

Ayurvedic Food and Nutraceuticals - A review on understanding roles, food as medicine


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Nutraceuticals & dietary supplements are versatile in nature. They have become a necessity in the modern world. Nutraceuticals, a term combining the words nutrition and pharmaceutical, are foods or food products that provide medical benefits & health, including the prevention and treatment of disease. Nowadays, dietary supplements are available in the general market. Dietary supplements contain antioxidants, probiotics as well and natural oils, which help in managing health issues. This includes weight management, joint pain, sleep issues, BP, and other complications. When people do not get relief from pharmaceuticals, they move towards nutraceuticals or dietary regimens. Ayurveda mentions the benefits of Ahara for therapeutic purposes. It is easily available and cheap in kitchen remedies. The medical food that is available in the market is not satisfactory based on value and pharmaceutical standardization. Chemically purposed food is also harmful to the body. There is rich literary documentation on Ahara in Ayurveda. Research should be done according to disease and to maintaining good health. It is mentioned that if a man is practicing a wholesome diet there will be no need for medication. Likewise, the best available medicine will not be effective if he is not following dietary restrictions.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Diet, Nutraceuticals, Pharmaceutical, Preventive medicine

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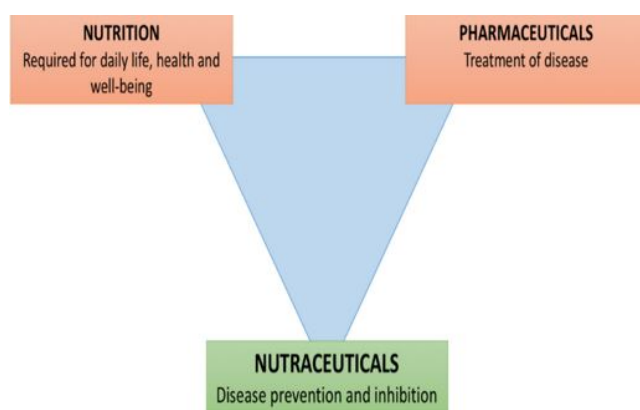
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Introduction

Food plays a very crucial role in both health and disease. A healthy life starts with healthy food. In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* is one of the three pillars of life. Nutraceuticals & dietary supplements are versatile in nature. They have become a necessity in the modern world. The classical texts of *Ayurveda* of 200 BC–700 AD dedicate sections on foods. According to *Ayurveda*, *Swasthya*, the best health is being "established in one's self or one's natural state." To achieve this, one has to have a balance of Physical and physiological factors, metabolic and excretory processes, senses, mind, and body tissues, and attain a state of self-awareness and contented self. [1] The root cause for the strength, complexion, and vitality of living beings is *Ahara* (food). It has the ability to control the disease pathology and promote health as well. [2] Nutraceutical, a term combining the words "Nutrition" and "Pharmaceutical," is a food or food product that provides health and medical benefits and also the prevention and treatment of disease.

The term "nutraceutical" was coined by Stephen L. De Felice in 1989 and is a combination of the words "nutrition" and "pharmaceutical." [3] A nutraceutical can be a nutrient-rich food, a medicinally active food, or a specific component of a particular food. Examples include garlic, omega-3 (found in fish), soybeans, ginger, minerals, vitamins, dietary fiber, hydrolyzed proteins, enriched foods, fortified foods, and so much more.



These are natural substances that offer health benefits beyond their nutritional value, and their origins can be traced back to the ancient Indian system of medicine. *Ayurveda* uses nutrition to promote health and prevent disease. Many Ayurvedic drugs and herbs can be considered nutraceuticals.

Nutrition is a very poorly understood concept in India. The percentages of people who are properly nourished are less in number. According to the imbalance of nourishment pattern, it can be classified as under nourished, over nourished, and nourished with calories but not required nutrients. The percentage of the third one is greater than the others. [3] Dietary risk factors have raised attention worldwide for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The recent report from data in 2019 showed that around 7.9 million deaths and 187.78 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) are linked to dietary risk factors and NCDs. [4] Food is the best source for serving nutritional needs, but with growing modernization, some traditional methods are being given up. Hence, modern food habits are affecting balanced nutrition. There is an ever-widening gap in nutrient intake, due to which normal life is no longer normal. However, the affluence of the working population with changing lifestyles and the reduced affordability of sick care, in terms of time and money involved, are some of the forces that are presently driving people towards thinking about their health and wellness.

Materials and Methods

Nowadays, dietary supplements are available in the general market. Dietary supplements contain antioxidants, probiotics, and natural oils. Which helps in managing health issues. This includes weight management, joint pain, sleep issues, BP, and other complications. Valuable and descriptive information on healthy and unhealthy food using various *Dravyaguna* lexicons, the role of *Ahara* in various lifestyle disorders.

- Health and Food
- Disease and Food
- Food as Medicine Health and Food

Health and Food

According to *Ayurveda*, the science of life, *Swasthya*, "being established in one's natural state" is the best health. To achieve this, one has to have a balance of Physical and physiological factors, metabolic and excretory processes, body tissues, senses, and mind, and attain a state of self-awareness and contented self. Health is dependent on Food. Food enhances vitality and strength and makes the body sturdy. Food improves luster, longevity, *Ojas*, memory, determination, and *Agni*.

Food is among the three sub-pillars of supporting life. It 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, most importantly, radiant health from food. Food is what gives the sense organs strength and allows them to function in their domains.[5]

Disease and Food

Acharya Charaka emphasizes the importance of food. The body, as well as disease, is formed by food. The majority of fatal illnesses are caused by eating the wrong foods. So, an 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.[6] Nowadays, diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes (*Madhumeha*), obesity (*Sthaulya*), insomnia (*Nidranasha*), anxiety neurosis (*Chittodvega*), and bronchial asthma (*Tamaka Swasa*) are highly prevalent and are labelled as lifestyle disorders. Primarily, poor eating habits and behaviours cause these lifestyle disorders. Therefore, due consideration mentioned in *Ayurveda* should be given to all aspects of diet planning in treating diseases and maintaining health.[7]



Food as Medicine

According to *Acharya Harita* if a person ignores the concept of *Pathya-Apathya* and devours *Apathya*, illness never leaves their body. Hence person should use *Pathya* regularly according to their physical and pathological condition regularly.

Even in the absence of medicine, if the patient takes only *Pathya* according to a 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 *Vaidyajeevnam*, *Acharya Lolimbaja* pointed out that if patients do not take *Pathya*, then why do they take medicine? Without following the *Pathya* schedule, there are no value and benefits of medicine.[8] The disease can be cured without any medicine by following a wholesome regimen. Whereas even hundreds of medicines cannot cure a disease in the absence of a wholesome regimen.[9]



Result

Among all (*Upastambhas*), *Ahara* (diet) is best nourisher of life. *Acharya Charaka* says that sinful acts & an unwholesome diet are two important factors for causation of diseases. In absence of these two factors, individual becomes free from all diseases. For prevention of disease & to treat ongoing disease, concept of nutritional balance is important and wholesome. *Ahara* (food) must meet these criteria to meet body's biochemical & physiological requirements & to avoid excess or deficiency of any nutrient, which may increase risk of disease. One should not consume food after prescribed time, & food should not be consumed in less or more quantity. No medicine is equivalent to food. This connection is further discussed in terms of three states of being: *Satva*, *Rajas*, & *Tamas*. *Sattva* is state of satisfaction, *Rajas* is excited state, & *Tamas* is related to lethargic disposition; that is, foods can induce these states of mind.

Ayurvedic diet is a subject that has been thoroughly researched by highly learned *Acharyas* and gives detailed advice on food preparation, the mental state of the person preparing the food, standards of hygiene, utensils to be used, the right time of eating for good digestion, the proper quantity of food, etc. so that the food ingested provides maximum nutrition. Many examples are provided in *Ayurvedic* texts in terms of wholesome supplements, *Pathya*, and *Apathya*. These are particularly indicated in disease management. For example, pomegranate, amla (Indian gooseberry), buttermilk, etc., are mentioned as good *Pathya Ahara* (Good dietary supplements) in the management of iron-deficiency anemia. Yogurt is considered unwholesome in most *Dosa-imbalanced* conditions. There are very specific instructions for consuming yogurt; it should not be taken at night or in seasons such as summer, spring, and fall. It should be taken with sugar candy, honey, or green gram soup. There are also disease-specific or medicine-specific instructions that should be followed for the consumption of *Ahara*. It is clear from the above section that *Ayurveda* has its own universally applicable principles, methods, and practices that are very different from biomedicine and modern nutrition concepts. In *Charak Samhita*, mentioned that the right food or *Ahara* is not just important for physical well-being, but also for happiness, satisfaction, growth, strength, and a long, stress-free life.

Conclusion

Herbal nutraceuticals have a wide role in health and disease. The *Ayurvedic* concept of medicinal foods coincides with the existing implications of nutraceuticals. "*Sarvam Dravyam Pancha Bhoutikam*" which means the rational use of these foods will make us healthy and fit immunologically. There is a huge shift in diet, lifestyle, and health practices owing to rapid modernization. Adapting to healthy practices starting with daily diet may curb the mortality and morbidity of noncommunicable diseases of lifestyle.[11] When people experience failure from pharmaceuticals, they instantly move towards Nutraceutical or dietary regimens. *Ayurveda* mentions the benefits of *Ahara* for therapeutic purposes. It is easily available and cheap and in the form of kitchen remedies. The medical food available in the market is not satisfactory, based on value and pharmaceutical standardization.

Chemically purposed food is also harmful to the body. When a person or patient corrects their Diet, it means it moves from intake of unwholesome to a wholesome diet and finally gets over to disease, this proves that food works as a medicine.[12] For a truly healthy diet, the majority of the diet should be made up of nutritious and healthful foods, but disease-promoting foods or junk food should be avoided. 90% of the daily diet should be made up of nutrient-rich plant foods that are high in calories and contain healthy phytochemicals, such as beans, vegetables, fresh fruits and legumes, raw nuts, seeds and avocados, starchy vegetables, and whole grains. These foods or nutraceuticals construct a disease-preventing and health-promoting diet with protective substances. The rich nutrient food intake will provide maximum protection against not only infections, asthma, and allergies but also against heart disease and cancer in adulthood.[13] Research should be done according to health conditions disease and for maintaining good health. It is mentioned that if a man is practicing a wholesome diet there will be no need for medication, Likewise, the best available medicine will not be effective if he is not following dietary restrictions.

Discussion

Ayurveda has a scientific approach to health management. The main objective of *Ayurveda* is to preserve the health of a healthy person and to treat the disease. The diet and regimen which is beneficial to the body and give happiness to the mind. Lots of importance is given to the diet with regard to its processing, quality, quantity, and so on. *Ahara*, *Swapna (Nidra)*, and *Brahmacharya* play an important role in the maintenance of the "*Swasthya*" of an individual. *Ahara* plays an important role in healthy, diseased, and convalescent states. It is more important than the medicine itself. A wholesome diet is a prime cause for the growth and development of the body; on the contrary, an unwholesome diet causes several diseases. *Acharya Charaka* stated that the ideal diet is that which rebuilds the worn-out systems, nourishes *Dhatus*, and maintains the equilibrium of the body's constituents. An irrational diet acts otherwise, producing disease. One should eat food that is warm, smooth, in proper quantity, after digestion of the previous meal, and that is not harmful to the energy.

It should be eaten in a hygienic place, provided with all accessories, neither too hurriedly nor too leisurely, without talking or laughing, with full concentration and having proper regard for oneself. Also, Fuel like coal is required to keep the fire continuously or enlighten. Similarly, the *Ahara* acts as the *Indhana* (fuel) for the *Jatharagni* and the other *Agnis* in the body. *Ahara* alone sustains the properties of *Agni* in body. This shows the mutual relationship between *Ahara* and *Agni*. If food is not taken at all or in less quantity, due to the lack of *Indhana*, *Agni* starts digesting *Dhatus* of body, and these *Dhatus* get depleted, and *Doṣas* become aggravated, resulting in the diseases. Nowadays people ignore importance of diet according to disease and depend only on medicines prescribed for disease. In this way, in form of order, medicine got first rank and on the other hand second rank is given to diet. But it is mentioned in *Ayurvedic* scriptures that first aim is to protect health in a healthy man, which should be fulfilled through diet, which is *Rasa*-predominant in nature. If person is suffering from a particular disease, then in this situation, along with medicine, disease-specific diet should be used. In this way, diet can be used as a primary or secondary treatment modality.

Why Nutraceuticals?

For so many of us, it is impossible to get the required nutrition from the routine food. Secondly, we live in a highly toxic environment, filled with pollution and pesticides that throw off our body's ability to regulate it. Also, consider the number of new ailments that are haunting us: Epstein Barr, chronic fatigue, lupus, etc; now they are widespread in our population. This is a more sensible strategy to strengthen our system or terrain rather than settling for antibiotics, which have lost their effectiveness. There are many side effects from drugs because they are not natural to the body, whereas, with good quality supplementation that can be absorbed and utilized by the body, we can truly strengthen our body and add vitality.

Why do nutraceuticals seem attractive?

- Their half-life is relatively long.
- Many diets are rich in phenolic components and are consumed daily by human beings.
- They rarely have any side effects. Many people believe this approach is more natural than using prescription-wise drugs.

These can be easily absorbed in the intestine after ingestion. They do not require an appointment with a healthcare provider and are easily available without a prescription. They feel dietary supplements will help them feel healthier and stronger, give them more energy, and prevent illness. Some people turn to these products when they feel standard treatments for their specific illnesses have failed.[10] Dietary risk factors have raised attention worldwide for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The recent report from data in 2019 showed that around 7.9 million deaths and 187.7 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) are linked to dietary risk factors and NCDs. This is a wake-up alarm to the health community in food sciences, pharmaceuticals, and preventive medicine towards adopting a natural food-based lifestyle. These NCDs are mainly due to eating junk food and low intake of dietary fruits or fibers leading to nutritive deficient states and, later, diseases.[11]

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