

An Ayurvedic View on Āhāra - A Review

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Abstract: *Āhāra (food) is one of the most fundamental pillars of life and health, described as Mahābhāiṣajya—the supreme medicine—in Ayurvedic science. Proper diet and disciplined dietary habits (Āhāra Vidhi Vidhan) play a pivotal role in maintaining the equilibrium of Doṣa, Dhātu, Mala, and Agni, thereby sustaining health and preventing disease. In the present era, due to irregular lifestyle and improper food habits, disorders of the digestive system and metabolic diseases are increasing rapidly. This review aims to evaluate classical and contemporary Ayurvedic literature regarding Āhāra, its classification, importance, and practical application in health maintenance.*

Keywords: Āhāra, Āhāra Vidhi Vidhan, Rasas, Upasthambha, Digestion, Ayurveda

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease.” Ayurveda similarly upholds this holistic definition. Ācārya Suśruta describes health (Swasthya) as a balanced state of Doṣa, Agni, Dhātu, and Mala, along with contentment of Ātma, Indriya, and Mana:

समदोषः समान्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः।
प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते॥ (Su. Sū. 15/48)

Among the Trayopasthambha (three pillars of life)—Āhāra (food), Nidrā (sleep), and Brahmacharya (regulated conduct)—Āhāra is considered the foremost. It nourishes the body, maintains strength, complexion, and vitality, and supports the functioning of Jatharāgni (digestive fire). Ācārya Charaka emphasized that appropriate food, when consumed with discipline, sustains life, while faulty diet (Apathyāhāra) becomes a causative factor for diseases.

2. Objectives

- 1) To collect and evaluate information about Āhāra in Ayurvedic classical texts.
- 2) To review related research articles and web-based resources on Āhāra.
- 3) To analyze references and descriptions of Āhāra from Bruhatrayī and other authoritative sources.

3. Methodology

A literary review was conducted using classical Ayurvedic compendia such as Charaka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya, along with commentaries and related research papers. The descriptions of Āhāra, its classification, and its principles were critically analyzed.

Ācārya Charaka classified Āhāra into twelve groups (dvādaśa varga): Śūkadhānya, Śāmidhānya, Māmsavarga, Śāka, Phala, Harita, Madya, Ambu, Dugdha, Ikṣu, Krutāṇna, and Āhārayogi dravya.

Ācārya Suśruta divided Āhāra into two main categories: Drava dravya (liquid substances) and Anna dravya (solid foods), each further classified into ten subgroups such as Toyavarga, Kṣīravarga, Takravarga, Śālī, Kuḍhānya, etc.

Ācārya Vāgbhaṭa also classified Āhāra in Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya Sūtrasthāna (Adhyāya 5–6) under Drava and Anna dravya, including the unique Aushadha varga, not described by Charaka or Suśruta.

4. Results

A set of rules for proper eating—to maximize health benefits:

- Eat warm food; warmth stimulates Agni and promotes proper digestion.
- Eat unctuous food; Snigdha foods aid Vāta balance and smooth digestion.
- Eat only after the previous meal is digested; this maintains Doṣa equilibrium.
- Avoid eating too fast; it may cause indigestion.
- Avoid eating too slowly; digestion becomes weak.
- Avoid excessive talking or laughing while eating.
- Eat mindfully and calmly for proper digestion.

5. Discussion

Ayurveda presents a comprehensive approach to health through proper dietary conduct. Āhāra is not only the fuel for Jatharāgni but also the foundation for Dhātu nourishment and Doṣa balance. Faulty eating habits disturb this equilibrium, leading to disease manifestation. By following Āhāra Vidhi Vidhan, one can maintain Agni, achieve Doṣa harmony, and promote both physical and mental health. Thus, Āhāra serves as both a preventive and curative measure—truly earning its title of Mahābhāiṣajya.

6. Conclusion

In Ayurveda, health and longevity depend largely on correct dietary practices. Understanding the nature, timing, quantity, and method of food intake is crucial for sustaining Swasthya. The classical guidelines of Āhāra Vidhi Vidhan remain highly relevant in the modern era of lifestyle-related

diseases. Adapting these principles can help achieve holistic well-being and disease prevention.

References

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