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Healthy Way Of Eating Food - *Ayurvedic* Guidelines

Anamika Gupta¹, Vd. Sudipta Kumar Rath²

1. PG Scholar, Dept. of Dravyaguna Vigyana, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

2. Asso. Professor, Department of Dravyaguna Vigyana, National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

ABSTRACT: Introduction - Health is an outcome of proper food (input), proper digestion and metabolism (throughout) and proper utilization and excretion (output). Currently a vast body of information on the nutritional requirement is available and accordingly guidelines are also widely available for better health. It is interesting to note that despite this information, we are not able to achieve the goals of healthy diet even if amongst the population who are using these healthy diets. The reason for this, as described in *Ayurveda* is the lack of proper knowledge of individualized dietary guidelines (based on *Prakriti*, *Desha* and *Kala*) and the rules pertaining to consumption of diet (*Ahara vidhi visheshayatan*). Therefore, it is pertinent to review the whole gamut of guidelines about food and way to consume food as described in *Ayurveda* so as to improve the existing dietary guidelines.

Materials and methods- This study comprises collection and critical review of literature in the ancient classical texts, scientific journals, research papers, dissertation etc.

Observations - *Ayurveda* describes that the dietary requirements are different based on the *Prakriti*, place of origin and residence and time of consumption of food. The concept is alike the personalized medicine concept of modern medicine and can be termed as Personalized Diet. Further, *Ayurveda* lays a lot of importance on how the food has to be consumed for optimum utilization. *Charaka* states that there are eight important factors which can lead to proper utilization of consumed diet or otherwise. These include the nature of the food, the processing and its effect on the diet, etc. Awry consideration of these in the pursuit of taste can lead to long term harmful effect on the user.

Discussion and conclusion – It is quite evident that a more holistic dietary guideline is prescribed in *Ayurveda* in comparison to the present trend of dietary guideline. Following this holistic individual healthy way of eating food is the key to achieve optimum health.

Keywords: *Ahara vidhi*, dietary guidelines, *ayurvedic*, healthy eating.

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Corresponding Author : Anamika Gupta,
P.G. Scholar, P.G. Department of Dravyaguna
Vigyana, NIA, Jaipur, Email id-
aanamika208@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION:

The disease incidence pattern in the 21st century has shifted to lifestyle disorders from the infectious ones. Most of the lifestyle disorders can be rooted back to faulty dietary habits. Although, diet is the most important input in sustenance of health and life, owing to ignorance and faulty habits, people often consume food which is detrimental to their health. *Ayurveda* postulates that maintenance and promotion of health along with prevention of disease is far more important than management of the diseases. *Ayurveda* goes on state that by following proper lifestyle and appropriate diet as per the guidelines, one can remain healthy.

There is detailed description regarding the dietary guidelines in *Ayurveda* concerning dietary ingredients, their processing, when

and how to eat them, etc. Traditionally, in India this knowledge was known to the generations but in the recent past due to the irrational westernization of our lives, people almost have lost touch with this traditional wisdom. The current trend of dietetic advice is by and large limited to the types of diet and their quantity. This approach lags behinds the *ayurvedic* larger holistic approach of dietetics which includes individualized dietetic decisions, how to cook food and how to take it and when to take it. All these are covered under the ambit of *ahara vidhi* (Dietary guidelines).

Diet is said to be best sustainer of life¹ so as to so much that *Charaka* states that the human beings and the diseases are nothing but output of their diet². Therefore, proper

diet taken as per proper guidelines is critically required for health. But, we should not misconstrue that only proper diet can ensure health because there are other causes of diseases.³

Ayurveda in a holistic manner consider many factors like *prakriti*, *Agni*, habitat (*desha*), age, season, type of processing, source of ingredients, etc. for determining an individualised dietic practice for achievement of optimum health. This paper contemplates to dwell upon such factors in order to spread greater public awareness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS-

This study comprises of:

- a) Collection of literature in the ancient classical texts, scientific journals, research papers, dissertation etc. concerned with the concept.
- b) Critical review of the compiled literature and suggestions derived therefrom.

DISCUSSION-

After reviewing the literature thoroughly, it is observed that the guidelines pertaining to diet can be classified into three major categories:

- A. Pertaining to the person.
- B. Pertaining to the nature.
- C. Pertaining to the diet and dietary substances.

A. Pertaining to the person:

- a) **Prakriti:**⁴ One should prefer food on the basis of *prakriti*. As in case of *vataja prakriti*, one should prefer to have *Sneha, ushnadi guna ahara*. In case of *pittaja prakriti*, one should prefer *madhura, tikta, Kashaya* and *sheeta guna ahara*. In case of *kaphaja prakriti*, one should prefer to have *katu, tikta, Kashaya* as well as *ruksha guna ahara*.
- b) **Desha:**⁵ As there are three types of *desha* are mentioned i.e. *jangala desha, anupa desha* and *sadharana desha*. In *jangala desha*, the dominance of *vata* and *pitta dosha* is found. E.g. Bikaner, Jaisalmer, etc. here the people should prefer to have *snigdha, madhura* as well as *sheeta ahara*. In *anupa desha*, the dominance of *vata* and *kaphadosha* is found. E.g. Assam, orissa, etc. in *sadharana desha*, the *doshas* are found to be in normal proportion i.e. *samadosha*. E.g. Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, etc.

- c) **Kala:**⁶ Before consuming *ahara*, one should also know about the *kala* whether it is *nityaga* or *awasthika kala*. In *nityaga kala*, one should prefer *ahara* intake according to *ritucharya*. In *awasthika kala*, *ahara* according to disease should be taken. As according to age, one should take diet, on the basis of disease, diet also changes and as that during pregnancy, one should not take *tikshna, ushna ahara dravya*.
- d) **Upyogasanstha:**⁷ It is related to procedure of taking food i.e. rules of use. One should consume food according to the rules. These are referred to as dietetic rules. Symptoms of proper digestion should also be included in dietetic rules because intake of food before the previous food gets digested may provoke all the three doshas leading to serious consequences. An individual should not eat within three hours and do not starve beyond six hours.
- e) **Upyokta:**⁸ *Upyokta* is one who consumes food. This is also the main person on which the rules of mainly depends upon as how one individual consumes food. As mentioned in *sushruta*, one should recline like a king after taking food and then walk hundred steps at leisure and then lean on left side and relax.
- f) **Agni:**⁹ *Agni* is considered to be the root or the most important sustaining factor (moola) of living beings. As mentioned in *charaka*, diminished *agni* leads to death of an individual. (ref) *Agni* is of four types: *vishamagni, teekshanagni, mandagni* and *samagni*. In *vishamagni*, *ahara* gets digested in *vishamaawastha* i.e. sometimes it gets easily digested whereas sometimes, it is difficult to digest even the *laghu ahara dravyas* and hence *agni* is also the main factor. In *teekshanagni*, *ahara* gets digested very fastly, no matter the person is eating *guru* or *laghu ahara*. In *mandagni*, it is difficult to digest even *laghu ahara* and hence it causes *vidaha*, which results in formation of *aama* and ultimately it leads to various disorders. In *samagni*, food gets digested normally without causing any discomfort to the person.
- g) **Matravata:**¹⁰ One should prefer to take *ahara* in proper proportion and quantity which do not causes vitiation of *doshas*, propels ahead smoothly, so that excretion is smooth. Quantity also depends upon the quality of the food i.e. *guru* substances should be taken in such

a way that one still feels hungry and *laghu* substances should be taken till one feels just full.

- h) **Jeerne:**¹¹ Food should be consumed only when the previous food gets digested. As when food gets digested, *agni* also gets *dipta*, *strotas* gets clear and open and there is no chance of having discomfort.
- i) **Virya- viruddha:**¹² Avoid eating incompatible food i.e. honey with hot substances, fish with milk, sour substances with milk, etc. as it leads to various disorders.
- j) **Atidruta:**¹³ One should not consume food very fastly as it may enter into a wrong passage. In this situation one can never determine the taste of food articles and the food taken so hurriedly can obviously affect the power of digestion by increasing the *vata*.
- k) **Ativilambhita:**¹⁴ One should not eat food very slowly as the person didn't get any satisfaction after eating that food and even the food gets cold which didn't taste well and hence it leads to *vishamata* of *ahara paka*.
- l) **Ajalpana, ahasana, tanmanabhunjita:**¹⁵ one should not laugh, talk and with distracted mind while having food as it may vitiate

doshas and hence causes improper digestion of food.

- m) **Aatamanamabhisamikshyabhunjita:**¹⁶ one should take food in a prescribed manner, with due regard to his own self. The person should eat rightly by considering one's own constitution, compatibility and needs.

B. Pertaining to the nature:

- a) **Desha:** According to *desha*, properties of substance also change which grows in that particular area and it becomes *oksatmya* to the person living over there.
- b) **Kala:** *kala* also plays an important role as in *nityaga kala*, one should take diet according to *dincharya* and *ritucharya* as mentioned in the text.
- c) **Ishte desha sarvopakarna:**¹⁷ While taking food, person should also give importance to the environment as environmental factors also plays an important factor as it affects our psychology. Consuming food in healthy environment leads to healthy lifestyle as well as intake of food in an unhealthy environment leads to various *manovikaras*.

C. Pertaining to the diet and dietary substances:¹⁸

- a) **Prakriti:** It is the quality or nature of *ahara dravya*. It means we should know about its quality whether it is *guru* or *laghu*, *sheeta* or *ushna*, etc. for e.g. person having aggravated *vata* in his body should avoid consuming *sheeta* as well as *ruksha ahara* as it will aggravate *vata dosha* more predominantly. As in texts, the *gunas* of some *dhanya* is also given as *mudga* having *laghu guna* and *masha* having *guru guna*.
- b) **Karana:** It is processing of substances or *sanskara*. By doing *sanskara*, the alteration in the quality of *dravyas* is seen. *Samskara* may be *jalasamyoga*, *Agni sannikarsha*, *manthana*, *bhavana*, etc. e.g. *Dadhi* is said to be heavy for digestion but after doing *samskara*, *dahi* becomes *laghu* i.e. *dahi* is mainly responsible for *shotha vikaras* but when it undergoes churning process, it becomes buttermilk having *laghu* nature i.e. light for digestion and helps in reduction of *shotha*.

- c) **Samyoga:** It is defined as the combination of two or more than two substances and these results in the manifestation of new qualities which cannot be obtained by using the same substance separately. For e.g. the combination of honey and ghee, they should not be taken in equal quantity as it is toxic to body. Also milk and fish should not be taken together, though both of them tastes sweet but due to the contradiction in their potency they obstruct the *strotas* and hence causes various diseases.
- d) **Ushna ahara:** *Ahara dravya* should be taken *ushna* (hot) as it tastes well, digests easily, eases *vata* and lowers *kapha*.
- e) **Snigdham:** *Snigdha ahara* tastes more, increases digestive enzymes, digests easily, eases *vata*, builds tissues, increases strength, improves complexion also.
- f) **Rashi:** It is preferred as quantity. One should take *ahara* in proper quantity. Quantity of food depends upon the *agni* of an individual. It is divided into two types i.e. *sarvagraha* and *parigraha*. *Sarvagraha* refers to the *ahara*

dravya which is taken in *pinda* form i.e. combined form of pulses, rice, etc. and *parigraha* refers to quantity of each of its ingredients. In modern era, they mainly focus on *parigraha* as they specify the amount of carbohydrate, protein etc. to be taken.

CONCLUSION-

- *Ahara* is the most important factor for maintenance and promotion of health.
- Dietary practice should be determined in an individualised manner.
- Dietary practice is a dynamic process and it involves all the factors mentioned above.

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