

**Review Article**

**Food and Nutrition in Ayurveda: A Review**

Amruta N. Patil <sup>1\*</sup>, Shivkant J. Patil <sup>2</sup>, Laxmikant B. Patil <sup>2</sup>

P.G. Scholar <sup>1</sup>, Assistant Professor <sup>2</sup>, Professor and HOD <sup>3</sup>

Department of Dravyaguna <sup>1,3</sup>, Department of Swasthavritta <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup> Yashwant Ayurvedic college, P.G.T. and R.C., Kodoli, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India - 416114

<sup>2</sup> S. G. V. Ayurvedic Medical College, Bailhongal, Belgaum, Karnataka, India - 591102

\* **Corresponding Author:** Dr. Amruta N. Patil, **E-mail:** [amrutapatil3516@gmail.com](mailto:amrutapatil3516@gmail.com)

Article Received on: 19/05/2019 Accepted on: 25/06/2019 Published on: 30/06/2019

**ABSTRACT:**

"If food is taken properly then what's the need of medicines;  
If food is not taken properly, then what's the use of medicines! "

Ayurveda places special emphasis on Ahara (diet) and Anna (food) and believes that healthy nutrition nourishes the mind, body and soul. Ayurveda does not discriminate food to be good or bad, instead it defines 'Diet' as that which is 'beneficial' (Hitakaraka), taken in appropriate and moderate proportions and taken at proper time of the day. It emphasizes various factors that influence food, such as its biological properties, origin, environmental factors, seasons, preparation, freshness, and provides a logical explanation of how to balance food according to one's dosha and physical needs. Ayurveda regards that diet is the origin of strength, life activities, the bright texture of the skin, health and normal activities, of all the organs. These essential qualities of a healthy or 'Swastha' person is due to the intake of proper food in quality and quantity.

**KEY WORDS:** *Ayurveda, Diet, Nutrition.*

**INTRODUCTION:**

Nutrition plays a central role in Ayurvedic living. Ayurveda places special emphasis on "Ahara" (diet) and "Anna" (food) as a means to good life, health and wellness. Healthy and wholesome food nourishes the mind, body and soul. Ayurveda asserts that although the digestive capacity of each person may be different, the quality and appropriate quantity of food are necessary for a healthy life. Food taken in proper quantity provides strength, vigor, good complexion and nurtures the health of the tissues<sup>1</sup>.

Ayurveda is a 6000-year-old health care system that asserts the science, philosophy and spirituality are necessary aspects for a healthy living. Ayurveda is considered not only a comprehensive medical system but also a way of life. The individual is inseparable from his or her surroundings and is a "microcosm" within the "macrocosm."<sup>2</sup> In other words, as a microcosm one is constantly under the influence of vast environmental transformations. Although these

changes may not be inherently apparent to the naked eyes, these concepts are unique and establish the fact that individuals should be treated within the context of his or her surroundings. Similarly, in order to live healthy, one must live in harmony with his or her surroundings and formulate a diet that balances ones doshas.

**Materials and Methods:**

Data has been collected from the classical texts, research articles, manuscripts and internet. Relevant data on various aspects were critically reviewed.

**Ayurvedic Concept of Food:**

Ayurveda asserts that every root is a medicine<sup>3</sup> so there is no good or bad food and provides a logical approach to designing balanced foods for optimal nutrition by formulating food groups that work in harmony, induce proper digestion and promote

maximum absorption of essential nutrients. When food is similar to one's dosha it will aggravate the dosha. Therefore, one must select the proper food group to balance the dosha.

Ayurveda recommends:

- a. Minimal consumption of raw food and vegetables,
- b. Knowledge of herbs and their effects prior to use, and
- c. Avoid food combinations that are antagonistic such as tamarind with milk.<sup>4</sup>

Ayurveda believes that the plants and plant products that constitute our diet have a strong influence on the physical and mental states of the individual.

In order to have proper digestion Ayurveda recommends not to consume too many raw foods and to avoid leftovers. Fresh, homemade food is recommended for proper nutritional assimilation. Spices are used to make the food compatible and balance its adverse actions. Eating warm food stimulates agni and digestive enzymes; therefore warm food is recommended. Time for intake of food is also taken into consideration such as Vata people may go for smaller quantity and eat more frequently. Most suitable time to eat is dawn and dusk. Pitta individual may take his / her largest meal at noon (maximum of three times) while Kapha individuals may skip breakfast and may make the lunch as their largest meal. Age and gender are also factors to be considered. Elderly persons should have Vatahara diet, middle-aged person must comply with Pittahara diet, and children should be given Kaphahara diet. Similarly, men may consider more Pittahara diet as opposed to women favoring more Kaphahara diet. A relaxed and calm mind is recommended to have optimal digestion. It is recommended not to eat with overpowering emotions such as stress, anger and grief etc. as these factors produce irregular and anomalous digestive process and have negative impact on the mind, the center for all sensory control and perceptions.

#### **Influence of food over mind and emotions:**

Ayurveda asserts that the mind is directly influenced by the quality of food eaten, food preparation, appearance, aroma and freshness of the food. These factors influence all the five senses and regulate proper digestion. Based on above basic principles, Ayurveda promotes selection of fresh food, preparation of food by combining compatible foods and use of herbs and spices to enhance flavor and

taste of the food. It advocates that the quality of the food also regulates emotion, mental agility and mental vigor. Ayurveda has classified the food category in three basic groups:<sup>5,6</sup>

**Satvic food:** such as fresh vegetables, rice, milk, butter, honey, fruits, nuts when eaten in right quantity will balance all three doshas, bring mental harmony and evoke conscious awareness.

**Rajas or Rich food:** such as garlic, coffee, wine and fried food, too spicy or too hot will stimulate fantasy, jealousy, and ego. Although these emotions may appear as negative aspects, some of these emotions are needed to lead a normal life. Rajasic food should be included in the diet with modesty.

**Tamas or Dull and sluggish food:** list contain frozen food, certain root vegetables, peanut, left- over and meats that may need more energy to digest. Such food may enhance emotions like ignorance, greed and laziness. This food category must be included in the diet with caution.

#### **Food Source:**

In addition to basic qualities of the food, origin and source of the food should also be taken into consideration. Milk in general is a Satvic food and can come from various sources such as human, cow, goat, sheep, buffalo, camel and horse and each will have its own property. The properties of milk coming from different sources will influence people differently according to their tridoshas. Human milk promotes longevity and nourishment. Cow milk is sweet, cold, soft, unctuous, viscous, smooth, slimy, heavy, dull and clear. It is wholesome, rejuvenating and strength promoting. It promotes intellect longevity and virility. Thus cow milk is nourishing, healing, remedial and is used as Rasayana<sup>7</sup>. Warm milk of the cow immediately after milking (dharoshna) promotes strength. It is like ambrosia and alleviates all three doshas and stimulates digestion. However, cold milk (dhara sita) aggravates all three doshas. Thus milk should be taken warm<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Incompatible food and diet:**

Ayurveda recommends that diets, which aggravate dosha, and are antagonistic in respect to season, place, time, and combination are harmful and should be avoided. Such as rough and cold food in the winter is antagonistic in terms of time / season.<sup>9</sup>

Honey and ghee in equal quantity is antagonistic in

dosage<sup>10</sup> and milk with fish is a bad combination of food.<sup>11</sup>

Drinking too hot or too cold is not favorable for the digestive system and eating too many nuts in summer aggravates pitta.

### **Ayurvedic concept of dietic regulations & procedure:**

Acharya Charak exclusively quoted the dietic regulations and procedure to the known history of mankind. The term "Ahara Vidhi Vidhana"<sup>12</sup> is used first by Acharya Charaka. Though many other classics have elaborately mentioned the same rules, they have explained them under different headings like Bhojana Vidhi, Annavidhi etc.

These are the dietetic regulations and procedure for those, who are healthy as well as for certain types of patients. One should eat food, which is hot, unctuous, in due measure, after the digestion of previous food, and nonantagonistic in potency. It should be eaten in a congenial place, provided with all accessories, neither too hurriedly, nor too leisurely, without talking or laughing with full concentration and having proper regard to oneself.

### **Reasons behind Ayurvedic dietic regulations:**

#### **1. Hot food (Ushnam Ashniyat):**

By taking hot food, Vata Anulomana is achieved. Pitta gets stimulated and secreted, thereby increasing Agni or power of digestion. Kapha in oral cavity i.e., Bodhaka is secreted to acknowledge proper taste of food. With the above conditions, Agni gets activated and the digestion process is completed in proper time.

#### **2. Unctous (Snigdham Ashniyat):**

By taking unctuous food, obviously Vata is alleviated (Anulomana). For Agnidipana, Sneha is required as is seen practically in the outer world, as well as in body. Due to Kledana property, Kledaka Kapha gets stimulated which helps in Madhura Avasthapaka of food. Also Bodhaka Kapha is secreted which aids to feel the proper taste.

Because of above properties, Snigdha dravya promotes the first Avasthapaka - Madhura, and therefore the above mentioned qualities like increase in Bala, Varna, Sharira and power of sense organs etc. are achieved, which rejuvenate the body by decreasing the speed of aging process.

#### **3. In due major (Matravat Ashniyat):**

The optimum quantity of food promotes longevity, without afflicting Vata, Pitta and Kapha. It easily passes down to the rectum after proper digestion. It does not impair the power of digestion (Agni is not vitiated). It gets digested without any difficulty.

#### **4. After the digestion of previous food (Jeerne Ashniyat):**

When food is taken after proper digestion, the Doshas are at their normal places, Agni is kindled, hunger is felt, all the Srotas are clear and open; eructation from mouth is healthy, Vata is normal and the urges for Vata, Mutra, Purisha are well attended. The food taken in such a condition does not vitiate any body - elements and serves the sole purpose of promoting life.

Therefore it is very important aspect for the maintenance of health.

#### **5. Nonantagonistic (Veerya Aviruddham Ashniyat):**

The diseases that are caused by Viruddha Ahara are listed by Acaryas. Some of them are Adhmana, Amavisa, Grahani, Amlapitta, etc. These are the Vyadhis related to Annavaha and Purishavaha Srotasas. Some other important diseases are Kustha, Pandu, Shotha, Jwara, Andhata, Indriya Daurbalya, Santana Dosha and even death. By avoiding Virudha Ahara, we can prevent a hetu for above diseases.

#### **6. In a congenial place, provided with all accessories (Ishta Deshe, Ishta Sarva Upkaranam Ashniyat):**

To eat in a congenial place provided with all the necessary appurtenances is needed for sound psychological condition during meals. Otherwise the unpleasant place and atmosphere can lead to the disturbed mind (Manovighata).

All these factors affect mind as well as body e.g., olfactory sense is having a close relation with digestion. Good smells of food provoke the salivation as well as secretion of digestive juice. The same is true with other senses.

Appropriate appliances for dining are needed and indicated in detail by Acharyas. There is a large list of utensils required for preparation, serving, storage and dining etc.

This specification may be due to some chemical reactions between the food material and utensils. This reaction can be helpful for longer preservation of food as well as its healthy effect on body. Some materials are strictly contraindicated for specific foods, e.g., sour foods should not be kept in copper utensils, as the chemical reaction produces poison like substances and leads to many disorders

#### **7. Not too hurriedly (Na Atidrutam Ashniyat):**

The food should not be taken too hurriedly. If it is eaten so, food is liable to go into other pathways; Motion of food if paralysed, Food can not be placed properly and One can neither know about the bad qualities nor good qualities of food

For all the above reasons proper time and due attention should be given to the meals along with proper chewing of the food.

#### **8. Not too leisurely (Na Ativilambitam) :**

Food should not be taken too leisurely, if eaten in such a way, satisfaction can not be achieved ; Food is eaten in excess of quantity and The food may get cold.

The food gets digested irregularly Persons who eat too leisurely, naturally tend to eat more, still satiety can not be achieved. The temperature of food gets altered i.e. the hot items become cold and vice versa. All these factors hamper Agni and the food is not digested properly.

#### **Without talking or laughing with full concentration (Ajalpan, Ahsan, Tanmana Bhunjit):**

Food should be eaten without much talking and laughing. Talking and laughing divert the attention from the meals and the food is eaten too hastily or too slowly. Thus the uniform speed of eating can not be maintained, hence both the above opinions are practically true. In one meal also, some food is eaten hurriedly while some slowly if the attention is diverted by other things. The secretion of digestive juices gets disturbed and finally the system also gets affected which affects body as well as mind.

#### **Ayurvedic concept of Nutrition:**

Hunger and Nutrition:

Modern science supports Ayurvedic principles that there is a close connection between food and mind as

hunger (feeding) and satiety both are regulated by the hypothalamus in the brain. Stimulation of the lateral part of the hypothalamus excites the emotional drive to seek out food. Over stimulation may cause hyperphagia (excessive eating). Similarly, the satiety center of the brain located in the ventro-medial nuclei of the hypothalamus may cause aphagia (refusal to eat) upon stimulation. Control of the appetite is governed by amygdala of the brain and is closely connected with the sense of smell and the limbic system. According to Ayurvedic principles there is a close connection between smell and hunger. Taste, salivation, chewing, and swallowing all influence hunger and satiety and aid in digestion. Activities of the feeding center are regulated by nutritional need such as low blood glucose level. However, feeling of hunger when the stomach is empty is due to the stimulation of the Vagus nerve, which causes stomach to contract, referred to as hunger "pains", is regulated by the blood glucose level, amino acids, and fatty acid metabolism. Bypassing any of these regulations may lead to digestive problems. Ayurveda recommends eating only when one is hungry and only one-third capacity of

ones stomach, so that body is at optimal condition for proper digestion. As body temperature, feeding and emotions are regulated by the limbic system, there is a close relationship amongst these physiological functions. When the food intake increases, the metabolic rate becomes faster and the production of heat is intensified. In order to maintain a physiological balance, Ayurveda asserts not to consume too hot or too cold food and to restrict other activities during food intake, including too much talking. Additionally, since emotions are processed by the limbic system, Ayurveda recommends maintaining a state of calm while eating to maximize the digestive process and recommends to avoid eating when emotions such as anger, anxiety, worry or grief sets in.

#### **Thirst and water intake:**

Water intake is regulated by the neurons in the hypothalamus in the thirst center. Ayurveda describes eight groups of water depending on its source and views it, as a necessary part of nutrition for life. As water is considered to be essential for sustaining life, water is never prohibited under any circumstances. Warm water is light, digestive, stimulating and alleviates all doshas. It is good for kapha dosha, asthma, kasa (Bronchitis), Jvara (fever). Water taken before eating induces kapha dosha and

suppresses the power of digestion. Cold water takes more time to be digested and is recommended only during murcha (fainting) vitiation of Pitta, ushma (excessive heat), madatyaya (alcohol consumption), bhram (giddiness), physical fatigue and vomiting. Cold water should not be used in pratishyaya (cold), flatulence, aruchi (anorexia) hiccups and immediately after oleation therapy. During the process of eating, water taken in small quantity stimulates digestion, and when taken after meal causes sthauilya (obesity). Water taken in excess fetters digestion and dilutes nutrients. Therefore frequent intake of water in small quantities is recommended. During meals only one-third capacity of stomach should be filled with water. The consumed food is digested by "jathar agni" (gastric fire). The nutrients ingested from the food undergo the process of absorption, assimilation and then are finally transformed into energy or consciousness. According to Ayurveda, agni, the fire principle of the body governs this process. The vital breath (Prana), positive immune system (Ojus) and the cellular intelligence (Tejas) are all expressions of nutrition via the means of Agni (2). The end product of food, after digestion, runs through the circulatory system and bathes (irrigates) the tissues in the form of ultimate nutrients. Water plays a critical role in the trafficking of nutrient. These nutrients are selected and transported to the tissues and other specific places in the body, which are then transformed into energy.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The diet and dietetic code are inter-related and inseparable. Diet or Anna can be considered as Samavayi Karana for continuity of life. Ahara Vidhi Vidhana is a kind of Karma or method that is equally important as food. Hence it can be considered as Asamavayi Karana. Ahara is not only meant for maintenance of health but it is also very important part of curative aspect. So, Ahara Dravyas can be considered as Dravyabhuta Ausadhi and dietetic rules are Adravyabhuta Ausadhi.

Indian culture as well as Ayurveda have unique contribution in the field of dietetic code. Eating is not merely meant for fulfilling the hunger, but it should satisfy the bodily and psychological needs also. The rituals and rules connected with act of eating definitely help to uplift the level of physiology and psychology.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with

- Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.500 (*Ch.Su.27/3*)
2. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.897 (*Ch.sha.5/3*)
3. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.471 (*Ch.Su. 26/12*)
4. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.498 (*Ch.Su.26/99*)
5. Bhagavad-gita complete edition with original Sanskrit text, Roman translation and elaborate purports by A.C. Bhaktivedanta swami prabhupada The India Heritage Foundation Bangalore, First Indian Printing 2006. Page No.758-761
6. Six Decades of Ayurveda Of Prof. Priya Vrat sharma, edited by Prof. Satya Deo Dubey & Dr. Anugrah Narain Singh, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Pratishthan, Delhi, First Edition 2005, Page 915-916
7. Vagbhata : Ashtanga Hridaya with Sarvangsundara Commentary edited by Pt. Hari Sadashiva Shastri Paradkar, published by: chowkhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi- 2012, Page 68 (*AH.Su.5/21-22*)
8. Vagbhata : Ashtanga Hridaya with Sarvangsundara Commentary edited by Pt. Hari Sadashiva Shastri Paradkar, published by: chowkhamba Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi- 2012, Page 70 (*AH.Su.5/28-29*)
9. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.497 (*Ch.Su.26-88/89*)
10. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.497 (*Ch.Su.26/90*)
11. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.497 (*Ch.Su.26/93*)
12. Charaka: Charakasamhita of Agnivesha with Charak

Chandrika Teeka, edited by Dr. Brahmanand Tripathy, Volume 1, Reprint 2009, published by: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi. Page no.665 (*Ch.Vi.1/24*)

13. Dr. Sharma Ravindra, Dr. Malviya Reeta, Dr. Nathani Sumit, Dr. Rama Murthy A, Dr. Khemani; Concept Of Nutritional Diet In Ayurveda; International Journal of Ayurvedic and Herbal Medicines, March-April- 2013 Page 1150-1158

14. [http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/som\\_articles/25](http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/som_articles/25)

**Cite this article as:**

Amruta N. Patil, Shivkant J. Patil, Laxmikant B. Patil, Food and Nutrition in Ayurveda: A Review, ADJIM 2019; 4(2), p. 18-23.