

# A Literature Study of Beneficial and Harmful Effects of Ahara Samskara

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## ABSTRACT

*In Ayurveda, Ahara Samskara (food processing) is a key determinant of whether a food becomes Hitakara (wholesome) or Ahitakara (unwholesome), based on its altered Guna, Mahabhuta composition, and Dosha interaction. Samskara is more than a physical change. It is a functional and philosophical transformation that influences a substance's Rasa (taste), Virya (potency), Vipaka (post-digestive effect), and Prabhava (specific action). The overall effect of food can be compatible or incompatible with the individual's Prakrti (constitution), Agni (digestive activity), Kala (time/season), Desha (region), and Vikara (disease status). Ayurveda highlights the role of Samskara Samyoga (combinations of processing techniques), such as Agni Samskara (thermal contact) with Toya Samnikarsha (water contact)—which can modify or balance the inherent properties of substances. Properly applied Samskaras on Ahara enhance digestibility and Dhatu nourishment, while improper or excessive processing may lead to Dosha prakopa, Ama formation, Agni-mandya, and Srotorodha. Hence, the thoughtful application of Samskaras offers a path to personalized, preventive, and therapeutic nutrition in Ayurveda.*

**Keywords:** Ahara Samskara, Samskara Samyoga, Hitakara, Ahitakara, Guna, Mahabhuta, Dosha prakopa, Ama, Agni, Yukti vyapashraya Ahara-Samskara.

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## INTRODUCTION

A person's development, nourishment, intelligence, and health are all influenced by the food they eat if its Hitakara (wholesome) to body, and the Ahitakara Ahara (unwholesome) is a base for all the Vyadhi (disease). As an Upastambha (supporting pillar) and the source of Agni (digestive activity) it is the main factor supporting mental, physical, and spiritual equilibrium. <sup>1</sup>Ayurveda places a strong emphasis on eating according to the proper guidelines, known as Ahara-vidhi-visheshayatana (the eight variables pertaining to food intake) as suggested by Charakacharya in which Ahara Samskara (food processings) places a prominent role. <sup>2</sup> Acharyas claim that certain food processing techniques, such as Toyaagnisannikarsha (contact of water, fire), Shoucha (washing), Manthana (churning), Desha (location), Kaal (time), Bhajana (vessel), and Bhavana (trituration), change the inherent nature of raw materials. In Ayurveda, the transformation of food through Samskara (processing) is not limited to individual actions;

often, multiple Samskaras are applied in combination, that changes to the food's Gunas, Mahabhutas (elemental composition), and biological effects significantly. This concept, known as Samskara Samyoga (combination of processing techniques), plays a critical role in determining whether a substance becomes Hitakara or Ahitakara. <sup>3</sup>Combination of Toya-Agni-Soucha Samskara, the inherent Gaurava present in rice grains is reduced turning the prepared recipe Odana relatively laghu. When Samskaras such as Agni Samskara (heating), Toya Samnikarsha (water contact), Soucha Samskara etc are applied together, they can either enhance or counteract certain properties of food. A properly chosen combination suitable for particular condition of a Swastha (healthy) or Atur (diseased) person can aid Agni-samarthy (digestive compatibility), Dosha-shamana (dosha pacification), and Dhatu-prasadana (tissue nourishment). Conversely, combinations may lead to Dosha prakopa (dosha aggravation), ama utpatti (toxin formation), and Srotorodha (channel obstruction). Thus, the combination of Ahara Samskaras must be selected with careful consideration of conditions of an individual's Prakriti, Agni, Kala, and Roga etc to achieve desirable health outcomes.

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To study and analyze the beneficial and harmful effects of Ahara Samskaras on physical and mental component of a human.

To categorize the Ahara-Samskara or combination of Samskara as beneficial or harmful for physical and mental component of human, on the basis of conceptual analysis.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ashtanga Hridaya and its Commentaries

Ahara Samskara and its effect on Dravya were analysed in detail

Review on Samskara –

**Etymology** – The term Samskara (संस्कार) is derived from the Sanskrit root “kr (कृ)” meaning to do or to make, with the prefix “sam” (सम्) meaning well, completely, or properly, and the suffix “ghan” indicating the act or result of an action. Samskara literally means: Well-processed, refined, or perfectly accomplished transformation. Termed as Karan (Processing), Following are its types, stated by Acharyas to bring transformation in the natural character of raw substance.

Toyaagnisannikarsha (contact of water, fire), shoucha (washing), manthana (churning), desha (place), kaala (time), bhajana (vessel), bhavana (trituration) etc.

On the basis of detailed critical conceptual analysis its practical applicability. On the basis of detailed critical conceptual analysis further exploration with practical applicability is possible.

#### 1. Toya Samskara (Water Contact Processing)

- Washing = Improved Texture- Clean Dravya- healthy.
- Mixing Toya in Dravya floor = Lehan- Pana Kalpana aids Bala and Satmya for Agni-bala, promotes quick Tarpan (hydration) through circulation.
- Soaking = Shita, Guru, Snigdha, Drava gunas of Toya penetrate get imbibed in Dravya structure = hygroscopic action Dravya becomes relatively heavy to digest
- Boiling Dravya + Toya Gunas + Agni Gunas (Ushna, Sukshma, Laghu) modifies the food's texture, solubility, compatible for Dosha, Agni, fairly light to digest

**Hitakara:** When enhances Shita, Snigdha, Mrdu, and Laghu properties in Dravya; pacifies Vata and Pitta; improves Rasa Dhatu and supports triggering Mala-Mutra removal. It reduces toxicity and impurities, aiding Agni when used appropriately in Swastha and Atura.

**Ahitakara:** When Excessive or cold water mixed- can result Kapha dushti, Agni deability, foundation for Ama, may promote Srotorodha, Dhatvagnimandya and impair Dhatu production.

Not at all recommended in conditions like -Kapha Prakopak Ritu, Sharir / Vyadhi Awastha, Kapha Prakriti, Agnimandya

#### 2. Agni Samskara (Fire Contact Processing)

Sadrava Agni -boiling, steaming -due to contact with liquids with the Agni, the Gunas induces are different Ex-with grains like Raktashali which are already Laghu transformed soupy form further increase

their Lagutva drastically in place of its original Guru and Shita qualities, the food thus formed is most digestible, Doshapachna.<sup>4</sup>

Nirdrava Agni- roasting, or frying. The Dravya considerably loses Aap Mahabhuta, Drava, Snigdha, Shita contents becomes more and more dry, depleted in nutrients, obstructive. Can be selectively useful only due to it significantly reduced Guruta.

**Hitakara:** Sadrava Agni Samskar dilutes, cleans the food of microbial impurities, Support Dravya assimilation and digestion. It reduce Ama support Srotoshodhan, pacify Vata, Pitta. Can act Pachana for Kapha, Rasa, Meda, support Rasa Dhatu assimilation. Nirdrava Agni- Every Brimhan Dravya can be processed to obtain relative less Agnimandya with Bruhan effect. Recommended in Kapha Pradhan, Ama Pradhan, Balahina Vyadhi Lakshan, Vyadhi Sharir Awasthas with logic.

**Ahitakara:** Illogical heating can render Dravya less or overcooked, Ama or Dagdha which is cause of Ajirna, severe Agnidushti. Dravya devoid of nutrients can result Dhatu Karshan Dhatu-shosha. Can lead Vikrut Parinaman due to Tikshna, Ushna, Sukshma, Ruksha, Chala Gunas and resultant Pitta Vata Dushti, Srotas can experience irritability or Mala-baddhatva.

### 3. Shauca (Washing/Cleansing)

Cleaning raw materials, Medium used-water or herbal decoctions, others, based on the Dravya which is to be cleansed. A preparatory step before further processing.

**Hitakara:** Aids Dravya Sampannata and supports Agni (digestion of that Dravya) by removing dirt, Visha (toxins). Particularly for Abhishyandi-Klinna substances; promotes shuddhatva and supports Dosha shamana.

**Ahitakara:** Excess or inappropriate washing may reduce essential nutrients or Snigdhatva, increase Rukshatva, aggravate Vata, and may impair Dhatu formation.

### 4. Manthana (Churning)

This involves separating or homogenizing the Dravyas, as in making Takra, Navanita.<sup>5</sup> Dadhi, though capable of causing Shotha, becomes Shothahara and Laghu upon churning.

**Hitakara:** Reduces Kapha enhances Laghutva and Vyavayitva, supports Agni and improves Dhatwagni; especially beneficial in Sthula or Kapha-prakrti individuals properly Mathita Dravya acts better.

**Ahitakara:** Excessive churning increases Vata due to Chala Guna, Rukshatva and weakening Agni, and may disturb Snigdhatva in Dhatu. when Manthana done in improper way it may increase Kapha Dosha, leading to Santarpana Vyadhi.

### 5. Desha (Place of Processing)

Geographic and climatic features of the location impact the transformation of food during processing and storage.<sup>6</sup> Place the substance under a heap of ash, indicating environmental influence on qualities.

**Hitakara:** Dry, clean, and warm environments help preserve Ruksha and Laghu gunas, reducing Kapha accumulation and promoting Agni.

**Ahitakara:** Damp or contaminated surroundings increase Kleda, Guru, and Picchila Gunas, promoting ama formation, Srotorodha, and Mala vitiation. The Ahara kept in Damp area, prone to faster spoilage.

### 6. Kala (Time and Season of Processing)

Refers to both seasonal and day-time factors influencing food processing and consumption.

**Hitakara:** Processing in seasonally suitable times (e.g., sun-drying in summer) helps maintain balanced Gunas, prevents microbial growth, and aligns with seasonal Dosha variations to support Agni. The time taken for proper processing of food as seen in Madya Kalpana preparations is due to Samskara of Kala.

**Ahitakara:** Mistimed processing (e.g., fermentation during cold/rainy seasons) can enhance Kapha, reduce Agni, and promote Ama, disrupting Mala-pravrtti and Dhatu-paka. When Ahara kept for longer time, the Kala samskara acts on Ahara, makes it Parushita.

### 7. Bhajana (Type of Vessel Used)

The nature of the cooking or storage vessel influences the final Gunas of the food.<sup>7</sup> Apply a paste of Triphala to an iron vessel, demonstrating how the container modifies the food.

**Ahitakara:** Unnatural or reactive materials (e.g., plastics, aluminum) may introduce Visha-like elements, impair Agni, and disturb Guna, Dhatu, and Mala equilibrium.

**Hitakara:** Using Loha, Tamra, or Mrnmaya (clay) vessels can infuse beneficial minerals, support Dipana and Rasayana effects, and aid Dosha balance.

### 8. Bhavana (Trituration with Liquid Media)

Involves infusing a base substance with the properties of a liquid medium through grinding or wet mixing.  
<sup>8</sup>When fruits like Amalaka are triturated with juices or svarasa, their existing qualities are enhanced further.

**Hitakara:** Enhances Sukshmatva, potentiates Prabhava, modifies Virya and Rasa to suit therapeutic or nutritional goals; aids in targeted Dosha pacification and Dhatu pushti.

**Ahitakara:** Incorrect liquid pairing or over-processing can increase Tikshna or Ushna excessively, aggravating Pitta, harming Ojas, and impairing Agni. During Aushadi nirmana incorrect Bhavana given with wrong Dravya leads to Upadrava.

Each of these Samskaras is an intelligent intervention on the raw nature of food to customize it for Agni-samarthya, Dosha-anulomana, and Dhatu-pushti. When performed mindfully, they become Hitakara; when misapplied, they generate Ahitakara consequences, such as Dosha prakopa, ama utpatti, Agni dushti, and Mala-vighata.

### Combination of Ahara Samskara:

The combination of Agni Samskara and Toya Samnikarsha Samskara is a fundamental Ayurvedic transformation that alters both the Guna and Mahabhuta constitution of a substance in a synergistic manner. While Agni Samskara imparts Ushna, Laghu, Tikshna and Ruksha Gunas—enhancing Agni, Vayu, and Tejas Mahabhutas—Toya Samnikarsha introduces Shita, Drava, Snigdha, and Mrdu qualities, dominated by Aap and Prithvi Mahabhutas. Together, this combination creates a balanced transformation where water acts as a medium for softening and extraction, and fire enhances digestibility, sterility, and bioavailability. This dual Samskara is seen in preparations like Kashaya, Odana, Manda, and Yusha, where the end product becomes more Sukshma, Vyavayi (quick-acting) and therapeutically potent, with mitigated heaviness and increased absorption—making it ideal for clinical and dietary use across varying Dosha and Agni conditions.

**Table No.1- condition showing Hitakaratawa and Ahitakaratawa of Ahara Samskara on Ahara dravya Kurchika**

Sr.	Condition showing Hitakaratawa of Ahara Samskara Kurchika	Samskarita dravya	Samskara	Hitakara Ahara Samskara
1.	<sup>9</sup> Shukra vardhaka	Dugdha+dadhi	Agni+Kala Samskara	Kurchika Ref: Ah.Su-5/41
Sr.	Condition showing Ahitakaratawa of Ahara Samskara Kurchika	Samskarita dravya	Samskara	Ahitakara ahara Samskara
1.	<sup>10</sup> Vishtamba	Dugdha+dadhi	Agni+Kala Samskara	Kurchika Ref: Ah.Su-5/41

As a classic example of Ahara Samskara can result in either Hitakara (wholesome) or Ahitakara (unwholesome) consequences, Kurchika is prepared by combining Dugdha (milk) and Dadhi (curd) using Agni and Kala Samskaras. Kurchika, when properly processed, reduces its Guru and Picchila gunas through Agni Samskara, while Kala Samskara (timely fermentation) adds Sukshma and Mrdu qualities, making it more digestible and allowing it to nourish deeper Dhatus like Shukra. By supporting Agni and balancing Doshas, Kurchika acts as Shukra Vardhaka. Inappropriate use of these Samskaras, however, can result in Vishtambha (obstruction), Ama-formation, and Kapha-Vata aggravation. This is because the ensuing Kurchika retains its Guru, Picchila and Abhishyandi qualities.

This dual nature demonstrates that the same material can have opposing effects on Guna, Dosha, Agni, Dhatu, and Mala based on the quality and sequence of Samskara. This highlights the fact that food's

influence in Ayurveda is largely formed by its processing rather than Dravya's constituents to be beneficial or harmful to the body.

**Table No. 2- Role of Samskarita Dravya and Ahara in Different Avasthas with Ayurvedic References**

Sr. no	Avastha	Samskarita dravya	Samskara	Ahitakara Ahara with Reference
1.	<sup>11</sup> Udarasta krimi	Navaneeta	Agni sannikarsha	Ghrita Ref: Ah.Chi-20/35
Sr. no	Avastha	Samskarita dravya	Samskara	Hitakara Ahara with Reference
2.	<sup>12</sup> Garbhini	Navaneeta	Agni sannikarsha	Ghrita Ref :Ah. Sha -1/43

According to Avastha the Hitakarata and Ahitakarata is told in this. Ghrita, when prepared from Navanita through the Samskara of Agni Samnikarsha, undergoes transformation in its Guna, Mahabhuta Samyatva, and Karma, altering its effect based on Rogibheda and Avastha Vishesha. This Samskara enhances Sukshma, Tikshna, and Agnidipana Gunas, increases Agni Mahabhuta, and reduces Amakarata, making the Ghrita more Srotovishodhaka and Yogavahi, while retaining core Snigdha, Madhura, and Guru guna. In Garbhini, where Vata-prakopa and Garbha-pushti are of concern, such Samskarita Ghrita becomes Brimhana, Vatahara, Rasavardhaka, and Garbhashayanupravishta, thus acting as Hitakara Ahara. Conversely, in Udarastha Krimi, the same Ghrita becomes Ahitakara, as its Snigdha-Madhura-Guru Guna promote Krimi-pushti, block Srotas, weaken Jatharagni, and vitiate Rasa-Rakta Dhatus. Thus, the same Ahara, when transformed by Samskara, may become either Hitakara or Ahitakara depending on Dosha, Vyadhi, and Dehashakti, emphasizing Ayurveda's principle of Yukti vyapashraya Ahara-Samskara.

## DISCUSSION

Ahara Samskara serves as a crucial element in Ayurvedic nutrition and healing, playing a key role in determining whether a particular food will act as Hitakara (beneficial) or Ahitakara (harmful). Through the application of specific processing techniques—such as Agni, Toya, Kala, Bhajana, Bhavana, Shauca, Manthana, and Desha—the natural qualities and elemental composition of a food substance are transformed. Ayurvedic Samskaras like Toya enhance Drava, Sheeta, and Snigdha Gunas, improving solubility and compatibility with Vata and Pitta, while Agni Samskara transforms Guru to Laghu and Ushna, boosting Agni and reducing Ama. Shauca removes toxins and Abhishyandi factors, supporting Shuddhatva and effective digestion. Manthana reduces Kapha, enhances Laghutva, and supports Dhatvagni, making it suitable for Sthula or Kapha Prakriti individuals. Desha influences food transformation, where dry and warm environments help Agni, while damp places promote Ama. Kala Samskara aligns processing with seasonal rhythms to preserve Gunas and prevent Kapha increase. Bhajana adds the qualities of the vessel into food, affecting Rasa and Dosha, while Bhavana infuses specific liquid properties through trituration, altering Rasa, Virya, and Prabhava for targeted Dosha and Dhātu support. These changes influence how well a food supports digestion, balances the Doshas, nourishes the Dhatus, and regulates Mala production. When Samskaras are properly chosen and combined, they can convert heavy, hard-to-digest, or Dosha-aggravating foods into lighter, Agni-supportive, and therapeutically valuable forms. A fitting illustration is Kurchika, created by processing Dugdha and Dadhi through Agni and Kala Samskaras. When prepared with correct heat and timing, it sheds its Guru, Picchila Guna and acquires Sukshma, Mrudu Gunas, making it nourishing to deeper Dhatus like Shukra and suitable for digestion. On the other hand, improper application of these Samskaras—such as undercooking or untimely fermentation—may retain its Abhishyandi and Guru properties, resulting in Vishtambha, Ama formation, and Kapha-Vata imbalance, rendering it Ahitakara. This highlights that the health impact of food is shaped more by its method of preparation than by its original form. When Navanita is subjected to Agni Samskara, it transforms into Ghrita, bringing about notable changes in its Guna, Mahabhuta composition, and overall Ahara Samskara. Though it retains its Snigdhatva and Madhuratva, the heating process introduces Sukshma, Tikshna, and Agnivardhaka properties, enhancing its potency and reach

within the body. This transformation allows Ghrita to act differently in varied physiological states, in a Garbhini, it supports fetal nourishment by stabilizing Vata, enriching Rasa Dhatu, and promoting Ojas, thereby acting as a Hitakara dietary substance. On the other hand, in the presence of Udarastha Krimi, the same Ghrita becomes unsuitable, as its Snigdha and Guru Gunas, along with increased Prithvi and Jala Mahabhutas, provide a conducive environment for parasitic proliferation, contributing to Krimipushti and Srotorodha, thus acting as an Ahitakara Ahara. This illustrates how Samskara alters not just the substance but its interaction with the Doshic state, and highlights the Ayurvedic view that the appropriateness of even a Nitya sevaneeya dravya like Ghrita is determined by Deha-Avastha, Dosha-Prakopa, and Kala. The Ayurvedic lens insists that proper processing—aligned with the individual's Agni, Prakrti, Ritu, and disease condition (Roga-bhava)—is essential to achieving a wholesome outcome. Inappropriate Samskara not only triggers Dosha disturbance but also interferes with Srotas flow, Dhatu formation, and Mala elimination. This underscores that the quality of processing governs the substance.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while individual Samskaras are described distinctly, classical Ayurvedic texts repeatedly emphasize their combined application, revealing how these interactions determine whether a substance becomes Hitakara or Ahitakara.<sup>13</sup> Agni Samskara applied to Jangala Mamsa in Vasanta Ritu for Jangala Shulya preparation counters seasonal Agnimandya and reduces Gurutva, making it digestible. Manthana Samskara transforms Dadhi into Takra, which becomes suitable for conditions like Arshas, Atisara, and Grahani by altering its Gunas and Dosha-pacifying capacity. Ghrita, when processed from Navanita through Agni Samskara, it acts as Brimhana and Vatahara in Garbhini, but in Udarastha Krimi, the same Ghrita becomes Ahitakara by aggravating Snigdha and Guru effects. Similarly, the combination of Samskaras like in Kurchika Samskaras involved Agni and Kala can transform into a Hitakara Ahara by inducing qualities that nourish Shukra Dhatu; whereas improper application of the same Samskaras leads to Ahitakara outcomes. Thus, the impact of a Samskara—alone or in combination—must always be analyzed with respect to Dosha, Vyadhi, Avastha, and Rogibheda, underscoring the Ayurvedic emphasis on Yukti-based Samskara application.

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