



## Exploring Ayurvedic Concept of Food (AHAR)

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### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, a holistic system of medicine that originated in India thousands of years ago, places great emphasis on the role of food in maintaining health and preventing disease. Ayurvedic food is based on the principles of balance and harmony, with the aim of promoting optimal health and well-being. One of the key principles of Ayurveda is the concept of doshas, which are the three fundamental energies that govern our physical and mental functions.

These doshas are Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, and each person has a unique combination of these energies that determines their individual constitution, or prakriti. Ayurvedic food aims to balance these doshas, by providing the right combination of flavours, textures, and nutrients that are appropriate for each person's constitution.

Ayurveda views health as a dynamic process that is influenced by lifestyle, diet, emotions, and environment. It emphasizes the importance of prevention and maintenance of health rather than just treatment of disease. Ayurveda suggests that a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, stress management, and adequate sleep, can help maintain the balance of the doshas and promote good health. In summary, Ayurveda defines health as a state of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, where there is balance and harmony between the individual and the environment.

### INTRODUCTION

Ayurvedic food is typically made up of fresh, whole foods that are locally grown and in season. This includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and spices. The emphasis is on natural, unprocessed foods that are rich in nutrients and easy to digest.

One of the key features of Ayurvedic food is the use of spices, which are not only used to add flavour to dishes but also have medicinal properties. Spices such as turmeric, cumin, coriander, and ginger are commonly used in Ayurvedic cooking, as they are believed to aid digestion, boost the immune system, and reduce inflammation in the body.

Another important aspect of Ayurvedic food is the concept of food combining, which involves pairing foods in a way that promotes optimal digestion and absorption of nutrients. For example, combining grains with legumes or vegetables with healthy fats can help balance the different doshas and improve overall health.

In addition to emphasizing the right foods and spices, Ayurvedic food also places great importance on the way food is prepared and consumed. Eating slowly and mindfully, in a calm and peaceful environment, is believed to aid digestion and promote a sense of well-being.

Some examples of Ayurvedic dishes include "khichri", a traditional Indian dish made from rice, lentils, and spices, and dal, a lentil-based soup that is often served with rice and vegetables. Other popular Ayurvedic foods include herbal teas, such as ginger tea and chamomile tea, and fresh fruit and vegetable juices.

Overall, Ayurvedic food is a healthy and nourishing way of eating that can help improve digestion, boost the immune system, and promote overall well-being. By following the principles of Ayurveda and choosing fresh, whole foods that are appropriate for your constitution, you can enjoy a healthy and balanced diet that supports your physical and mental health.

### DIFFERENT RASAS AND THEIR EFFECT ON DOSHAS

Ayurveda recognises six flavours in food, which can play a vital role in our physiology and health. The word Rasa means taste or the particular sense object as perceived by the tongue. Its material substances are water and earth. In the manifestation and differentiation of Rasa the other 3 mahabhoota are the causative factors [1]. There are 6 Rasas according to Charka Samhita which are-Sweet, Sour, Saline, Pungent, Bitter and Astringent[2]. These 6 Rasas can have a pacifying or an aggravating effect on tridoshas. Among these tastes the sweet, sour and saline overcome Vayu; astringent, sweet and bitter subdue Pitta and astringent, pungent and bitter win over Kapha [3].

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## IMPORTANCE OF PROPER FOOD ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA

Food is most essential for sustenance of life<sup>[4]</sup>. According to Ayurveda diet is among one of the 3 sub-pillars of life, and if the body is well supported through diet it will continue to be well endowed with strength, complexion and development<sup>[5]</sup> till the completion of one's life span.

Food is considered an essential component of Ayurveda, and a healthy and balanced diet is viewed as a key factor in maintaining health and in prevention of disease. The origin of life and disease is food. Healthy and wholesome diet is responsible for maintenance of health and processed food with unhealthy preparations are the cause of disease<sup>[6]</sup>.

Food is the vital breath of living beings and hence people rush to the food. Complexion, cheerfulness, good-voice, life, imagination, happiness, contentment, strength, intellect- all of these are dependent on food<sup>[8]</sup>.

As is stated in Charaka Samhita, "One taking wholesome food with controlled self-lives healthy for one thousand and thirty-six nights (100 years)<sup>[9]</sup>."

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## THE SUPPRESSION OF URGE OF HUNGER AND IT'S TREATMENT

The wise should not suppress the impending urge of hunger as it may cause emaciation, weakness, disorder of complexion, body ache, anorexia and giddiness. Such cases are advised to be prescribed with fatty, warm and a light diet<sup>[7]</sup>.

These effects of course, appear after a long period of starvation due to which the glucose of body has already been depleted and the breakdown of fatty acids results in the formation of ketone bodies.

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## EFFECT OF SEASONS ON THE AYUREVEDIC DIET<sup>[10]</sup>

One's diet leads to promotion of strength and complexion only if he knows the wholesomeness according to different seasons dependent on behaviour and diet. The three Doshas Vata, Pitta and Kapha are influenced by changing seasons and hence a change of diet becomes eminent with changing seasons.

During the Spring season the aggravated Kapha dosha should be pacified via intake of easily digestible foods. The taste palette should be bitter and astringent and honey, ginger should be eaten.

The summer season brings the sun at its peak and therefore, the body needs a lot of fluids to keep it cool and for the maintenance of electrolytic balance. The ideal diet includes fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants. Foods that are easier to digest are recommended in this season.

The rainy season invites sour and saline palette and *Sneha* (unctuous) to be eaten. The inclusion of *Yusha* (soup) is advised.

Autumn season aggravates the Vata dosha and hence cereals which are easily digestible are advised to include in the diet. Due to increased Vata dosha, warm foods are advised to be included in the diet.

Winter season is characterised by cold and harsh winds and a dominant Kapha dosha Ayurveda recommends meat, fat, milk and milk products, sugarcane and fermented preparations.

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## THE CONCEPT OF VIRUDDHA AHAR

The viruddha ahar or apathya ahar are defined as the food substances which adversely affect the mind and body and therefore, are the cause of dosha imbalance in our body which eventually causes diseases.

One should not have the habit of taking dried meat, dried vegetables, tuber of lotus (*Shaluka*, *Nymphaea alba* Linn.) and stalk of lotus (*Bisa*, *Nymphaea alba* Linn.) as these are heavy to digest. One should never eat meat of emaciated animal<sup>[11]</sup>.

Regular consumption of coagulated milk, cream-cheese, pork, meat of cow and buffalo, fish, curd, black-gram and wild-barley should be avoided<sup>[12]</sup>.

Accordingly, one should never eat such heavy to digest articles as preparations of flour, rice, flattened rice etc., on top of a meal. Even while hungry one should take them in right quantity<sup>[13]</sup>.

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## HEAVINESS AND LIGHTNESS OF FOOD

Heavy substances, taken in little quantities become light. Likewise, light substances become heavy if taken too much. Thus quantity is one of the factors governing heaviness and lightness of the substances. Hence, a little of heavy substance should be taken while in case of light ones, one may take them up to point of saturation<sup>[14]</sup>.

Considerations of heaviness and lightness is particularly important in case of weak, inactive, unhealthy, delicate and those accustomed to comfortable living<sup>[15]</sup>.

By this, it should not be confused that lightness and heaviness in food articles is quite inert. In fact, light articles are predominant in properties of Vayu and Agni while others (heavy ones) are the same in those of Prithvi and Soma<sup>[16]</sup>.

Considering the property of an article the intake of heavy ones is advised as one-third or half of the saturation point and not excessive saturation. Even in case of light articles in order to maintain proper strength of Agni<sup>[17]</sup>.

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## FOOD HABITS IN AYURVEDA

Ayurvedic food habits are not only limited to the right kind of food in the given season rather it focuses on the overall process of taking a meal. It doesn't just focus on the meal but also the way of eating and enhancing the experience of taking a meal by engaging all the senses.

There are eight specific factors of method of dieting such as- nature, processing, combination, quantity, place time, rules for use and consumer<sup>[18]</sup>.

Vagbhatacharya insists to take the food sitting on the floor. According to him, this intensifies the digestive fire. We should take our evening meals while the sun is still out. According to Acharya, we should have our dinner before sunset, as the digestive fire becomes dormant once the sun sets. He recommends us to take only liquid food after sunset. This is important for asthma, diabetes and Vata diseased patients<sup>[19]</sup>.

The ayurvedic way of eating promotes mindfulness. In addition to what foods you eat, mindfulness is another major part of the Ayurvedic diet. Mindfulness is a practice that involves paying close attention to how you feel in the present. In particular, mindful eating emphasizes minimizing distractions during meals to focus on the taste, texture, and smell of your food<sup>[20]</sup>.

According to one small study in 10 people, practicing mindful eating reduced body weight, depression, stress, and binge eating<sup>[21]</sup>.

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## CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic is a traditional system of medicine in food or AHAR it is deemed to be a very important aspect of well-being of an individual. The principles of Ayurvedic dieting suggest that the food we eat should be fresh, whole, natural and should be consumed in moderation.

The six tastes of Ayurveda, the pathya-apathya, the balancing of doshas and the overall composition of food in every season provides for a unique combination that keeps a holistic approach towards dieting.

In conclusion, Ayurvedic food is based on principles of natural, whole and fresh foods with emphasis on balance and individualization, by following these principles one can improve one's overall health and well-being.

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