Ahara vidhi – the Ayurvedic dietary concepts

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Abstract:

The aim of Ayurved is to maintain the health of healthy person and cure from diseases. In present era, diet and life style are responsible for many diseases. According to Ayurved the living human body and diseases that afflict it is both the product of Ahara. Ahara is considered as one of the Tri upastambha of life. So many guidelines are explained in Ayurvedic texts, which are titled as AharaVidhi, where the laws of do’s and don’ts about diet and drinks are given. At the presents many newer food processing methods are in practices which are harmful to human being. That’s why Ayurved suggest that one should follow these guiding principles to prevent various diseases. Ayurved offers some basic dietary guidelines that include choosing appropriate food, combination of food, cooking methods, quality and quantity of food, nature of consumer, geographical and environmental conditions etc. On this background this review will be helpful to adopt the dietary directives in the day to day life.

Keywords:
Ahara Vidhi, Dietary Habits, Upastambha.
INTRODUCTION:

Ayurved has emphasized diet as one of the essential part of healthy life. It is likely that no other science has described the unique effect of diet as thoroughly, as Ayurved described thousand years ago. In Taittiriya Upanishad, it is explained that human being has originated from Ahara. Ayurved has given detail discipline and process to take the Ahara for an individual and in general both. This discipline is titled as Ahara Vidhi. Ayurved believes that, the reason for all the disease depends on our digestive process (1). Each Ahara either has Dosha aggravating or Dosha pacifying action on body. Health and the disease both are the product of Ahara, only the distinction is Hita Ahara constitutes the health and Ahita Ahara dis-constitutes the health. Acharya Charaka has given a single lined sutra regarding the Vidhi of diet, which contains a lot for a person who wishes to lead a healthy life. Wholesome diet is a main cause for the growth and development of the body, unwholesome diet is cause of several diseases, So in our classics diet is having a very important place, but to be a wholesome diet does not means only the food items, but it includes so many factors, which are titled as “AharaVidhi”, where the law of do’s and don’ts about the diet and drinks are given. Our ancient Ayurvedic texts have laid an immense emphasis on all aspects of Ahara and AharaVidhi.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Healthy food is dependent upon many factors such as mode of preparation, habitat, combination, time season of intake, manner of intake, body constitution, Agnibala of consumer etc. This dietetics and nutrition is well elaborated in Ayurved in form of Ahara Vidhi Vishesh Ayatana and Ahara Vidhi Vidhanam(2).

Ahara Vidhi Vishesh Ayatana means (3) the factors responsible for wholesome and unwholesome effect of the Ahara, which are discussed in detail and are summarized briefly below-


1. Prakriti (Qualitative characteristic of food):

It means natural quality of food, drugs i.e. inherent attributed like Guru, Laghu. These are the innate properties of substances. On the basis of nature, Green Gram, Grey Partridge are Laghu, while Black Gram, Meat are Guru. Nowadays, many hybrid foods are in use. E.g. Wheat, Rice, Sugarcane, Watermelon, Mango, Maize etc but in hybrid food articles all the natural qualities are not present. So Prakriti is a factor which gives the complete knowledge about anything, that’s why it has been described first among the eight factors (5).

2. Karana (Processing of Substances):

Karana is also known as Sanskara. It means processing of substances which leads to alteration in the inherent properties of substances (6). This modification is brought about by dilution, application of heat (vaporization, distillation and sublimation), clarification, emulsification, storing, maturing, flavouring, impregnation, preservation and the material of receptacle.

As by processing, for example Vrihi which is heavy to digest, becomes light when transformed into Laja after frying,

On the other hand, flour of roasted grains becomes heavy when processed into cooked bolus.

3. Samyoga (Combination / Mixing):

Samyoga means combination of two or more substances. This chemical
combination exhibits special properties which none of the constituent ever possessed (7).

For example -The combination of Honey and Ghee, Honey and Ghee taken alone is wholesome to the body but combined together, they become toxic. Similarly, Honey and Ghee in equal quantity, Honey and Lotus seed are antagonistic. So we can say that though Samyoga is very useful but it may be harmful too.

A few examples of its usefulness are Guda and Curd in combination is more useful as it has Snehana, Tarpana, Hridya and Vataghna effects. Milk with Ghee used regularly is the best Rasayana.

4. Rashi (Quantity):

Rashi is the measure of the total mass and of each constituent in order to determine the effects of the right and wrong doses (8).

Sarvagrasaha – The Quantity of food taken in its entirety and,

Parigrasaha - The Quantity of each of its ingredients.

A person should have his diet in proper amount; it means that a person should have diet according to his digestive power (Agni) (9).

The lakshana of appropriate amount of food is that it should be digested in proper time without causing any problem in the natural Prakriti of the person (10). The Ahara in gross can be divided on the basis of Guru and Laghu. The Guru Ahara dravya have Prithvi and Jala Guna predominantly; that’s why they pacify the Agni, if taken in large amount so they should be taken 1/3rd or 1/2 of the Kukshi. On the other hand Laghu Ahara Dravyas predominantly have Vayu and Agni Guna, which intensify the Agni, so they are considered to be least harmful even if they are eaten to a surfeit though they should also take in improper amount (11).

As per Acharya Vagbhata described, half of the stomach is to be filled with solid food, one quarter with liquids, another quarter should be kept vacant for the free movement of Vata (12).

The absence of measure is laid down fewer than two heads-

A. HeenaMatra -The diet which is deficient in measure (Heena Matra) is result in the impairment of strength, complexion and plumpness, in the impairment of functions of life, and in the incidence of the 80 types of Vata disorders

B. AtiMatra - The diet which is excessive in measure (Ati Matra) is considered as Sarva Dosha Prakopka, it aggravates all the Doshas.

5. Desha (Habitat) (13):

In the present context, Desha is considered as Bhumi Desha and Deha Desha. Both the lands as well as the patient constitute Desha. Dosha are distributed in three different regions of the body.

Deha Desha –

Our classics says that the first region of the body which extends from Hridaya to complete upper portion is place of Kapha Dosha, the second region extending between the Hridaya and Nabhi is place of Pitta Dosha while the third region extends from Nabhi to extreme down and have Vata Dosha.

Bhumi Desha-  

Is grouped in three classes according to the preponderance of different Doshas, on the cause and effect relationship with the climate of that region i.e. Sun, Wind etc. These are Jangla, Anoopa and Sadharana Desha. Acharya Charaka says that in the Jangala Deshathe Vata and Pitta are in predominance, where as in the Anupa Desha the predominance of Vata and Kapha is witnessed. Wholesomeness of diet also depends on the Desha. Use of dry and sharp substances in deserts and unctuous in Marshy land is having antagonistic effect.

6. Kala (Time) (14):


Time is used in two senses, time in the general sense and time in the sense of stage. The sense of stage is used in relation to disease (Avasthika Kala) and the general sense is used in relation to seasonal wholesomeness (Nitayaga Kala), in form of day and night. Life as a whole starting from intrauterine period till death is the entire time dynamic. Peoples are bound to face major and minor changes in every moment of life and thereby, Dosha sare also accordingly varied. In Swastha-avastha, Kalais considered as Nitayaga. In this condition Ahara should be taken according to Dincharaya and Ritucharya, which help the body function to aclimatize with the external environment.

In Rugn avastha, Avasthika Kala is considered by Vyadhi Avastha. E.g. In Nava Jwara, Langhana should be done for 7 days, but if Jwara is Jeerna Ghritapanais indicated.

Ashtanga Sangrahakara, Prayoga Vagbhata has explained only saptavidha Aharalpana. He has combined Upyoga and Upayokta together and counted them as Upyoga Vyavastha.

7. Upyoga Samstha (Dietetic Rules) (15) : It simply means the dietetic rules. It contains everything related to Diet, how to eat, when to eat, what to eat.

8. Upyokta (The User) (16) :
   The user is he/she who makes use of food, habituation depends on him. Creating wholesomeness by habitual intake of things comes under Upyokta and known as Saimya which differs person to person. As the Prakriti of Ahara Dravyas is considerable factors, the Prakriti of Upyokta is also considered for wholesomeness of diet...
   These are the factors described in our classics which are the foundation of Dietetics.

AHARA VIDHI–VIDHANAM (RULES FOR FOOD INTAKE) (17) :

All people should follow these rules while eating the food to remain healthy and enhance the span of life.

In spite of Ahara vidhi viseshayatana some other rules are described in classics.

Ahara vidhi vidhana (dietary guideline) is described by Acharya Charaka . This is explained in following points-

Usnam Ashniyat (consuming warm food) (18) :
   The first requisite regarding prepared meal is that it should be taken Ushna (hot). If one’s taking hot food, feel of proper taste, stimulates the Agni (digestive power), Vata Anulomana and Reduction of Kapha are achieved. The precise sequence of AharaVidhiVidhan is very important. Besides the whole meal being Ushna, it must begin with Ushna Anna, so that profuse flow of saliva and gastric Juices are achieved for the next food items.

Snigdham Ashniyat (Diet should include fat)

The meal taken should be Snigdha (Uncutious). The Snigdha Ahara causes feel of proper taste, Agni deepana, facilitate early digestion, Vata anulomana and It makes the body Plump, Strengthens the sense organs, increases in the brightness the complexion. Fat provides a concentrate source of energy and essential fatty acids are needed for growth and development. Fat is essential for absorption of Vitamin A, D, E and K. These vitamins are well known to increase immunity.

Matrvat Ashniyat (Balanced diet) (20) :
   It means eat in adequate amount. The Lakshana by which a person can decide that this is Matrvat are (21), Freedom from distress in the stomach, Absence of any cardiac discomfort. The non-distension of sides, Freedom from excessive heaviness of the stomach, Gratification of the senses, Subsidence of hunger and thirst, Sense of ease in the standing, sitting, lying down, walking,
inhaling, exhaling, talking. Easeful digestion and assimilation of food in the evening and the morning, the imparting of strength, complexion and plumpness.

**Jirne Ashniyat (Meal taken after digestion of previous meals)**

It simply means eat after digestion of the previous meal. If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, i.e. undigested Ahara Rasa gets mixed up with the Ahara Rasa of food taken afterwards; it provokes all the Doshas (humour). While the food taken when the previous meal has been fully digested, the humours have returned to their normal places, the gastric fire is kindle, hunger is born, the channels are clear and open, the eructation from the mouth is healthy, the stomach is clear, the peristaltic movement is normal and when the urges.

**Na Atidrutum Ashniyat (Not eating too fast)**

Do not eat hurriedly. One should not take food too hurriedly. If food is taken too hurriedly it enters into a wrong way or it is not properly placed, as food taken in hurry can obviously affect the power of digestion by increasing the Vata.

**Na Ativilambitam Ashniyat (Not eating too slowly)**

Do not eat too leisurely. One eating too leisurely is not satisfied even if he eats much. If food becomes cold this causes Agnimandya.

**Ajitanaahasantanmana Bhunjita (Eating without Talking or Laughing, Mindful eating)**

Do not talk or laugh while eating, one who talks and laughs while eating is liable to suffer the same disorders as the one who eats too hastily. In this most important one is That the food should be eaten with concentration. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too slowly or too hastily.

**Atmanamabhisamiksyam Bhunjita Samyak (Eating after analysing one’s need)**

Eat rightly, considering your constitution. Such knowledge makes for the determination of what is wholesomeness for each individual. This one is very important, as rules of Ahara are definitely wholesome, but they are general rules. They should be applied by considering own self. In classics mentioned that the proper time for giving Ahara to a person is when he can provide calm and healthy state of mind.

Now days we can see special dining rooms in the houses of affluent class. Everyone always tries to keep the dining place pleasant.
gets free of stool, urine, and eructation’s, and feel his body and sense organs light and free. When he feels hungry and when his Kukshi becomes light. Once food is taken, it should not be taken again before one Yama, as it interferes with Raso-uptatti and creates Ama. But the food should be taken before two Yama because if person fast for more than two Yama he will experience Bala Kshaya.

Acharya Sushruta has given Dwadasa-Anna-Pravicharana(28) especially for unhealthy peoples. These pravicharana facilitate the use of different type of Ahara and AharaVidhi according to the status of health of a person but whenever a person takes food, proper time of meal, It is a very important aspect regarding dietetics that when to take food.

2. Ushna Guna Ahara – Kapha Vata Roga, Snehapayi.
10. Alpa Ahara– Mandagni.

**AharaVidhi for taking different types of food items:**

Acharya Suśhruta has described methods of par taking of diet (Āhāropacāra) as items of Āhāra should be served in the successive order of increased sweetness. One should wash his mouth with water often in between the dinner; when his tongue is clean, relish for food will be greater than ever before; the tongue is becoming satiated with sweet taste in the beginning itself will not be able to appreciate other tastes, hence it should be washed in between. Item taken in the beginning of meal should be Guru, Snigdha, Madhura, food having Manda and Shhira properties like coconut, mango, and sweets. In the middle of meal, one should take Shukta etc. Amla food items at the end one should consume Laghu, Ruksha, Katu, Tikshna and food items which are of mild laxative in nature.

Saindhava lavana and Adraka are always palatable before meal as it is Pathya, aggravates Agni, increases taste of food, and cleans tongue and throat.

**DISCUSSION:**

Ahara, nidra and bramhacharya are the tri-upastambha i.e. also called as pillars of life. Ahara plays very important role in the preventive and curative aspect of disease. Ahara is said to be Mahabhaisajya by Acharya Kashyap. If we concentrate about the right way of taking Ahara and the regimens related to Ahara described in Ayurveda positive health can be achieved easily. By the concept of Prakriti easily choose the Ahara. By Karan and Samyoga bring out the new, desirable and adaptable properties in Ahara and avoid the harmful effect of the Ahara. Rashi gives the idea about quantity of Ahara which digest easily and give strength to body. Desha helps in selection of Ahara suitable to one’s body constitution. Kala helps to choose food according to ritu and state of body. Upayogasamstha are the code and conducts for taking diet should be followed in today’s lifestyle. Upayokta means people should be aware about the good or bad outcome of the Ahara he is taking.
CONCLUSION:

The dietetic field is having many such precious concepts of Ayurved. “Deho Hi Ahara Sambhava” Health is dependent upon diet. Not only diet but also method of diet intake has important role in the continuity of healthy life. The description given by Acharya Charaka as Asta-AharaVidhiVisesha Ayatanana, Ahara Vidhi Vidhana, is both for the healthy and unhealthy persons and by Acharya Sushruta has described it for unhealthy persons and called it as Dwadasha-Anna-Pravicharana in Sutra Sthan chapter. The application of these rules is effective in maintenance of health as well as in the curative aspect for many diseases. Ayurved deals with the both swasthyarakshana and vyadhiparimoksha. The adaptation of dietic rules will be helpful in fulfilment of both these prayojanas.

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