



CONCEPT OF *AAHAR* IN *AYURVEDA* AND IT'S IMPORTANCE IN MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH

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Abstract-

Ayurveda, a traditional Indian medicinal system, promotes physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Maintaining *dosha* balance (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) prevents and treats sickness. *Ayurveda* uses herbal medicines, yoga, meditation, and customised food and lifestyle advice based on an individual's constitution and health needs. Nutrition, or *aahara*, is essential to good health. It includes food preparation, meal schedule, and mental health. A healthy person has balanced physical and mental humours, effective digestion, normal tissue function, and waste removal. Physical, mental, and social well-being define health, not just the absence of illness or weakness. *Aahar* boosts athleticism, complexion, and energy. Food before and during conception affects *prakriti*. Oral substances *Aahara* or *Ausadha* are called *Aahar*. This review examines the concepts, health benefits, and current relevance of *Ayurvedic* eating practices to help integrate them into current health practices.

Keywords- *Aahara*, *Aaharvidhi* *Vshesayatana*, *Dosha*, *Mahabhaishajya*

Introduction-

Ayurveda, an ancient medical practice that originated in India more than 5,000 years ago, focuses on a comprehensive approach to promoting health and well-being. It encompasses the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of health, with the goal of preventing and treating sickness by maintaining a harmonious balance of physiological elements called *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*). *Ayurveda* incorporates a range of techniques, such as herbal medication, yoga, meditation, and *pathya-apathya*, which are customised to suit an individual's constitution and health requirements. The significance of traditional

Indian medicine rests in its holistic approach to attaining and preserving maximum health through natural methods and preventive measures. In *Ayurveda*, *Aahara* (diet) is seen as a fundamental and essential aspect of maintaining good health. *Aahara* encompasses not just the act of consuming food, but also includes the techniques used in its preparation, the specific timing of meals, and the mental state one adopts while eating. Adequate nutrition is considered essential for preserving well-being, facilitating digestion, and harmonising the *doshas*. *Ahara* involves the selection of fresh, seasonal, and constitutionally appropriate foods, which support the body's innate capacity for healing and flourishing.

The two-fold aim of *Ayurveda*- the maintenance of health in a healthy man and the relief from disease in a patient.ⁱ A person whose somatic and psychic humors are in a state of equilibrium, digestive capacity or digestion is uniformly healthy, with normal functions of the fundamental tissues of the body and waste products accompanied by the lucid status of the soul cognitive organs and mind is said to be a healthy person.ⁱⁱ

According to WHO- Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social-wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.ⁱⁱⁱ

The significance of *Aahar* should never be underestimated. Every *Dravya* is composed of the five elements, hence when analysing the significance of *aahara*, it is important to remember that our body is also made up of these five elements. The overall health and disease status of an individual is entirely determined by the type of diet they consume. According to the *acharya Sushrut Aahar* refers to substances that are consumed orally.^{iv} The growth of the body is dependent on consuming a well-balanced diet that is rich in nutrients, as well as ensuring efficient digestion and absorption of the food. The term "growth" is used to refer to the nourishment that *panchabhautika Aahar* provides to its related *panchabhautika* component of the body. It is considered one of the three pillars of existence, known as *Tryoupstambha*, as explained by *Acharya Charak*. *Aahar* is accountable for enhancing physical strength, improving complexion, and boosting overall vitality. Given that the diet consumed during and prior to conception greatly influences the nature of a newborn, *Aahar* (diet) has a significant role in determining their *prakriti*. *Anna* can only be taken after 6 months from the individual's birth. *Dosha*, *dhatu*, and *mala* are simply the metabolic products resulting from the digestion and assimilation of food in an individual.

Based on the explanations offered by different *Acharyas*, it is evident that the term *Aahara* can refer to either *Aahara* or *Ausadha*, the substance that is consumed orally. *Vagbhata* distinguishes *Aahara* as *Rasapradhana* and *Ausadha* as *Virya Pradhana*. From this perspective, *Ausadha Dravyas* provide principally *Gunas* of that medicine, *Sheeta*, and *Usna Guna*, whereas *Ahara Dravyas* nourish bodily components and humours.

Classification of Aahara in Ayurveda

Aahar can be classified in numerous ways. In *Ayurveda*, it is classified according to mode of use, on the basis of *panchbhuta* predominance, origin of *Dravya*, effect of *Aahar* on body, *shadrasa*, *guna*, *vipaka*, *triguna*, on the basis of *varga* (*Drava dravya*, *Anna dravya*).

Acc. to usage^v-

1. *Ashita* (eatables)
2. *Peeta* (drinkable)
3. *Leedha* (linctuses)
4. *Khadita* (chewables)

In *sharangdhara samhita*, there are 6 types mentioned according to usage.^{vi}

1. *Bhojya*- (rice and daal)
2. *Bhaksya*- (laddu, chapati)
3. *Charvya*- (chiwada, roasted chana)
4. *Lehya*- (Chutney, chyavanprash)
5. *Choshya*- (Mango , sugarcane)
6. *Peya*- (Panak, milk)

Acc. To *Yoni*(source)- a) *Sthavara* (plant source) b) *Jangham* (animal source)

Acc. To *Prabhava* (specific action)-a) *Hita Aahar* (wholesome) b) *Ahita Aahar* (unwholesome)

Acc. to *Rasa*(taste)-

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a) <i>Madhura</i> (sweet) | d) <i>Katu</i> (pungent) |
| b) <i>Amla</i> (sour) | e) <i>Tikta</i> (bitter) |
| c) <i>Lavana</i> (salty) | f) <i>Kashaya</i> (astringent) |

In *srimadbhagvada geeta* three types of *Aahar* been described acc. to *triguna*-

1. *Sattvic Aahar*
2. *Rajasa Aahar*
3. *Tamas Aahar*

Consumption of pure food i.e. *satvika Aahar* makes the mind clear. When mind is devoid of blemishes memory power enhances.

Acc. to *Vimsati Gunas*-

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|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Guru</i> (heavy) | 11. <i>Mrdu</i> (soft) |
| 2. <i>Laghu</i> (light) | 12. <i>Kathina</i> (hard) |
| 3. <i>Sheeta</i> (cold) | 13. <i>Vishada</i> (clear) |
| 4. <i>Ushna</i> (hot) | 14. <i>Picchala</i> (viscid) |
| 5. <i>Snigdha</i> (unctuous) | 15. <i>Slakshan</i> (smooth) |
| 6. <i>Ruksha</i> (dry) | 16. <i>Khara</i> (rough) |
| 7. <i>Manda</i> (slow) | 17. <i>Sukshma</i> (subtle) |
| 8. <i>Teekshna</i> (sharp) | 18. <i>Sthula</i> (gross) |
| 9. <i>Sthira</i> (stable) | 19. <i>Sandra</i> (dense) |
| 10. <i>Sara</i> (fluidity) | 20. <i>Drava</i> (liquid) |

Significance of *Aahar*-

Dieticians play a crucial role in managing lifestyle diseases in a period of rising rates of illness; the importance of *Aahar* cannot be overstated. The maintenance of life requires *Aahar*. All living things are sustained by *Aahar*. The qualities of *Aahar* include lustrous skin, shine, exquisite voice, enthusiasm, skill, excitement, fullness, nourishment, power, and intellect. The *Aahar* is the foundation for all that is apparently done, both on Planet and in the celestial plane. *Aahar* refers to the sustenance that provides living entities with power, complexion, and zeal. The genesis of *sharir* is from the consumption of *aahara*. The source of illnesses can be attributed to the type of food consumed, whether it is beneficial (*hita*) or harmful (*ahita*), based on the individual's constitution. Therefore, *Aahar* might be attributed to the emotional states of pleasure and sadness in life.^{vii}

Timing For *Aahar* Intake –

Acharya Charak emphasises the utmost need of consuming meals at the appropriate time to sustain good health.^{viii} According to acharya sushruta, one should eat once in the morning and once in the evening. Food should only be consumed when the bowels have been evacuated, when the senses are clear, there is a lightness in the body, there is clear belching, the heart is free of blemishes, the *vayu* is normal, there is an interest in eating, there is an empty stomach, and hunger flares up.^{ix}

Aahar as Mahabhaishaja

In *Ayurveda*, as mentioned in *Kashyap Samhita* Aahar is given the term of *mahabhaishjya* because there is no medicine available which works like food.^x *Ayurveda*'s goal of “*swasthasya swasthasya rakshanam, aatuurasya vikar prasamnam ch*” i.e., Aahar itself is sufficient for healthy person to live healthy life and with some combination like medicated *yavagu* as described in *ayurvedic* texts for the diseased person. Modern healthcare systems can benefit from *Ayurvedic* dietary concepts by incorporating them into patient care, which places an emphasis on preventative medicine and individualised nutrition plans. Whole, unprocessed foods and medicinal spices such as ginger and turmeric have been shown to improve digestive health, balance the gut flora, and reduce the risks of chronic diseases, according to scientific study. Warm milk and ghee are staples in stress management diets, while ginger and turmeric are anti-inflammatory.

ASHTA AAHAR VIDHI VISHESHAYTANA^{xi}

These are the 8 factors which should be considered before taking food:

1. <i>Prakriti</i> (nature)	It means the natural quality of Aahar & <i>aushadha</i> like <i>guru</i> or <i>laghu</i> etc. e.g. black gram is heavy, green gram is light.
2. <i>Karana</i> (method of processing food)	Processing of substance leads to transformation to inherent characters of the substance; e.g. raw rice is heavy and rice cooked by boiling is light.
3. <i>Samyoga</i> (combination)	combination of two individual or more than two substances; Results in manifestation of specific qualities, which are not present individually. e.g. combination of ghee and honey etc.
4. <i>Rashi</i> (quantity)	Two types of quantity- 1. <i>Sarvagraha</i> - quantity of food taken as entirety, and 2. <i>Parigraha</i> - quantity of each ingredients.
5. <i>Desha</i> (place)	Place of growth of the substance in particular locality, e.g. drugs grown in Himalaya are potent etc. <i>Desh</i> divided in 3 – <i>janghal</i> , <i>anupa</i> , <i>sadharan desha</i> .
6. <i>Kala</i> (time)	<i>Nityaga kala</i> - acc. to seasons

	<i>Avasthika kala</i> - acc. to the state of disease, age(<i>bala</i> , <i>madhyam</i> , <i>vridhdha</i>)
7. <i>Upayogasamstha</i> (rules of food intake)	Dietetic rules, dependent on symptoms of digestion.
8. <i>Upayokta</i> (consumer)	Person who takes the food article or the one responsible for habitual intake of things i.e. <i>okasatmya</i> .

Rules for food intake^{xii}-

(Dietetic rules)

1. *Ushnaasniyat*- one should eat warm food
2. *Snigdhaashniyat*- intake of unctuous food
3. *Matravadasniyat*- food intake according to quantity
4. *Jeernashniyat*- eating after one feels hunger
5. *Veeryaviruddhamasniyat*- eating food which is not contradicted
6. *Ishtdeshe*- eat in desired place
7. *Naatidrutam*- do not eat in hurry
8. *Naatiavlambitam*-do not eat very slowly
9. *Ajalapana ahasan tanmana bhunjita*- eating with concentration i.e. without talking and laughing
10. *Aatmanamabhi-samikshya bhunjita samyaka*- eating after considering one-self thoroughly.

Aaharkaal-When faeces and urine are expelled, *hrdaya* gets clear, *doshas* traverse in their appropriate paths, belching becomes clear, hunger starts, the body becomes light and capable of detecting the senses; then only food or *Aahar* may be consumed.^{xiii}

Aharmatra is mentioned as half of the stomach filled with food and 1/4th with water. The rest of the stomach is to be left empty for the *dosha* 's.^{xiv} And acc. to *Charak Samhita*, quantity of food depends upon the strength of *agni*. Most of the incurable diseases are produced due to improper *Aahar*. So one should have intelligence and self-control to consume conducive food in right quantity, at the right time to prevent diseases.^{xv}

Relation between Agni and Food-

It is important to consume an appropriate amount of food. *Jatharagni* is not activated when there is insufficient or excessive food intake. For example, When *Agni* is not provided with a sufficient amount of wood, it will expire. Similarly, even if an insignificant fire is given an excessive amount of wood, it will also expire. The excessive consumption or lack of food can lead to the deterioration of *agni*, therefore emphasising the need of consuming an appropriate quantity of food for the proper functioning of the body.^{xvi}

Conclusion

Ayurveda emphasises the importance of *ahara* (diet) in maintaining and recovering health. The major findings show that *Ahara* requires meal timing, planning, and intentional eating, not just nutrition. Fresh, seasonal, well-balanced, *dosha & Rasa*-specific meals are recommended in *Ayurvedic* diets. This method aids digestion, metabolism, and illness prevention. Research shows that *Ayurvedic* diets rich in full, unprocessed foods and medicinal spices like turmeric, ginger, and cumin can improve gut health, reduce inflammation, and control stress. The findings show that *Ayurvedic* diet can address modern health issues such as gastrointestinal diseases, chronic inflammation, and mental health issues. The three *Upastambhas*—*Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmacharya*—form the basis of existence, with *Ahara* (diet) highest. Health, strength (*Bala*), complexion (*Varna*), and growth (*Upacaya*) depend on proper eating. Diet affects complexion, vocal quality, lifespan, intellect, clarity, happiness, enjoyment, sustenance, and strength. *Ahara* vigilance is necessary for pleasure, heaven, salvation, and health. *Jatharagni* (digestive fire) is essential to *Ahara*'s metabolism. Deviations from the dietary code (*Ahara Vidhi Visesayatanani*) can vitiate *Doshas* and *Dhatus*, harming health. *Prakriti*, the initial element, represents *Ahara Dravya* (food ingredients) and individual composition. *Ayurveda* emphasises the mind-body link, where pleasant emotions aid digestion and bad emotions hinder it. One can attain and sustain optimal health by following the concepts of *Ahara Vidhi Visesayatanani*, highlighting the deep knowledge contained in *Ayurvedic* lifestyle choices.

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