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# Modern perspective on diet regimen w.s.r. to *Ashtang Hridaya*

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## ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is a lifestyle science which focuses on how to lead a healthy life along with the curative aspects. *Aahar* (food) is the most important aspect of human life. Ayurveda has also described the importance of food by including it in the "*Trayopasthambha*" i.e., three important pillars of human life, which are *Aahar* (food), *Nidra* (sleep) and *Bramacharya* (Abstinence). *Aahar* decides the health status of human being. Physical and mental health, Oja, complexion, longevity and energy come from the consumed *Aahar*. Ayurveda describes various concepts regarding healthy living such as: *Dincharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Yogasana* and many concepts regarding proper diet are also described in Ayurveda such as: *Viruddha Aahar*, *Aahar Vidhi* etc. Considering importance of *Aahar*, present article deals with detailed study of *Aahar Vidhi* i.e., diet regimen described by *Acharya Vagbhat* along with the modern take on it.

**Key words:** *Ayurveda*, *Aahar*, *Aahar Vidhi*, *Vagbhat*.

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is the ancient Indian science which deals with various aspects of healthy living in humans. Various ancient practitioners have given their valuable remarks and perspectives over different factors that affect everyday life of a normal human. The *Bruhat Trayi* i.e., the great triad of Ayurveda refers to three early age Sanskrit encyclopaedias of medicine, which are core texts of the indigenous Indian medical system of Ayurveda which includes - *Charak Samhita*, *Sushrut*

*Samhita* and *Ashtang Hridayam Samhita*. This great triad describes various concepts of a healthy living according to *Acharyas* in the respective time periods. *Aahar* is one of the pillars of healthy living according to Ayurveda. Nowadays, as the lifestyle of humans is changed drastically, there is increased prevalence of various lifestyle related disorders where faulty dietary habits play a major role. Ayurveda has given a detailed description about how to consume diet, when to consume diet, which diet is good for health, what is the most suitable time to consume food and everything related to *Aahar* i.e., food and health. Different *Acharyas* have described different techniques according to their respective time periods which are relevant in today's era too. *Aahar* supplies the core energy a human needs to function throughout their day so it becomes very important to pay attention to what we consume. The food taken with discipline can be a major successful step towards a good, healthy and disease-free life, which is the ultimate goal of Ayurveda i.e., "*Swasthasya Swasthyarakshanam*". A modern take on what our ancient practitioners have already

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described is a much-needed step towards a healthy future.

### AAHAR

Food is essential to the survival of all living things. Food is required by all living things in the universe. Food influences complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength, and intellect. Professional activities that lead to happiness in this world, Vedic rituals that lead to heaven and the observance of truth, and *Brahmacarya* that leads to salvation are all based on food. Only a healthy body can afford to perform all activities leading to happiness, heaven, and salvation, and food consumption is essential for health preservation. As a result, food is the primary factor in achieving all of them.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### Aahar Vidhi: Ashtang Hriday<sup>[2]</sup>

##### Proper Time for Food Consumption (*Kale Satmyam*)

Food should be consumed at proper time regularly. According to *Aacharya Vagbhat*, the proper time for taking meals is after the elimination of feces and urine, when mind is clear (devoid of emotions), when the *Doshas* are moving in their natural paths (functioning normally), when belchings are pure (without any foul smell or taste), when hunger is well manifest, when the flatus is moving downward easily, when digestive activity is keen, when the sense organs are clear (properly functioning), when body is light, then only food should be consumed observing the rules and procedures of taking food. That is the ideal time.<sup>[3]</sup>

##### Hygienic Practices during Food Consumption (*Shuchi*)

Food to be consumed should be clean and hygienic. Food which is contaminated with grass, hair etc different adulterants should be avoided.<sup>[4]</sup> Food cooked in the clean, hygienic atmosphere, under all septic precautions is worthy of consumption.

##### Eating Food which is freshly Prepared and Easily Palatable (*Snighoshna Laghu*)

Eat food which is not roasted or hard to eat. Avoid eating dry food. Food should be served and eaten hot or warm since it is easily digestible in that state. Food products which are roasted, dry, hard to eat are

generally unhealthy, not fresh and with less nutritive values. They are often hard to digest and hamper your digestive activities. Fresh/ warm food, without contamination and highest bio - availability of nutrients will be suitable nourishment for body.

##### Mindful Eating (*Tanmana*)

Food should be consumed with due attention. 'Mindful eating' as we call it in modern era is paying attention to our food, on purpose, moment by moment, without judgement. It is an act of savouring the moment, the taste of food, the smell of it being freshly served, being thankful for what is in your plate and appreciating each moment with full awareness.

##### Eating Food Containing All the Six Flavours Majorly Sweet Flavour (*Shadrasa, Madhurprayam*)

Food to be consumed should contain all the six tastes with predominance of sweet taste. *Madhura* i.e., sweet rasa is unctous and help elimination of feces, urine and flatus properly.<sup>[5]</sup>

The six tastes are sweet (*Madhura*), sour (*Amla*), salty (*Lavana*), bitter (*Tikta*), pungent (*Katu*) and astringent (*Kashaya*). Each taste corresponds to a certain area of the tongue which stimulates a particular bodily organ. Ayurvedic dietary exercises say that it is important to activate all the organs equally for them to function properly. One method of stimulating the internal organs is by activating the taste buds corresponding to that particular organ.

##### Eating Neither Too Fast nor Too Slow (*Na Atidrut Vilambitam*)

Avoid eating too fast (without paying attention to what you are eating or how much you are eating). Avoid eating too slow too. Unlike other *Aacharyas*, *Aacharya Vagbhat* has mentioned eating too slow as a *Aahar Vidhi* to be avoided or taken care of.

Fight and fright are the two main responses to emergency which are predominantly mediated by sympathetic activity. When this system is active, secretions are lowered and blood circulation is shifted from central pool to periphery. In this situation, a person becomes tense. This is not very favourable condition for food intake. Too slow eating of food indicates the person's lack of interest and attention in

food. In this condition the chances are that the person might eat in excess due to avoidance which is inappropriate.

#### **Eating After Bathing (Snataha)**

Food should be consumed after taking bath. For smooth, easy, sound digestion try showering before breakfast and notice the difference yourself. It becomes a healthy ritual to cleanse and purify your body, then enjoy nourishing it with the healthy and wholesome food. Bathing before food consumption is effective for good and easy digestion.

#### **Eating When Hungry (Kshut Vaan)**

Food should be consumed only after having good hunger. The digestive process is governed by its own biological clock, digestive cycle and timings of hunger are set according to an individual's habits. Eating only when hungry is very important to ensure smooth and effective functioning of body.

#### **Eating In Solitude (Viviktastha)**

Sitting in solitude while eating is suggested by *Aacharya Vagbhat*. When we are eating in solitude/silence, we are detaching ourselves from the rest of the world. This lets us focus on what is ahead of us, the current ongoing task. It helps us to destress and also promotes mindful eating.

#### **Eating After Washing Feet, Hands and Face (Dhaut Pada Kara Aananaha)**

Food must be consumed after washing feet, hands and face. The habit of washing hands, feet and face before eating is even more relevant in today's era of Covid-19 in terms of maintaining a proper hygiene. Food should be consumed with clean hands to avoid any kind of infection or upset stomach due to ignorance of proper hygiene.

#### **Eating After Satisfying Elders, Children and those who depend on you (Tarpayitva Pitrun, Devan, Atitheen, Balakaan, Guroon, Pratyavekshya tirashchoapi pratipannaparigrahan)**

Eat after satisfying the *Pitrus* (manes), gods, guests, children and *Guru*. After satisfying even the dependents maintained in the house (such as servants,

horses and other animals for receiving services, parrots and other pets etc)

Only after sharing your food, feeding the ones who are dependent on you for their needs, you can truly enjoy your own meal. Eating in a good state of mind is the key.

#### **Eating After Considering Likes and Dislikes (Samikshya Samyag Aatmana)**

Food should be eaten only after carefully considering one's own constitution (*Prakriti*), likes and dislikes. Eating food which is suitable for you and the food you like, instantly enhances your state of mind and helps in mindful eating. It helps to make choices regarding what to eat, what not to eat and how much to eat etc.

#### **Eating Without Complaining (Anindana)**

Food should be consumed without scolding, abusing the food and without complaining about it. Scolding or complaining about the food before eating hampers your state of mind and suggests your dislike towards what is being served in your plate. Eating in this state of mind and eating forcefully does no good to your body and digestion as well.

#### **Eating In Silence (Abruvana)**

Food should be consumed without too much of talk. Eating silently, without talking, laughing will avoid aerophagy (engulfing air) and ensure proper eating and early satisfaction.

#### **Taking Liquid Diet (Dravam)**

Partaking more of liquid food is suggested by *Acharya*. Liquid food helps easy digestion, prevents dehydration, and provides proper and instant nourishment. It is also effective and is suggested in diseased condition by practitioners even today.

#### **Eating In a Good Company (Ishtam Ishtaihi Sahashniyaschuchi Bhaktajan Hritam)**

The food consumed should be liked by the individual and it should be consumed in the company of liked person if not in solitude. It should be served by those who are clean and faithful to him. Eating in good ambience, clean place, made with all safety

precautions and eaten along with people who care about you can be more fulfilling and satisfying indicating good health and happy stomach.

## DISCUSSION

Unorganised, improper dietary habits are the primary reason for the increasing health disorders in modern era. Intake of frozen, canned, processed food plays an important role in causing of these diseases. There is definitely a need to acknowledge people about how our ancient practitioners have already given a step-wise guide to how to eat, what to eat and when to eat and many other disciplines regarding food habits and consumption but with the pinch of modern views on it so that people would more profoundly understand our ancient knowledge and return with some important take home messages.

In modern era, newer food processing methods are in practice to increase digestibility, to enhance the colour and flavours of the food. In order to increase the appearance of food many chemicals are also being added to it which has become the root cause of various diseases. Microwaving the food causes water molecules in food to resonate at very high frequency which cooks food instantly and saves a lot of time. But at the same time it alters the natural chemical composition of food which is inappropriate. Food cooked according to the traditional cooking techniques of Ayurveda will maintain and even enhance its original nutritive values. The *Sanskar* (processing) done on the food by ancient methods will only help making it easily digestible. Eating hot meal, freshly prepared, eating on time, eating in silence, savouring each bite, eating with clean hands and clearer mind, these are the *Aahar Vidhi* which are even more relevant in today's era of constant hustle and inconsistency of dietary habits. It shows how important it is to consume food in a proper disciplined manner to avoid future risk of diseases and hampered health. *Aacharya Vagbhat* had made it clear by the stepwise Sutra on *Aahar Vidhi* (dietary guidelines) and which are truly scientific and relevant.

## CONCLUSION

*Aahar* is life of living being. "*Prana Pranabhutamanna*". Human health is said to be the

bio-product of what we consume on daily basis. Healthy life starts with healthy food and healthier dietary habits. *Aahar* is the important factor in human for both healthy and diseased condition. The strength, complexion, intelligence, longevity of a person will enhance if he practices correct diet regimen. Diet regimen by *Aacharya Vagbhat* is truly scientific and relevant.

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