



Review Article

www.ijrap.net

(ISSN Online:2229-3566, ISSN Print:2277-4343)



A REVIEW ON THE ASSOCIATION OF AAHAR WITH MENTAL HEALTH

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Received on: 30/05/22 Accepted on: 04/07/22

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DOI: 10.7897/2277-4343.1304108

ABSTRACT

Nutrition is the gross term. It includes body nourishment and mind nourishment. Mind nourishment can be understood in two forms, i.e. good thoughts and good food. Good thoughts depend on a positive mind attitude. The goodness of food depends on what kind of food a person eats and how to eat the food. The role of Satwik Aahar mentioned in Bhagwat Geeta, Chaturvidh Aahar, and Shad-rasatmak Aahar mentioned in Ayurvedic texts are essential to know what to eat, and Aharvidhi Vidhan, which is explained in Charaka Samhita is necessary to understand how to eat. The mind has three qualities, Satwa, Raja and Tama, which are present in almost everything, including food. Chhandogya Upanishad points out that the food eaten has three layers; sthula amsha, madhyama amsha and sukshma amsha, and what is sukshma (the subtlest part), that is mind. It also states Aahar shuddhau satwa shuddhi. From the purity of food comes the purity of mind. One should always try to increase the Satwa guna because; the persons having Alpa Satwa are more prone to have diseases, as Alpa Satwa indulges Pradnyaparadha, and pradnyaparadha is the root cause of all kinds of illness. So, it is important to achieve Satwa Shuddhi and to achieve Satwa Shuddhi Aahar Shuddhi is important.

Keywords: Saatwik Aahar, Mental health, Aahar, mind nourishment, Satwa shuddhi.

INTRODUCTION

WHO defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease. Mental health is also more than the absence of mental disorders. It is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their abilities, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to their community. ¹

Ayurved is an ancient life science in which health is defined at a spiritual level, as “Prasanna aatmendriya manaha” ². It is not an only equilibrium in your dosha dhatu mala agni and kriya but also equilibrium and harmony in atma (soul), indriya (senses) and mind. Ayurved Sharira is not just a body, but it is grossly defined as Tatra Shariram naam “Chetana adhishtaanbhutam” ³. Sharira is where Chetana means soul along with mind resides.

So, the term Sharira Poshana includes both body and mind nourishment.

The Ayurvedic texts used in the present study are Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita with their commentaries. The classic texts Bhagwat Geeta, Chhandogya Upanishad references, modern medical literature, and information on various websites are collected for the study.

Aahar

Aahar is a substance swallowed through the throat after eating ⁴. Acharya Dalhana says the substance consumed through Annalika is called aahar. ⁵ Whatever is swallowed is called “Aahar”. Charaka Samhita states that there is a variety of aahar items humans eat. Yet, due to the necessity of the “swallowing act”, whatever is undergone a process of deglutition is Aahar ⁶. Acharya Chakrapani mentioned that Ahara means anything which is ingested, and thus it includes both diet and drugs. Also,

Acharya Gangadhara says that anything consumed by the tongue down to the throat is called Ahara. Therefore, drugs are also included in aahar. Ahara (food) is considered the Mahabhaishajya (the superior medicine) in Kashyap Samhita and Brahma in Upanishad. Trayopastambha, namely Ahara, Nidra and Brahmacharya, are three sub-pillars of Ayurved shastra ⁷, where Aahar has been mentioned first, which shows its importance.

So many terms are mentioned in the modern medical literature. “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food” - Hippocrates, the father of medicine. ⁸ These thousands of years old quote acknowledges the importance of healthy eating. Food - mood connection (by Dr Uma Naido) ⁹. No health without mental health, stated by WHO ¹⁰, shows the importance of food and mental health.

Mind

The mind has three qualities satwa, raja and tama, called gunas.

1. Satwa is the highest guna, representing balance and harmony. It is the ideal state.
2. Raja represents an active and intense mind. Excess raja leads to stress, overstimulation, and over-excitement.
3. Tama is the base guna associated with inertia, lethargy, and laziness.

These three qualities are present in almost everything, including food.

Aahar and Mind association

As defined earlier, Sharir poshana includes both body nourishment and mind nourishment. Mind nourishment depends on good thoughts which originate from a positive mind attitude, and

Good food further depends on what to eat and how to eat it.

[A] What kind of food one should eat is explained with “Saatwik Aahar” mentioned in Bhagwat Geeta, Chaturvidh aahar and Shad-Rasatmak aahar mentioned in Ayurvedic texts.

[B] How to eat the food is explained in Charaka Samhita as Aaharvidhi Vidhan.

Trividha Aahar

1. Saatwik Aahar

“Aayuh-sattva-bala-arogya-sukha-preeti-
vivirdhanaahaa |
rasyaaha snigdhaaha sthira hridyaa aahaaraaha
saatwikapriyaahaa ||”

Food that enhances (aayu) longevity, (satwa) mind strength, (bala) body strength, (aarogya) health, (sukha) happiness and (preeti) joy, that which is (rasya) juicy, (snigdha) oily, stable (sthira) and (hridya) pleasant, is dear to one who is saatwik.

2. Raajasik Aahar

“Kativ-amlalavana-atyushna-teekshna-ruksha-
vidaahinaha |
aahaaraa raajasasyeshtaa
dukhkhashokaamayapradaahaa ||”

Food that is bitter, sour, salty, excessively hot, pungent, dry, and burning is dear to the raajasic person, causing pain, sorrow and disease.

3. Taamasik Aahar

“Yaatayamam gatarasam pooti paryushitam cha yat |
ucchishtamapi chaamedhyam bhoojanam
taamasapriyam||.”

Stale (Yatayamam) means that food has lost its original state, being kept for a long time. Tasteless (Gatarasam) means that which has lost its natural taste. Putrid (Puti) means emitting a bad smell. Decayed (Paryusitam) means acquiring rancidity by lapse of time. Refused (Uchistam) means the food that has remained over after being taken by persons other than Gurus etc. Such food is Unclean (Amedhyam), and it is not supposed for offering in the worship of God.¹¹

So Saatwik food will help calm the body and mind so that one can get the maximum advantage of the food compared to Raajasik and Taamasik food. Raajasik and Taamasik food generate intoxicating vibes in the body, which makes it challenging to focus on spiritual things.

Chaturvidha Aahar

1. Aashita – bhojyam odanadi, the coarse form of food eaten by churning, is chewable.
2. Khaadita – bhakshyam modakadi, solid form of food eaten by biting, eatable.
3. Peeta – peyam ksheeradi, drinkables are a liquid form of food taken by drinking.
4. Leedha – lehyam madhwadi, mostly semisolid/semiliquid food form, likable.¹²

Shad Rasatmak Aahar

Rasa is the essence of life. This rasa affects every aspect of our existence. It is considered a powerful therapeutic tool. In Ayurved, Rasa (taste) has given immense significance. Ayurveda recognizes six flavours and is termed Shadrasa, viz Madhura (sweet), Amla (sour), Lavana (salty), Katu (pungent), Tikta (bitter), and Kashaya (astringent). Each of these has a role to play in our health and wellbeing.

- Excessive intake of Madhur Rasa leads to Kapha prakopa, which causes obesity, laziness, heaviness, Mandagni etc.
- Excessive intake of Amla Rasa leads to Pitta Prakop, causing Irritation in the throat etc.

- Excessive intake of Lavana Rasa leads to Rakta-Pitaa Prakopa, causing Greying of hair, Alopecia etc.
- Excessive intake of Katu Rasa causes Dizziness, Weakness, Vertigo etc.
- Excessive intake of Tikta Rasa leads to Dryness, Depletion of Rasa to Shukra Dhatu etc.
- And Excessive intake of Kashay Rasa leads to dryness, infertility etc.

It is said that “Sarvarasabhyaso Balakaranam”. So, it is advised to take shadrasatmak ahar, which is present in aashit khaditadi four food forms.¹³

Aahar Vidhi Vidhaan

Nutrition is the basic need for a healthy life, but one cannot gain optimum benefit from the food consumed without knowing proper dietary guidelines. There are many guidelines related to diet and its contents in modern aspects, but the Ayurved has its unique approach and importance. Acharya Charaka has given ahara vidhi vidhan (dietary guidelines), which can prevent many diseases arising from faulty dietary habits.

- Ushnamashniyat (consuming warm food)
- Snigdhamashniyat (food should be unctuous)
- Matravatashniyat (food in proper quantity) According to Ayurveda, matra (amount) is of two types one is sarvagraha (whole amount) another parigrah (amount of individual ingredient)
- Jeerneashniyat (Meal taken after digestion of previous meal)
- Veeryaaviruddhamashniyat (food having no contradictory potencies)
- Ishtadeshe ishtasarvopkarnam chashniyat (Meal taken at proper place and with appropriate accessories)
- Naatidrutamashniyat (Not eating too fast or not in a hurry)
- Naativilambitamashniyat (Not eating too slowly)
- AjalpanAhasan tanmanabhunjeet (Eating without talking or laughing, Mindful eating, with concentration)
- Atmanamabhisamikshya bhunjeet samyak (Eating after analyzing one Need)¹⁴

In the Vedanta philosophy, there are said to be five elements. The first two- Akasha (space or ether) and Vayu (air) are not visible to us. The other three-Prithvi (earth) – referred to as Annam (food), Apa (water) and Agni (fire or energy) - are visible, and therefore they have been discussed. These three elements are never found in their pure form. They are always in a combined state. The Mana/ Chitta (mind) is the most refined product of food (annam), the Prana is the most acceptable product of water, and the Vak (speech) is the most refined product of fire.¹²

“Annamashitam tredha vidhiyate tasya yaha sthavisishtho
dhaatuhu tat purisham bhavati yo madhyamaha tat mansam yo
anishtha tat manaha ||.”

Chhandogya Upanishad 6/5/1

Food, when eaten, becomes threefold. What is coarsest in it becomes faeces, what is medium becomes flesh, and what is subtlest becomes mind. Here food is not converted into mind, but when we eat the food mind is pleased by apyayana. This proves that if we consume Saatwik Aahar (food), our Mana becomes Saatwik. If we eat Raajasik Ahar (food) our Mana becomes Raajasik and if we consume Taamasik Ahar our Mana becomes Taamasik.¹⁵

“Aaharshuddhau satwashuddhihi satwashuddhau dhruva
smritihi smritilambhe sarvagranthinam vipramokshaha.”
Chhandogya Upanishad 7/26/2

When the food is altogether pure, the mind becomes pure. This pure mind imposes firm memory. All bonds get loosened with this strong memory. Then only one set free becomes liberated.

DISCUSSION

Day by day, the burden of mental disorders is increasing globally, affecting individuals' quality of life. As estimated by WHO (2004), mental disorders are the third leading cause of disabled life in low to middle-income countries. Mental health disorders are also the fourth leading cause of death worldwide (WHO, 2001).¹⁶ This is because these mental issues are mostly not recognized in the early stages, which is why they become more complex to treat. So, no health without mental health was started by WHO for early recognition and prevention of mental disorders. The role of preventive medicine, nutrition, diet, and lifestyle management is essential here. The primary purpose or objective of Ayurved is "Swasthasya swastya rakshanam" to keep the health of a healthy individual. For that, in Ayurved aahar-vihar, pathya apathy, Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, what to eat? When to eat? How to eat? How to behave? Everything is explained in a very detailed manner. Saatwik Aahar Gow-ghrit, Medhya dravya, Hridya dravya, Abhyanga, Nasya is some of them... More importance is given to Aahar than Aushadhi. As it is said, Aahar (food), if taken properly, is like medicine (aushadhi). A person whose mind is with increased raajasik or taamasik guna is more prone to have mental disorders than a person with saatwik mind¹⁷. Saatwik mind is said to be a pure mind, and this purity helps to prevent illness. So, one should always try to increase the satwa guna as prevention is always better than cure. This is only possible with saatwik ahar because the purity of mind comes from the purity of food.

Sankaracharya gives a wider import to this word 'food'. Anything we take in through our five senses, i.e., Rupa, Rasa, Shabda, Gandha, Sparsa, is also 'food'. Anything we receive through the senses should also be pure. Food eaten alone will not suffice.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Sharira (body) and mana (mind) are inseparable entities. The things that affect the body also change mental status, such as food. Vata, Pitta and Kapha are three Shareer Dosha; Satwa, Raja, and Tama are three Manasik Dosha. Of which Satwa is said to be an ideal state. Satwa means pure. Satwa also means mind; Satwa Shuddhi is the purity of mind, the healthy and disease-free State. The persons having Alpa Satwa are more prone to have diseases, as Alpa Satwa indulges Pradnyaparadha (misuse of intellect), and pradnyapradha is the root cause of all kinds of illness. So, it can be understood by loka-purusha saamya siddhanta that Shudhha Aahar or Saatwik Aahar is important to achieve Satwa Shuddhi. So, it proves that purity of mind comes from the purity of food.

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Cite this article as:

Prajakta Vaidya and Smita Dhurde. A review on the association of aahar with mental health. Int. J. Res. Ayurveda Pharm. 2022;13(4):161-163 <http://dx.doi.org/10.7897/2277-4343.1304108>

Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared

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