



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON INFLUENCE OF AHARA (DIET) ON MENTAL HEALTH FROM AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Ayurvedic principles of Ahara (diet) are designed to take care of both physical and mental aspects of health of human being. Ayurveda emphasizes that the diet should be customized for each individual according to physical condition, Sharirika and ManasikaPrakriti (physical and mental constitution), Agnibala (digestive power), seasonal and daily changes and other natural factors surrounding an individual. In Ayurveda Ahara is considered as one among the Trayopasthambha (three subsidiary pillars that are Ahara-diet, Nidra-sleep and Brahmacharya-regulated sexual act). Unhealthy dietary habits are well quoted by Ayurveda in the pathogenesis of mental disorders such as Unmada (insanity), Apasmara (epilepsy), Atavabhinivesha (psychic perversion) etc. Though there is no direct classification of Ahara in classical text based on ManasikaGunas (psychic features), this can be well understood with the relationship between Sharirika and Manasika Dosha (physical and mental humors). The present review is intended to highlight the Ayurvedic aspects of significance of Ahara in relation to mental health. The matter was collected mainly from the Brihatrayee Grantha (Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Astanga Hridaya and Sangraha), the published articles in reputed journals, authentic webpages and PubMed. Ayurvedic concept of Ahara emphasize that good physical strength, intellect, complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, happiness, contentment all are dependent on the diet which we consume.

Keywords: Ahara, Triguna, Mana, Mental health

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community¹. Good nutrition is integral to mental health. Proper nutrition plays a central role in Ayurvedic living. Good physical strength, intellect, complexion, cheerfulness, good voice, happiness, contentment all are dependent on Ahara only². Food is essential for the life and proper development of the body. The body is directly connected with mind and whatever factors influence the body influence mind too, and vice-versa³. Digested food is divided into 3 parts. The subtle part nourishes the mind and middle part nourishes the body and the gross part is termed as Mala (residue of metabolism)⁴. The role of Ahara is well established even in the manifestation of psychopathology. Ayurvedic concepts of disease is mainly two types based on the location that is Shareerika (physical) and Manasika (mental). The psychic diseases are like Kama (excess desires) etc. and physical diseases are like Jwara (fever) etc., are interconnected⁵. Ayurvedic principles of dietetics are designed so well to make food most nourishing in every manner. They are based on ancient observations and insights. Ayurveda emphasizes that the diet should be customized for each individual according to physical condition, Sharirika and ManasikaPrakriti(physical and mental constitution), Agnibala

(digestive power), seasonal and daily changes and other natural factors surround an individual. The present review highlights the Ayurvedic view about the influence of Ahara on mental health.

UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP OF TRIDOSHA, TRIGUNA AND PANCHAMAHABHUTA

All the living and non-living things of the universe are made up of Panchamahabhuta (five basic elements viz- Prithvi- earth, Jala-water, Agni-fire, Vayu- air, and Akasha-ether). Panchamahabhuta is the base of every substance in this universe, including this body and its components such as Dosha (humors), Dhātu (fundamental tissues) etc. The substances are named according to the predominance of the particular Mahabhuta in it. The food which we consume and this body both are Panchabhautika in nature. The healthy and disease condition of this body is due to equilibrium and imbalance of the Tridosha respectively⁶. There are three Gunas (qualities) of Manas (mind) viz. Satva (responsible for purity), Rajas (responsible for attachment) and Tamas (responsible for ignorance). Among these, the Rajas and Tamas are considered as Mano Dosha⁷ because they play an important role in the psychopathology and are impure in nature. So here it is important to know the relationship between Tridosha, Triguna (three bodily humors) and Panchamahabhuta, which is shown in table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Relation of SharirikaDoshas with Panchamahabhuta

Name of the Dasha	Panchabhautika composition
Vata	Vayu + Akasa
Pitha	Agni + Jala
Kapha	Pruthvi + Jala

Table 2: Relation of Panchamahabhuta with Triguna

Panchamahabhuta	Predominant Guna
Akasa	Satva
Vayu	Rajas
Agni	Satva + Rajas
Jala	Satva + Tamas
Pruthvi	Tamas

MENTAL PERSONALITIES AND DIETARY CHOICES

Ayurveda considers mind and body as the two pathways for the manifestation of diseases⁶. The mind has in it three constituents or tendencies viz. Satva, Rajas and Tamas. The table 3 shows the dietary choices of different mental personalities⁸.

Table 3: Different mental personalities and their dietary choices

Mental personalities	Characters related to Dietary Choices
Satvika	Vrata Param (perform fasting), Shuchim (purity), Jitama (self-control), Ashuchi Dveshi (dislike for impurity)
Rajasika	Atimatra Ahara (take large quantity of food), Amisha Priyam (likes non vegetarian food), Mahashanam (voracious eater), Vikrita Ahara Shilam (unhealthy diet pattern), Ahara Kamam (excessive desire for food)
Tamasika	Jugupsita Ahara Param (abnormal food habits), Ahara Lubdham (greedy for food), Toya Kamam (excess desire for water)

ASSOCIATION OF AHARA WITH PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Ayurveda classical texts have clearly mentioned unwholesome diet is the cause of both Sharirika (physical) and Manasika (psychological) Vyadhi (diseases). Viruddha Ahara (incompatible food), Dushta Ahara (polluted or improperly processed food) and Ashuchi Ahara or Malina Ahara (unhygienic food) is the important factor in the manifestation of psychological disorders. Viruddha Ahara includes the food which provokes

Doshas, but doesn't expel out of the body. Dushta Ahara is the food whose natural properties is modified by various processes. Properties of processed food are depending on two matters - proper selection of food process, conduction of them in a proper way. Errors in these two results in adverse effects in the consumed food articles. Impure food is called Ashuchi or Malina Ahara which will be harmful to both body and mind. Food contaminated with grass, hair etc are also considered as Ashuchi Ahara. The psychological diseases and etiological diet are shown below in table 4.

Table 4: Psychological diseases and their Naidanika Ahara (etiological diet)

Disease	Nidanika Ahara (etiological diet)
Unmadam (insanity) ⁹	Viruddha, Dushta Bhojanaani (taking incompatible and polluted food)
Apasmaram (epilepsy) ¹⁰	Ahita-ashuchi Bhojanani (unwholesome and unclean food intake)
Atatvabhinivesham (psychic perversion) ¹¹	Malina Ahara Shilasya (habitual intake of unwholesome food)
Shokaja Atisaara (diarrhea due to grief) ¹²	Alpashanasya (consuming less amount of food)
Dvistartha Smyogachhardi (vomiting caused by the contact with the unwanted objects) ¹³	Dvishta pratipa ashuchi puti amedhya bibhatsagandha Ashana (smelling, eating and seeing disposable, antagonistic, unclean, putrid, unholy and gruesome ingredients and objects)
Mada, Murchha and Sanyasa (intoxication, fainting and syncope) ¹⁴	Malina Ahara Shilasya (habitual intake of unwholesome food)

The relationship of Shad rasa with mental factors are also well described in Ayurveda texts¹⁵ for e.g. Madhura rasa (sweet taste) is ShadIndriyaPrasadana (nourishes five senses and mind), Amla Rasa (sour taste) is Mano Bodhayati (clarify the mind), Atisevana of Katu Rasa (excess consumption of pungent taste) causes Murchha (fainting), Bhrama (giddiness) and Atisevana of Tikta Rasa (excess consumption of bitter taste) produces Moha (unconsciousness), Bhrama (giddiness).

The recent studies also proved that the change from traditional lifestyles and diet is linked to increased rates of depression and other mental health disorders¹⁶. The shift from traditional to the Western dietary pattern has become the leading cause of the growing burden of non-communicable diseases and in the year 2015, the Global Burden of Disease study identified unhealthy diet as the leading cause of early mortality worldwide¹⁷. Between 1990 and 2013, the number of people suffering from depression and/or anxiety increased by nearly 50%, from 416 million to 615 million. Close to 10% of the world's population is affected and mental disorders account for 30% of the global non-fatal disease burden¹⁸. Data from adult populations have indicated that better-quality diet is associated with better mental health outcomes¹⁹.

DISCUSSION

Unhealthy dietary habits are well quoted by Ayurveda in the pathogenesis of mental disorders such as Unmada, Apasamara, Atatvabhinivesha etc. Though there is no direct classification of Ahara in classical text based on ManasikaGunas but this can be well understood with the relationship between Sharirika and Manasika Dasha. There are multiple social, psychological, and biological factors determine the level of mental health of a person at any point of time²⁰. Faulty lifestyle and poor diet are identified as one of the important risk factors for many mental illnesses such as Dementia including Alzheimer's disease, Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar affective disorder, Schizophrenia and other psychoses and Developmental disorders, including autism²¹. Various modern studies have clearly established the association of dietary habits and mental disorders. The study done by Jacka FN et.al.¹⁹ shows a habitually poor diet (e.g. increased consumption of Western processed foods) is independently associated with a greater risk for depression and anxiety¹⁹. A variety of population studies have linked adherence to traditional dietary patterns with lowered risk of anxiety or depression. The recent prospective investigations showing that stronger adherence to traditional healthy dietary patterns are associated with a 25 to 30% lower risk

of depression²². Both Ayurveda and recent studies prove that Ahara has an important role to play in our healthy mental status.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda emphasizes that the diet should be customized for each individual according to physical condition, Sharirika and ManasikaPrakriti(physical and mental constitution), Agnibala (digestive power), seasonal and daily changes and other natural factors surround an individual. The evidences from modern medical science also accept the influences of food in the mental health and disease. Proper diet according to the place, time and occupation of the person certainly helpful for stabilizing the physical and physiological activities.

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