



Review Article

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UPAYOGA NIYAMA (DIETARY RULES) IN AYURVEDA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

As per Ayurveda, 'food is the medicine if it consumed properly'. Ingestion of food which is uniquely suitable to the physiology with prescribed dietary rules enhances the ones physical, mental and spiritual strength. Ayurveda is the science of life and the term prana (life) used for ahara itself indicates its due importance. Acharya Sushruta defines a healthy person as one in whom there is perfect balance of all bodily functions with equilibrium of the mind, senses and spirit. Only suitable ahara is not able to provide the health but certain other factors execute the prime role. Acharya charaka has elaborated these factors under the heading upyoga niyama (dietary rules). These dietary rules play crucial role in the digestion process, maintenance of equilibrium of doshas and dhatus and to bestow the strength to mind and sense organs. In this article we discuss the role upayoga niyama with their logical interpretation.

Keywords: Upyoga niyama, ahara, dietary rules.

INTRODUCTION

One famous quote for the ahara (food) is "You are what you eat." It means whatever you are taking as a food is going to reflect on your body and mind. So appropriate diet and healthy diet would be able to improve one physical as well as another is mental strength. In Ayurveda, various aspects of ahara have been expounded thoroughly, appropriately and significantly to maintain such physical and mental strength.

As per Ayurveda, Ahara having best liked color, smell and touch and consumed accordingly to proper regimen is said to be prana

(life). Ahara is called as prana because its benefits are noticeable clearly, it is the fuel for the agni (digestive power) and it stimulates the satva (mind). If ahara is consumed in the stipulated manner it bestows compactness (normalcy) and strength to the dhatus (body elements), better complexion to the body and pleasantness to the indriyas (sense organs). And if ahara is consumed in the wrong manner it brings about unhappiness.¹

Ayurveda has elaborated certain dietary rules under the heading Upayoga niyama or samstha² (dietary rules) to get the benefit of ahara and to boon the psychosomatic strength. These are about thirteen in numbers as follows-

Table 1: Upyoga niyama

No	Upyoga niyama	Meaning
1.	Ushna ahara	Intake of hot meal
2.	Snigdha ahara	Intake of unctuous meal
3.	Matrvat ahara	Intake of proportionate meal
4.	Jirna avastha ahara	Intake of meal after the digestion of previous meal
5.	Virya aviruddha ahara	Intake of food substances which are not antagonist to their virya (potency)
6.	Ishta Desh	Intake of meal at hygienic and pleasant place
7.	Ishta Upakaran	Intake of meal in hygienic and pleasant utensils
8.	Na atidruta	Do not eat too fast
9.	Na ativilambita	Do not eat too slow
10.	Ajalpa	Do not speak during meal
11.	Ahasana	Do not laugh during meal
12.	Tanmana Bhunjita	Concentrate the mind during intake of meal
13.	Atmanam abhisamikshya	Intake of meal after the assessment of personal strength

The 'Upayog niyama' are having inevitable role in the process of digestion, in the maintenance of equilibrium of doshas (body humors), in the normalcy of dhatus and to bestow the psychosomatic strength. There is a specific process of action of Upayoga niyama over the digestion and eventually on the body and mind.

Logical interpretation of 'Upayog niyama'

1) Ushna ahara

Intake of hot meal provides taste to the food, stimulates the agni, digests the food quickly, normalizes vata dosha and mitigates kapha dosha.³

Logical reasoning behind the action of Ushna ahara is as follows

Provides taste to the food

Hot meal stimulates and dissolves the bodhak kapha situated at rasanendriya (sense organ of taste). Dissolved bodhak kapha moistens rasendriya thus helps in the assessment of taste.

Stimulates agni and digest the food quickly

Hot meal stimulates agni which itself having ushna property. Ushna property lightens the food by decreasing its guru, snigdha etc property up to certain extent. Thus it lowers down the load over agni. Ushna property dissolves kledak kapha and stimulates the pachak pitta (agni) and thereby digest food quickly.

Normalizes vata and mitigates kapha

Hot meal decreases the sheeta guna of vata and stabilizes saman vayu which is near to agni. It mitigates kapha by hampering its properties like snigdha, guru and sheeta.

2) Snigdha ahara

Intake of snigdha ahara provides taste to the food, gives strength to the weak agni (digestive power), helps to digest the food quickly, normalizes vata dosha, nurtures the body, increase power of the indriyas (sense organs), provide strength to the body and gives complexion and glint.⁴

Logical reasoning behind the action of Snigdha ahara

Taste to the food

Snigdha ahara provides moistness and strength to the rasendriya and thus helps in the assessment of taste.

Strength to the weak agni and digest food quickly

According to Acharya Charaka, the best medicine for weak agni is the sneha (substance with snigdha property).⁵ The vitiated vata has prime role in the hypo-functioning of agni. Snigdha ahara stabilizes saman vayu which is near to agni by reducing its ruksha (dry) property. Normalized saman vayu removes the hurdles in the process of digestion and gives strength to the agni to digest food quickly.

Nurturing and strength to the body

Snigdha ahara improves the process of formation of dhatus, normalizes vata and eventually increases strength of the body.

Increases power of Indriyas

Snigdha ahara due to its unctuous property provides contentment to the indriyas and helps them in the process of proper contact with their respective objects (Indriyarthasamyog)

Improve complexion and glint

Snigdha ahara provides nourishment to the tvacha (skin) and keeps it healthy. Snigdha ahara also improves the functioning of bhrajaka pitta present in tvacha and thereby improves one's complexion and glint.

3) Matravat ahara

Ingestion of proportionate diet without aggravating the Vata, pitta and kapha dosha increases only life, do not disturb the normalcy of agni, digest easily and excretion of the kitta bhaga (waste products) takes place with ease.⁶

Logical reasoning behind the action of Matravat ahara

Maintains equilibrium of vata, pitta and kapha

Food which is taken according to the ones agni, after considering heaviness and lightness of the food substances is termed as proportionate diet. Such diet provides free space for the mobilization and proper functioning of all three doshas eventually maintains their equilibrium.

Maintains normalcy of agni and smoothness in digestion and excretion

As the proportionate diet maintains equilibrium of all the three doshas, the normalized samana vayu ignites agni and helps pachak pitta in the process of digestion whereas kledak kapha provide softness to the food. After digestion, waste products easily get excreted by the apana vayu from the body.

4) Jirna avastha

The food which is taken after the digestion of previous food, when doshas reside in their own sthana (places), after belching, after lightness or purity in chest, after elimination of apana vayu, urine and feces, would maintain the equilibrium of dhatus (body elements) and increase the life.⁷

Logical reasoning behind the intake of food in Jirna avastha

Intake of food in a state of indigestion causes blending of improperly formed ahara rasa from the previously undigested food with the newly formed ahara rasa. Such intermixing of ahara rasas provokes the doshas in a rapid manner. These vitiated doshas along with ama (undigested ahara rasa) manifest the diseases like alasaka, visuchika and other diseases relevant to indigestion.

5) Virya aviruddha

Intake of food substances which are antagonist to each other with regards to their viryas (potency) produce the same diseases occurred due to the incompatible diet like skin disorders, impotency etc.⁸

Logical reasoning behind the intake of Virya aviruddha ahara

All kinds of foods which agitate doshas but do not expel them out are termed as incompatible diet.⁹ Intake of incompatible diet with respect to virya causes great vitiation of doshas and being abhishyandi cause obstruction to the strotas (channels). These vitiated doshas produce the indigestion whereas the obstructed strotas are unable to provide the nutrition to the body elements eventually produce general debility and manifest the diseases.

6) Ishta desha

Intake of meal at unhygienic and unpleasant place makes the mind unhappy.¹⁰

7) Ishta upakaran

Intake of meal in unhygienic and unpleasant utensils makes the mind unhappy.¹¹

Logical reasoning behind the intake of food at Ishta desha and in Ishta upakaran

Intake of food at unhygienic place and in unhygienic utensils produce urges of mind like anger, malice and irritation. As per Ayurveda urges of mind are to be suppressed.¹² Because such urges of mind disturb the normalcy of doshas, hampers the secretion of digestive enzymes and there by the process of digestion too.

8) Na atidruta

Due to rapid ingestion of food, such food goes into the abnormal or unwanted tract, or remains in undigested form, or not stays longer in amashaya (stomach) or gets vomit outside the body. Intake of food in a rapid manner is not helpful in understanding its merits and demerits.¹³

9) Ajalpam

Speaking while intake of food produces the adverse effect similar as atidruta ahara (eating too fast).¹⁴

10) Ahasan

Laughing while intake of food produces the adverse effect similar as atidruta ahara (eating too fast).¹⁵

Logical reasoning behind the intake of food too fast or speaking or laughing while eating

Food goes into the abnormal or unwanted tract

Intake of food too fast or speaking or laughing while eating, may alter the normal tract of the food. If such food goes into the respiratory tract creates extreme discomfort and would produce immediate gag and coughing reflex. If these reflexes unable to clear the food, it obstructs the tract and causes choking.

Remains undigested or not stay longer in amashaya or vomit out of the body

Intake of food too fast or speaking or laughing while eating, may not stimulate the bodhaka kapha and kledak kapha and therefore softening of food not takes place. Intake of food in such a foresaid condition agitates doshas and disturbs agni eventually food remains undigested. Vitiating doshas especially vata vomits out the undigested food as it is unsuitable to body and able to produce toxicity in body.

11) Na ativilambitam

Taking food very slowly is unable to produce contentment so overeating of food takes place. Food becomes cold and such food get untimely and improperly digested.¹⁶

Logical reasoning behind Na ativilambita ahara

Unable to produce contentment and causes overeating

Due to slow intake of food there is improper secretion of bodhaka kapha. Hence, the process of mixing of food bolus with bodhaka kapha gets hampered and softening of food not takes place. Such

unsoftened food unable to produce contentment to rasendriya consequently overeating takes place.

Food becomes cold and improperly digested

Intake of food slowly loses its ushna property which is useful for the stimulation of agni and its proper digestion. According to acharya charaka, taking food slowly converts the normal agni into vishamagni. This vishamagni is incompetent to digest food properly and produces indigestion.

12) Tanmana bhunjita

Intake of food without concentration of mind produces the adverse conditions same as atidruta ahara.

Logical reasoning behind tanmana bhunjita

Intake of food without concentration may go into unwanted tract like respiratory tract. It may not stay longer in amashaya and gets vomit out. Ingestion of food without concentration is not helpful in understanding its merits and demerits. However, intake of food with concentration indirectly helps in the proper secretion of digestive juices and provides contentment to the body, mind and sense organs.

13) Atmanam abhisamikshya

Think before intake of food that is it suitable or unsuitable, favorable or unfavorable for our self. Thinking over these aspects would be able to keep our knowledge intact about our suitability to particular food.¹⁷

Logical reasoning behind Atmanam abhisamikshya

As per Ayurveda, food should be taken in accordance with one's prakriti (constitution), bala (strength), vaya (age), desha (region/habitat), kala (time), agni etc. These factors decide the one's suitability or unsuitability towards particular food. Suitable food gives strength while unsuitable one manifests the disease.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of above interpretation, upyoga niyama has due importance in the digestion process. Process of digestion depends on normalcy of agni and almost all diseases arise due to the hypo functioning of agni.¹⁸ These upyoga niyama maintain the normalcy of agni by avoiding the digestive load thereby avoids formation of ama. They maintain the equilibrium of all three doshas and enhance their working potency. Stabilized vata dosha stimulates the agni, helps in the process of digestion and excretion. Normal pitta dosha digests ahara properly and maintains the complexion of the body too. Whereas stabilized kapha dosha softens the food, provides contentment to the indriyas and strengthens dhatus. Taking food at healthy places, in healthy utensils and with concentration bestows strength to the mind. Stable mind without any psychological urges like anger, grief etc. helps in the secretion of digestive enzymes and indirectly uplifts the digestion.

Therefore, intake of food with proper dietary regulations escalates the digestion ability and consequently the psychosomatic strength.

CONCLUSION

The one's strength, health, span of life and prana (life itself) all depend on agni. This agni gets either kindled or killed by the fuel

in the form of food and drinks and not otherwise by anything other than fuel. Hence to maintain the normalcy of agni and to bestow the psychosomatic strength these thirteen Upyoga niyama (dietary rules) plays a crucial role.

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