



Short Review Paper

Dietary directives for longevity of life-Ayurvedic perspective

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Abstract

Ayurveda is a holistic science which maintains harmony between body, mind and soul. Promotion of Health, increasing the life span and curing the illness of diseased person is the main aim of Ayurveda. In present era, unhealthy diet and changing lifestyle are main factors which influence susceptibility to many diseases. This ancient science mainly focuses on food as it believes that wholesome food nourishes the body as well as mind. Food is one of the key pillars (Upasthambha) of life. It is not just the quantity or quality of food that determines the maintenance of health but also the way of consuming food. The digestion, absorption, and assimilation of food are complex procedures where physical, physiological, social, and emotional factors play a critical role. For achieving complete benefits of food, one should follow some rules which are mentioned in Ayurveda, i.e. the dietary rules which have been titled as Ahara Vidhi Vidhan. Due to various unhealthy practices of taking food, the physical as well as mental strength of body is deteriorating. So, Ayurvedic dietary guidelines should be followed for maintenance of health. On this background present article focuses on dietary directives in Ayurveda which is beneficial for health restoration in an individual.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Food, Dietary guidelines, Health.

Introduction

Ayurveda is a holistic system of natural health care. Promotion of Health, increasing the life span and curing the illness of diseased person is the main aim of Ayurveda¹. In present era, unhealthy diet and changing lifestyle are main factors which influence susceptibility to many diseases. This ancient science mainly focuses on food as it believes that wholesome food nourishes the body as well as mind. Food is one of the key pillar (Upasthambha) of life^{2,3}. Ayurveda explains good mental health is essential for a healthy person and that can be achieved through proper food selection and dietary schedule. Many dietary directives are mentioned in Ayurvedic texts, i.e. Ahara vidhi vidhan⁴, where the rules for consumption of food are given. Due to various unhealthy practices of taking food, the physical as well as mental strength of body is deteriorating leading to various life style and metabolic disorders. So, Ayurvedic dietary directives should be followed to prevent these diseases. This science not only deals with eating nutritious food, but also deals with major factors of food like taking suitable anupana (adjuvants), time, the manner and the place in which it is taken etc.

Importance of Food

Anna or Ahara (Food) is considered as precious gem since the Vedic period itself. In Mahabharata, it is said that all living beings are formed out of food and it helps in the growth and existence of all living things; it is considered as Lord Brahma by

Upanishads. The growth, nourishment, procreation, and dissolution of living beings are the result of food according to Ayurveda. Food is called Prana –means vital for life. All the things that help to lead a quality life such as physical as well as mental strength, strength to Dhatus (tissue elements), complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, pleasure of sense, memory, contentment, intellect, enthusiasm, etc. are dependent on food^{1,2}. According to Chandogya Upanishad, Purity of food helps in purifying the inner self i.e. Mind. Food is the one thing that promotes health in both diseased and normal people, so it is considered as Mahabhaishajya (Ultimate Medicine). One should knowingly and decidedly eat food. Food with similar attributes replenishes and grows body entities. Food of opposite qualities is responsible to bring back overgrown body entities within physiological limits. Chief theme of management of body health is maintenance and sustenance of body components into physiological limits. Sometimes food can offer results in primary line of treatment or as support to health.

Ayurveda had classified food according to seasons, age, purpose, benefits, constitution, daily usable, and not usable, aimed at giving the best and balanced diet to the body regarding age, season etc. However, the complete utilization of food takes place only with these rules for consuming food and is known as Aharavidhidhana. Although most Acharyas talk about the rules, the one that is said by Charaka appears to be more practical as he says what are to be followed, what not, and who should follow these rules; which are as follow¹ Aharavidhidhan¹.

Ahar-Diet, Vidhi- Method/manner, Vidhan- Application: Diet/food should be consumed at clean, pleasant space. Hands and legs should be washed/ cleaned properly. Vessels in which food is cooked, stored and served should be clean. Food should be consumed fresh and hot. It should not be consumed in hurry or very slowly. Excessive talking, laughing should be avoided. Food should be consumed in proper amount and by heart².

Following are the Dietary directives which should be followed by healthy and in ill person (upto some extent) who take healthy food timely and usually – one should consume hot /warm food, unctuous food, it should be in proper quantity³, after the digestion of previous meal, Consuming food that is not contraindicated in Potency, at pleasant area, with all the favorable tools, not too in hurry, not while laughing or talking and with full attention after due consideration to the self.

Ushnam ashniyat (Consuming hot food): One should consume food that is warm. Consuming warm food helps in retaining the taste, stimulates the digestive fire, and undergoes digestion very easily. It will also help in Anulomana (normalize proper movement) of Vata (which is responsible for movement and cognition) because of hot potency⁴.

Food consumed cold will result in anorexia, decreased digestive fire, nausea, distension of the abdomen, etc. Foods that are extremely hot are also not advisable. If consumed, they cause Daha (Burning Sensation), Trishna (Thirst), loss of strength, giddiness, and Raktapitta (Bleeding disorders). Another category is the food that is again made hot, after preparation. This is also not advisable because even water that is reheated is contraindicated for use. So, using reheated food is definitely not indicated⁴.

Snigdham ashniyat (Consuming food that is Unctuous): One should take unctuous food; as it enhances the taste, it will increase subdued power of digestion in a similar manner like ghee ignites holy fire in ritual ceremony. The food will get digested quickly and Anulomana of Vata (Flatus coming out easily) occurs due to the softness imparted by Snigdha Guna (Unctuous property). It will strengthen the sense organs and will enhance growth, strength, and complexion of the body. The food consumed dry without getting moistened remains as a hard mass, causing improper digestion. Dry food diminishes the color and strength of the body; causes dryness, constipation, tiredness, and retention of urine; and vitiates Vata (which is responsible for movement and cognition), resulting in its upward movement. Consuming excessive unctuous food make the person to suffer from drowsiness, thirst, indigestion, excessive salivation, loss of taste, heaviness of heart, and disease of the abdomen and throat, along with other diseases. Eaten food ignites the non ignited digestive fire, helps for quick digestion, easy passage of flatus, strengthens the body, provides stability to sense organs, increases stamina, improves color complexion; hence one should consume unctuous food^{1,4}.

Matrvat ashniyat (Consuming food in proper quantity): one should eat in proper quantity. Food taken in proper quantity without disturbing Doshas (Regulatory functions of body), only promotes life span, easily passes of faeces, Proper quantity is the activator of digestive functions. Food whether laghu (Easily digestible) or guru (non easily digestible) both require a specified quantity for proper digestion. For understanding the quantity of food to be taken, if we do the imaginary three parts of stomach half of its capacity should be filled with solid foods, one part should be filled with liquids and the remaining one part should be kept empty for proper churning process. One should not eat full of its capacity to avoid indigestion^{4,5}. Agnimandya (deterioration of digestive power) is main reason for indigestion which is due to unwholesome dietary practices, improper life style, withholding of natural urges and even by altered psychological behaviour⁶. Even though food is taken in proper quantity, the mind that is inflicted due to factors such as fear, anger, shyness, and jealousy will make a person to misinterpret good hygienic food as unhygienic and results in Ajirna (indigestion)³.

Jirne ashniyat (Consuming food after digestion of previously consumed food): If person takes food during indigestion or consume food before digestion of previous meal, that undigested food mixes with earlier meal which causes Aam Nirmitee in body and vitiates Doshas (Regulatory functions of body). Hence, person should eat food after digestion of previous meal.

The signs of first meal digested or ideal time for taking meal are when flatus passes easily, after the evacuation of stools and urine, when the eructation are without any foul smell or taste, when appetite is well manifest, when the digestive activity is good, when sense organs are functioning well, when there is lightness in body, belly has loosened, when mind is clean (devoid of emotions). Hence, ideal time for taking meal is eat after previous meal is digested. On contrary, if meal is taken without previous digestion, non elimination or excess of elimination of faeces and urine occurs, distension of abdomen, feeling of heaviness and giddiness etc. occurs due to indigestion which deteriorates the body and can be the major cause of disease formation.

Veerya aviruddha bhunjita (Consuming food that is not contraindicated in Potency): One should take food consisting of the items not contraindicated in potency. Components in the diet that are contrary to the body elements (*Dosha* and *Dhatus*) and tend to disagree with the system are termed as *Virudha Ahara*. Food which is antagonistic in respect of place, time, in respect to Digestion power, dosage, indication, contra-indication suitability, Processing, potency, bowels, health condition, order, cooking, combination, richness in terms of properties, palatability, directives of eating, is not wholesome for the person. Some articles are naturally incompatible on account of their qualities such as poison; some become incompatible when combined, such as taking milk with fruits in the form of

milkshakes, etc (exception Mango). There are 18 types of Viruddha. One among them is Sanskar Viruddha. Diet and Drugs prepared in a particular manner can cause poisonous effect on body. E.g. repeatedly heating cooking oil which is most common trend in Today's era, which is Sanskar viruddha in nature⁷. Large consumption of repeatedly heating cooking oil have been reported as carcinogenic. These methods are more susceptible to cause lung malignancies, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer⁸. Rest types of Virudha Ahar may cause various disease like skin diseases leucoderma, leprosy, erysipelas, pustules, lumps; edema, rhinitis, genetic disorders, impotency, blindness, ascitis, mental disorders and even death.

Ishta deshe Ishta sarvopakaran ashniyat (Consuming food in places that are pleasant to mind and with required cookery): One should dine at one's favorite places, with required cookery. While eating in favorable place individual can concentrate on food itself which will certainly help for nourishment of body. Similarly is with favorable accessories, Acharya Sushruta had given some specific guidelines regarding the place and methods for having food. He gives a large list of utensils required for preparation, serving, storage, and dining for specific kinds of food, such as alcohol in earthen pots etc. One should always consume food in a proper place with proper equipment. Having food in uncomfortable places without proper accessories may lead to some psychic agitation and result in complications that are caused by an inflicted mind^{6,9,10}.

It enhances the properties of food, if we prepare or store specific food items in specific utensils. In another study, various researches have been taken place on iron containing cookware among children and females for the depletion of iron Deficiency anemia. The result showed that there were statistically significant increases in hemoglobin and iron indices in 11 studies and positive outcomes were observed in children in 50% of studies. These studies conclude that iron vessel shows some significant effect on the food items which are cooked in it¹¹.

Nati drutam ashniyat (Not consuming food too fast): One should not consume food too speedily as by eating fast the food can enter into a wrong passage and the food is not established in its place; over and above, we will not get achievement of merits and detection of the defects of food. So, one should not consume food in hurry.

One of the researcher's team carried out a cross sectional study, which suggests that there is high risk of hypertriglyceridemia due to fast eating which is one of the risk factor for CVD¹².

Nati vilambitam ashniyat (Not consuming food too slow): One should not eat too slowly as by eating slowly, food becomes cold and cannot be digested properly, there are chances of eating much, one does not get satisfaction. Hence one should not eat too slowly.

Ajalpanna ahasanas tanmana bhunjit (Not speaking or laughing while having food): One should not eat while talking or laughing. Eat after due consideration to our self. By taking food while talking or laughing or with no concentration, person is invoking with the similar defects of eating too fast. Hence one should not speak or laugh while having food and with concentration.

Aatman abhisamiksha samyak Bhunjita (Consuming food after due consideration of self): one should not eat without considering our self. Psychological states are closely linked to foods. Within a mindful approach, one should eat wholesome food preferably having health benefits¹³. Mind should be engaged in act of eating. One should take food with his eyes open then only, it becomes suited to his self. Hence, consuming food after due consideration of self is important.

Discussion

Acharya Charaka divided rules on the basis of these questions. Foremost explanation is regarding what sorts of food are to be taken. The food should be Ushna, Snigdha, Virya Avirudha and Matravat. Among these, first three deals with the quality and latter one deals with the quantity of food to be taken, Consuming warm, unctuous, and compatible food delivers a balanced diet to the body and an adequate quantity of food aids in the easy digestion and absorption of food.

The next thing said is when to take food. Acharya explains the characteristics of the proper time to consume food, that is, after the proper digestion of a previous meal which helps in the easy digestion of a meal which is already consumed and the meal to be consumed.

If the subject continues this unhealthy lifestyle and not following the dietary regimen, it may hinder the proper digestion of both meals and may lead to metabolic disorders by hampering the Jatharagni (Digestive power of body). From here, the involvement of bodily and mental factors starts in addition to the properties of food. The Mindful Eating is also most important thing to reduce the chances of disease to occur. The next explanation is regarding where to consume food, that is, in Ishta Desha etc. Here, their benefits along with the complications on not following them are given.

These include concerns about the factors of mind and the cleanliness of the food served. Scientifically, it is proved that micro geographies of the built environment provide a subtle, pervasive, and unconscious influence in food choice, food intake, obesity, and health. Finally, how to consume food is told; that is, food should not be taken in hurry or not to be taken very slowly, without laughing or speaking and with concentration. A person consuming food too slow or fast reported less hunger at a high significant level. Highly indulged with family, friends and with watching television will certainly distracts the mind away from the consumed food.

Conclusion

Due to hectic schedule of changing life style, people are not following the dietary practices for saving time or due to disturbed mind, which is not considered as a cause for disease by common man, but there negligence is an important factor for metabolic and psychosomatic diseases. The most important and ignored thing by people which is told by Acharya Charaka is Aatmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak, which applies to each and every of the earlier cited rules. That is, these are general rules and changes can be made according to the suitability of the subject and disease condition. But as a whole, following these rules will help a normal person in maintaining and improving his or her health and not following these will gradually result in the manifestation of many lifestyle and metabolic disorders.

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