



Review Article

ROLE OF AHARA AS A PRIME ETIOLOGICAL FACTOR IN THE MANIFESTATION OF DISEASE

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda considers *Ahara* (food) as one of the three supporting pillars. Food has been given prime importance since Vedic Period. It is considered as *Brahma* in *Upanishad*. Acharaya *Kashyapa* gives it the name "*Mahabhaisajya*". This is responsible for the growth, development and enhancement of *Ojas*. The body as well as diseases; both psychological and lifestyle disorders like Heart disease, Obesity, Diabetes, Hypertension and Cancer being the major health problems are formed by food, wholesome and unwholesome food are responsible for happiness and misery respectively. The disease can be cured without any medication by just following wholesome regimen, whereas even hundreds of medicines cannot be cure a disease in absence of wholesome regimen. *Ahara rasa* which is formed from ingested diet nourished not only our body but also nourished mind and sensory organs. *Ayurveda* describes that *Deha* is made up of *Ahara* and the *Vyadhi* also. According to *Laulimbaraja* "*Pathya* is the secret of healthiness likewise *Apathya* is the root cause of all diseases". *Ayurvedic Acharayas* describes importance of *Ahara* differently especially in *Brihatrayee*, a special chapter has been described for *Annapana Vidhi*. The principle of dietetics and nutrition in Ayurvedic system of medicine include different classes of *Ahara* i.e. eating and drinking items, principle of *Pathyapathya* (wholesome and unwholesome diet), discipline of eating (*Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatan*, *Dvadasha Asana Vidhi* etc.), *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible diet). *Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatan* includes eight discipline of eating and *Dvadasha Asana Vidhi* includes the twelve discipline of eating as described by *Acharya Charaka* and *Sushruta* respectively and is very important in daily life for promotion of positive health.

KEYWORDS: *Ahara, Mahabhaisajya, Ojas, Pathya, Apathya.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the most ancient science of life. The main aim of Ayurveda is "*Swasthasya Swasthaya Rakshanam*" which means to maintain the health of healthy person and "*Aturasya Vikara Prasamanam Cha*" means to cure the disease of diseased person. According to Ayurveda *Ahara*, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance. The substance, their specific tastes, qualities, potencies and digestive transformation are responsible for equilibrium of the *Doshas* and *Dhatu*. According to one quotation of *Sushruta* "*Sankshepta Kriya Yogo Nidaan Parivarjnam*"^[1] i.e. treatment in short is to avoid the causative factors. Life style disorders are common in present era due to poor life style which include poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, excess alcohol, poor sleep, stress due to heavy work load. Several factors results in increasing burden of life style disease which include rising income, increasing tobacco consumption, decreasing physical activity and increase consumption of unhealthy food (*Ahita Ahara*). According to *Acharya Kashyap*, since life

cannot be sustained without diet and only on medicine, the proper diet is referred to as "Greatest Medicine". *Aahar, Nidra, Bramhcharyaa* are *Traya Upstambha* (like pillar which supports building) in *Ayurveda*.^[2] *Ahara* is not only needed for the continuity of life, but for *Bala, Varna, Upacaya* etc. also. In *Ch.Chi* 15/3 it is mentioned that *Dehagni* is cause of *Aayu, Varna, Bala, Swasthya, Utsah, Upchaya, Prabha, Oaj, Tej, Agni, and Prana*. If *Agni* of person gets vitiated, metabolism in his body would be disturbed resulting in diseases. *Agni* in living body occupies entire body as various bio-transformations are ceaselessly carried out in living body at all places. Parts of *Agni* carrying out different functions are named as per their functions.

Types of Agni^[3]

1. *Jatharagni*

Part of this *Agni*, which remains in stomach, is called *Jatharagni*.

2. Bhutagni

It is part of *Agni* which is responsible to convert *Panchbhautic* part of food into *Panchbhautic*. Part of body constituents. It has to maintain proper function of sense organs by replenishing *Indriya Dravya*.

3. Dhatwagni

It is name to that part of *Agni*, which assimilates or synthesizes *Dhatus* of living body. This need particular environment hence these *Dhatwagni* are located in *Srotas* related to that particular *Dhatu*.

Jathragni digest the food and transforms into *Ahara rasa*. This further goes on transformation by *Bhutagni* and *Dhatwagni*. When *Ahara rasa* reaches to the *Dhatus* for nourishment it undergoes transformation process by respective *Dhatwagni* of *Dhatus*. When *Ahara rasa* reaches to *Rasa Dhatu* it first gets metabolized by *Rasagni* resulting in formation of *Poshak* and *Poshya Ansh*. When *Ahar Parinaman* takes places the different desirable component for corresponding cell, tissue is formed. These are nothing but *Poshakansh* or *Asthayi Dhatu* or *Margag Dhatu*. *Margag Dhatu* carries the nutrients required for the nourishment of the further *Sthayi Dhatu*. *Rupantaran* of *Margag Dhatu* (metabolic transformation) is carried out by *Dhatwagni* resulting in formation of *Prasadabhaga* and *Kitta bhaga*.^[4] If *Dhatwagni* of corresponding *Dhatu* is in equilibrium state then it will perform its proper function of *Dhatuutpatti* and *Dhatuparinaman*. If the *Dhatwagni* of any *Dhatu* gets vitiated, the process of *Dhatu Rupantaran* will be disturbed resulting in formation of vitiated *Poshak Ansh*. This vitiated *Poshak Ansh* will be responsible for vitiation of further *Sthayi Dhatu*. These conditions will lead to reduced *Dhatusarta* and also the reduced *Bala* of

body which is responsible for reduced *Vyadhikshmatwa* of body. The proper diet, taken in proper manner can lead to better health. On the contrary, proper diet if not taken in proper manner can lead to diseases.

Classification of Ahara Dravya

Acharya Charaka has classified the *Ahara Dravya* (diet/food articles) in different ways. Diet is one, from the view point of intake, of two types according to source, animal origin and plant origin, *Hitahara* (wholesome) and *Ahitahara* (unwholesome) depending upon its effect on biological system. These are further classified into four categories depending upon way of intake which are *Pan* (drinkables), *Asana* (eatables), *Bhakshya* (chewable) and *Lehya* (lickable). *Acharya Kashyapa* classified food articles into five categories as per the concept of *Panchamahabhutas* which are *Akasheeya*, *Vayavya*, *Agneya*, *Apya* and *Parthiva*. *Acharya Sharangadhara* and *Bhavaprakasha* further classified food articles into six types:

1. *Bhojya*
2. *Bhakshya*
3. *Charvya*,
4. *Lehya*
5. *Chusya*
6. *Peya*

Ahara is also classified into six categories depending upon the *Rasa* it contains which are *Madhur*, *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, *Tikta* and *Kashaya*. *Acharya Charaka* further classified into twenty types depending upon its twenty properties *Guru*, *Laghu*, *Sheeta*, *Ushna*, *Snigdha*, *Ruksha*, *Manda*, *Tikshna*, *Sthira*, *Sara*, *Mridu*, *Kathin*, *Vishada*, *Pichhila*, *Slakshna*, *Khara*, *Sukshma*, *Sthula*, *Sandra* and *Drava*.

Table 1: Showing Dosha Prabhava according to Rasa and Gunas of Ahara^[5]

S.No.	Rasa	Panchbhoutik Sangathan	Guna	Dosha Prabhava
1	Madhura	Prithvi + Jala	Snigdha, Sheeta, Guru	Kapha prakopa, Vatapitta nashaka
2	Amla	Prithvi + Agni	Snigdha, Ushna, Guru	Kaphapitta prakopa, Vatanashaka
3	Lavana	Jala + Agni	Snigdha, Ushana, Guru	Kaphapitta prakopa, Vatashamaka
4	Katu	Vayu + Akasha	Laghu, Ruksha, Ushana	Vatapitta prakopa, Kapha nashaka
5	Tikta	Vayu + Agni	Laghu, Ruksha, Sheeta	Vataprakopa, Kaphapitta nashaka
6	Kshaya	Prithvi + Vayu	Ruksha, Laghu, Sheeta	Vataprakopa, Kaphapitta shamaka

Acharya Charaka furthermore classified the *Ahara Dravya* into twelve major *Varga* (classes) depending upon its various forms, which is as follows: *Shookdhanya Varga*, *Shamidhanya Varga*, *Mansa Varga*, *Shaaka Varga*, *Phala Varga*, *Harita Varga*, *Maddha Varga*, *Jala Varga*, *Gorasa Varga*, *Ikshuvikara Varga*, *Kritanna Varga*, *Ahara Upayogi Varga*.

Principle of Balanced Diet

According to *Ayurveda*, one should divide the stomach into 4 parts i.e., two parts filled with solid, one part for liquid and another one part should be left empty for the *Doshas*. The diet which nourishes both the mental and physical built is called *Balanced Diet*. *Balanced diet* in *Ayurveda* can be defined as "the diet enriched with *Shadarasa* (all six *rasa*), required

Gunas (properties), *Veerya* and given to the individual after consideration of *Prakrati*, *Agni* (digestive power), *Kostha* (digestive system) and *Ritu* (season variation). In Ayurveda, *Matravatashniyata Ahara*^[6] is considered as balanced Diet. *Matra* (amount) is of two types one is *Sarvagraha* (whole amount) another *Parigrah* (amount of individual ingredient) so the diet must consist of variety of food items in proper amount from different groups so that it contains all micro and macro nutrients. Further *Acharya Charaka* specifies the quantity of food according to its quality.^[7]

- If the food article is *Guru* (heavy), only one third or half of the stomach capacity is to be filled up.
- In the case of *Laghu* food (light) articles excessive intake is not conducive to the maintenance of the power of digestion and metabolism.

Balanced diet does not disturb *Doshik* status of body, enhances longevity, gets digested and passes out without any problem. Amount of the diet should be according to *Agni* and *Bala* of the body.

Dushta Ahara

Dushta Ahara can be understood as the diet whose natural properties are modified by various processes. Properties of processed food are depended on two matters i.e., proper selection of food process and conduction of them in proper way. Error in these two results in adverse properties of processed food and lead to adverse effects in the consumed food articles this can be termed as *Dushta Ahara*. Over maturity is also reason for adverse effects, for e.g. over ripened fruit, stale water and stale *Madhya* (alcohol). Stale water has been kept for more than one day should never be given to thirsty person because it becomes *Abhishyandi* and increase *Kapha*. *Maharshi Sushrut* has given to detail description of proper storage of food item in proper utensil.^[8] If food item stored in improper utensil it gives rise to adverse effect for e.g., *Ghruta* kept in bronze vessels for more than ten days bring out poisonous properties in *Ghruta*. In comparative study of food prepared conventionally and in microwave oven published by Raum and Zelt in 1992 states that microwave food contains both molecule and energies not present in food cooked in the way humans have been cooking food since the discovery of fire. Naturally occurring amino acids have been observed to undergo isometric change (change in shape morphing) as well as transformation in a toxic form, under the impact of microwaves produced in ovens. Microwaves ovens are frequently used for reheating previously cooked food and bacterial contamination may not be killed if the safe temperature is not reached, resulting in food borne illness as with all inadequate reheating method. Processed food

including freezing, dehydration, canned foods, bakery items or items made of refined flour, packaged high caloric snack foods etc. Food is processed to extend its shelf life, more digestible and tastier. It also diminishes the nutritional value the food had in its fresh and natural form. Canning process also destroys the nutrients present in food i.e. substantial reduction of vitamins and minerals. Processed food is harmful for health due to:

- a) Increased sugar, fat and high carbohydrate clogged arteries causing heart attacks & stroke.
- b) Additives (emulsifiers)-Cause Inflammatory bowel disease (due to changes in gut bacteria, increasing intestinal permeability by damaging the tight epithelial cell junctions which strengthens the defense barrier), Colorectal cancer (processed meat), Anxiety, Depression (serotonin level disturbed), Nutritional deficiency disorders.

Ashuchi Ahar

Food should be used after cleaning process. *Acharya Charaka* mentions that if this process not done properly like meat of "*Haridrak*" mixed with ashes dust and honey causes instant death. Some impurities may remain in water and water leading to adverse effects. By storing water for long time there increases chance of contamination. Contamination often cause wide spread sickness and disease. Stale water i.e. water kept for many days should not be used for drinking as it becomes "*Abhishyandi*" and increases *Kapha*. Similarly if uncleaned vegetables and other food articles are consumed chance of contamination increase and lead to infection by bacteria, parasites etc.

CONCEPT OF AHAR VIDHIVISHESHAYATAN

According to *Charaka*, all the *Dravyas* are *Aushadhis* (*Nanausadhibhutam*) and these are of two types depending on the nature of composition ^[9].

Dravyabhuta Aushadhi

Adravyabhuta Aushadhi

Ahara Dravyas can be considered under the category *Dravyabhuta Aushadhi*. So, the dietetic rules can be considered as *Upaya* or *Adravyabhuta Aushadhi* for *Vikaraprasamana*. The eight factors of diet responsible for health and diseases are described as "*Ahara Vidhi Visheshha Ayatanani*."^[10]

1. Prakriti (Nature of food)

It indicates the nature of substances, i.e. inherent attributes (heaviness etc.) such as black gram is heavy and *Mudag* is light. The natural quality will undergo change by mixing with other substances.

2. Karan (Processing of food)

Processing is the result of contact with water or fire, washing, churning, place, time, mode and vessel used for cooking. Thus preparatory processes

like putting rice in water for soaking, grinding the rice with dal, roasting, frying, health, burning, boiling in water, frying in fats, cooking in steam, baking etc. also affect the quality of the food.

3. *Samyoga* (Combination of food)

It is combination of two or more substances. This result is manifestation of specific attributes which cannot be manifested by individual substance e.g. Combination of honey and ghee etc.

4. *Rashi* (Quantity of food)

Rashi is quantum of total (*Sarvagraha*) or individual (*Parigraha*) substance which determines the result of their administration in proper and improper dosage. The quantity of food is *Sarvagraha* and quantity of each of its ingredients is *Parigraha*.

5. *Desha* (Habitat of food)

Desha refers to both the region in which article of food is grown and also to the region where the user lives. *Desha* also refers to body of the user which means giving consideration to the state of his health, strength, constitution and digestive system.

6. *Kala*

Kala stands for both the time in the form of day and night and states of individuals (e.g. condition of health and age). Latter is relevant to the disease e.g. manifestation of disease due to *Kapha* during childhood and fever etc.

7. *Upayogsamstha*

Upayogsamstha stands for dietic rules. They are for the most part dependent on symptom of digestion.

8. *Upayokta*

Upayokta is that who take food. He is in the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things.

These eight factors are associated specially with useful and harmful effects neither due to ignorance nor intentionally one should resort to such food articles or other things (drugs, regimens etc.) as are instantaneously pleasing but harmful in the long term leading to unhappy consequences in form of life style disorders etc.

Similarly, *Sushruta* describes 12-fold considerations to be followed during the consumption of food and termed them *Dvadasha Asana Vidhi*.^[11]

1. **Sheet Ahara:** Indicated in thirst, alcoholic, burning, *Raktapitta* and in emaciated individuals.

2. **Ushna Ahara:** Useful in the patients with *Kaphaja* and *Pittaja* disorders and after *Virechan* and *Snehan* (oleation therapy).

3. **Snigdha Ahara:** Indicated in *Ruksha* individual, individual with *Vata Prakrati*, in *Vataja* disorders and the individuals emaciated by excess sexual act.

4. **Ruksha Ahara:** Useful in obese, diabetics and individual with excess *Kapha*.

5. **Drava Ahara:** Indicated in dehydrated and weak individuals.

6. **Shushka Ahara:** Indicated in the patients of dermatological disorders, erysipelas and diabetes mellitus.

7. **Ek-kalika Ahara:** *Ek-kalika Ahara* i.e. one time (once a day) is indicated in the individuals awaits impaired *Agni* (digestive power).

8. **Dvi-kalika Ahara:** *Ahara*, twice a day is indicated in individual with proper *Agni*.

9. **Aushadha Yukta Ahara:** The diet mixed with required drugs should be used in those patients, who are unable to take unpalatable drugs.

10. **Matraheen Ahara:** The individual with impaired *Agni* and the diseased individual should advise to take the diet in reduced quantum.

11. **Prashamaka Ahara:** The diet advised according to seasonal variation is *Dosha Prashamaka* i.e. pacify all the *Doshas*.

12. **Vratiprayojaka Ahara:** advised in healthy individuals to promote psychosomatic health.

Seasonal Consideration of Ahara (Contraindicated Ahara According to Ritu)^[12]

1. **Hemant-** Food and drink which are light and liable to vitiate *Vata* along with less feeding and high intake of gruel.

2. **Sisira-** Diet and drink possessing the qualities such as pungent, bitter, astringent, *Vata* provoking, light and cold.

3. **Vasanta-** Heavy, unctuous, sour, and sweet diets.

4. **Grishama-** Diet which are salty, sour, pungent or hot.

5. **Varsha-** *Udamantha* and water from river.

6. **Sharad-** Fat, oil, meat of aquatic and marshy animals, alkaline salt preparation and curd.

Role of Diet (Ahara) In Manifestation of Disease

S.No.	Disease	Ahara as a <i>Nidana</i>
1	<i>Raktapitta</i>	Intake of hot, sharp, sour, pungent, salty diet.
2	<i>Gulma- Vataja</i> - <i>Pittaja</i> - <i>Kaphaja</i>	Rough food and drink, excessive activity. Excessive use of pungent, sour, irritant, hot, wine. Cold heavy, unctuous food, excessive sleep in day.
3	<i>Prameha</i>	Idle sitting, over sleep, excessive use of curd, meat of domestic, aquatic,

		animals, milk, new cereals, all other cough promoting regimens.
4	<i>Kustha</i>	Intake of incompatible food and liquid, excessive use of cold and hot diet. Applied cold water immediately after intensive exposure to sun, take food during indigestion. Use of excessive new cereals, curd, fish, salt, sleep regularly in day.
5	<i>Unmada</i>	Antagonistic, defective and impure food.
6	<i>Apsmara</i>	Abundant morbidity due to intake unwholesome and unclean food, injury of mind by anxiety, passion, fear, anger.
7	<i>Shotha</i>	Regular intake of alkaline, sour, irritant, hot and heavy substance, excessive use of curd, uncooked food.
8	<i>Udara Roga</i>	Excessive use of hot, alkaline, burning, sour, poisoned, antagonistic and uncleaned food.
9	<i>Grahani</i>	Eating during indigestion, over eating, intake of unsuitable, heavy cold, too rough, contaminated food.
10	<i>Pandu</i>	Intake of alkaline, sour, salty, too hot, incompatible and unsuitable food, excessive use of black gram, oil, cake, <i>Tila</i> .
11	<i>Vatarakta</i>	Excessive intake of salt, sour, pungent, alkaline, unctuous, hot and uncooked food, curd, <i>Arnala</i> , <i>Sauwira</i> , <i>Sukta</i> , Buttermilk, putrified, dried meat of aquatic or marshy land inhabiting animals, <i>Virudhahara</i> .
12	<i>Swasa</i>	Use of cold water, habitual intake of dry foods, or intake of food deficient or excessive in quantity and before /long after the meal time. Excessive intake of sesame oil, <i>Vidahi</i> and heavy food, curd, unboiled milk, <i>Abishyandhi</i> , <i>Kapha Vriddhi Ahara</i> .
13	<i>Amavata</i>	<i>Virudhahara</i> , Excessive indulgence in <i>Guru Ahara</i> and <i>Kandashaka</i> (Tuberous Vegetable)
14	<i>Kasa</i>	Intake of unctuous, cold, astringent, <i>Pramitashana</i> , <i>Vidahi</i> , Sour, alkaline food, <i>Guru</i> , <i>Abishyandi</i> , <i>Madhura</i> , <i>Snigdha Sevan</i> , <i>Visama</i> or irregular type meal.

Apart from *Ahara* considering as a *Nidana* for various diseases, concept of *Viruddhahara* or incompatible diet (i.e., certain diet and its combinations, which inhibits the process of formation of tissue and which have opposite property to the tissue) is also mentioned in our Ayurvedic Literatures. If above said rules for the diet are not followed then the diseases occurring due to *Viruddha*

Aahara can occur which are; Impotency, Erysipelas, Blindness, Ascitis, Bullus, Insanity, Fistula-in-ano, Coma, Intoxication, Abdominal distension, Stiffness in neck, Varieties of Anemia, Indigestion, Various Skin Diseases, Diseases of Intestine, Swelling, Gastritis, Fever, Rhinitis, and Infertility.^[13] Some other nutritional deficiency induced disorders are summarized as follows in the table below.^[14]

Nutrient	Intake/Day	deficiency Induced Disorder
Vitamin A	5000 IU	Xerophthalmia, Bitot's spot, Immune dysfunction, Keratomalacia, night blindness
Vitamin B ₁	1-2 mg	Beriberi, Ophthalmoplegia, Cardiomegaly, Neuropathy, Wernick's encephalopathy
Vitamin B ₂	1-2 mg	Angular stomatitis, sore tongue and mouth, Cheilosis, Dermatitis
Vitamin B ₃	15-20 mg	Pellagra, sore mouth and tongue
Vitamin B ₅	5-10 mg	Weakness, tenderness of heels and feet, Paraesthesias
Vitamin B ₆	12 mg	Cheilosis, Glossitis, peripheral neuropathy, hypochromic anemia, convulsions
Vitamin B ₇	100-200 µg	Alopecia, myalgia, Seborrhoeic dermatitis
Vitamin B ₉	400µg	Megaloblastic anemia, Glossitis, Diarrhea
Vitamin B ₁₂	5µg	Megaloblastic anemia, Dementia, Diarrhea, Ataxia
Vitamin C	100 mg	Bleeding, purpura, scurvy, joint effusion, depression, poor wound healing
Vitamin D	400IU	Rickets, Osteomalacia, Osteoporosis, Tetany, muscle weakness
Vitamin E	10- 15IU	Neuropathy, Hemolysis, abnormal clotting, retinopathy
Vitamin K	80µg	Easy bruising
Zinc	15 mg	Impaired taste and smell, alopecia, hypogonadism, growth retardation,

		dementia
Iron	10-15mg	Hypochromic microcytic anemia, pre mature labour, impaired congenital development
Iodine	150µg	Hypothyroidism, goiter
Copper	2 mg	Anaemia, neutropenia, osteoporosis, defective keratinization and pigmentation of hair
Manganese	1.5mg	Dementia, dermatitis, hypercholesterolaemia, impaired growth and skeletal development.

CONCLUSION

Besides *Vayu* and *Jala*, *Ahara* is the third basic need for all the living organisms in the universe. Ayurveda since long is describing the beneficiary effect of *Ahara* as well as its adverse effects. Modern science is now coming towards the concept but is far away from Ayurvedic aspects because Ayurveda describes *Ahara* as *Mahabhaisajya* but Modern dietics has particularly described *Ahara* according to the nutritional value of its components, having no scientific division on the basis of *Prakruti*, *Desha*, *Kala*, etc what the Ayurveda describes which seems to be too much practical. So it is too much necessary to take *Hita Ahara* if someone wants to live a healthier life to attain the "*Trayee Eshanas*" or "*Purusarth Chatushtaya*". In short; Pure diet in the form of balanced diet; Pure body with moderate exercise; Pure mind with stress management; Pure devotion in terms of Spiritual health that helps our body immunity to build up and prevent human beings from various consequences which comes in the form of Life style disorders and other Nutritional deficiency disorders.

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