



Concept Note

Ahara-vidhi-vidhan (dietary guidelines): a comparison of eating habits in Ayurveda and modern age

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Article history

Received : January 20, 2019

Accepted : February 05, 2019

Keywords

Ahara-vidhi
Ayurveda
Balance diet
Lifestyle disorders
Charaka

ABSTRACT

In the present lifestyle, where everyone is busy in achieving their life goals, the people are escaping the normal routine of food habits, due to which they are facing various lifestyle disorders. This can be overcome by following detail discipline and process to take the *Ahara* (food). The three basic pillars of Ayurveda are *Ahara* (food), *Nidra* (sleep) and *Brahmacharya* (following the path of God Brahma). Among these, *Ahara* has been placed first which shows it is important to maintain and sustain life. *Ahara-vidhi-vidhana* described in Ayurvedic classics are the foundation of dietetics, which indicates the method of *Ahara* i.e., *ushna*, *snigdha*, *matravata* (adequate quantity) and *jirne ashniyat* (food after digestion of previous meal). The present concept note is written on the basis of literature available online as well as the textbooks including Ayurvedic classics. The diet and its method of intake have an important role in the continuity of a healthy life. The rules and methods of dietary intake are effective in the maintenance of health as well as in curative aspects for many diseases. Ayurvedic classics are store-house of valuable thoughts, in the present lifestyle, none care about health and consequences of eating and drinking habits, which leads to having many disorders. It is very important aspects regarding dietetics that when to take the food and many diseases can be prevented arising merely due to faulty dietary habits.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is an essential part of every life; it gives energy and nutrients to grow, develop, move, work, think and learn. Ignorance of diet guidelines caused the increasing prevalence of lifestyle disorders. Many guidelines related to diet are given in different literature describing its importance. But according to Acharya Charaka, the *Ahara-vidhi-vidhana* which is explained in *viman sthana*, one has a specific concept to prevent the many lifestyle disorders (Sharma, 2014). This attempt of compiling literature on *ahara-vidhi* of Acharya Charaka can explore the scientific view on this important area.

All the relevant topics related to *ahara-vidhi* have been taken from different *Samhitas*, journal, articles and online database. A detailed survey of literature was conducted to describe the importance of *ahara-vidhi* through Ayurveda and also to explain how it actually works to maintain health in a balanced condition. In addition, the present study was taken to find out dietary

directives in Ayurveda and exploring its extensive scope of scientific testing worldwide.

METHODS OF DIETING

Lifestyle disorders affect the lives of people which are mainly caused by improper food regimen. Improving the faulty dietary habits can prevent many lifestyle diseases. Ayurveda classics have described various rules of food intake. Acharya Charaka prescribed the methods of dieting for the healthy and the sick.

Warm food (*ushna*)

One should eat warm food because it stimulates the digestive fire. It digests quickly and also reduces mucous. For the digestion of food *Pitta* is important and *ushna guna* is also in *Pitta*. A certain temperature is essential for digestion as all the chemical reactions take place only with high temperature. Using warm food is also helpful in killing harmful microbes.

Unctuous (snigdha)

It stimulates the unstimulated digestive fire to get digested quickly, carminative flatus, develops the body, provide firmness to sense organs, increase strength, produce clarity of complexion, here, *snigdha* meaning food composing of *snigdha dravya*, i.e. *ghritha* and *tailam*, as *gritha* is the best *vata-pitta shamaka* and tail being *Vata-Kapha shamaka*, so, diet consisting *snigdha guna* pacifies the *tridosha*.

As fat provides concentrated sources of energy and essential fatty acids are needed for growth and development, the building of nerve cells and brain too fat is essential for absorption of vitamin A, D, E and K.

These vitamins are well-known to increase immunity. Monounsaturated fatty acids decrease the risk of CVS whereas polyunsaturated fatty acids are essential for proper functioning of body muscles. Similar to omega-3 fatty acids, they are essential for the normal metabolism of the body. Omega-3 fatty acid also creates a greater sense of fullness for a longer period, avoiding the stomach need for food again preventing obesity.

Proper quantity (matravata ahara)

Food, if taken in proper quantity, without disturbing *Vata-Pitta-Kapha*, promotes lifespan, easily passes down to the anus, does not disturb the digestive fire. *Matravata* can be according to food material *matra* i.e. again of two types, (1) *Parigraha matra* and (2) *Sarvagaha matra*, indicating the amount of food that consists of balance diet as it provides the body with essential nutrition, fluid, macronutrients and micronutrients. Acharya Charaka also indicates *Matravata ahara* as *Aharamatra* mainly depends on *agnibala* (digestive strength).

Food after digestion of previous meal (aahara jeerna ashniyat)

One should eat when the previous meal is digested because, during indigestion, the eaten food mixing the product of the earlier meal with that of the later one vitiates all the *doshas* quickly. On the contrary, when one eats after the previous meal is situated in their own location, *agni* is stimulated, appetite arose, the entrance of the channels are opened, the heart is normal, flatus passes down and urges of flatus, urine and faeces are attended to.

The eaten food promotes the life span, without affecting any *dhatu*. By taking food during incomplete indigestion i.e. *Adhyasan*, it vitiates the *agni* (Sharma, 2014), due to vitiation of *agni*, the digestion gets hampered and production of *Aamarasa*, which acts as a poison for our body and creates lots of diseases.

Food compatible with the body (Virya Avirudham Ashniyat)

One should take food consisting of the items non-antagonistic in potency. While doing so, one is not affected with the disorder caused by the food antagonist, as *virudha ahara* can cause diseases such as blindness, *raktavikara*, *grahani*, *amavisha*, hypersensitivity, *kustha*, *sotha* and fever.

Consume at a favourable place (Ishta deshe ishta sarva upkaranam ashniyat)

One should eat in a favourable place with favourable accessories. While eating in a favourable place, one does not fall victim to psychic disturbances. The meal should be taken in proper places with a proper utensil, the absence of both can create stress, which activates the 'Flight or Fight' response in the central nervous system and shuts down the blood flow, affects the digestive muscle and decreases the secretion needed for digestion. It can also cause spasm, and stress that can finally cause diarrhoea or constipation.

Consume moderately (na atidrutum ashniyat, na ativilambitam ashniyat)

One should not eat fast because by eating fast, the food may enter into the wrong passage. The meal should be taken at a proper speed so that all the enzymatic secretion should mix with the food for their proper digestion. Taking too speedy food can cause respiratory tract infection by choking it. It can also cause other diseases such as GERD (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease).

If food is taken in proper speed, enzymatic juices mix properly so food gets easily digested. The brain takes about 20 minutes to recognize that the stomach is full. So, eating with optimum speed prevents overeating and slowly taking of food improves appetite regulation, prevents overeating, decreases the food consumption, and well-absorbs essential nutrients.

On the other hand, one should not eat too slow because if one does not get satisfied, he eats more and also the food becomes cold which slow down the speed of digested.

Consume without talking and laughing (ajalpana, ahasan, tanmana bhunjita)

One should eat with concentration and while not talking or laughing. According to Acharya Charaka, the *pathya ahara* taken in proper amount does not get digested due to *chinta* (tension), *shok* (sad), *bhaya* (scare), *krodha* (anger), *dukha* (pain) and also due to improper bedding/ sleeping habits.

Consume appropriate food (Aatmanam-abhisamikshya bhunjitam)

Diet should be taken according to *satmya*, *prakriti*, and *agnibala*. It should be taken according to self-energy and nutrient requirement as in case of pregnancy, child labour, intellectual, old or sick people. Older people have a small appetite but needs nutritious food.

EATING HABITS OF PRESENT AGE

The eating habits and lifestyle of the present time, particularly of the young generation, are not good in view of health. A man eats many times even he is not hungry enough. Many times imbalanced diet and overeating are very common issues. Although there should be a meal when a previous meal is digested but, in the present time, a man also eats soon after a meal.

There are also issues of too heavy or too light foods which are consumed with concentration. Use of cold drinks, chilled water, spicy, preserved and junk foods is also a matter of serious concern. Many health issues also arise due to speedy and emotional eating mostly in teenagers whereas not avoiding eating food in constipation. Modern food taking rules, regulation like taking a high amount of sodium, hydrogenated fats, and refined sugar causes a lot of lifestyle disorder like hypertension, diabetes mellitus and kidney related diseases.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the concept of *Ahara-vidhan* in brief, we can see the scientific-logic of Acharyas for taking food in a manner known as *Ahara vidhi vidhan* that how can maintain itself in the condition of *swastha* to prevent the modern lifestyle disorders. It is necessary to follow the *Ahara vidhan* and not to follow the wrong eating habits of the modern age.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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How to cite this article?

Sahu DK, Ratre G, Harpal LC (2018). Ahara-vidhi-vidhan (dietary guidelines): a comparison of eating habits in Ayurveda and modern age. *Journal of Conventional Knowledge and Holistic Health*, 2 (2), Article ID 190.
