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## Physiological association of *Aahar* and *Mana*: A Review

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### ABSTRACT

*Ayu* (life) is an incorporation of *Sharira* (body), *Indriya* (senses), *Satva* (mind) and *Aatma* (soul) which signifies the concept of psychosomatics in *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* emphasizes the importance of maintaining the clarity of mind, the sense organ, and the normal physiological functions of the body. *Aahar* is the best of all medicines and is considered one among the three sub-pillars (*Trayopstambha*) of *Ayurveda*. As it is said that, *Aahar* (food) if taken properly, is work like *Aushadhi* (medicine). In today's fast paced life, many norms regarding *Aahar* have been compromised. Gut-brain axis has the communication between CNS and ENS. So improper food habits may be the cause of *Manas Rogas*. The mind has three qualities, *Satva*, *Raja* and *Tama*, which are present in almost everything, including food. The *Saatwik* mind is said to be a pure mind and this purity helps to prevent illness. It is possible due to *Saatwik Aahar* because the purity of mind comes from the purity of food. So, here is an attempt made to state the physiological association between *Aahar* and *Mana*.

**Key words:** *Aahar*, Gut-brain axis, *Mana*

### INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda* is the "science of life" that involves maintaining an individual's physical and mental health. As per *Ayurveda*, the one who has equilibrium of *Tridoshas*, normal *Agni*, normal *Dhatu*, *Mala Kriya* and whose *Aatma* (soul), *Indriya* (senses) and *Mana* (mind) all are happy, is considered as a healthy individual.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to WHO, Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.<sup>[2]</sup>

In *Ayurveda*, *Aahar*, *Nidra* and *Bramhacharya* are known as *Trayopstambha* i.e., Three sub-pillars of life.<sup>[3]</sup>

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It is clear from the order in which *Aahar* has been placed first, which shows that it's most important to maintain and sustain life. According to *Aacharya Charaka*, *Aahar* is considered as *Prana* or vital breath of living beings. All the characteristics like complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, life, imagination, happiness, contentment, corpulence, strength, intellect - depends on *Aahar*.<sup>[4]</sup> *Acharya Sushruta* also states that strength, health, color, freshness, alertness of sense organs etc. are factors dependent on ingestion of *Aahar*.<sup>[5]</sup>

In *Bhagwat Gita*, three types of *Aahar* have been described: *Satwik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik*. It helps in the development of the same temperament in the mind.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Mana* is one of the factors which is influenced by *Aahar*. It is also categorized into three *Guna* - *Satva* (balance), *Raja* (arrogance) and *Tama* (indolence). *Raja* and *Tama* are reactive inclinations, which vitiate the mind resulting an emotional imbalance and psychological disturbances. Therefore, they are termed as two *Dosha* of mind.<sup>[7]</sup>

*Sharira* is the place where *Chetana* means soul along with mind resides.<sup>[8]</sup> So, the term *Sharira Poshana* refers to both body and mind nourishment.

As we know, a healthy mind always resides in a healthy body, Therefore, to maintain the physical as well as the mental health proper nutrition is an important factor.

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. To study the association of *Aahar* and *Mana*.
2. To analyze the importance of proper *Aahar* for maintenance of a healthy mind.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literature related to *Aahar* and *Mana* is taken from various *Samhitas*, reference books, journals, publications and magazines.

#### *Aahar*

The term "*Aahar*" refers to anything that is swallowed or ingested using the tongue, mouth, or throat.

*Aacharya Charaka* states that, due to the act of swallowing, whatever is undergone during the process of deglutition is *Aahar* and it is responsible for the growth of body entities.<sup>[10]</sup>

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Aahar* is referred as "*Brahma* or Creator", which declares its supremacy.<sup>[10]</sup>

All living beings are sustained because of food. There is no medicine equivalent to food available anywhere. Even if drugs are introduced to diseased person, he cannot get cured without food. This is reason why *Aacharya Kashyapa* called *Aahara* as *Mahabhaishajya*.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### Benefits of *Aahar*<sup>[12]</sup>

- *Preenana* - *Aahar* provides good nourishment to all the cells and organs.
- *Bala Krita* - Enhances strength and immunity of the body.
- *Deha Dharaka* - Supports the body and makes it strong.
- *Ayu Vivardhanam* - Enhances the life span.
- *Tejo Vivardhanam* - Enhances the luster.
- *Utsaha Vivardhanam* - increases enthusiasm and maintains a positive attitude.

- *Smruti Vivardhanam* - Enhances memory.
- *Ojo Vivardhanam* - improves the *Ojas*, or essence, of every tissue, which in turn impacts immunity.

*Aahar* is the source of strength, life, complexion and *Ojas* of living beings. It also says that *Aahar Shuddhau Satwa Shuddhi* - means from the purity of food comes the purity of mind. It gives color, lustre, speech, life, innovation, happiness, content, nourishment, strength, intelligence to a person.

#### *Trividha Aahar*<sup>[6]</sup>

##### 1. *Satvik Aahar*

Food that enhances *Ayu* (longevity), *Satva* (mind strength), *Bala* (body strength), *Aarogya* (health), *Sukha* (happiness) and *Preeti* (joy), that which is *Rasya* (juicy), *Snigdha* (oily), *Sthira* (stable) and *Hridya* (pleasant), is dear to one who is *Satwik*.

##### 2. *Rajasik Aahar*

Food that is bitter *Katu* (bitter), *Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salty), *Atyushna* (excessively hot), *Tikshna* (pungent), *Ruksha* (dry) and *Vidahi* (burning) is dear to the *Rajasik* person, causing pain, sorrow and disease.

##### 3. *Tamasik Aahar*

*Yatayamam* (Stale) means that food has lost its original state, being kept for a long time, *Gatarasam* (Tasteless) means that which has lost its natural taste, *Puti* (Putrid) means emitting a bad smell, *Paryusitam* (Decayed) refers to becoming rancid with the passage of time, *Ucchistam* (Refused) means the food that has remained over after being taken by persons other than *Gurus* etc. Such food is *Amedhyam* (Unclean), and it is not supposed to be offered in the worship of God.

To preserve the *Satwik Manasa Prakriti* and shield the mind from *Raja and Tama Guna*, the appropriate diet should be followed. It is strongly advised that a person should never consume food out of greed or when unaware of what he eats. The improper food habits are one of the causes of *Manas Rogas*.

#### *Mana*

*Satva* (mind), *Aatma* (soul) and *Sharira* (body) together are considered as the triad (*Tridand*) of life. In *Brihat Trayi*, Location of *Mana* is described as *Hridya*.

*Mana* is described as -

- *Karan Dravya* - factors for creation of this whole universe.
- *Amurta Dravya* - which has no physical form but whose activities determine its existence.
- *Ubhayatmaka* - it works in connection with both sensory and motor organs.
- *Atindriya* - cannot be perceived by five sensory organs.
- *Achetan* - devoid of consciousness.
- *Adhyatma Dravya* - connection of *Atma*.

*Mana* has three components i.e., *Satva*, *Raja* and *Tama*. The latter two i.e., *Raja* and *Tama* are the *Doshas* of *Mana*, which if get disturbed by any wrong behavioural, vitiates the mind.

#### Relation of Aahar and Mana

In *Chhandogya Upanishada*, *Mana* is described as *Annamaya*. *Mana* is nourished from food-the gross part of the food produces faeces, the middle portion fosters growth of muscular and other body tissues, while the subtle parts nourish the mind.<sup>[13]</sup> The mind becomes pure when all of the food is pure. Firm memory is imposed by this pure mind.

In *Annapanavidhi Adhyaya*, *Aacharya Charaka* states the relationship between the *Aahar* and *Mana*. *Aacharya* refers *Aahar* as vital strength if it has desirable colour, smell, taste and touch and have been taken according to prescribed methods. It produces energy in *Mana* (*Satwam oorjayati*), constitution of *Dhatu*s, strength, complexion and clarity of sense organs, if properly taken; otherwise they become harmful.<sup>[14]</sup>

Inappropriate food (*Anuchita Aahar*) is considered as one of the causes of *Unmad*.<sup>[15]</sup>

The channels conveying *Rakta*, *Rasa*, and *Sadnya Vaha Srotas* (consciousness) became vitiated when a person indulged in dirty food (*Malinaaharasheelasya*) and having himself covered with *Rajas* and *Tamas*. They give rise to diseases - *Mada* (narcosis), *Murccha* (fainting) and *Samnyasa* (coma).<sup>[16]</sup>

*Ama* develops when a person consumes foods they disliked and also having food while afflicted with psychic emotions such as passion, anger, greed, confusion, envy, bashfulness, grief, conceit, excitement and fear. Due to anxiety, grief, dread, rage, an uncomfortable bed, and vigil, even the wholesome food taken in proper quantity, does not get digested.<sup>[17]</sup>

A person who takes *Satvik Aahar* is more likely to live a stress-free life and it makes a person less risk of illness to mental disorders like depression, anxiety, mood disorders, hyperacidity etc. The mind-body equilibrium is ruined by *Rajasika Aahar* and they make the mind anxious, hyperactive, lack of concentration and affect sleeping patterns and develop insomnia, increases urges of anger. *Tamasik Aahar* slows down the speed of activities, depression, numbness etc.<sup>[18]</sup>

*Rasavaha Srotas* and *Manovaha Srotas* are connected with each other. *Rasavaha Srotas Dushti Hetu* might also be taken into consideration for vitiating *Manovaha Srotas*. From all the above descriptions, it is clear that there is strong association of *Aahar* and *Mana*.

#### Gut-Brain Axis

The gut-brain axis (GBA) is a bidirectional communication pathway between the central and enteric nervous systems that connects the brain's emotional and cognitive centers to peripheral intestine processes. The bidirectional communication occurs through immune, endocrine, humoral and neural connections.<sup>[18]</sup>

The gut brain axis includes - Central nervous system (CNS), Autonomic nervous system (ANS), enteric nervous system (ENS) and Hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal axis (HPA axis).

The CNS and in particular HPA axis can be activated in response to environmental stress as well as elevated systemic pro-inflammatory cytokines. So, through secretion of the corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) from the hypothalamus, stimulates adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) secretion from pituitary gland that, in turn, leads to cortisol release from the adrenal glands. Cortisol is an important stress

hormone that affects many human organs, including the brain. Thus, both neural and hormonal lines of communication combine to allow the brain to influence the activities of intestinal functional effector cells, such as immune cells, epithelial cells, enteric neurons, smooth muscle cells, interstitial cells and enterochromaffin cells.<sup>[19]</sup>

In order to maintain sufficient mental health, there must be proper communication between the gut bacteria and the brain. A balanced diet is important to maintain both a functional GBA and good mood.

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of Ayurveda is “*Swasthasya swastya rakshanam*” to keep the health of a healthy individual. For that, in Ayurved various *Aahar*, *Vihar*, *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya* etc. are explained in a very detailed manner. *Aahar* has given more importance than *Aushadhi*. As *Aahar* (food) is said to be like medicine (*Aushadhi*), if taken properly. As we know, *Sharira* and *Mana* are inseparable entities. Anything which affects the body can also change the mental status. *Satwik* mind is said to be a pure mind and this purity helps to prevent illness. This is only possible in *Satwik Aahar*, as the purity of mind comes from the purity of food. The food we eat directly influence the mental health as equal as its effect on physical health.

## CONCLUSION

*Aahar* is the primary factor for strength, complexion and vitality of living beings. In *Chhandogya Upanishad*, *Mana* is said to be *Annamaya*, which means it is made up of food. The food which is unacceptable for the mind will not nourish the body because there is bidirectional communication between CNS and ENS as per Gut-Brain axis. *Satvik Aahar* helps to keep a person healthy or in a disease-free state. Because *Satva Shuddhi* (Purity of mind) comes from *Satvik Aahar* (Purity of food).

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