



A CONCEPT OF AHARA IN AYURVEDA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ahara is first among the three significant pillars of Ayurveda¹. It means that it is one of the fundamental principles ahead which gives health, happiness and harmony along with the nature. One should regularly take such substances which are conducive to the preservation of good health and are able to avoid the attacks of sickness. Such type of diet is called naturally healthy diet. Ayurveda is science of life. Main aim of Ayurveda is to maintain health of a person. *Ahara* plays importance role to achieve this target. In the modern times, the ways in which the food is prepared and presented have changed drastically. Because of the rapid swiftness of life style towards urbanization, one can have less access to fresh food. Today, the dependency on packaged and processed food has also increased exceptionally. It definitely has some destructive effect on both mental and physical well-being. At present, the consumption of unwholesome food has led to the rising prevalence of various diseases in society. In this context, the Ayurvedic concepts of *Āhāra* and *Āhāra-Vidhi* are described.

Keywords: *Ahara, Kala, Viruddha, Dhatu, Agni, Srotas, Rasa, Veerya, Vipaka, Ashana* etc.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara is first among the three significant pillars of *Ayurveda*. *Ayurveda* has given three sub-pillars- *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya* which support the body itself. *Ahara* has been enumerated first, which shows its importance. Breast milk is the first and well-balanced food for the newly born baby. The milk that has got its more or less direct bearing on *Ahara* taken by the mother plays decisive role in development, sustenance, reproduction and termination of life. It is a well-known fact that, *Ahara* supplies energy to body. This bio energy is supplied by proper and adequate nutrition in the form of protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins and water.

Material and Methodology

The literature review is compiled from available Ayurvedic texts such as *Samhitas* (*Caraka Samhita*, *Susruta Samhita*, *Astanga Hridaya*, *Astanga Sangraha*). The search for articles was also conducted on online databases including PubMed and Google Scholar.

Definition & Derivation of *Ahara*

The word *Ahara* is very much familiar since time immemorial. Various classics/dictionaries

Table 1: Classification of *Ahara* According to Various Classics ^{4,5}

Sr. no.	<i>Charka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	
		<i>Drava Varga</i>	<i>Annapana Varga</i>
1	<i>Sukadhanya</i>	<i>Jala</i>	<i>Dhanya</i>
2	<i>Samidhanya</i>	<i>Ksira</i>	<i>Mamsa</i>
3	<i>Mamsa</i>	<i>Dadhi</i>	<i>Phala</i>
4	<i>Harita</i>	<i>Takra</i>	<i>Saka</i>
5	<i>Phala</i>	<i>Ghrta</i>	<i>Lavana</i>
6	<i>Saka</i>	<i>Taila</i>	<i>krtanna</i>
7	<i>Madya</i>	<i>Madhu</i>	<i>Bhaksya</i>
8	<i>Ambu</i>	<i>Iksu</i>	<i>Anupana</i>

describe *Ahara* in their own unique way. Gangadhara defines *Ahara* as anything that is ingested through the tongue and swallowed down the throat, which also includes medications¹. *Acharya Dalhan* opines that the substance which is swallowed through *Anna Nalika* is called *Ahara*. According to *Chakrapani* *Ahara* means that which is ingested and thus it includes in itself both diet and drugs. This view of *Chakrapani* is also supported by *Gangadhara*. *Acharya Gangadhara* says that anything which is ingested by the tongue down to the throat is called *Ahara*. Therefore, drugs are also included in *Ahara* ². From the above statement, it can be concluded that the word *Ahara* means any substance which is taken in via the mouth and swallowed through throat.

Modern Dictionary meaning of word *Ahara*³

According to Taber's dictionary, food is defined as "any material that provides the nutritive requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical well-being. Collins Dictionary defined the word food as "Any substance that can be ingested by a living organism and metabolized into energy and body tissue is known as food."

9	<i>Gorasa</i>	<i>Madya</i>	-----
10	<i>Ikshuvikara</i>	<i>Mutra</i>	-----
11	<i>Krtanna</i>	-----	-----
12	<i>Aharapyogi</i>	-----	-----

Table 2: Classification of Ahara according to Acharya Vagbhatta

<i>ASTANGA SANGRAHA</i> ⁶		<i>ASTANGA HRUDAYA</i> ⁷	
<i>Pannam</i>	<i>Annam</i>	<i>Dravyam</i>	<i>Adravyam</i>
<i>Toyam</i>	<i>Sukadhanyam</i>	<i>Toyam</i>	<i>Sukadhanyam</i>
<i>Ksiram</i>	<i>Simbidhanyam</i>	<i>Ksiram</i>	<i>Simbidhanyam</i>
<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Pakvannam</i>	<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Pakvannam</i>
<i>Tailam</i>	<i>Mamsam</i>	<i>Tailam</i>	<i>Mamsam</i>
<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Sakam</i>	<i>Madyam</i>	<i>Sakam</i>
<i>Mutram</i>	<i>Phalam</i>	<i>Mutram</i>	<i>Phalam</i>
			<i>Aushavargam</i>

Table 3: Classification of Ahara According to Acharya Charka⁸.

Sr. no.	Classification basis	Types	Name
1	<i>Ekviddh</i>	1	<i>Aharya</i>
2	<i>Dwiyoni</i>	2	<i>Sthavaram</i> (Vegetable products), <i>Jangama</i> (Animal products)
3	<i>Dwividdh Prabhav</i>	2	<i>Hitam</i> (wholesome), <i>Ahitam</i> (unwholesome)
4	Chaturviddh Upyog	4	<i>Pan, Asan, Bhakshya, Lehya.</i>
5	<i>Shdviddh</i>	6	<i>Madhura, Amla, lavana, katu, Tikta, kashya</i>
6	<i>Vinshtividdh</i>	20	<i>Guna bhed</i>
7	<i>Aprisankheya Bhed</i>	---	<i>Sanyog and Sanskar bhed.</i>

Table 4: Classification of Ahara according to various Acharyas:^{4,5,6,7,8}

Sr.no.	Classification acc. to	Types of Ahara
1	<i>Acharya Sushruta, Bhavamishra, Yogratnakar, Kashyapa, Sarangdhar</i>	<i>Chusya, Peya, Lehya Bhojya, Bhaksya, Carvya</i>
2	<i>Shrimad Bhagavata Gita (As per the effect of Ahara on Manas)</i>	<i>Satvika, Rajsika, Tamsika</i>
3	<i>Shrimad Bhagavata Gita (Based on three modes of material nature)</i>	<i>Yajna, Tapa, Dana</i>
4	<i>Acharya Sushruta (Based on effect of Ahara)</i>	<i>Ekanta – Hitakara; Ekanta – Ahitkara; Hita – Ahitkara.</i>

Table no. 5: Classification of food according to Modern Dietetics -

	MAJOR NUTRIENTS	OTHER NUTRIENTS
ENERGY RICH FOODS	Carbohydrates and fats	
	Whole grain cereals, millets	Protein, fiber, Calcium, Iron & B-complex vitamins
	Vegetable oil, ghee, butter	Fat soluble vitamins, essential fatty acids
	Nuts and oil seeds	Proteins, vitamins / minerals
	Sugar	Nil
BODY BUILDING FOODS	Proteins	-----
	Pulses, nuts and oilseeds	B-complex vitamins, invisible fat, fiber
	Milk and milk products	Calcium, Vitamin A, Riboflavin, Vitamin B12
	Meat, fish, poultry	B-complex Vitamins, Iron, Iodine, Fat
PROTECTIVE FOODS	Vitamins and minerals	-----
	Green leafy vegetables	Antioxidants, fiber and other carotenoids
	Other vegetables /fruits	Fiber, sugar and antioxidants
	Eggs, milk and milk products	Protein and fat

Table no. 6: Hita Ahara-Ahita Ahara⁹

Sr. no	Types of Ahara		
1	<i>Ekant Hita Ahara</i>	The food which does not harm the body even though used always	
2.	<i>Ekanta Ahita Ahara</i>	The food which harms the body quickly and so cannot be used even for short period, which are always unsuitable and cause <i>Dahana, Pachana</i> and <i>Marana</i>	Water, milk, ghee and <i>Audana,</i>
3.	<i>Hita – Ahita</i>	The foods which do not harm in certain conditions but cause harm in certain other conditions	<i>Kshara</i> and <i>Visha</i>

Table no. 7 Hita - Ahita Ahara Dravya

S. No.	Ahara Dravya	Hita Ahara Dravya	Ahita Ahara Dravya
1	<i>Sukadhanya</i>	<i>Shali</i>	<i>Yavaka</i>
2	<i>Shami dhanya</i>	<i>Mudga</i>	<i>Mamsa</i>
3	<i>Udaka</i>	Rain Water	River Water
4	<i>Lavana</i>	<i>Saindhava</i>	<i>Ushra</i>
5	<i>Shakha</i>	<i>Jivanti</i>	Mustard Oil
6	<i>Mriga Mamsa</i>	<i>Ena</i>	<i>Gomamsa</i>
7	Meat of birds	<i>Lava</i>	<i>Kapota Mamsa</i>
8	<i>Vilesaya</i>	<i>Godha</i>	<i>Bheka</i>
9	<i>Matsya</i>	<i>Rohita</i>	<i>Cilcima</i>
10	<i>Sarpi</i>	<i>Goghrita</i>	<i>Avisarpi</i>
11	Milk	<i>Godugdha</i>	<i>Avidugdha</i>
12	<i>Sthawara Sneha</i>	<i>Tila Taila</i>	<i>Kusumbh oil</i>
13	<i>Anupamrga Vasa</i>	<i>Varaha Vasa</i>	<i>Mahisa Vasa</i>
14	<i>Matsya Vasa</i>	<i>Culuki Vasa</i>	<i>Kumbhira Vasa</i>
15	<i>Jalcara Vihanga Vasa</i>	<i>Pakahamsa Vasa</i>	<i>Kakamadgu Vasa</i>

16	<i>Viskira Sakuni Vasa</i>	<i>Kukkuta Vasa</i>	<i>Chataka Vasa</i>
17	<i>Sakhada Medsam</i>	<i>Aja fat</i>	Fat of elephant
18	<i>Kandanam</i>	<i>Shringavera</i>	<i>Aluka</i>
19	<i>Phala</i>	<i>Mridvika</i>	<i>Nikuka</i>
20	<i>Iksu Vikara</i>	<i>Sharkara</i>	<i>Phanita</i>

Balanced diet: -

A balanced diet is one which provides all the nutrients in required amounts and proper proportions. A balanced diet should provide around 60-70% of total calories from carbohydrates, preferably starch; about 10-12%

from protein and 20-25% from fat. It can easily be achieved through blend of four basic food groups. In addition, a balanced diet should provide other no nutrients such as dietary fiber, anti-oxidants and phytochemicals which provides positive health benefits.

Table 8: Following Table shows the concept of Diet to be taken daily as per Acharya Charaka.

Sr. no.	As per Acharya Charak	Can be correlated to
1	<i>Sashtika Sali</i>	Carbohydrate
2	<i>Mudaga</i>	Protein
3	<i>Saindhava</i>	Salt
4	<i>Amlaka</i>	Vitamin
5	<i>Yava</i>	-----
6	Rain water	Water
7	Milk	Protein, fat, sugar etc.
8	<i>Ghee</i>	Fat
9	<i>Jangala mamsa</i>	Protein
10	<i>Madhu</i>	Sugar

Table 9: Eighteen types of Viruddha Ahara as described by Acharya Charak¹⁰.

Sr. no.	Types of Viruddha	Description
1	<i>Desa Viruddha</i>	Intake of dry and sharp substance in deserts; unctuous and cold substance in marshy land.
2	<i>Kala Viruddha</i>	Intake of cold and dry substance in winter; pungent and hot substance in the summer.

3	<i>Agni Viruddha</i>	Intake of <i>Guru Dravya</i> when the power of digestion is mild (<i>Mandagni</i>); intake of <i>Laghu Dravya</i> or light food when the <i>Agni</i> is <i>Tikshna</i> .
4	<i>Matra Viruddha</i>	Intake of honey and ghee in equal quantity.
5	<i>Satmya Viruddha</i>	Intake of sweet and cold substance by persons accustomed to pungent and hot substance
6	<i>Dosa Viruddha</i>	Utilization of diets and regimen has similar qualities with <i>Dosas</i> but at variance with the <i>Satmya</i> of the individual.
7	<i>Samskara Viruddha</i>	Diets which when prepared in a way produce poisonous effects, for example meat of peacock roasted on a castor spit.
8	<i>Virya Viruddha</i>	Substances have <i>Sheeta Virya</i> in combination with these of <i>Ushna Virya</i> .
9	<i>Kostha Viruddha</i>	Administration of a mild purgative in a small dose for a person of <i>Krura Koshtha</i> and administration of strong purgative in strong dose for a person having <i>Mridu Koshtha</i> .
10	<i>Avastha Viruddha</i>	Intake of <i>Vata</i> aggravating food by a person after exhaustion, sexual act and physical exercise or intake of <i>Kapha</i> aggravating food by a person after sleep or drowsiness.
11	<i>Karma Viruddha</i>	If a person takes food before his bowel and urinary bladder is clear (empty) or when he does not have appetite or after his hunger has been aggravated.
12	<i>Parihara Viruddha</i>	Intake of hot thing after taking pork etc. and cold things after taking ghee.
13	<i>Upachara Viruddha</i>	-----do ----- -
14	<i>Paka Viruddha</i>	Preparation of food etc. with bad or rotten fuel and under cooking, over cooking or burning during the process of preparation.
15	<i>Samyoga Viruddha</i>	Intake of sour substance with milk.
16	<i>Hrudya Viruddha</i>	Any substance which is not pleasant in taste.
17	<i>Sampada Viruddha</i>	Intake of substance that is not matured over matured or putrefied.
18	<i>Vidhi Viruddha</i>	Taking meal without follow the rules of eating.

Table no. 10: Viruddha Ahara as per Acharya Sushruta¹¹

S.No.	Type of Viruddha	Description
1	<i>Samyoga Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by combinations come under this like <i>Mulaka</i> along with milk; Fruit of <i>Amra</i> and <i>Jambu</i> ; Products of sugarcane along with fish.
2	<i>Karma Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by processing, ex- <i>Ghee</i> kept in a bronze vessel for ten days or more; honey either along with hot substances or in hot seasons, etc.
3	<i>Mana Viruddha</i>	Substances which are incompatible by proportion, like honey and <i>ghee</i> or honey and water mixed in equal quantities should not be consumed.
4	<i>Rasa Viruddha</i>	Foods Which are incompatible by tastes sweet and salt are incompatible in respect of taste and potency.

Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani consist three different words. Here, *Vishesa* relates to both word *Ahara* and *Vidhi* as:

1. *Ahara Vishesa*: It means specialty, special property, and distinguished effect of *Ahara*.
2. *Vidhi Vishesa*: It means a special system, special method, special manner, special way, special arrangement, special rule, special command or special statement for diet intake.
3. *Ayatana*: It means cause, support, Hetu etc. Thus, *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani* means the causative factors which are responsible for the wholesome and unwholesome effect of the food or of the method for the diet intake.

Table no. 11: Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanani¹²

Sr. no.	Name of the factor	Description	Explanation with example
1	<i>Prakriti</i>	Nature of the food substances. <i>Prakriti</i> indicates the nature of the substance, i.e. inherent attributes of diets and drugs.	<i>Masha</i> is heavy and <i>Mudga</i> is light and meat of <i>Sukara</i> is heavy and that of <i>Ena</i> is light.
2	<i>Karana</i>	Processing of food substances. Processing results in the transformation of the inherent attributes of substances.	Transformation of the food quality is affected by dilution, application of heat, cleansing, churning, etc.
3	<i>Samyoga</i>	Combination of two or more food substances.	Combination of honey & ghee or honey, fish and milk.

4	<i>Rashi</i>	Quantity of substances to be taken	Quantity of all things involved is <i>Sarvagraha</i> and that of each and everything individually is <i>Parigraha</i> .
5	<i>Desha</i>	<i>Desha</i> denotes the habitat of food substances.	It determines the variations of the qualities of the substances according to their geographic region, due to different soil etc.
6	<i>Kala</i>	Time as age, seasons and conditions	Time factor is described in dual context; one pertains with daily and seasonal variations while other deals with individuals' conditions of age and disease.
7	<i>Upayoga samstha</i>	It consists of dietetic rules	-----
8	<i>Upayokta</i>	Habit and state of individual.	It means the person who takes food.

However, *Ahstanga Samgrahakara, Acharya Vagbhata* has illustrated only seven types of *Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatanas*. He stated them as “*Sapta Vidh Ahara Kalpana*.” He has combined *Upyoga Samstha* and *Upayokta* together and counted them as “*Upayoga Vyavastha*.” “*Ahara Vidhi Vishesa Ayatana* is indicative of wholesome and unwholesome diet whereas *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* indicates the method of intake of diet.

This description given by the *Acharya Charak* is both for the healthy and unhealthy persons and *Acharya Sushruta* has described it for unhealthy persons and called it as “*Dwadasha Asana Vichara*.”

Table 12: Dwadasha Asana Vichara¹³.

S. no.	Type of Asana	Description
1	<i>Sheeta Anna</i>	Persons afflicted with thirst, heat, alcoholism, burning sensation, <i>Rakta - Pitta</i> , poisoning etc. should be treated with cold food.
2	<i>Ushna Anna</i>	Persons afflicted with the aggravation of <i>Kapha</i> and <i>Vata</i> as well as those already treated with purgatives of <i>Sneha</i> and those whose body is full of <i>Kleda</i> should be treated with warm food.
3	<i>Snigdha Anna</i>	Persons suffering from the aggravation of <i>Vata</i> , have <i>Rukshata</i> and those accustomed to physical exercise should be treated with <i>Snigdha</i> food.

4	<i>Ruksha Anna</i>	Persons with an excess of <i>Medas</i> and <i>Kapha</i> as well as those suffering from <i>Meha</i> and those previously treated with a <i>Sneha</i> should be treated with <i>Ruksha</i> food.
5	<i>Drava Anna</i>	Weak, parched and thirsty persons should be given <i>Drava</i> food.
6	<i>Sushka Anna</i>	Those suffering from <i>Meha</i> and ulcers as well as those whose bodies are full of <i>Kleda</i> should be given dry food.
7	<i>Eka-kala Anna</i>	Persons with impaired digestion should be given only one meal every day.
8	<i>Dwi- kala Anna</i>	Persons with the proper amount of digestion should be given two meals a day.
9	<i>Matra hina Anna</i>	Food and drink in smaller quantity would be beneficial to persons suffering from impaired digestion or any other disease.
10	<i>Ausadha yukta</i>	Medicine should be given with food and drink to a person a verse to it.
11	<i>Dosa prasamana</i>	Foods consumed appropriate- suitable to season is <i>Dosa</i> .
12	<i>Vriti artha</i>	All foods consumed by the healthy person is meant to maintain health and life.

Conclusion

Ahara (according to ayurvedic definition) is a substance which is swallowed through throat; hence even *Ausadha* (medicine) can be considered as *Ahara* also. The *Ayurvedic* description of *Ahara* according to *Gunas*, *Satmya*, *Dosa*, *Kala* etc. seems to be more logical & scientific as compared to contemporary science. Every factor described in *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* have observational result and directly responsible for maintaining health. Therefore, it is important to know, learn and adopt the ethics of *Ahara* described in *Ayurveda*. Furthermore, extensive in-depth research is required to validate these concepts in the light of contemporary science.

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