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Ritucharya for healthy life

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ABSTRACT

Ritu, the season, classified by different features expresses different effects on the body as well as the environment. *Ayurveda* has depicted various rules and regimens (*Charya*), regarding diet and behavior to acclimatize seasonal enforcement easily without altering body homeostasis. The prime principle of Ayurvedic system of medicine is preventive aspect, can be achieved by the change in diet and practices in response to change in climatic condition. This is a very important aspect of preventive medicine as mentioned in Ayurvedic texts. Lifestyle disorders are very common in the present era, basically originating from lack of following seasonal regimens due to lack of concentration in seasonal characteristics. A firm scientific analysis is the base, which holds true even on date. In this review article, various regimens in diet and lifestyle as mentioned in the classics of *Ayurveda* and their importance on lifestyle disorders has been discussed.

Key words: Lifestyle disorders, seasonal regimens, seasonal variations in India

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the age old science of life, has always emphasized to maintain the health and prevent the diseases by following proper diet and lifestyle regimen rather than treatment and cure of the diseases. The basic principle followed in the Ayurvedic system of medicine is *Swasthyashya Swasthya Rakshanam*, which means to maintain the health of the healthy, rather than *Aturashya Vikara Prashamanancha*, means to cure the dis- eases of the diseased.^[1] For this purpose the *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) have been mentioned in the classics of Ayurveda.^[2] In *Tasyashitya* chapter of Charaka Samhita, it is said - *Tasya Shitadiya Ahaarbalam Varnascha Vardhate ! Tasyartusatmayam*

Vaditam Chestaharvyapasrayam !! which means the strength and complexion of the person knowing the suitable diet and regimen for every season and practicing accordingly are enhance.^[3] Main theme of this chapter is to make people aware concerning the methods to live in accordance with the environment. In this article, the *Ritucharyas* mentioned in the classics of *Ayurveda* have been discussed and emphasis has been given on the likely impact of *Ritucharya* on lifestyle disorders.

Classification of season

The year according to *Ayurveda* is divided into two periods *Ayana* (solstice) depending on the direction of movement of sun that is *Uttarayana* (northern solstice) and *Dakshinayana* (southern solstice). Each is formed of three *Ritus* (seasons). The word *Ritu* means to go. It is the form in which the nature expresses itself in a sequence in particular and specific in present forms in short, the seasons.^[4]

A year consists of six seasons, namely, *Shishira* (winter), *Vasanta* (spring), and *Grishma* (summer) in *Uttarayan* and *Varsh* (monsoon), *Sharada* (autumn), and *Hemanta* (late autumn) in *Dakshinayana*. As *Ayurveda* has its origin in India, the above seasonal changes are observed predominantly in Indian subcontinent.

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The six seasons along with their properties

| Kaal (semester) | Ritu (season) | Maas (month) | Properties of the season | Powerful tastes | Dosha prevalent | Required Panchkarma |
|------------------------------|---------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| Aadaan (Northern Solastice) | Sishira | Magha and Phalguna (mid January to mid march) | Cold and dewy season | Tikta (bitter) | Pitta | Swedana, Patar Potli, Shashtishali Pind Swedana, Abhyangam |
| | Vasanta | Chaitra and Baisakh (mid March to mid May) | Spring season | Kashaya (astringent) | Kapha | Vamana |
| | Grishma | Jyeshtha and Aashadha (mid May to mid July) | Summer season | Kattu | Vata | Mild Abhyangam & Swedana |
| Visarga (Southern Solastice) | Varsha | Shravana and Bhadrapada (mid July to mid September) | Rainy season | Amala (sour) | Vata | Vastikaram |
| | Sharad | Aashvin and Kartika (mid September to mid November) | Autumn season | Lavana (salty) | Pitta | Virechana |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--|---------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------------------|
| | Hemant | Margshirsha and Pausha (mid November to mid January) | Winter season | Madhura (sweet) | Pitta | Virechana, Abhyangam, Swedana |
|--|--------|--|---------------|-----------------|-------|-------------------------------|

Shishira^[5]

General condition: Mid-January to mid-March (approximately) is considered as *Shishira Ritu* (winter). During this season, the environment remains cold, along with cold wind. The predominant *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* during this season are *Tikta* (bitter) and *Akasha*, respectively. The strength of the person becomes less, deposition of the *Kapha Dosha* occurs and *Agni* (catabolism) remains in a higher state.

Aahara: Foods having *Amla* (sour) as the predominant taste are preferred. Cereals and pulses, wheat/gram flour products, new rice, corn, and others, are advised. Ginger, garlic, *Haritaki* (fruits of *Terminalia chebula*), *Pippali* (fruits of *Piper longum*), sugarcane products, and milk and milk products are to be included in the diet.

Foods having *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent) predominant *Rasa* are to be avoided. *Laghu* (light) and *Shita* (cold) foods are advised to be prohibited.

Vihara: Massage with oil/powder/paste, bathing with lukewarm water, exposure to sunlight, wearing warm clothes is mentioned to follow. *Vata* aggravating lifestyle like exposure to cold wind, excessive walking, sleep at late night, are to be avoided.

Vasanta^[6]

General condition: The approximate time is from mid-March to mid-May. This season is considered as season of flowering and origin of new leaves. Predominant *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* during this season are *Kashaya* (astringent), and *Prithvi* and *Vayu*, respectively. Strength of the person remains in

medium degree, vitiation of *Kapha Dosha* occurs and *Agni* remains in *Manda* state.

Ahara: One should take easily digestible foods. Among cereals, old barley, wheat rice and others are preferred. Among pulses, lentil, *Mugda*, and others, can be taken. Food items tasting *Tikta* (bitter), *Katu* (pungent), and *Kashaya* (astringent) are to be taken. Besides those, honey is to be included in the diet. Meats like that of *Shahsa* (rabbit), which are easy to digest can be taken. Foods which are hard to digest are to be avoided. Those which are *Sheeta* (cold), *Snigdha* (viscous), *Guru* (heavy), *Amla* (sour), *Madhura* (sweet) are not preferred. New grains, curd, cold drinks, and so on, are also to be prohibited.

Vihara: One should use warm water for bathing purpose, may do exercise during *Vasant Ritu*. *Udvartana* (massage) with powder of *Chandana* (*Santalum album*), *Kesara* (*Crocus sativus*), *Agaru*, and others, *Kavala* (gargle), *Dhooma* (smoking), *Anjana* (collyrium), and evacuative measures, such as *Vamana* and *Nasya* are advised. Day-sleep is strictly contraindicated during this season.

Grishma^[7]

General condition: Mid-May to mid-July (approximately) is considered as *Grishma* (summer) season. Environment is prevalent with intense heat and unhealthy wind. The river-bodies dried and the plants appear lifeless. The predominant *Rasa* is *Katu* (pungent) and *Mahabhuta* are *Agni* and *Vayu*. The strength of the person become less, deposition of *Vata Dosha* occurs, but the vitiated *Kapha Dosha* is pacified during this season. *Agni* of the person will remain in mild state.

Ahara: Foods which are light to digest, those having *Madhura* (sweet), *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Sheeta* (cold), and *Drava* (liquid) *Guna*, such as rice, lentil, etc., are to be taken. Drinking plenty of water and other liquids, such as cold water, buttermilk, fruit juices, meat soups, mango juice, churned curd with pepper, is to be practiced. At bedtime milk with sugar candy is to be taken. *Lavana* and food with *Katu* (pungent) and *Amla* (sour) taste and *Ushna* (warm) foods are to be avoided.

Vihara: Staying in cool places, applying sandal wood and other aromatic pastes over the body, adorning with flowers, wearing light dresses and sleeping at day time are helpful. During night one can enjoy the cooled moon rays with breeze. Excessive exercise or hard work is to be avoided; too much sexual indulgence and alcoholic preparations are prohibited.

Varsha^[8]

General condition: Mid-July to mid-September (approximately) is considered as *Varsha Ritu*. During this season the sky is covered by clouds and rains occur without thunder storm. The ponds, rivers, etc., are filled with water. The predominant *Rasa* and *Mahabhuta* during this season are *Amla* (sour), and *Prithvi* and *Agni*, respectively. The strength of the person again becomes less, vitiation of *Vata Dosha* and deposition of *Pitta Dosha*, *Agni* also gets vitiated.

Ahara: Foods having *Amla* (sour) and *Lavana* (salty) taste and of *Sneha* (unctuous) qualities are to be taken. Among cereals, old barley, rice, wheat, etc., are advised. Besides meat soup, *Yusha* (soup), etc. are to be included in the diet. It is mentioned that one should take medicated water or boiled water. Intake of river water, churned preparations having more water, excessive liquid and wine are to be avoided. The foods, which are heavy and hard to digest, like meat, etc., are prohibited.

Vihara: Use of boiled water for bath and rubbing the body with oil properly after bath is advised. Medicated *Basti* (enema) is prescribed as an evacuative measure to expel vitiated *Doshas*. Getting wet in rain, day sleep, exercise, hard work, sexual indulgence wind, staying at river-bank, etc., are to be prohibited.

Sharat^[9]

General condition: The period between mid-September to mid-November is *Sharat Ritu* (autumn). During this time the Sun becomes bright, the sky remains clear and sometimes with white cloud, and the earth is covered with wet mud. The predominant *Rasa* is *Lavana* (salty) and predominant *Mahabhutas* are *Apa* and *Agni*. The strength of the person remains

medium, pacification of vitiated *Vata Dosha* and vitiation of *Pitta Dosha* occur, and activity of *Agni* increases during this season.

Aahara: Foods are having *Madhura* (sweet) and *Tikta* (bitter) taste, and of *Laghu* (light to digest) and cold properties are advised. Foods having the properties to pacify vitiated *Pitta* are advised. Wheat, green gram, sugar candy, honey, *Patola* (*Trichosanthes dioica*), flesh of animals of dry land (*Jangala Mamsa*) are to be included in the diet. Hot, bitter, sweet, and astringent foods are to be avoided. The food items, such as fat, oils, meat of aquatic animals, curds, etc., are also to be not included in the diet during this season.

Vihara: Habit of eating food, only when there is a feeling of hunger is recommended. One should take water purified by the rays of sun in day time and rays of moon at night time for drinking, bathing, etc. It is advised to wear flower garlands, and to apply paste of *Chandana* (*Santalum album*) on the body. It is said that moon rays in the first 3hrs of night is conducive for health. Medical procedures, such as *Virechana* (purging), *Rakta Mokshana* (bloodletting), etc., should be done during this season.

Hemanta^[10]

General condition: Mid-November to mid-January is considered as *Hemanta* (late autumn) *Ritu*. Blow of cold winds starts and chillness is felt. Predominant *Rasa* during this season is *Madhura* and the predominant *Mahabhutas* are *Prithivi* and *Apa*. The strength of a person remains on highest grade and vitiated *Pitta Dosha* gets pacified. Activity of *Agni* is increased.

Diet regimen: One should use unctuous, sweet, sour, and salty foods. Among cereals and pulses, new rice, flour preparations, green gram, Masha, etc., are mentioned to be used. Various meats, fats, milk and milk products, sugarcane products, *Sidhu* (fermented preparations), *Tila* (sesame), and so on, are also to be included in the diet.

Vata aggravating foods, such as *Laghu* (light), cold, and dry foods are to be avoided. Intake of cold drinks is also contraindicated.

Lifestyle: Exercise, body and head massage, use of warm water, *Atapa-sevana* (sunbath), application of *Agaru* on body, heavy clothing, sexual indulgence with one partner, residing in warm places is recommended. Exposure to strong and cold wind, habit of day sleep, etc., are mentioned to be avoided.

DISCUSSION

This is the way the ancient sages set up the regimen for various seasons on analytical reasoning to obtain *Swastha* (health) and prevent the diseases. The examples set by them stand as a hint to decide other do's and don'ts in the regimen *Ritucharya*. The environmental factors include the nature of the land, water, and various atmospheric phenomena, including temperature, humidity, wind, rain, clouds, and atmospheric pressure. All their environmental factors undergo a continuous change and at a time, no two moments are exactly alike in a given place. Thus, with the rising Sun the temperature keeps on rising and gradually drops at night. The maximum and minimum temperature fluctuates daily but it is highest in summer and lowest in winter. Similarly, all these factors show diurnal as well as seasonal variations and these variations for a particular time are known as season.^[11]

In *Ayurveda*, the knowledge of *Ritucharya* is a first-hand guide to the concept of *Kriya-Kala*, which describes the modes and stages of the development of diseases, with regard to the state of different *Doshas* - *Vatu*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* in accordance with the changes of time. A good understanding of it is very much essential for early diagnosis and prognosis for adopting preventive and curative measures. It is to be known that disharmony in the *Doshas* - *Vatu*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* results in *Roga* (disease). And aim of the science of *Ayurveda* is to maintain the harmony. With changes in diet and lifestyle, there are changes in the state of *Tridosha*, which is bound to affect us, resulting disharmony, causing lifestyle diseases. *Ritu* acts as *Vyanjaka* or *Nimittakarana* in the aggravation and manifestation of disease. For example, an evening (afternoon) headache is essentially with *Vata*

predominance. Diseases due to *Vata* show a tendency to aggravate during the rainy season.

CONCLUSION

Ritucharya is a powerful, health giving Ayurvedic tool that helps us live according to the changes in season and make internal adjustments so that our *Doshas* are in a state of balance. Ayurvedic health guidelines are extremely powerful and potent. The importance of following *Ritucharya* is that we are able to stop disease even before it starts. With health care costs on the rise, high stress lives and weakening immunity, *Dinacharya* assume even greater importance to us. It helps us take charge of our health and our families' health and gives us simple yet powerful tools to help our body.

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