charak samhita* is through the act of deglutition that *aahar* term was derived. *Aahriyate iti aaharah*.

Second classification is done on the basis of origin of edible drugs that is from plant /animal origin.

Aahar is classified as *hitkar/beneficial* and *ahitkar/non-beneficial*.

On the basis of consumption in its physical state *ashit/eatable*, *peet/drinkable*, *khadit/chewable* and *lehya/lickable* consistency food is classified.

On the basis of 6 tastes as per *ayurved* classification of drugs is mentioned with sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter and astringent.

On the basis of *gurvadi guna ahar* drug can be classified in 20 types.

Lastly on the basis of permutations and combinations there can be infinite number of food articles.

Above classification is more of related to preparation of *aahar dravya* that is in consumable form.

Classification of drugs to be used in the preparation of food given in classical texts is as follows:

A] This classification is done on the basis of physical state of raw drug, thus liquid drugs are grouped as -

- *Jala varga*- in this group different source for collection of water is mentioned along with its properties out of which *varsha jala* is considered best.
- *kshiradi varga*- in this group milk and milk products like *dadhi*, *kurchika*, *takra*, *mastu* along with its properties. Cow's milk is considered best of all.

- *Ghrit varga*- in these group different types of butter extracted from different sources of milk is mentioned out of which cow's ghee is considered best.
- *Taila varga*-in this group various oilseeds from which oil can be extracted are mentioned out of which *til tail* is considered best.
- *Madhu varga* – in this group honey collected from different sources are mentioned.
- *Ikshu varga*-in this group sugarcane and it's by products like *raab, phanita, jiggery* are mentioned along with their properties.
- *Madya varga*-this is group of fermented liquids in which *kanji, asavaarishta, tushambu, sauviraka* is mentioned with its properties.
- *Mutra varga*- in this group 8 types of urine is mentioned out of which cow's urine is considered best.

B] Solid *dravya* are classified as -

- *Shukadhanya varga*- this group consists of all the major grains namely *rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, makka* used as major part of meals and staple food in most parts of the world.
- *Kudhanya varga*- this group consists of inferior grains like *kodo, bhagar* which are comparatively smaller in size than grains and light to digest. These grains are getting popular in current era due to their easy digestibility and higher nutritional value.
- *Shamidhanya varga*- this group comprises of pulses majorly like *green gram, Bengal gram, toor, masur, rajmash, chanak*.
- *Mansa varga* – this comprises of flesh of animals like *kukkut, harin, kapot*.
- *Shaka varga - phala, patra, pushpa, naal, kanda*- this class of vegetables consists of leafy vegetables like *bathua, methi, palak, chaulai, chanak*; fruits, flowers, stem and tubers of plants used as vegetables
- *Phala varga*-this group consists of fruits like *draksha, dadim, kadali, aamra*.
- *Harit varga*- this group comprises of certain condiments used in cooking process and due to their varied usage is not categorised in any group like *ginger, garlic, coriander*.
- *Lavanadi varga*-this group comprises of all the condiments used as flavouring agents like *ela, lavang, pippali*.
- *Kritanna varga*- this group comprises of prepared food articles where one or more than one of group *dravya* is used as ingredient and processing is done to prepare different preparations like *polika, pruthuk, krushara, rasala*.

Conceptual study review:

Ayurved believes that diet is the most important part in the management of disease. As if one is not away from the causative factor disease cannot be cured from its root. It is well said: "jaisa khao anna waisa bane tan"/we are what we eat. So what we eat and how we eat both and when we eat all these aspects are very important. As mentioned in Ashataahar vidhi vishesh ayatana the effect of food depends on many factors like method of cooking involved, its origin, season when it is grown, dosh pradhanta, state of body, agni, bala etc. This diversified aspect of dietetics and nutrition is well elaborated in *Ayurveda* in the form of *Ashtaahar vidhi vishesh ayatan*⁶.

These eight principles of food consumption are as follows -

- *Prakriti* – basic nature/characteristic quality of drug
- *Karan* – processing/*sanskaar* carried out on the drug
- *Sanyog* – combination of more than one drug
- *Rashi*- quantity as a whole and individual
- *Desh* – place/habitat
- *Kaal* – time/season
- *Upyogsanstha* – place, equipments and rules of diet consumption
- *Upyokta* - user

Rules of diet consumption⁷:

- *Ushnamashniyat*- food should be consumed when it is freshly prepared and hot
- *Snigdhamashniyat*- food should contain *snigdha dravya* it should not be dry and devoid of oily substance
- *Matravatashniyat*- quantity of food consumed as a wholesome and as individual food article
- *Jirneashniyat*- one should eat after previously consumed food is digested completely
- *Veeryaviruddha*- one should avoid incompatible combination
- *Ishta deshe*- the place where one consumes food should be pleasing, neat and clean
- *Ishta sarvaupkaran*- use of proper utensils for serving food should be done
- *Na ati drutam*-one should not eat too fast
- *Na ati vilambitam*- one should not eat too slow
- *Ajalpan*- consuming water along with food is not recommended

- *Ahasan*- while consuming food one should not laugh
- *Tanmana bhunjit*- one should consume food by focusing on eating with full attention
- *Atmanam abhisamikshya*- one should analyse own hunger while eating so that over eating is avoided

Concept of *viruddha ahar*⁸-

This is a unique concept of ayurved wherein consumption of incompatible combinations is to be avoided. Combination of two or more than two food items results in formation of new combination which may yield beneficial or harmful effect. Opposite combination can happen w.r.t. *kaal, desh, agni, matra, satmya, dosh, sanskar, veerya, koshtya, avastha, krama, paka, sanyog, hriday, vidhi* which may prove fatal.

Significance of *Ayurvedic* dietetics:

Improper diet is the root cause of any disease. Even if *hitkar ahar* is consumed in excess it is not beneficial for health. Ayurvedic principles say even if *Ahitkar ahar* is consumed mindfully it can prove beneficial to health.

The principles of *ayurvedic* dietetics explains raw material to be used as food, their preparation methods, right combinations and general rules of diet consumption which helps in designing a proper diet for healthy and diseased person.

Discussion:

The detailed description of *aahar dravya* along with its properties itself shows the importance of diet in our day to day life. As diet is part of our daily regime one should be cautious about consuming food by following *ayurvedic* guidelines as far as possible. Eating a healthy diet and abiding by the rules of diet consumption helps in maintaining health whereas defying these rules results in various health complications leading to lifestyle disorders.

Conclusion:

Proper diet helps in maintaining health of an individual and improper diet is the root cause of many diseases. Consumption of healthy diet will result in no requirement of medicine and if one consumes unhealthy diet then medicine will be of no use.

Disclosures:

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Statement of Ethics:

The authors have no ethical conflicts to disclose.

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