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Ayurvedic Perspective on Food as Medicine - A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Main key for good health is wholesome food and obedience of different dietary regimen without which nothing can be obtained. Generally people have this problem that after suffering from disease, they are unable to choose proper food according to the disease and also being ignorant about the diet according to the disease, due to which that particular person's disease becomes fiercer. Therefore, food according to disease is of great importance which helps for the destruction of disease. Before knowing this food, it is also very important to know the factors of disease. It is clearly described in the codes that improper food is the root cause of diseases and along with it, the nature of the particular person, condition of vitiate *doshas* in his body, *Agni, Kala, Desha*, etc. also play an important and helpful role in this process. If seen in this way, food is also a cause of diseases and it is also an infallible medicine for disease prevention. In different *Ayurvedic* texts and lexicons, what type of food should be taken daily in the codes, the benefits of proper food, how to choose specific dietary articles in various diseases like *Prameha, Sthaulya, Arsha* etc. and how this food will cure the disease in the form of medicine is mentioned in detail. In this article this all matter will be described in detail.

Key words: Food, Medicine, Digestive fire, Dietetics, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION

Many references in texts are there which shows that behind development of each and every disease, unwholesome food plays as a crucial etiological factor. When person or patient correct their Diet means it moves from intake of unwholesome to wholesome diet and finally gets over to disease, it proves that food

works as a medicine. According to *Ayurveda* the food plays a very delicate role for the maintenance of health. Out of the three *Upastambhas*, the *Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (Sleep), *Brhamcharya* (refrained from all sexual acts) diet has been recognized as a first and essential factor. Among all (*Upastambha*), *Anna* (Food) is the best sustainer of the life. Emphasizing upon the balanced diet *Acharya Charaka* says that a man votary of wholesome diets and controlled habits survives for thirty-six thousand nights (hundred years) in a disease free state blessed by noble men. Showing the importance of diet *Acharya Sushruta* says that the food determines the origin of beings and forms a chief source of their bodily strength and complexion as well as of the *Ojas* in the organism. *Ayurveda* also aims to fulfill the four basic pursuits of life (*Chaturvarga*) viz. *Dharma* (virtue), *Artha* (wealth), *Karma* (desires) and *Moksha* (salvation). These pursuits are mainly depends upon the good health or a diseased fee state of the

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body which can be obtained by wholesome dietetics and obedience of regimen.^[1] *Acharya Charaka* explained the importance of intake of wholesome food at proper time as the wholesome food is responsible for health and maintenance of body, whereas unwholesome food produces diseases. As the germinating seed becomes dry without water the disease becomes powerless with proper supervision and administration of *Nidana*, *Pathya* and *Aushadha*.^[2]

Need of the Study

In present time, burden of diseases is increasing continuously. People do not want to buy expensive medicines or to admit in hospitals; therefore they are seeking for effective and economic solution. In ancient time most of the people used the food for prevention or to treat these diseases It is possible to make person disease free with just proper diet.^[3] The aim of *Ayurveda* i.e., “*Swasthasaya Swasthya Rakshnam*” can be fulfilled or achieved only by different healthy dietary and culinary practices. There are two types of *Dravyas* mentioned in *Ayurveda* i.e., *Ahara Dravyas* and *Aushadha Dravyas*.^[4] In other context it is clearly mentioned that if we consume conducive food in right quantity at right time it surely helps to prevent diseases.^[5] Person who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Healthy eating can help people with chronic diseases to manage these conditions and prevent complications. People have been suffering from many diseases due to lack of awareness or knowledge of various traditional dietary and culinary practices. In this way there is emerging need to understand role of *Ahara* as an individual treatment modality, to maintain health, to sustain life also to treat various disease conditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

By use of different *Dravyaguna* lexicons, valuable and descriptive information of *Pathya & Apathya Ahara*, Role of *Ahara* in different lifestyle disorders, Use of *Ahara* in form of Medicine have provided and given in an understandable tabular form. Many aspects are covered here to show the importance and role of food in form of medicine.

- Health and Food
- Disease and Food
- Food as Medicine
- Specific dietary articles according to various diseases
- Others - New innovations related to *Ayurveda* dietetics

Health and Food

Health is dependent on Food. Food enhances the vitality, strength and makes the body sturdy. Food improves *Ojas*, luster, longevity, memory, determination, and *Agni*. Food is among the three sub pillars of supporting life. Food is the fundamental factor in the creation, continuation, and disintegration of all entities, including the divine *Brahman* and others. Life is impossible without food. Organic beings derive their growth, power, and radiant health from food. Food is what gives the sense organs strength and allows them to function in their own domains.^[6]

Disease and Food

Acharya Charaka emphasizes importance of food. The body as well as disease is formed by food, wholesome & unwholesome food is responsible for happiness and misery respectively. The majority of fatal illnesses are caused by eating the wrong foods. So intelligent and self controlled man should consume conducive food in right quantity at right time to prevent diseases. Irregularity (*Vaishyamy*) of diet which brings about ill health.^[7] Now-a-days, the diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes (*Madhumeha*), obesity (*Sthaulya*), cancer (*Arbuda*), liver diseases (*Yakrit Vridhhi*), insomnia (*Nidranasha*), anxiety neurosis (*Chittodvega*) and bronchial asthma (*Tamaka Swasa*) are highly prevalent and are labeled as lifestyle disorders. These lifestyle disorders are caused by primarily poor eating habits and behaviors. Therefore, due consideration mentioned in *Ayurveda* should be given to all aspects of diet planning in the treatment of diseases and to maintain the health.^[8]

Food as Medicine

According to *Acharya Harita* if a person ignored the concept of *Pathya-Apathya* and devour *Apathya*,

illness never leave their body. Hence person should use *Pathya* according to their physical and pathological condition regularly. Even in the absence of medicine if patient takes only *Pathya* according to disease he will become healthy. However, the patient will never get well even if he takes more and better medications and doesn't take the doctor's recommended *Pathya Ahara*. In *Vaidyajeetnam*, *Acharya Lolimbakra* pointed out that if patient do not take *Pathya*, why they take medicine. Without following the *Pathya* schedule there are no value and benefits of medicine.^[9] The disease can be cured without any medicine by just following wholesome regimen. Whereas even hundreds of medicines cannot cure a disease in absence of wholesome regimen.^[10]

Specific Dietary Articles according to various diseases^[11]

Table 1: Showing the Specific Dietary Articles in Prameha

<i>Pathya</i> (wholesome)	<i>Apathya</i> (unwholesome)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> - Yava Use of <i>Venuyava</i> Old <i>Triticum sativum</i> floor Use of one year old rice or millets like <i>Shymaka</i> (<i>Setaria italic</i>) Use soup of <i>Phaseolus mungo</i> <i>Cicer arietinum</i> (bengal gram) product Leafy Vegetables - <i>Patola</i>, <i>Jeevanti</i>, <i>Kakmachi</i> etc. Oil-Mustard oil, <i>Ingudi</i> oil, <i>Atasi</i> oil Use of Honey, old liquor <i>Phaseolus mungo</i>, <i>Amalaka</i> Roasted meat Decoction of <i>Triphala</i> and <i>Kusha</i>, water added with honey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of New Grains and newly formed liquor Regular use of curd and its product, meat of goat, fish etc. Use of rice pudding Milk and its preparation Jaggery and its products in excess or regular intake Enjoying sedentary life Indulgence of sleep

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Exercise, Bath Rough Massage or massage with dry powder External usage of <i>Agaru</i>, <i>Chandana</i> 	
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Table 2: Showing the Specific Dietary Articles in Sthaulya

<i>Pathya</i> (wholesome)	<i>Apathya</i> (unwholesome)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dry and Heavy (<i>Guru</i> in Nature) Food, Soup of <i>Phaseolus aureus</i>, <i>Cajanus indicus</i>, <i>Dolichos biflorus</i> Use of <i>Vidanga</i>, <i>Patola</i>, Honey Solution <i>Bruhata Panchmoola</i> decoction added with honey, <i>Takra</i>, Iron tablets, Rough and Dry massage, Night awakening, Regular Intercourse as per norms. Regular physical and mental exercise/work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking more sweet, cold and unctuous food Taking more quantity of food Consuming food prior to the previous meal's digestion No or less sexual activity, No Physical activity Day time sleep after meal, regular happiness Mental relaxation and Hereditary

Table 3: Showing the Specific Dietary Articles in Arsha

<i>Pathya</i> (wholesome)	<i>Apathya</i> (unwholesome)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Old Cereals, Use of <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> Soup of <i>Pisum sativum</i>, <i>Phaseolus aureus</i>, <i>cajanus indicus</i>, <i>Ervum lens</i>, <i>Basella rubra</i>, <i>Ferula narthex</i>, <i>Spinacea oleracea</i>, <i>Trichosanthes dioica</i>, <i>Portulaca quadrifida</i>, <i>Amorphallus campanulatus</i>, <i>Solanum nigrum</i>. Taking large amount of ghee orally just before meal, Rice pudding, Fresh <i>Takra</i> with <i>Saindhava</i> salt Juice of <i>Dadima</i>, <i>Badara</i>, <i>Matulunga</i>, Curd with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased consumption of <i>Abhishyandi</i> foods and sweet, heavy, and chilly foods Food causing burning sensation, Incompatible food, Taking food in state of digestion, Deficit meal under nutrients Dry leafy vegetables, Intake of rich food taking long time to digest Inspissated milk preparation, sprouted cereals, <i>Moolaka</i>, newly cultivated cereals, Unformed

<p><i>Dadima</i>, Ghee, Jaggery, Goat milk, butter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Jeevanti</i>, <i>Vastuka</i>, <i>Kakmachi</i> and <i>Changeri</i> 	<p>Curd, Day time sleep, Abnormal sitting and posture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suppression and Stimulation of natural urges
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Others - New innovations related to Ayurveda dietetics

- **Ayurnutrigenomics** - Integration of Ayurgenomics with the traditional concept of *Ahara* and *Pathya*. The selection of a suitable dietary, therapeutic, and lifestyle regime is made on the basis of clinical assessment of an individual maintaining one's *Prakriti*. For e.g. - *Matura Aahar Vihara Prakriti*.
- *Ayurveda Ahara - Ayurveda Aahara* Regulations, 5th May, 2022

DISCUSSION

When channels become hard by aggravated and vitiate *Dosha*, *Pathya* (healthy and wholesome food) helps to soften the *Srotasa* and *Dosha* alleviation resulting in help to cure the disease. *Acharya Kashyapa* expounded upon the significance of *Pathya* and bestowed upon it the title *Mahaushadha*, signifying that no other medicine is equivalent to *Ahara* for any individual and that one can achieve health solely via the practice of *Hita Ahara*. Now-a-days people ignore the importance of diet according to the disease and depend only to the medicines prescribed for the disease. In this way, in form of order, medicine got first rank and on other hand second rank is given to the diet. But it is clearly mentioned in the *Ayurvedic* scriptures that the first aim is to protect health in a healthy man, should be fulfilled through the diet which is *Rasa*-predominant in nature. If the person is suffering from a particular disease, then in this situation, along with the medicine, the disease-specific diet should be used. In this way diet can be used as a primary or secondary treatment modality according to the condition in the form of medicine.

CONCLUSION

Among all (*Upastambhas*), *Ahara* (diet) is the best sustainer of life. *Acharya Charaka* says that sinful acts and unwholesome diet are the two important factors

for the causation of diseases. In the absence of these two factors, the individual becomes free from all diseases. For prevention from disease and to treat the ongoing disease the concept of nutritional balance is important and wholesome *Ahara* (food) must fulfill these criteria; to meet biochemical and physiological needs of the body and to avoid excess or deficiency of any nutrients that increases the risk of disease. One should not consume food after the prescribed time or food should not be consumed in less or more quantity. Eating before feeling lightheaded can result in indigestion, *Mandagni*, or even death. No medicine is equivalent to food. With proper dietary habits, a person can become disease-free.

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