

## Integrating Ahara Vidhi Regulations into Daily Routine for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

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### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, emphasizes holistic well-being—physical, mental, social, and spiritual—through preventive and promotive health approaches, with *ahara* (diet) playing a central role in maintaining balance. To review the eight-fold dietary guidelines (*Aṣṭa Ahara Vidhi Viśeṣayatanani*) from Charaka Saṃhita *Vimāna Sthāna*, analyzing their relevance in natural equilibrium, growth, and disease prevention in contemporary daily life. A conceptual analysis of classical Ayurvedic texts detailing Ahara's influence on dhatu (tissue) balance, constructive processes, and overall health. The eight dietary determinants—*prakṛiti* (natural qualities), *karāṇa* (processing), *samyoga* (combination), *rasi* (quantity), *deśha* (habitat), *kala* (time/season), *upayoga-saṃsthā* (dietary etiquette), and *Upayokta* (individual constitution)—are explored in depth.

**Keywords:** Ahar, Dietetics in Ayurveda.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda a science of life has been in existence since the beginning of time. It is more than just a medical system. We all are part and parcel of nature. The health is supreme foundation for the achievement of happy life. The objective of Ayurveda is to accomplish the physical, mental social and spiritual well being by any of adopting preventive and promotive approach as well as to treat the diseases with its various remissive approaches. Ayurveda helps to maintain the health in a person by using the inherent principles of nature to bring the individual back into equilibrium with their true self. Ahara plays a pivot role in the prevention as well as in the treatment of diseases. It plays an important role in establishing the phenomena of wear and tear, process of growth and repair supply of energy for all physical activities etc. It is one of the *Trayopastambha*<sup>1</sup>, without which the life cannot exist. The very same fact is stressed while describing the synonyms of the body as 'DEHA' and 'SHARIRA'. This further indicates that the maintenance of health is carried out by the homeostasis in the various physiological constituents in the body. Wholesome diet is prime cause for the growth and development of the body, on the contrary, unwholesome diet causes several diseases. Wholesomeness of Ahara varies as person to person. *Ahara Vidhi Viśeṣayatanani* are the factors, which are guidelines for the selection of wholesome diet. Acharya Charaka has described 8 factors as Ahara Vidhi *Viśeṣayatanani* in *Vimāna Sthāna* Ist chapter that should be followed Definition & Derivation of Ahara<sup>2</sup>: The word "AHARA" is very much familiar since time immemorial. The word is derived from the root "HRN HARANE" means - To be taken in. The substance which is to be taken in or swallowed in, through the throat is called AHARA. Dalhana has stated that which is swallowed through *Annanalika* (esophagus) is called AHARA. While commenting on the description of Ahara, Chakrapani has said that Ahara means that which is ingested and thus it includes in itself both diet and drugs.

Role of Ahara in Growth, Strength, Maturity and Activities of Life: From the time of conception the body grows, develops strength, and gradually matures. Kala Yoga, *Swabhava Samsiddhi*, Ahara *Sausthava* and *Avighata* are the factors responsible

for the growth of the body. Excellence of the ingested food is one among the causative factors which are responsible for the growth. *Dhatusamy* and *Dhatu Vaishamy* are the two states of the body. Disturbance in the equilibrium of Dhatus is known as disease and the state of equilibrium reflects upon the health. Ayurvedic classics, especially in the Charaka Samhita, the doctrine of *Swabhavoparama Vada* is mentioned (Doctrine of Natural destruction) which states that "constructive and destructive processes in the body run side by side. Perfect cause is there for the manifestation of the beings. But there is no such cause for the destruction of the body. Ahara (Food) is the main factor responsible for the constructive activities of the body. Ayurveda places special emphasis on Ahara and states that complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, life, imagination, happiness, contentment, corpulence, strength, intellect etc. all are dependent on *Ahara*. The process of construction and destruction profoundly influences the body. Predominance of one or the other depends on *Avastha* (age).

**Selection of Food- Guidelines** -Regarding the *Satmya-Asatmya* qualities of Ahara, Ayurvedic classics have laid down some rules and regulations for taking the diet. Even though a man takes wholesome Ahara, he should have to observe the dietetic rules, to achieve proper digestion, assimilation and health of the body. Both healthy persons as well as patients should follow these rules. Charaka has laid down eight factors, determining the utility of food, which are known as "*Ashtau Ahara Vidhi Vishesayatana*". Ahara may be wholesome as well as unwholesome. The wholesomeness depends upon the variation in dose, time, method of preparation, habitat, constitution of body, disease the age of an individual. Due to the above reason Ayurvedic classics have laid down some examination methods, rules and regulations for taking diet. Even though a man takes wholesome Ahara, he should have healthy person as well as patients should exam these points while selecting the food. to examine the following points to achieve the proper digestion, assimilation and nourishment to the body. Both healthy person as well as patients should exam these points while selecting the food.

**Definition:** Ahara Vidhi Vishesayatana consist three different words. Here, *Vishesa* relates to both word - Ahara and Vidhi as, 1) Ahara Vishesa, 2) Vidhi Vishesa, 3) Ayatana.

Here *Ahara Vishesa* means: Speciality, special property, distinguished effect (of Ahara). Special command or Special statement for diet intake. *Vidhi Visesa* means: Special system, Special method, Special manner, Special way, Special arrangement, Special rule, the body. Both healthy person as well as patients should exam these points while selecting the food.

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*Ayatana*: Cause, support, *hetu* etc. Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesayatana* means the causative factors which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the food or of the method for the diet intake. These are the special factors in the science of diet and dietetics. These different factors give rise to *Hitakara* (favorable) and *Ahitakara* (Unfavorable) effects and are helpful to one another.

**Detailed Description:** Eight factors are mentioned by Acarya Charaka<sup>2</sup> in Vimana Sthana 1st chapter as -

Application of *Ahara Vidhi Vishesayatana* in Present Scenario in Maintenance of Health

- 1) *Prakriti* - Nature of substances
- 2) *Karana* - Processing of substances
- 3) *Samyoga* - Combination of different substances
- 4) *Rashi* - Quantum of substances to be taken
- 5) *Desha* - Habitat of substances
- 6) *Kala* - Time as age, seasons and conditions
- 7) *Upayoga Samstha* - Dietetic rules
- 8) *Upayokta* - Habit and state of individual

These are the 8 factors, which are most important from the preventive and curative aspect of health. They are to be examined before food intake and are to be followed during food intake. Before taking any food articles a person has to think about the nature of natural qualities of *Ahara Dravyas*. This is the examination of *Prakriti*.

- 1) *Prakriti* (Nature of Substances): *Prakriti*<sup>3</sup> indicates the nature of substances, i.e. inherent attributes (heaviness etc.) of diet and drugs e.g. *Masha* (*Phaselus radiatus* Linn.) is heavy and *Mudga* (*Phasenlus Mudga* Linn) is light due to their *Prakriti*. Like-wise meat of *Sukara* (Boar) is heavy and that of *Yena* (Deer) is light for digestion by nature. Before taking food articles one has to decide about the *Prakriti* of food articles, i.e. whether its property is *Ushna* or

Shita or is it *Swabhavatah Guru* or *Laghu*. These types of examinations are must be done. But on the contrary *Prakriti Parikshana* is not so important for the person who have strong digestive power. Hence, it could be said that, the *Prakriti* is most important factor, that's why it has been given first place among the eight factors. The *Ahara dravya* must be used after the examination of *Prakriti*. So the physician must know about *Prakriti* of *Ahara Dravya*. *Prakriti* is such a factor which gives the complete knowledge about anything and here in the context of *Ahara Dravya* the knowledge of *Prakriti* gives more and complete information about food items which are to be consumed.

- 2) *Karana* (Processing of substances): *Karan*<sup>4</sup> means the processing of the inherent attributes of substances. Processing results in the transplantation of the desired attributes in the substances. Transplantation of the attribute is caused by dilution, application of heat, cleansing, churning, storing, maturing, flavouring, impregnation, preservation and through container etc. A physician must know about the various types of *Samskara*, because as one can get benefit from *Samskara*, due to ignorance, at the same time one can also get bad side effects from *Samskara*. Probably all efforts are made to increase bioavailability<sup>5</sup>.
- 3) *Samyoga* (Combination of Substances): After applying various types of *Samskara*<sup>6</sup>, if physician cannot get desirable effect, at that time Physician has to use *Ahara Dravya* with the combination of other *Ahara Dravya*, is called *Samyoga*. *Samyoga* is the combination of two or more substances. This results in the manifestation of specific attributes, which cannot be manifested by individual substances, e.g. combination of honey & ghee or honey, fish and milk<sup>7</sup>. Here, one thing should be clear that *Samyoga* and *Samskara*, both are quite different factors. *Samskara* is the process, which involves the union of one substance with another one or more where the drug is totally impregnated with other, it cannot identify separately. And the last quality of combination is different with the quality of combine substances.
- 4) *Rashi* (Quantum of Substances): When the *Prakriti* is not suitable and *Samskara* and *Samyoga* are also not applicable, in this situation, the physician has to manage quantity of *Ahara* and is called *Rashi*<sup>8</sup>. *Rashi* is the quantum of total (*Sarvagraha*) or individual (*Parigraha*) substances which determines the results of their administration in proper and improper dosages. The quantity food taken in its entirety is "*Sarvagraha*" and the quantity of each of its ingredients is "*Parigraha*"<sup>9</sup>. Quantity of all things involved is *Sarvagraha* and that of each and everything individually is *Parigraha*. For the purpose of taking food, the stomach capacity should be divided into three parts; one part of it should be filled up with solid food, the second part with liquids and the third part should be left for *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*<sup>10</sup>. One who takes food with due regard to this principle, does not fall a victim to any of the harmful effects which arise out of food taken in improper quantity. Unless a portion of the stomach is left empty for *Dosha*, the food itself will get vitiated by them. Here the apportionment of the stomach capacity into three does not mean that they should all be equal. In fact, this apportionment should be based on the equal requirement of each of three factors, viz. Solid food, liquid food and *Dosha*, obviously solid food should occupy the biggest portion of the stomach. *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* have different abodes in the body, but in comparison to the solid food, their space requirement is very small in as much as they are all clubbed up in one portion of the stomach.
- 5) *Desha* (Habitat of Substances): *Desha*<sup>11</sup> is the factor which is not only concerned to the *Ahara* but also to the *Upayokta*. *Desa* relates to the habitat. It determines attributes due to –

Procreation (Growth) : Drugs growing in Himalaya are very efficacious and those in deserts are light.

**Movement of substances in particular locality:** Animal which graze light food or those inhabiting deserts or those who are very active are light; otherwise, they are heavy. Their acclimatization to that region : One can acclimatized to different types of localities by using substances having opposite qualities, e.g. use of hot and unctuous substances in marshy land and cold and unctuous substances in deserts.

- 6) *Kaal* (Time): In Indian system of medicine, there has been a thorough consideration for seasons, besides the dietetic regimens for days and nights. Life as a whole starting from intrauterine period till death is all the time dynamic. One is bound to face minor or major changes in every moment of life and thereby, *Doshas* are also variable accordingly, based upon the strength of sun and moon outside and the variabilities of body *Doshas* and their control through certain *Ahara* and *Vihara*. So in the Drug research *Kala* is to be considerable.
- 7) *Upayoga Samstha* (Dietetic rules): *Upayoga Samstha* stands for the dietetic rules. They are for the most part dependent on the symptoms of digestion. These are the dietetic rules which are to be followed while taking the food. One should consume only that in proper quantity which is -
  - *Usna*
  - *Snigdha*
  - *Matravat*
  - Is consumed after the digestion of previously ingested food

- *Virya Aviruddha Ahara*
- Is to be taken into *Iste Dese* where it provided with *Ista Sarvopakarana*
- Not to be taken speedily
- Not to be taken too slowly
- Taken without talking with others
- Taken without laughing
- Taken with the concentration of the mind
- Taken after paying due regard to oneself

Healthy individuals as well as some of the patients should observe the following, even while using such of the food articles as are more wholesome by nature; one should eat only that food in proper quantity which is hot, unctuous and not contradictory in potency and that too, after the digestion of the previous meal. Food should be taken in proper place equipped with all the accessories, without talking and laughing, with concentration of mind and paying due regard to oneself.

- 8) *Upayokta* (Habit of The Individual): *Upayokta* is he, who takes food, is in the main responsible for the wholesomeness by the habitual intake of things (Oka *Satmya*). Creating wholesomeness by habitual intake of thing does not come under the preview of Desha; it is described under *Upayokta*. It is known as a *Satmya* which differs person to person.

Conclusion: The healthy bodies as well as the diseases are nothing but the outcome of Ahara. Out of all the factors for maintenance of positive health, properly food taking occupies the most important position because diet or Ahara is the basic medicament other than any substance. Though one is not able to sustain life without Ahara. In today's fast paced life, many norms regarding diet & regimen have been compromised which is showing the overall declining status of health in the society. Ahara and its related codes and conducts have been long forgotten by the human being. Nowadays, we are neglecting the digestive capacity, nutritional value of food products, time sense of food intake and are more interested in eating tasty, ready to eat food materials. All these factors leads to manifestation of different metabolic diseases. It is also observed that many diseases are arising merely due to these faulty dietary habits. In this context, concept of Ashta *Aharavidhi visheshayataneis* most ideal in today's lifestyle.

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