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Concept of Dietetics in Ayurveda

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Abstract

Ayurveda concepts of *Ahara* (dietetics) emphasise that eating a balanced diet is essential for maintaining good health and preventing disease in addition to providing nutrients. The ideal food that is consumed provides energy for the body and mind. The Ayurvedic theory of food administration stated that the similar quality of food items nourishes the similar types of tissue components in the body. Ayurveda describes therapeutic and nutritional uses of various types of food items and their processing methods. The food items are classified into grains, millets, milk etc. Ayurvedic dietetics or nutraceuticals construct a health-promoting, disease-preventing substance. Intake of rich nutrient food provides immunity which is not only helpful to protect against infections but also supports the management of diseases. Nutraceuticals are natural bioactive materials that provide demonstrated physiological benefits or reduce the risk of chronic diseases, above and beyond their basic nutritional function. *Acharya Charaka, Sushruta and Vagbhata* also accepted the importance of diet, specially the beneficial one. All the activities of this world, as well as efforts made for eternal emancipation depend upon diet, thus cereals are the greatest in comparison to other things.

Key words: Ayurveda, *Ahara*, Grains, Vegetables, Milk, Nutraceuticals.

Introduction

The idea behind nutraceuticals and the Ayurveda concepts of *Ahara* emphasise that eating a balanced diet is essential for maintaining good health and preventing disease in addition to providing nutrients.Various dietetic formulations are prescribed by Ayurveda for the treatment of different disease conditions. Dietetic preparations referred to as *Pathya*(wholesome food) are mentioned, along with those that are contraindicated, such as *Apathya*(unwholesome food), for a given disease condition.The various dietetic formulations included under the context of *Pathyakalpana* are *Yavagu, Manda, Peya, Vilepi, Anna, or Odana kalpana, Kṛashara, Yusha, Takra, Khada, Kambalika, Raga, Shadava* etc (1, 2).

The properties of such food preparations are sometimes natural and sometimes they result from the special method of preparation involved like combination etc. No amount of medication can help a patient who does not follow a tight diet regimen, in the case of disease, a decent and proper diet is worth a hundred medicines. Rather than simply listing the types of foods to avoid when suffering from a particular illness. Ayurveda also lists specific items that should or shouldn't be consumed based on how much they aggravate *Vata, Pitta, or Kapha* (1, 3).

Many food items have had their therapeutic or dietetic qualities studied, along with the chemical changes they go through in the digestive systems of various mammals. As a result, our *Samhitas* contain recommendations like the one that states that a *Prameha* (urinary disorders) patient should eat barley corn that has passed undigested through the faeces of a cow or horse. That a patient with a skin ailment should drink camel milk, that a patient with a pulmonary condition should consume any predatory animal or bird's flesh (1, 2).

The exclusion of salt and water from the food of an ascites or anasarca patient is mentioned in *Samhitas* (Ayurvedic texts) shows that our *Rishi* possessed a higher chemical knowledge regarding the effects of organic matter on the human system.

In modern science, food articles are primarily classified depending upon their chemical composition namely carbohydrate, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, etc. For example, all varieties of rice may be treated as one group based on their carbohydrate content. But Ayurveda considers that freshly harvested rice is heavy for digestion. It aggravates *kapha*. If used continuously, it is considered to produce many complications. But old rice stored for over six months is considered to be light and more useful for an average person. The freshly harvested rice produces more fat in the body than that of the old rice. Thus, for an emaciated individual having good digestive power, freshly harvested rice is nutritious, whereas for a fatty person, without good digestive power, old rice is nutritious. In Ayurveda, such classification is based on the biological action of the food articles and their rasa (Taste) (1, 2, 3).

There are three types of rice, namely, *Shali, Shashtika and Vrihi*. Botanically all of them belong to the same family and species. Their botanical name is *Oryza sativa* Linn. But, according to Ayurveda there is a great difference in their nutritive value. Whereas *Shali* and *Shashtika* varieties of alleviate *Doshas* and

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maintain their equilibrium, the third type of rice aggravates them.

There are many other types of food ingredients which chemically contain starch. But they are considered to produce a depletive effect on the human body. For example, *Koradusa* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum* Linn.) type of corn produces depletive effect and reduces fat of the body expeditiously (2, 3).

Pulses contain mostly protein. But, according to Ayurveda, some of them like *Masha* (*Phaseolus radiatus* Linn.) is heavy for digestion and it produce more fat in the body whereas *Mudga* (*Phaseolus mungo* Linn) is considered to be light for digestion, and it reduces fat in the body. *Kulattha* (*Dolichos biflorus* Linn), on the other hand, is exceedingly nutritious for patients (1, 2).

Ayurvedic dietetics considers following factors: -

1. *Prakriti* (Nature) of a person.
2. Environmental considerations.
3. Proper time of eating.
4. Combination of food articles.
5. Emotional effect.
6. Quantity of food.
7. Taste of food items.
8. *Doshika* status of food substances.
9. Method of preparation.

The nature of a food represents the integral characteristics that are reflected inthe biological effects through a set of twenty types of opposite properties which primarily represent the five elementals (*Panchamahabhuta*) predominance of a food. The properties of food items and medicinal substances possess the capacity of Ayurvedic treatment and nourishments of tissues.

Table 01: The integral properties of food and their actions are as follows (4, 5, 6, 7, 8)

Properties	Action	Properties	Action
Guru (heaviness)	Promotes weight, strength	*Laghu* (lightness)	Promotes lightness on body
Sheeta (cold)	Pleasing to mind; relieves fainting, thirst, sweating, and heartburn; causes congestion	*Ushna* (hot)	Hot potency, improves digestion
Snigdha (smooth/ unctuousness)	Promotes softness; improves strength and complexion; removes dryness	*Ruksha* (dryness)	Causes dryness in body and tissues
Manda (soft/ slow acting)	Promotes softness and slow action in body	*Tikshana* (sharpness/ fast acting)	Induces burning sensation, inflammation
Sthira (stable)	Capacity to retain things and strength	*Sara* (movable)	Expels flatus and waste products out of the body
Mridu (soft)	Induce softness in body parts	*Kathina* (hard)	Induce hardness in body parts
Vishada (non-mucilaginous)	Absorbs moisture and remove excessive sliminess; responsible for loss of adhesiveness between structures and loss of integrity in body	*Picchila* (mucilaginous)	Strengthens, promotes healing and union, increases kapha
Slakshana (smooth)	Smoothening; heal damaged tissues, wounds and ulcers	*Khara* (coarse/ roughness)	Causes roughness on body and scrape and deplete tissues
Sthula (gross)	Causes obstruction in channels and tissues owing to its heavy and large size and its inability to move easily in the body	*Sukshma* (subtle)	Small in size; enable easy dissolution and penetration into minute channels of the body, into each cell and small channels of body and hence spread in the body.
Sandra (concentrated)	Nourish the organs and tissues in the body and increases thickness and density of tissues in a healthy way contributing to stability of the body and maintenance of health	*Drava* (liquid)	Moistening:flow freely and move in all parts of the body in an uninterrupted way; it has the capacity to drip through, dissolve, liquefy, moisten things, circulate, ooze and flow in the body.

Ayurveda lays great deal of emphasis upon proper diet for the treatment of patients. For each and all diseases wholesome and unwholesome food ingredients have been described.

In Ayurveda, ingredients used for food and drinks have been classified into 12 groups as follows (1, 2):

1. *Shuka dhanya* (Corns with bristles)
2. *Shami dhanya* (Pulses)
3. *Mamsa* (Meat)
4. *Shaka* (Vegetables)
5. *Phala* (Fruits)
6. *Harita* (Salads)
7. *Madya* (Wines)
8. *Ambu* (Water)
9. *Gorasa* (Milk and milk products)
10. *Ikshuvikara* (Products of sugarcane)
11. *Kṛitanna* (Food preparations)
12. *Aharayogi* (Accessory food articles)

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Table 02: *Kṛitanna Varga* (Cooked/Prepared Foods prepared by Rice (*Oryza sativa* Linn) and without rice and actions

S.No.	Pathya Kalpana	Ingredients	Preparation Method	Consistency / Characteristics	Indications (Classical)	Classical Reference	Modern Nutritional Correlation
1	***Odana* (2)**	Cooked rice with water	Plain rice properly boiled	Cooked thicky consistency	Pacify Tridosha	Balya, easy to digest, nourishing	Plain boiled rice nourishes
2	***Manda***	Rice + excess water	Rice boiled in 14 times water, supernatant liquid collected	Very thin, watery, light, easy to digest	Initial stage of fever, improves digestive capacity, nourishes the tissues and improves dehydration	Sharangdhar Samhita Madhyama 2/ 172;(9) CharakaSaṃhita, Sutrasthana 27 (4)	Oral rehydration substitute provides electrolytes, minimal calories
3	***Peya***	Rice + plenty of water	Rice boiled in 14 times water, slightly thicker than Manda	Included cooked rice along with liquid like Semi-liquid, more nourishing than Manda	Used in mild digestive power, pelvic pain, fatigue, diarrhea, fever, restores energy	Sharangdhar Samhita Madhyama 2/169 (9)	Light porridge, provides carbohydrates, prevents fatigue
4	***Vilepi***	Rice + less water	Rice cooked in 4 times water, thicker than Peya	Thick porridge-like, more solid	During convalescence, strength increases, uses in eye disorders, thirst, fever, indigestion pain	Sharangdhar Samhita Madhyama 2/167 (9); Bhav Prakash Samhita, Krittanne. (8)	Similar to modern rice gruel/khichdi, it provides higher calories & satiety
5	***Yavagu***	Rice/other cereals, sometimes with medicines	Rice cooked to thick paste form in 6 parts of water, can be mixed with medicinal herbs or spices	Soft gruel with therapeutic value	Used as Anupana (vehicle) for medicines, specific therapeutic use (e.g. Shunthi-Yavagu for Ama, Pippali-Yavagu for Kapha). Uses in fever, thirst, cleans urinary bladder	Sharangdhar Samhita Madhyama 2/154 (9); Bhav Prakash Samhita, Krittanne (8).	Functional food: acts as diet-based therapy, easy to digest
6	***Yusha***	Pulses (Mudga, Masura, Chanaka etc.) + water	Pulses boiled, supernatant soup used, can be seasoned with Saindhava, Ghee	Thin soup-like, protein-rich	Recovery stage, provides strength, balances Doshas: Mudga for Pitta, Masura for Kapha, Chanaka for Vata	Bhav Prakash Samhita, Jwaradhikar (8)	Similar to dal soup, provides protein, minerals, and amino acids
7	***Krasara***	1 part of rice with 1/4th part of green gram + 6 parts of water	Boiled by adding appropriate quantity of asafoetida, rock salt, ginger and turmeric	Prepared in semisolid paste	Aggregates Pitta, it digests slowly, enhances the memory, strengthens the tissues	Bhav Prakash Samhita, Krittanna. (8)	Nourishes the tissues

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8	**Payasa**	Rice cooked in milk & sugar	In appropriate proportion cooked properly	sweet rice pudding	Pacify Vata-Pitta, increases Kapha, strengthens the tissues and aphrodisiac		Kheer (sweet rice pudding)
9	**Laja**	Fried paddy			Cures vomiting, diarrhoea, bestows strength, relieves thirst	Sushruta Samhita Sutra 46/ 413	Astringent sweet in taste, digestible
Other than rice							
10	**Saram (Rasam)**	liquid extract made with tamarind	1 part of seedless tamarind boiled with seasonal vegetables + 16 parts of water reduced to half and filter fried with black pepper, rock salt, cumin, ginger, asafoetida etc. spices	Alleviates Vata and slight aggravating Kapha & Pitta	Enhances taste, promotes appetites	Yogaratnakara Purva Khanda (2)	Daily consumption provides required nutrition and improves appetites

Table 03: Selective Shaka Varga and other Vegetable groups of Ayurvedic dietetics (1, 2, 3)

S.No.	Name of Shaka (Vegetable)	Effect on Doṣhas	Properties / Indications	Modern Nutritional Correlation
1	***Patola (Trichosanthes dioica)***	Pacifies Kapha, Pitta& Vata	Useful in fever, improves taste, helminthiasis/ worm infestation, skin diseases, and as cardiac tonic	Pointed gourd is rich in fiber, antioxidants
2	***Ervaruka (Cucumis sativus)***	Pacifies Pitta, increases Kapha	Good in Pittaja disorders, thirst, burning sensation	Cucumber – Cooling, hydrating, hydrating, vitamin C
3	***Karvellaka (Momordica charantia)***	Pacify Kapha, and increase Pitta	Enhances the digestive capacity, indicated in diabetes, skin disorders and helminthiasis	Bitter guard having Hypoglycemic, anti-diabetic property
4	***Karkotaka (Momordica dioicaRoxb.)***	Pacify Kapha	Cures fever, dyspnoea, skin allergy & diseases, poison	
5	***Vartaka (Brinjal)***	AlliavatesKapha, Vata little Pitta	Having diuretic properties, and strengthening	
6	***Koshataki (Luffa cylindrica)***	Pacify Kapha-Pitta	Indicated in oedema, anemia, skin disorders, abdominal disorders and spleen	Ridge gourd – low calorie, high fiber, improves digestion
7	***Vastuka (Chenopodium album)***	Tridoshahara (mild)	Improves digestion, laxative	Bathua leaves – rich in iron & calcium
8	***Shigru (drumstick) leaves (Moringa oleifera leaves)***	Alleviates Vata-Kapha	Increase digestive capacity, nourishes the body aphrodisiac and rejuvenating	Moringa – protein, calcium, vitamin A rich
9	***Shigru (drumstick) fruit (Moringa oleifera leaves)***	Pacify Kapha and Pitta	Uses in Kapha and Pitta disorders, skin, analgesic, dyspnoea	Moringa – protein, calcium, vitamin A rich antioxidants
10	***Vastuka (Chenopodium album (Bathua))***		Pachana, Bṛṁhaṇa, Virecaka	Rich in iron, calcium, vit. C
11	***Kashmarya Patra (Gmelina arborea (Beechwood leaves))***		Balya, Pittahara, Rasāyana	Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory
12	***Palanka (Spinacia oleracea (Spinach))***		Useful for eyes, and blood disorders	Iron, folate, vit. A, antioxidants

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Table 04: Selective *Phala Varga* (group of fruits) of Ayurvedic dietetics (1, 2, 3):

S.No.	Name of fruit	Effect on Doshas	Properties / Indications	Nutrientcontent as per modern
1	***Draksha (ripened grapefruit)***	Pacify *Kapha* and *Pitta*	Good for eyes, usesin fever, jaundice, dysuria, bleeding disorders, dyspnea, emesis, gout, dysuria, burning sensation, cachexia, alcoholism	good source of vitamin C, vitamin A, vitamin K, carotenes, B-complex vitamins such as pyridoxine, riboflavin, and thiamine, Iron
2	***Amra (mango fruit)***	Alliviates*Vata*, *Pitta* & *Kapha*	Indicated in disorders of urinary system, ulcer	Source of vitamin C and fibers
3	***Narikela (tender Coconut fruit)***	Subsides *Vata and Pitta* disorders	Cleans the urinary bladder, burning micturation, strengthen	Good source of essential minerals
4	***Kharjura (dates fruit)***	Cold potency, sweet in taste, pacify *Vata* & *Pitta*	Uses in blood disorders, alcoholism, syncope and intoxication	Per 100 g contains Protein 5.1 g; Fat 9.0g; Carbohydrates 78.0g; Energy 394kcal; Fiber 73.1g; Antioxidants 80400µ mol/100g

Table 05: *Dhanya Varga* (Cereal & Pulses Group) of Ayurvedic dietetics (1, 2, 3)

S.No.	Name (Sanskrit)	Modern Equivalent	Effect on Doṣas	Properties / Indications (Ayurveda)	Modern Nutritional Correlation
1	***Shali (Rice – old, red variety preferred)***	*Oryza sativa*	Pacify *Tridosha*; especially *Pitta*	*Balya, Brimhaṇa, Laghu, Pathya in Jvara, Raktapitta*	Easily digestible carb source, gluten-free, low allergenic
2	***Shashtika (Rice – 60-day variety)***	*Oryza sativa*	Pacify *Vata-Pitta*	*Laghu, Balya, Rasāyana*, good in fevers & convalescence	Light rice, rich in carbs, quick energy
3	***Yava (Barley)***	*Hordeum vulgare*	Pacify *Kapha-Pitta*	*Lekhana, Medohara, Mutrala,* useful in *Prameha, Sthaulya*	High-fiber cereal, lowers cholesterol, good for diabetes
4	***Godhuma (Wheat)***	*Triticum aestivum*	Pacify *Vata*, increases *Kapha*	*Guru, Balya, Vrishya, Brimhana*	Protein + gluten source, energy-rich
5	***Mudga (Green gram)***	*Vigna radiata*	Pacify *Tridosha*	*Laghu, Balya, Deepana,* good in *Pitta* disorders	Easily digestible pulse, protein rich
6	***Masura (Red Lentil)***	*Lens culinaris*	Pacify *Kapha*, increases *Pitta*	*Ruksha*, useful in *Kapha* disorders, *Raktapitta*	Protein & iron rich
7	***Chanaka(Bengal gram)***	*Cicer arietinum*	Pacify *Kapha*, increase *Vata*	*Ruksha, Lekhana,* useful in *Prameha, Medoroga*	High-protein legume, moderate fiber
8	***Kulatha (Horse gram)***	*Macrotyloma uniflorum*	Pacify *Kapha*, increase *Vata*	*Ruksha, Deepana,* reduces *Meda*, useful in *Ashmari, Shotha*	Anti-obesity, anti-lithic, protein rich
9	***Masha(Black gram)***	*Vigna mungo*	Increase *Vata*, pacify *Kapha-Pitta*	*Guru, Balya, Vrishya, Rasayana*	High protein & fat, bodybuilding
10	***Priyangu (Little millet)***	*Panicum miliare*	Pacify *Kapha-Pitta*	*Laghu*, useful in *Pitta disorders, Trishna*	Millet – gluten-free, cooling effect

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Table 06: *Dugdha/ Ksheera* (milk) group of Ayurvedic dietetics (1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12)

Kshira	Ayurvedic properties	Actions / Classical uses (Ayurvedic)	Typical modern nutritional profile — approximate (per 100 mL)
Godugdha/ Goksheera (Cow's milk)	Sweet in taste; unctuous, cold potency; Generally, pacifies *Vata* & *Pitta*, builds *Ojas*; considered the best/*jivaniya* (life-promoting)	*Rasayana* (rejuvenative), *oja-vardhaka* (improves ojas/ immunity), *balya* (strength), *Shukra-vardhaka* in some contexts; widely used as an anupana and base for *kṣhirakalpanas*.	≈ per 100 mL: Water ~87–89 g; Energy ~60–70 kcal; Fat ~3.5–4.0 g; Protein ~3.2–3.5 g; Lactose ~4.5–4.9 g. (Typical cow milk composition summaries).
Mahisha Ksheera (Buffalo milk)	Heavy, Sweet in taste; cold potency; highly unctuousness (*Snigdha*), *Guru* (heavy),tends to increase *Kapha*, is thicker and slower to digest.	Good for increasing dhatu moisture and nidra (sleep), used where nourishing/heavy effect is desired; not preferred in individuals with weak digestion or *Kapha* predominance.	≈ per 100 mL: Water ~81–84 g; Energy higher ~100–130 kcal (varies by breed); Fat commonly ~6–8% (higher than cow milk); Protein ~4.0–4.5 g; higher total solids — makes it richer & creamier. (Buffalo milk generally ~2× fat vs cow milk).
Aja (or *Aja-dugdha/ ksheera* (Goat's milk)	Sweet in taste; unctuous; relatively light (laghu) compared to buffalo; easier to digest for many due to small fat globules and different casein profile. Effects: milder on digestion; less tendency to produce *kapha*	Used where a nourishing but more digestible milk is needed (children with cow-milk sensitivity sometimes given goat milk in practice with caution). Useful in *rasayana*/child nutrition in some local traditional uses.	≈ per 100 mL: Water ~87–88 g; Energy ~60–70 kcal; Fat ~3.5–4.5 g (fat globules smaller); Protein ~3.3–3.6 g; Lactose ~4.1 g. Goat milk often has lower αs1-casein and may be better tolerated by some.

Discussion

Food is said to be cause of stability for all living beings. There is nothing else except diet for sustaining the life of living beings. Any other medicament just like diet not available, one is capable to make person disease free only with cereals (congenial diet). One cannot sustain life without diet even of endowed with medicine, that is why the diet is said to be the great medicament by physicians.

Acharya Caraka, Sushruta and Vagbhata also accepted the importance of diet specially (4, 5, 6, 7). Diet is said to be basis of life, strength, complexion, *Ojas*, growth and development, perspicuity of *indriyas*, happiness, clarity of voice, lusture, pleasure, increase of *dhatus*, intellect, health etc. entire life of individual depends upon food, all the activities of this world, as well as efforts made for eternal emancipation depend upon diet, thus cereals are the greatest in comparison to other things.

The food rich with all the essential nutrients and recommended judicially is called Nutraceuticals. Nutraceuticals are natural bioactive materials that provide demonstrated physiological benefits or reduce the risk of chronic diseases, above and beyond their basic nutritional function. Consumers' demand for quality of life has fuelled the 'nutraceutical revolution and seeking complementary or alternative beneficial products. The association of nutraceuticals with traditional medicine brings the long-standing consumer acceptance. Although the concept of nutraceuticals is gaining more popularity more recently, its roots can be traced to the ancient Indian system of medicine, Ayurveda It is clearly stated that food, which besides providing nutrition helps to maintain the healthy state and prevents the occurrence of diseases should be consumed. The classical texts of Ayurveda are filled with scattered references of implication of food products in various disease entities. The concept of "*Aajasrik Rasayana*' (general rejuvenation) deals with food products that can be consumed daily for improving quality of life by offering protection from external and internal stressors. Commonly used nutraceuticals of Ayurveda include Chyavanprash (for general health and prevention of respiratory disorders); *Brahma Rasayana* (for protection from mental stress). *Phala Ghrita* (for reproductive health); *Arjuna Ksheerpaka* (for cardioprotection); *Shatavari Ghrita* (for general health of women during various physiological states) and *Rasona Ksheerpaka* (for cardioprotection) (1, 2).

Similarly, in Ayurveda, a physician never recommends a fixed diet to all, but he advises the quantity varied as per the digestive capability of the patient.The food comprises all the six tastes and balanced the bodily tissues or maintaining *Panchabhautika* constitution of the body are considered as ideal diet. Pathya (wholesome food) changes from person to person with every individual at every moment, even if it changes in the same person depending upon various biological conditions such as *Prakriti, Vikriti, Swabhav,* condition of *Dosha, Dhatu* (bodily tissues) *Agni bala* (digestive capacity), *Rog Bala* etc. According to modern science, the nature of food is analysed by the presence of macro and micronutrients of food such as carbohydrates, fats, protein, vitamins, and minerals. But in *Ayurveda Pathya* to one person may not be similar to another person also. Therefore, diet plans on individual capacity basis are must for maintaining and cure of any diseases.

Conclusion

Ayurvedic dietetics or nutraceuticals construct a health-promoting, disease-preventing substance. Intake of rich nutrient food provides immunity which is not

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only helpful to protect against infections but also supports the management of diseases. Thus, the concept of Ayurvedic dietetics aids healthy living which keeps body and mind healthy.

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