

Conceptual Study Of Ahara (Mahabhaisajya)

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Abstract

The food is said to be cause of stability for all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living beings. Ahara is said to be **Mahabhaisajya** by Kashyapacarya, hence no medicament like diet is available. One cannot sustain life without diet even of endowed with medicine that is why the diet is said to be the great medicament by physician. Commenting upon above said aphorism, other authors have also accepted the importance of diet specially the beneficial one. Diet is said to be basis of life, strength, complexion, Ojas, growth and development, clarity of Indriyas, happiness, clarity of voice, lustre, pleasure, increase of Dhatus, intellect, health etc; entire life of individual depends upon food, all the activities of this world, as well as efforts made for eternal emancipation depend upon diet, thus cereals are the greatest in the comparison of other things.

Keywords: Ahara, Mahabhaisajya, Kashyapacarya, Indriyas, Dhatus.

INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction, nutrition, patience, Buddhi (critical understanding) enthusiasm, virility, strength, good voice, Ojas, glare, life, geniuses and radiance etc. all such qualities in the human beings develop only from diet that is why the person desirous of long life should eat the diet which is congenial, appropriate in quantity and taking in proper time having six Rasas ¹.

Defination & Derivation

In Sabda Kalpadrma ² Ahara word is derived from

AAHARH: - PUM + AANG + H + DHYA

DRAVYAGLADH KARNAM

According to this derivation, the meaning of word Ahara is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating. Similar type of description is given in Halayudhakosha.

In Vacaspatyam ³ the word Ahara is stated as food & it is derived as follows

AAHARH:- PUM + AANG + H + DHYA AAHARNE

UPSARYOGAT BHOJNE

In Amara Kosha ⁴ Ahara word is derived as

AAHARNAM +HYA + DHYA

From the above statement it can be concluded that the word Ahara means any substance which is taken in via the mouth and swallowed through throat.

Dalhana:⁵ Substance which is swallowed through Annanalika (oesophagus) is called Ahara.

Chakrapani:⁶

AAHIYAT ITYAHARO BHESHJAM.

Ahara means that which is ingested and thus it includes in itself both diet and drugs.

Gangadhara:⁷ Gangadhara has also supported the view of Chakrapani by commenting, that which is ingested by the tongue down to the throat, is called Ahara. Therefore drugs are also included in Ahara.

Modern Dictionary meaning of word Ahara

- **Collins dictionary:** defined the word food as "Any substance that can be ingested by a living organism and metabolized into energy and body tissue is known as food".

- **According to TABER's dictionary:** food is defined as "any material that provides the nutritive requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical well being.

Importance of Diet:

Food is the cause of strength, colour and vitality of all living beings. Food is dependent on six tastes which are residing in substances. The level of Doshas whether it increased, decreased or in normalcy stage; is dependent on the tastes, qualities, potencies and taste after digestion of the substance.

Ahara vidhi:

Pranah pranabhritanam tadyuktya nihantyasun.

Visham pranaharam tachh yuktiyuktam rasayanam.

(Ch.Chi.24/60)

Ahara is not only needed for the continuity of life but for Bala, Varna, Upachaya also. The proper diet taken in proper manner can lead to better health. On the contrary proper diet if not taken in proper manner can lead to diseases. Ahara, as well as the method of its intake both have equal importance according to Ayurveda. In other medical sciences, food is considered important but not the manner of eating. In Ayurveda, proper method of intake food as well as effects of improper methods of intake on body are also stated. According to Charaka, Aushadhis are of two types depending on the nature of composition.

i) Dravyabhuta Ausadhi

ii) Adravyabhuta Ausadhi

Ahara Dravyas can be considered under the category no (i) as **Aaharam to mahabhaisajyam** Regarding second category, Chakrapani has commented in Charak viman sthan.

Tatra yaddravyabhootam tadupayabhiluptam. (ch.vi.8/87)

So, the dietetic rules can be considered as category no (ii) Upaya or Adravyabhuta Ausadhi.

Ahara Vidhi-

A system, method, manner, way, arrangement, rule, law, command, conduct, condition or statement for diet intake (V.S.Apte).

Vishesha - Speciality, special property, distinguished effect (of Ahara Vidhi).

Ayatana - Cause, support, hetu, etc. Thus, Ahara Vidhi Vishesha Ayatana means the causative factors responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the methods for diet intake. They are as

Prakritikaransamyogarashideshkalopayogsansthopayoktrashtamani bhavanti. (ch.vi.1/21)

These factors explore each and every aspect of Ahara. Among these, the seventh factor is Upayogasamsth. These are the dietetic rules i.e. Ahara - Vidhi - Vidhana. Any kind of alteration in these Ahara - Vidhi - Vidhana leads to the imbalance of Dosha which creates the diseases. People generally do not aware of this and therefore suffer from lot of diseases and also recurrence of the diseases. This Ahara - Vidhi - Vidhana is useful for Swasthyarakshana i.e. for maintenance of health as well as treatment because Nidanaparivarjana is the 1st principle of treatment. In view of the association of painful diseases with irregular dieting, a wise person who has control over his senses should take wholesome food in proper quantity and in proper time. If consumed according to rules they provide fuel to the fire of digestion; they promote mental as well as physical strength, strength of tissue elements and complexion and they are pleasing to the senses.

Otherwise they are harmful.

Hitashi syanmitashi syatkalbhaji jitendriyah.

Pashyan rogan bahun kastannbuddhiman vishnashnat. (ch.ni.6/11)

Ahara Vidhi means the method for diet intake **Vidhana** means statement, code, rules etc. Thus Ahara Vidhi Vidhana means the rules for diet intake mentioned by Charakacharya in Vimanasthana. Healthy individuals as well as some of the patients should follow the things stated after. One should eat only that food which is:

- 1) In proper quantity
- 2) Hot
- 3) Unctuous
- 4) Not contradictory in potency
- 5) After the digestion of the previous meal
- 6) In proper place equipped with all the accessories
- 7) Without talking
- 8) Without laughing

9) With concentration of mind

10) With paying due regard to oneself.

Susruta Samhita gives very descriptive view regarding this subject. It is explained as 'Aharavidhi'.⁹ Under this heading, the following topics are included.

- **PAKSTHAN VICHARAH** (Kitchen regimen)
- **BHOJANSTHAN VICHARAH** (Dining Place)
- **KALBHEDEN AAHARVIDHI** (Dining time)
- **AKALBHOJAN DOSHKATHANAM** (Disadvantages of improper dining time)
- **HEYANNKATHNAM** (Unedible food)
- **SWADISHTHA ANNAGUNAH LAKSHANANI** (Considerations with tasteful foods)
- **BHOJNOTTARM SEVYANI VARJYANI** (Post meal regimen)
- **BHOJANE KRAMVICHARAH** (Sequence / order of food articles)

In Ashtanga Samgraha, author has written one whole chapter named "Annapanavidhi". In this chapter Vagbhatacarya had given the unwholesome effects of Ruksha, Atisnigdha, Atiushna, Shita Anna along with the compilation from ancient classics mainly Charaka and Sushruta.¹⁰

Ashtanga Hridaya compiles the references in brief in Matrashitiya adhyaya of Sutrasthana.¹¹ Yoga Ratnakara had given this topic under the heading of "Nitya .

Vritti Prakarah."¹² Bhava Prakasha had given this topic in the chapter of Dinacharya.¹³ Many other authors have given the description, but all have followed the above authors in some or other way.

1. Ushna Bhojana (Intake of warm food):

USHNAMSHNIYAT. (Ch.Vi.1/25)

One should take warm food.

Advantages of taking Ushna Ahara are as follows: ¹⁴

- When taken warm, it is delicious
- Provokes the factors (enzymes) in the abdomen responsible for digestion
- Gets digested quickly because it helps secretion of saliva and secretion of Gastric juice.
- Helps in detachment of Kapha
- Lightness in body

Ati – Ushna Ahara as a cause of disease:

- Udakavaha Srotasa dushti
- Raktavaha Srotasa dushti
- Antarvidradhi
- Nijashotha
- Raktapitta
- Udara
- Pandu
- Vatarakta
- Hridroga
- Ushnavata

Disadvantages of taking Shita Ahara are as follows: ¹⁵

A person who takes very cold food suffers from abdominal pain, softness of Grahani Dosha, hate for food, aggravation of Kapha and Vata, cough and hiccup and also debility, loss of taste, weak digestive capacity, oppression in the chest (nausea), stasis of food for long time inside and horripilations.

Shita Ahara as a cause of disease:

- Rasavaha Srotasa dushti
- Antarvidradhi
- Vataja Gulma
- Krimi
- Anantavata
- Arsha
- Bhagandara
- Grahani Dosha

- Vatavyadhi
- Bijopaghataja Klaihya
- Samana Vayu Dushti
- Prameha
- Kaphaprakopa
- Sthaulya

2. Snigdha (Intake of unctuous food):

SNIGDHAMSHNIYAT. (Ch.Vi.1/25)

One should take unctuous food.

Advantages of taking Snigdha Ahara are as follows:

- Unctuous food is delicious
- Provokes the subdued power of digestion; it gets digested quickly
- Helps in the downward movement of Vata
- Gets digested quickly
- Increases the plumpness of the body
- Strengthens the sense faculties
- Brings out the brightness of complexion
- Promotes strength
- Increases the prowess

Dissadvantages of Ati-snigdha Ahara:¹⁶

The person who takes very unctuous food suffers from drowsiness, thirst, indigestion, diseases of abdomen and throat, diseases caused due to Kapha and Meda, excess salivation, heaviness of the heart, laziness and loss of taste (appetite).

Atisnigdha Ahara as a cause of disease:

- Rasavaha Srotasa dushti
- Raktavaha Srotasa dushti
- Krimi
- Prameha
- Urustambha
- Kustha
- Vatarakta
- Sthaulya
- Chhardi

Disadvantages of Ruksha Ahara:¹⁷

The person who takes dry food suffers from constipation, Udavarta (upward movement of gases), discoloration, languor, over eating, vitiation of Vata, retention of urine, loss of strength, dryness of skin, obstruction to the movement of flatus and faeces.

Ruksha Ahara as a cause of disease:

- Pranavaha Srotasa dushti
- Anantavata
- Antarvidradhi
- Udara
- Grahani Dosha
- Vatavyadhi
- Bijopaghataja Klaihya
- Ardhavabhedahka
- Kshatakshina
- Udavarta
- Vatarakta
- Apana Vata dushti
- Karshya
- Kshaya

3. Matravat (Intake of food in proper quantity) :

In Charaka and Kashyapa Samhita, there is reference about Matra (Quantity) of food. While in Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya there is reference about Guru - Laghu Ahara. Actually, Matra and Swarupa (Guru - Laghu) of food are two inter-dependent things. Hence, they are also taken here under the same heading. Food taken in optimum quantity needed to a person is termed as Matravat.

Matravadashniyat. (ch.vi.1/25)

One should take food in proper quantity.

Advantages of taking food in proper quantity are as follows:

- Promotes longevity in its entirety without afflicting Vata, Pitta and Kapha
- Easily passes down to the rectum
- Does not impair the power of digestion
- Gets digested without any difficulty.

Ideal Matra (Quantity) of Ahara for a person:

There is no such fix quantity of food which is an ideal quantity of food. Ayurveda believes that every human being is unique and different from others, hence the needs for everything are different from one to another. The hunger or the quantity of food needed also differs from one person to other. So, it is not possible to decide a specific quantity of food which will be applicable to all. Because quantity of food for a person is depend on Agnibala (digestive power) of a person which vary according to the person and also the nature of food he is taking.

Aaharmatra punargnibalapekshni. (ch.su.5/3)

Matra punargnibalaha dravyapekshni. (a.s.su.11/3)

Considering these points, Ayurveda contributes a special view in regard of the Matra of food. To decide appropriate quantity of food that is sufficient for a person's good health, Charakacharya had given some guidelines in Charak viman sthan.

According to Agni: There are 4 types of Agni - Vishama, Tikshna, Manda and Sama. Among them, Vishamagni is due to dominance of Vata dosha (Vata Prakriti), Tikshnagni is due to dominance of Pitta dosha (Pitta Prakriti), Mandagni is due to dominance of Kapha dosha (Kapha Prakriti) and Samagni is due to balance state of all three doshas.⁶⁵

Lakshanas of these types of Agni are also quoted by Acharyas. Samagni is that which digests the normal quantity of food without causing any difficulty; Mandagni is that which is incapable of digesting even small quantity of food, Vishamagni digests the food sometimes properly and sometimes improperly and Tikshnagni is that which digests the usual quantity of food or even excess quantity without any difficulty (within a short time). Out of these four, Samagni is said to be ideal.¹⁸

Disadvantages of taking food in more quantity than normal

Food taken in excessive quantity aggravates all the three doshas. Symptoms due to each Dosha are as follows:

Vata: produces colic pain, constipation, malaise, dryness of mouth, fainting, giddiness, irregularity in the power of digestion, rigidity of sides, back and waist, and contraction and hardening of vessels.

Pitta: causes fever, diarrhea, internal burning sensation, thirst, intoxication, giddiness and delirium.

Kapha: causes vomiting, anorexia, indigestion, cold fever, laziness and heaviness in the body.

Atimatra Ahara as a cause of disease:

- Rasavaha Srotasa dushti
- Gulma
- Grahani Dosha
- Ardhavabhedahka
- Annavaha Srotasa dushti
- Purishavaha Srotasa dushti
- Kaphaprakopa
- Sthaulya
- Stanyaroga
- Visarpa

- Prana Vayu dushti
- Udara
- Rakta dushti
- Chhardi

Disadvantages of taking food in less quantity than normal:¹⁹

If a person takes food in very less quantity which can not satisfy his hunger, it is not able to nourish the body properly and produce the symptoms as below:

1. Impairment of the strength, complexion and plumpness.
2. Distension and misperistalsis in the abdomen.
3. Impairment of longevity, virility and Ojas.
4. Affliction of body, mind, intellect and senses.
5. Impairment of the excellence of Dhatus.
6. Manifestation of the inauspicious conditions.
7. Causation of eighty varieties of Vatika diseases.

Hinamatra Ahara as a cause of disease²⁰:

- Anantavata
- Arsha
- Grahani Dosha
- Vatavyadhi
- Vatarakta
- Bijopaghataja Klaihya
- Pranavaha Srotasa dushti
- Kshatakshin
- Udavarta
- Pittaparakopa
- Karshya
- Kshaya

Hinamatra or Laghu Ahara as a treatment of disease:

- Santarpanajanya vyadhi²¹
- Atinidra¹⁰⁷

Ideal time for taking food:²²

- The Doshas are in their proper places
- Agni (digestive enzymes) is provoked
- There is feeling of hunger
- The entrances of the channels of circulation are open
- Pure belching (without any taste or smell)
- Enthusiasm
- Elimination of wastes at the proper time
- Lightness of the body
- Flatus is moving downward easily
- Mind is clean
- Sense organs are functioning well

Advantages of taking food at proper time are as follows:

- Unimpaired cardiac function
- Downward passage of the Vata
- Proper manifestation of the urges for voiding flatus, urine and stool.
- The product of food does not vitiate the Dhatus of the body and promotes longevity in its entirety.

Disadvantages of taking food before digestion of previous meal:

If one takes food before the digestion of the previous meal, the digestive product of the previous food, i.e. immature rasa gets mixed up with the product of food taken afterwards, resulting in the provocation of all the Doshas instantaneously

When the digestive fire has not become keen after the morning meal, a second meal should not be partaken; if a second meal is partaken when the earlier food is undergoing digestion, it only destroys the digestive fire.

Ahara Kala:

In Sushruta Samhita, there is reference of Dwau- kala Bhojana. But there is exception of Pitta Prakriti to this rule. Pitta Prakriti people are having 'Dandashuka' because of dominance of Tikshna Guna of Pitta, digestion occurs faster as compared to Vata and Kapha Prakriti. Therefore they have feeling of hunger frequently. Srutis (law books, scriptures) stipulate two times for taking meal viz-once in the evening and once in the morning; no meal should be taken in between, this rule/code is similar to that of Agnihotra (fire oblation) (not to be violated). Food should not be taken (for the second time) within one yama (three hours after the earlier meal), should not starve for (more than) two yama (six hours) because during the period of first three hours, Ahararasa of previous meal gets produced. A second meal hinders this process and after a lapse of six hours there will be decrease of strength of the body. So both these should not be done.

Ideal time for meal:

A) Lunch-

Ideal time for lunch is between first and second Yama i.e. between 3-6 hrs after sunrise (beginning of day).

B) Dinner-²⁴

Ideal time for dinner is after the end of first Prahara i.e. after 3 hrs after the beginning of night (after sunset).

Ahara Kala according to Ritu:²⁵

In seasons during which the nights are very long (hemanta and Shishira – dewy and winter respectively), persons should partake food in the morning itself, such food being predominant in qualities opposite of the qualities of the season; in seasons in which the days are very long (Grishma and Pravrut-summer and early rainy seasons respectively), food suitable to the season should be partaken in the afternoon; in seasons in which both day and night are equal (Sharada and Varsha - autumn and spring season respectively), food should be partaken at the middle, dividing the day and night equally.

CONCLUSION

- Ahara (diet) is a substance that is taken through the mouth for the body sustenance, maintenance and repair.
- Ahara(diet) is the strong base for healthy humanity and should be treated as a sadhana will eating and understanding its utmost importance in achievement of Purushartha Chathushathaya.
- The Ahara vidhi Vidhana is another very important tool which needs to be adopted & understood by people while eating their food as Ahara has direct impact on our personality and mind dynamism.
- The Ahara Vidhi Visheshha Ayatananee is another very potential mechanism for healthy cooking. Our people have lost this great knowledge of cooking and yet very crucial as the food qualities(Guna) that our body demand can be enhanced and made more palatable as per our body food nutrients concentration gradient demand by this 8 principles.
- Food is one of the main factors that sustain our body, generate diseases and yet taken very lightly by people while eating. Ahara itself is Bala, Ayushkara and happiness.
- During disease recovery phase, Potent, appropriate Guna based Ahara(diet) need to be given utmost importance as equivalent to medicine as Ahara itself is medicine.
- For our long healthy sustenance there is a great need to understand Pathya(healthy food category) from Apathya(unhealthy food category) by everyone of us in our daily life by applying Ayurvedic Ahara principles like Ahara Vidhi Vidhana, Aharavidhi Visheshha Ayatanani etc.

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