

# Ahara Vidhi Vidhana: Ayurvedic Concepts of Food Consumption and Their Relevance in The Modern Age

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## ABSTRACT

In the modern world, when everyone is focused on attaining their goals, people often forget their balanced dietary routines, which leads to a number of lifestyle disorders. The three basic pillars of *Ayurveda* are *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya*. Among these, *Ahara* has been placed first which shows it is important to maintain and sustain life. Food habits like excessive intake, high protein diet, spicy, oily, harmful combination together, taking food without analysing one's *Agnibala* are leading causes for diseases. For achieving complete benefits of food, one should also follow certain rules as told in *Ayurveda* regarding what, when, where, and how the food should be consumed. In *Vimansthana*, *Charakacharya* explains about *Aharavidhividhana* are the foundation of dietetics, which indicates the method of taking *Ahara*, which is useful for mankind.

**Aim & Objectives** – To elaborate such principle of *Ayurveda* known as *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* and their relevance in the modern age.

**Materials and Methods** - Different classical *Ayurvedic* texts, websites, journals and research articles were referred in above context.

**Discussion and conclusion** - The time, place, quantity and manner of *Ahara* intake are necessary. *Ahara* taken in proper manner helps in the proper growth of the body on contrary if taken in improper manner leads to various diseases. Thus, *Aharavidhividhana* plays a significant task in both causation and curing of the disease. *Nidanaparivarjana* is considered to be the main line of treatment. Properly followed *Aharavidhividhana* keeps the body healthy and prevents the diseases.

**KEYWORDS:** Ahara Vidhi Vidhan, Ahara, Food, Dietetics

## INTRODUCTION:

Food is the source of all life and everyone in the world looks for it. According to *Charak Samhita* Food is essential for Complexion, good voice, long life, understanding, happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength and intelligence<sup>1</sup>. *Ahara*, *Nidra*, and *Brahmcharya* are *Trayopstambha* (three sub pillars), which maintain the body itself, as explained by the *Acharya*. Here *Ahara* has been placed first which

shows that it is most important to maintain and sustain the life<sup>2</sup>. Food is the one thing that promotes health in both diseased and normal people, so it is considered as *Mahabhaishajya*<sup>3</sup> (Ultimate Medicine). The advancement of the social economy and improving standards of living are having a significant impact on modern people's eating habits. Along with the complexity of food processing and source diversity, the consumption of fast food and meals away from home also reflects these changes. The primary traits of the modern diet are excessive intake of high-energy, high-density, and ultra-processed foods, fast food and takeaway, inadequate and irregular eating times, and snacking in between meals.<sup>4</sup> The majority of individuals in today's world follow a sedentary lifestyle and only consume dry, cold meals rather than freshly prepared food. Even if they haven't digested their previous meal, they will often consume more of it at inappropriate times and places if they enjoy it. They are reluctant to consume much of the food items if they don't like it. In fact, nobody is eating wisely. For example, while watching TV or films, some people eat very slowly and without noticing what they are eating. Some people consume their meals quickly because of their packed lives.

People these days eat at buffets during events and when travelling since they are pressed for time. the prevalence of unhealthy eating habits like eating more meals away from home (53.4% in hospital canteens, 23.0% in restaurants and takeaway), eating less frequently (30.5%), and eating too quickly (the duration 10 min, 34.6%)<sup>5</sup>. The prevalence of lifestyle diseases, often known as non-communicable diseases, or NCDs, is increasing rapidly nowadays. They are defined by the frequency of everyday routines that people follow and result from an improper interaction between people and their environment. Lifestyle diseases are caused by a number of variables, the most significant of which are unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity, a disturbed biological clock, and excessive use of alcohol and junk food.<sup>6</sup> Unhealthy eating habits are the cause of the metabolic syndrome, dyslipidaemia, hypertension, insulin resistance, and abdominal obesity. 40.5 million deaths worldwide in 2016 were attributed to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), according to WHO data. In India, NCDs comprised 63% of all deaths in 2016, while 35 million deaths globally in 2005 were caused by NCDs.<sup>7</sup>

Irregular eating schedules are the main components of the modern diet. The manner which determines how well one stays healthy. *Ahara* and the way how it consumed both have equal significance in *Ayurveda*. *Acharya Charaka* emphasised *Ahara-vidhi-vidhana*<sup>8</sup>, which is described in *Viman Sthana*. The foundation of dietetics is *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan*, which is detailed in our classics. Which indicates the method of *Ahara* intake, these are *Ushna Ashniyat*, *Snigdha Ashniyat*, *Matravat Ashniyat*, *Jirne Ashniyat*, *Virya Avirudha Ahara*, *Ishta Deshe / Ishta Sarvopkarnam Ashniyat*, *NaAtidrutam Ashniyat*, *NaAtivilambit Ashniyat*, *Ajalpana*, *Ahasan*, *Tanmanabhunjitam*, *Aatanam Abhisamikshya Bhunjitam*.

## DISCUSSION

The eating habits and lifestyle of the present time, particularly of the young generation, are not good in view of health. A man tends to eat even when he is not truly hungry. Overeating and an unbalanced diet are prevalent issues. Although there should be a meal when a previous meal is digested but, in the present time, a man also eats soon after a meal. There are also issues of too heavy or too light foods which are consumed with concentration. There should be severe concern with the use of cold beverages, chilled water, spicy, preserved, and junk food. It's also very important to be cautious when using cold beverages, chilled water, spicy, preserved, and junk food. Modern dietary guidelines, such as consuming

large amounts of sodium, hydrogenated fats, and refined sugar, are responsible for numerous lifestyle disorders, including diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and kidney-related illnesses.

### **Significance of Ahara Vidhi Vidhan -**

#### ***USHNAM ASHNIYAT (One should eat warm)***

Warm food is preferred for consumption. Warm food facilitates easy digestion, enhances flavour retention, and activates the digestive fire. Due to *Ushnaguna's* heated potency, which is an opponent to the aggravating element of *Vata*, it will also aid in *Anulomana*, or regulating *Vata's* appropriate movement. The reduction of elevated *Kapha* is also aided by warm food<sup>9</sup>.

In present era, Official and professional employees typically eat their lunch from a box that was brought to work in the morning and gets cold. Cold food leads to anorexia, decreased digestive fire, nausea, abdominal distension, etc<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, when food is served too cold, it causes vitiation of *Vatakapha* as well as a cough and hiccup<sup>11</sup>.

#### ***SNIGDHAM ASHNIYAT (One should eat unctuous food)***

Food that is rich in fat is recommended since it will taste good and enhance digestion's sluggish power in a similar way to how ghee ignites a fire. Due to the *Snigdha Guna's* softness, the food will be absorbed quickly and cause *Vata Anulomana*. It will improve the body's growth, strength, and complexion in addition to strengthening the sense organs<sup>12</sup>.

Modern generations are very concerned with their physical appearance, and because of a false theory that ghee will make people fatter, they avoid foods that are considered to be traditional good habits. Food that is consumed dry and not moistened becomes a hard mass, preventing appropriate digestion and leading to the development of *Vidagdha* (Indigestion due to *Pitta Dosha*) kind of *Ajirna*<sup>13</sup>. Dry food depletes the body's pigment and strength, leads to dryness, constipation, fatigue, and urine retention, and vitiates *Vata*, causing it to continue moving upward.<sup>14,15</sup>

#### ***MATRAVAT ASHNIYAT (One should eat in proper quantity)***

A person's lifespan gets longer by eating in the right amounts, which maintains the balance of their *Tridosha* (three body humours). An appropriate amount of food is not impeding the ability of digestion and promotes proper peristalsis and a comfortable passage of the meal towards the rectum after it has been thoroughly broken down before being ejected out.<sup>16</sup>

Greediness and *Pragyapradha* cause people to consume more food it will cause instant *Tridoshakopa* and result in *Amapradosha* (Diseases of ama), which may further lead to many other metabolic diseases<sup>17</sup>. Consuming food in less quantity results in all types of *Vataroga*; the depletion of strength, color, and valor of body.<sup>18</sup>

#### ***JIRNE ASHNIYAT (One should eat when the previous meal is digested)***

Only after the previous meal has been properly digested should the next diet be consumed. If consumed in a different way, the inadequately digested *Ahararasa* (primary product of digestion) from the previous meal is combined with the *Ahararasa* of the newly ingested food and immediately aggravates all *Doshas*<sup>19</sup>.

A healthy person is suggested to eat only twice a day, in the morning and the evening; eating in between these times is not recommended to allow for adequate digestion. Food shouldn't be ingested within three

hours after the previous meal because during this time, *Rasadhatu* (the primary product of digested food) is produced. If food is consumed during this time, it impedes this process and leads to *Balakshya*.<sup>20</sup>

### **VIRYA AVIRUDHA ASHNIYAT (One should take food consisting of the items non antagonistic in potency)**

One should consume food that is noncontradictory in *Virya* (potency). A person who consumes non-contradictory food is not susceptible to diseases like *Kushtha*, *Andhya* (blindness), *Visarpa* (erysipelas disease), etc., which were regarded as side effects of *Virudha* (incompatible foods)<sup>21</sup>. Eating food that is insufficiently potent is frequently considered as the most significant factor in the onset of *Kushtha* and *Shvitra* (Leukoderma)<sup>22</sup>. Nothing can be done without *Virya*, and every action is the outcome of it.

*Virya* is the power by which an action takes place. Dietary ingredients known as *Virudha Ahara* are those that conflict with the body's elements (*Dosha* and *Dhatu*s) and have a tendency to disrupt the system<sup>23</sup>. When two substances with opposing *Viryas* are combined, the result is known as *Virya Viruddham*. According to *Charaka*, a combination known as *Virya Virudha* occurs when a substance with *Shita Virya* (cold potency) is ingested with a substance with *Ushna Virya* (hot potency)<sup>24</sup>.

In present era, Use of cold drinks, chilled water, spicy, preserved and junk foods is also a matter of serious concern. It is essential to take *Veerya-Aviruddha Ahar* to prevent problems arising due to *Viruddhaveerya Ahara* such as impotency, blindness, *raktavikar*, *grahani*, *amavisha*, hypersensitivity, *kustha* (skin disorders), *shotha*, fever, etc and may even cause death<sup>25</sup>.

### **ISHTA DESHE / ISHTA SARVOPKARNAM ASHNIYAT (Eat in desired place with desired articles)**

One should dine at one's favorite places, which are equipped with desired accessories<sup>26</sup>. Having food in uncomfortable places without proper accessories may lead to some psychic agitation and result in complications that are caused by an afflicted mind<sup>27</sup>. Even though food is taken in proper quantity, the mind that is affected due to factors such as fear, anger, shyness, and jealousy will make a person to misinterpret good hygienic food as unhygienic and results in *Ajirna* (indigestion)<sup>28</sup>

### **NAATIDRUTAM ASHNIYAT (Do not eat in hurry)**

Food should not be consumed in a hurry<sup>29</sup>. Food asphyxiation may occur if it is consumed in hurry because it may enter the wrong passage, not move correctly, or end up in the wrong places<sup>30</sup>. In addition, the individual eating the meal will not be able to recognise food flaws such as hair or other foreign objects mixed in with it, nor will they be able to recognise when it is of high quality<sup>31</sup>.

Due to haste, *Vata* will be aggravated and it will mislead the food into other places, producing symptoms such as hiccup, *Avasada* (Low placed) etc. Proper placement of food, at a proper time, for a proper duration is required for optimum digestion<sup>32</sup>. However, when food is consumed in a hurry, it bypasses all places within a shorter duration and the functions that are expected to happen at that particular region cannot take place in a proper manner; this again leads to disturbances in digestion and absorption<sup>33</sup>.

Physiologically, the salivation and secretion of enzymes is hampered; also, the food is not chewed properly and remains as large particles, so they do not undergo the action of digestive juices due to their larger size<sup>34</sup>.

**NAATIVILAMBIT ASHNIYAT (Do not eat very slowly)**

Consuming food slowly is not recommended. Slow meal consumption results in cold food, uneven digestion due to irregular digestive fire contact, lack of satisfaction or satiation, and the potential to overeat<sup>35</sup>.

People who eat while watching television, stressed out, worried, or preoccupied with other ideas are unlikely to be conscious of how quickly they are eating. Consequently, they will typically consume more and show less appreciation for the good or bad qualities of food, which is similar to consuming food in a hurried manner<sup>36</sup>.

**AJALPANA, AHASAN, TANMANABHUNJITAM (Eat with concentration without talking and laughing)**

Avoid talking or laughing while eating. People who do so are more likely to experience the same issues as those who eat quickly<sup>37</sup>. The most crucial aspect of the fact that eating the food needs concentration. Food is consumed either too slowly or too quickly when people are talking and laughing instead of paying attention to the meals.

These days, both kids and adults eat while rushing to get to work, school, or the tuition. This leads to no relaxation, poor nutrition or digestion, poor performance, and eventually a state of despair. Eating and watching television together leads to increased food consumption since there is less focus on the food.

**AATANAM ABHISAMIKSHYA BHUNJITAM (Eat after considering oneself thoroughly)**

Everyone should eat with appropriate manner, knowing well about the suitability or the unsuitability of the food components to the self. Thus, one should consume food only after proper self-consideration<sup>38</sup>. *Atmanam* means "self," and *Abhisameekshya* means "appropriately evaluated". *Acharya Charak* states that even when food is strictly followed by measure and consumed by someone who suffers from *Chinta* (anxiety), *Shok* (grief), *Bhay* (fear), *Krodh* (anger), *Dukha* (pain), or who stays up late at night, it would not be adequately digested<sup>39</sup>.

In present era, although everyone is running behind taste, one should eat what is right for them. Diet should be taken according to *Agni*, *Bala* and *Prakruti*<sup>40</sup>. As in the cases of pregnancy, child labour, intellectual, elderly, or sick persons, it should be consumed according with one's own energy needs and nutritional requirements.

**CONCLUSION**

Considering the aforementioned points, it can be concluded that *Ahara* should be taken according to *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* (dietary guidelines), which are genuinely scientific as mentioned by our *Acharyas*. *Acharya Charak* mentions food as prana or life of living beings if taken properly but if taken in a faulty manner may cause death<sup>41</sup>. It is necessary to follow the *Ahara Vidhi Vidhan* and not to follow the wrong eating habits of the modern age.

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