



Concept of *Aahar* in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT-

Ayurveda focuses a lot of emphasis on diet and food, and it holds that a balanced diet nourishes the body, mind, and soul. *Ayurveda* does not categorize food as good or bad; rather, it places emphasis on a number of factors that affect it, including its biological characteristics, place of origin, environmental factors, seasons, preparation, and freshness. It also offers a logical justification for how to balance food in accordance with a person's *Dosha* and physical requirements.

Key word – *Aahar*, *Dosh*, Nutrition, *Ras*, Spices,

Introduction –

Ayurvedic living places a strong emphasis on nutrition. According to *Ayurveda*, "*Ahara*" (diet) and "*Anna*" (food) are very important for healthy life, health, and wellness. Mind, body, and spirit are all nourished by wholesome, healthy food. Despite the fact that each person's digestive ability may vary, *Ayurveda* contends that a healthy life requires eating food of a sufficient quality and quantity. Food, when consumed in the right amounts, gives you energy, a healthy complexion, and supports the health of your tissues.^{1&2}

The 6000-year-old health care system known as *Ayurveda* claims that science, philosophy, and spirituality are all important components of leading a healthy life. *Ayurveda* is regarded as a way of life as well as a complete medicinal system. The individual is a "microcosm" within the "macrocosm" and is inseparable from his or her environment.³ In other words, because one is a microcosm of the environment, they are continually affecting them. These concepts are distinctive and indicate that people should be addressed in the context of their surroundings, even though they may not be immediately obvious to the naked eye. Similar to this, maintaining harmony with one's environment and creating a diet that balances one's *Doshas* are necessary for leading a healthy life.

Unlike heavy and greasy hog meat, foods like rice may be easier to digest. As a result, the effectiveness of food digestion is frequently used to determine how much and what kind of food to eat. *Ayurveda* emphasizes that a diet must be carefully chosen and planned, not only taking into account a person's physical circumstances but also taking into account their bodily type (*Pita*, *Kapha*, or *Vata*), as well as the seasonal and daily changes as well as other natural influences that surround them. Using wholesome food promotes health, while using unwholesome food results in disease, according to *Ayurveda*.

Since taste (*Rasa*) is a key component of healthy digestion, food and food groups are categorized in accordance with their flavors.

1. Sweet (*Madhura*)
2. Sour (*Amla*)
3. Salty (*Lavana*)
4. Bitter (*Katu*)
5. Pungent (*Tikta*)
6. Astringent are the six flavours (*Rasa*) of food (*Kashaya*).

The six steps of the digestive process line up with these six tastes. Each flavour stimulates the immunological and digestive systems in a significant way. These six tastes correspond to particular metabolite digestion organs and are detected on the tongue's various anatomical locations.

1. The tongue's tip detects sweetness, which is related to the corresponding organs, thyroid glands, and apical regions of the lungs.
2. Sour affects the lungs.

3. Salt affects the child.
4. Bitter affects the pancreas, liver, and spleen.
5. Pungent affects the stomach and brain.
6. Astringent affects the colon.

Tastes (Rasas): Each taste elicited by the food, when ingested in the right quantity, contributes to the body's nourishing.

- Sweet enhances the quality of life generally, gives skin lustre, strengthens the body overall, and is good for the throat (*Charak*). However, overuse will exacerbate *kapha* and exacerbate problems including obesity, congestion, and other illnesses.
- The right digestive powers (*Agni*) are stimulated by sour tastes, which also give energy, arouse the mind, and cause salivation. However, frequent use will result in indigestion, water retention, and heartburn.
- When used in moderation, salt, which is greasy and heavy, acts as an antispasmodic, a stimulant of energy, and a supporter of electrolyte and water balance. Salt, however, causes water retention when used in excess, raises blood pressure, and causes nausea. Rock salt should be used in the diet since it contains minerals, according to *Ayurveda*.
- Bitter foods like fenugreek, aloe Vera, turmeric, and dandelion boost all other flavours. They remove fat, tone the pancreas, and function as an antipyretic. Overconsumption may make you feel lightheaded.
- Pungent assists with digestion, absorption, and sinus cleaning when used sparingly. It also promotes circulation and aids with excretion. It contributes to the body's health and vigour while acting as a blood thinner. However, overuse can result in sterility, exhaustion, and extreme thirst.
- Unripe bananas, pomegranate, and chickpeas are a few examples of astringent foods that are binding and aid in absorption. Overuse will cause blood coagulation.

However, the same food may be quickly digested and may even encourage "*Agni*" when consumed separately. *Ayurveda* offers recommendations for food combinations that promote healthy digestion and optimal nutrition. Additionally, it advises using herbs and spices when cooking to make the food easier to digest. *Ayurvedic* cooking is a brilliant science that teaches how to combine foods and other ingredients in meals in order to keep good health.^{5,6}

Ayurvedic diet: According to *Ayurveda*, every root is a medicine, so there is no such thing as a bad or good food. It also offers a logical method for creating balanced meals for optimum nutrition by creating food groups that work well together, encourage proper digestion, and maximise the absorption of vital nutrients. Food that is comparable to one's *Dosha* will make the *Dosha* worse. To balance the *Dosha*, one must therefore choose the appropriate food category. *Ayurveda* advises avoiding dietary pairings that are antagonistic, such as milk and bananas, and limiting the consumption of raw food and vegetables. She also advises learning about the effects of herbs before using them⁴.

According to *Ayurveda*, the plants and plant-based foods that make up our diet have a significant impact on both a person's physical and mental health. *Ayurveda* advises avoiding leftovers and consuming a moderate amount of raw foods in order to have appropriate digestion. It is advised to eat homemade, freshly prepared food for proper nutritional absorption. Spices are used to mellow the negative effects of the dish and make it more palatable.

Warm food is advised since it activates the *Agni* and digestive enzymes. Food intake timing is also taken into account; for example, *Vata* people may choose smaller portions and eat more frequently.

The best times to eat are at dawn and dusk. While *Kapha* persons can skip breakfast and make lunch their greatest meal, *Pitta* individuals can eat their largest meal at noon (a maximum of three times). Age and gender are further considerations. Children should follow an anti-*pitta* diet, whereas middle-aged people should follow an anti-*Vata* diet provide them an anti-*Kapha* diet. Similar to how women choose a more anti-*Kapha* diet, men may explore a more anti-*Pitta* diet. It is advised to have a calm and relaxed attitude for the best digestion. Eating should be avoided while feeling particularly strong emotions such as stress, rage, and grief, among others, as these emotions lead to irregular and abnormal digestion processes and negatively affect the mind, which serves as the hub for all sensory perception and control.

Three separate terms make up *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani*. In this instance, *Vishesa* refers to both the words *Ahara* and *Vidhi* as:

1. **Ahara Vishesa:** This term refers to *Ahara's* uniqueness, particular qualities, and distinguishing effects.
2. **Vidhi Vishesa:** This term refers to a special system, method, approach, or arrangement for nutrition intake. It also refers to a special rule or instruction.
3. **Ayatana:** This term refers to causes, supports, *Hetu*, etc.

So, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani* refers to the underlying causes of the wholesome or unwholesome effects of food or of dietary consumption techniques. These are the unique elements in dietetics and nutrition science.

These eight elements, which influence the usefulness of various types of diet, are acknowledged in the classical *Ayurvedic* writings as follows:

Table 1. *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani*

| Factor Name | Description | Justification with an Illustration |
|------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Prakrti</i> | Nature of the dietary ingredients <i>Prakrti</i> denotes the nature of the substance, i.e., the characteristics that make drugs and diets effective. | <i>Masha</i> is heavy, <i>Mudga</i> is light, <i>Sukara</i> meat is heavy, <i>Ena</i> meat is light. |
| <i>Karana</i> | Processing of ingredients in food. The inherent qualities of substances change as a result of processing. | Dilution, the use of heat, cleaning, churning, etc. all change the food's quality. |
| <i>Samyoga</i> | <i>Samyoga</i> a mixture of two or more food ingredients. | Combination of milk, fish, and honey or honey and ghee. |
| <i>Rashi</i> | Quantity of substances to be taken | Amount of drugs to be consumed <i>Sarvagraha</i> , the whole of all the things at play, and <i>Parigraha</i> , the sum of each thing on its own. |
| <i>Desha</i> | <i>Desha</i> refers to the location of food resources. | It determines how the properties of substances vary according on their geographic location, the type of soil, etc. |
| <i>Kala</i> | <i>Kala</i> Age, seasons, and circumstances as time | The concept of time is discussed in two different contexts, one of which deals with daily and seasonal variations and the other with the health and ageing of an individual. |
| <i>Upayoga Samstha</i> | It includes dietary guidelines. | |
| <i>Upayokta</i> | Habits and emotional condition It refers to a consumer of food. | It refers to a consumer of food. |

While *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* denotes the way in which food is consumed, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatana* denotes wholesome and unwholesome diet. Food is necessary for good health. There are dietary guidelines that must be followed when consuming food. One should only consume in the correct quantity.

1. *Ushna*.
2. *Snigdha*
3. *Matravat*
4. Following the breakdown of previously consumed food.
5. Steer clear of *Viruddha* Ahara.
6. Favorable environment while taking food
7. Not much slow and fast

Both healthy and unwell people can use this description provided by *Acharya Charak*, and *Acharya Sushruta* has detailed it for unhealthy people and dubbed it "*Dwadasha Asana Vichara*."

Influence of food on the mind and emotions (Hunger and Nutrition) –

According to *Ayurveda*, the quality, preparation, look, aroma, and freshness of the food directly affect the mind. All five senses are affected by these components, which also control healthy digestion. *Ayurveda* encourages choosing fresh food, preparing food by combining foods that go well together, and using herbs and spices to improve the flavour and taste of the food based on the aforementioned fundamental principles. It promotes the idea that food quality also controls mental vitality, mental agility, and emotional regulation. The food category has been divided into three basic categories by *Ayurveda*:

Satva or light foods, when eaten in the proper quantity, like fresh vegetables, rice, milk, butter, honey, fruits, and nuts will balance all three *Doshas*, promote mental harmony, and stimulate conscious awareness.

Rajas, or rich food, such as garlic, coffee, and wine, as well as fried food and food that is excessively spicy or hot will increase fantasies, feelings of envy, and ego. Even while some of these emotions may seem like undesirable qualities, others are necessary for living a normal existence.

Tamsik Foods that may require extra energy to digest include frozen foods, some root vegetables, peanuts, and leftover or slow meats. These foods might make people feel more ignorant, greedy, or lazy. With prudence, this food group should be incorporated into the diet.

Food and diet that are incompatible: According to *Ayurveda*, diets that aggravate *Dosha* and are incompatible with the season, place, time, and combination should be avoided. In terms of time and season, rough and cold food in the winter is hostile. Milk and melons are not a good meal combination, while honey and ghee in equal amounts have an antagonistic effect on the body. The digestive tract is not favoured by drinking too hot or too cold, and consuming too many nuts in the heat aggravates *Pitta*.

Appetite and Nutrition: According to modern research, there is a close relationship between food and the mind since the brain's hypothalamus controls both fullness and hunger. The lateral hypothalamus is stimulated to increase the emotional desire to seek for food. Hyperphagia could result from extreme stimulation (excessive eating).

Similar to this, stimulation of the brain's satiety centre, which is located in the ventro-medial nuclei of the hypothalamus, may result in aphagia (a refusal to eat). The brain's amygdala controls appetite and has a close relationship with the limbic system and sense of smell.

Nutritional needs, such as low blood sugar, control the feeding center's activities. The blood glucose level, metabolism of amino acids, and metabolism of fatty acids all control the sensation of hunger when the stomach is empty. This sensation is caused by stimulation of the Vagus nerve, which forces the stomach to contract. Digestive issues could result from breaking any of these rules. In order to ensure that the body is in the best possible condition for appropriate digestion, *Ayurveda* advises only eating when one is truly hungry and only filling up one-third of the stomach.

There is a direct connection between these physiological processes since the limbic system controls body temperature, appetite, and emotions. The metabolism speeds up and the amount of heat produced increases as food intake rises. *Ayurveda* advises against eating food that is too hot or too cold and against engaging in other activities while eating, such as talking excessively. Since the limbic system is responsible for processing emotions, *Ayurveda* also advises not eating when emotions like anger, anxiety, concern, or grief are present in order to optimise the digestive process.

Water intake and thirst:

The neurons in the thirst area of the hypothalamus control how much water is consumed. *Ayurveda* categorises water into eight kinds based on its source and sees it as an essential component of sustenance for life. Water is never forbidden in any situation because it is thought to be necessary for maintaining life. Warm water is calming, gastrointestinal, invigorating, and balances all the *Doshas*. It is beneficial for *Jvara*, *Asthma*, *Kapha Dosh*, and *Kasa* (bronchitis) (fever). When consumed before food, water stimulates the *Kapha Dosh* and weakens the digestive process. Only those experiencing *Murcha* (fainting), *Usma* (extreme heat), *Madatyaya* (alcohol intake), *Bramara* (giddiness), physical exhaustion, or vomiting should drink cold water because it takes longer to digest.

Water taken in modest amounts during the meal stimulates digestion, but when consumed after the meal, it results in *Sthaulya* (obesity). Excessive water consumption hinders digestion and dilutes nutrients. So it is advised to drink water frequently in little amounts. Only one-third of the stomach's capacity should be filled with water during meals.

By "*Jathar Agni*," the eaten food is digested (gastric fire). The nutrients that are consumed through food are first absorbed, then assimilated, and lastly turned into energy or consciousness. According to *Ayurveda*, this procedure is controlled by the body's *Agni*, or fire essence. *Prana*, the positive immune system, *Ojas*, and *Tejas*, the cellular intellect, are all manifestations of nourishment through *Agni*.

After food has been digested, the byproduct bathes (irrigates) the tissues with vital nutrients by passing via the circulatory system. When it comes to nutrient trafficking, water is essential. The body's tissues and other designated areas receive these nutrients, which are subsequently carried there and converted into energy.

Discussion –

All living things are considered to experience stability as a result of the diet. Diet is the only means of sustaining life for all living things. *Acharya Kashyap* claims that *Ahara* is *Mahabhaisajya*. In other words, only via food is it possible to make a person disease-free (congenial diet). Even with medicine, one cannot survive without a food, which is why doctors often refer to diet as the greatest medicine. Diet is supposed to be the foundation of everything, including life, strength, complexion, *Ojas*, growth and development, *Indriya* function, happiness, clarity of voice, lustre, pleasure, growth of *Dhatu*, intellect, and health. Only through diet can one develop satisfaction, nutrition, tolerance, *Buddhi* (critical understanding), enthusiasm, virility, strength, good voice, *Ojas*, glare, life, geniuses, and radiance, among other qualities. As a result, anyone hoping to live a long life should consume a diet that is agreeable, appropriate in quantity and time, and contains six *Rasas*. All living things' life, colour, and power come from their food. Six tastes reside in food, and these tastes are responsible for the *Doshas* augmentation, diminution, and normality. The food items, their flavour, qualities, potency, after-digestive flavour, and actions of each one individually, prepared in the form of eatables, drinkables, likeable, and chewable, by the combination of many substances, using many different processes, and having various special effects; maintains health and prevents diseases.

By consuming healthy foods, a self-controlled man can live a hundred years without contracting any diseases. Food keeps life in motion for all living things. Food is a necessity for all living things in the cosmos. Food affects a person's complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, happiness, satisfaction, sustenance, strength, and intellect. All professions that lead to worldly happiness, Vedic rituals that lead to a place in heaven and observance of the truth, and *Brahmacarya* that leads to salvation are based on food. Only those with a healthy body can afford to engage in all activities that lead to happiness, heaven, and salvation, and eating is necessary to maintain health.

Conclusion –

Ahara is defined as a substance that is ingested down the throat, hence even *Ausadha* (medicine) can be categorised as *Ahara* and subject to the same regulations as *Ahara*. In comparison to the modern perspective, the *Ayurvedic* description of *Ahara* according to *Gun*, *Satmya*, *Dosa*, *Kala*, etc. seems

more rational & scientific. Every element mentioned in *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* has a purpose and is in charge of preserving health. The value of it on a somatic, psychological, and spiritual level is highlighted in addition to its importance on a somatic level. *Ayurvedic* dietetics relies on the status of *Agni Bala* for each and every individual rather than adhering to current rules that fix a constant amount of *Ahara* for all people generally.

Kala is the most crucial element of all the elements mentioned for *Ahara*. As *Matra*, *Ahara Parinama*, *Bala*, and even *Agni* depend on *Kala*, so do the other variables like them, such as *Agni*. The sunrise is later than usual when the days are shorter, which is why *Ahara Kala* is referred to as *Pratah*. But because the sun rises earlier over longer days, *Apranah* is also known as *Ahara Kala*. These three variables affect one's health. At least two of the components must be taken into account for health maintenance, and if even one more of these factors is compromised, health deteriorates and disease results.

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