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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 Visesh Ayatana* and *Ahara Vidhi Vidhanam*⁽²⁾.

Ahara Vidhi Visesh 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*, 2. *Karana*, 3. *Samyoga*, 4. *Rashi*, 5. *Desha*, 6. *Kala*, 7. *Upyoga-samsatha*, 8. *Upyokta*.

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 in to *Laja* after frying,

On the other hand, flour of roasted grains becomes heavy when processed in to 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 is having *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⁾.

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

Parigraha - 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 *VataDosha*.

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 Desha* the *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 *Dincharya* and *Ritucharya*, which help the body function to acclimatize 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 Sangraha kara, *Acharya Vagbhata* has explained only *saptavidha Aharakalpana*. He has combined *Upyoga* and *Upayokta* together and counted them as *Upayoga 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 *Satmya* 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 *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* 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) ⁽¹⁹⁾ :

The meal taken should be *Snigdha* (Unctuous). 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 brightens 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.

Matravat Ashniyat (Balanced diet) ⁽²⁰⁾ :

It means eat in adequate amount. The *Lakshana* by which a person can decide that this is *Matravat* 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) ⁽²²⁾ :

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.

Virya Aviruddham Ashniyata ⁽²³⁾ :

Eat those food articles which are not antagonistic in *Virya* (Potency). Eating the food that is not antagonistic in potency one will not afflict with disorders born of *Viruddha Ahara*. *Virya* is the power of substance by which action takes place;

Nothing can be done in absence of the *Virya*

Iste dese ista sarvaupakarnam Ashniyata (Meal taken at proper place and with proper instruments):

Eat in a congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances. In *Sushruta Samhita* there are some specific guidelines for *Desa* for *Bhojana*, the place where food to be prepared and where should be stored before serving. He advised to take food in such a place that is devoid of unwanted people. The place should be free from the defects of construction, the defect of ventilation and light can affect the health directly and indirectly. It should be properly levelled. The place should be pleasant also which

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.

Na Atidrutum Ashniyat (Not eating too fast) ⁽²⁴⁾ :

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) ⁽²⁵⁾ :

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

Ajalpanaahasantanmana Bhunjita (Eating without Talking or Laughing, Mindful eating) ⁽²⁶⁾ :

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.

Atmanamabhisamiksya Bhunjita Samyak (Eating after analysing one's need) ⁽²⁷⁾ :

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

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 infers with *Raso-utpatti* 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.

1. *Shita Guna Ahara* – *Trishna, Ushnata, Mada, Daha, Raktapitta, Visha.*
2. *Ushna Guna Ahara* – *KaphaVata Roga, Snehapayi.*
3. *Snigdha Ahara* – *Vata Prakriti, Rukshadeha.*
4. *Ruksha Ahara*– *Meda, Snigdha Sharira, Prameha Pidika.*
5. *Dravahara Ahara*– *Sushkadeha, Durbala.*
6. *Sushka Ahara*– *Prameha.*
7. *Ek Kaal Ahara*– *Increase Agni.*
8. *Dwikaal Ahara*– *Samagni.*
9. *Aushadh Yukta Ahara*– *Aushadhdwesi.*
10. *Alpa Ahara*– *Mandagni.*
11. *Dosha Prashmana Ahara*– *According to Ritu Kaal.*
12. *Vritiārtha Ahara*– *For Healthy Persons.*

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 *Sthira* 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-Ahara Vidhi Vishesha* *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 Sthana* 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 dietetic rules will be helpful in fulfilment of both these *prayojanas*.

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