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A REVIEW ON MILK IN AYURVEDA: THE BALANCE OF NUTRITION AND VIRUDDHA AHARA FOR HEALTHY LIVING

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, milk and its derivatives are considered rejuvenating foods (Pathya and Rasayana), similar to modern probiotics and prebiotics, believed to enhance life force (Ojas). Milk is praised for its nourishing properties, promoting immunity, and supporting bone health. Ayurveda emphasizes "Agni" (digestive fire), which governs digestion and metabolism. Historically, milk has been regarded as highly nutritious and rich in calcium. In modern times, milk's nutritional value has been debated, with some criticizing the fat content in whole milk and advocating for skimmed or plant-based alternatives like almond milk. Concerns about modern milk production methods potentially reducing health benefits have also emerged. As Acharya Charaka states, "You are what you eat", highlighting the importance of food combinations and preparations in maintaining health. Improper consumption, such as in unsuitable combinations, excessive quantities, or the wrong times, can lead to conditions like Viruddha Ahara (incompatible food combinations). In Ayurveda, dairy products are used not only for nourishment but also for their therapeutic properties. However, the scientific rationale behind these practices and their mechanisms of action remains an area for further research.

Keywords: Milk, Viruddha Ahara, Agni, Dairy products

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda considers health to be a well-balanced state of all anatomical, physiological, and psychological entities. Health and disease are caused by consuming wholesome and unwholesome diets, respectively. The Charaka Samhita mentions that without a proper diet, medicines are of no use and with a proper diet, medicines are not required. Ayurveda makes use of milk and milk products for preventive and curative purposes.

Acharya Charaka explained milk as Jeevaniya, which means it invigorates, enlivens, improvesand saves life.[1]

As it is produced from Laghu Aushadiya Rasa, it is Satmya to all humans.

Qualities and Functions of Milk

Milk is saatmya, jeevaniya dravya (a life-enhancing compound) for all. So, it is one of pathya dravya.

According to Acharya Charaka milk is described as swadhu (sweet), sheeta (cold), mridhu (soft), snigdha (oily), bahala (thick), slakshna(smooth), pichchila (slimy), guru (heavy), manda (slow), prasanna (clear). It is said to enhance oja (life force) and jeevanashakti and is considered superior to other types of milk and the most effective rejuvenating tonic (rasayana). [2]

Kehdev Nighantu described its properties as truptikaraka (satisfaction inducing), pushtikara (nourishing), medhya (cognitive enhancer), madhura rasa (sweet taste), madhura vipaka (sweet post-digestive effect), balya (strengthening), rasayana (rejuvenating), varnya (complexion enhancer), Kaphakaraka (promotes Kapha dosha), dhatu vardhaka (tissue builder), ojovardhaka (boosts ojas), Pittakaraka (promotes Pitta dosha), snigdha (oily or lubricating), stanya vardhaka (promotes milk production), sheetala (cooling), guru (heavy), daha shamaka (heat reducing), abhishyandhi (causing excessive fluid), Raktapitta (blood disorder), Vata nashaka (Vata pacifying), shukrya (promotes reproductive health), and rechaka (expellant).

Bhaavprakash has mentioned milk sheeta veerya (cooling effect), guru (heavy), snigdha (oily or lubricating), madhura rasa and vipaka (sweet taste and sweet post-digestive effect), mutrala (diuretic), pichila (slimy or viscous), stanyavardhaka (promotes milk production), mrudhu (soft or gentle), snehana (oleation), vishgna (toxic), pavitra (purifying), Kaphakaraka (promotes Kapha dosha), shukrala (promotes reproductive health), prasannata (cheerfulness), agnideepaka (digestive enhancer), ayuvardhaka (longevity enhancer), slakshana (smooth), manda (slow or dull), and rasayana (rejuvenating).

Cow's milk is considered most beneficial when consumed in its dharoshna state, meaning fresh, warm milk drawn directly from the udder. This form of milk is regarded as strengthening, easily digestible, and possess a cold potency. It enhances the digestive fire (agni) and helps balance all three doshas. However, once the milk cools down, it should be avoided. Different types of milk are preferred for specific conditions: buffalo milk is best for conditions of deha sita (coldness in the body), sheep's milk is ideal when boiled and kept warm, and goat's milk is best when cooked and then allowed to cool.

Uncooked milk is abhishyandi (which blocks body channels). It contributes to an excess of Kapha (which may manifest as undigested food or other imbalances) and is considered generally unhealthy. However, cow and buffalo milk are exceptions and are regarded as beneficial, even in their uncooked state.[3] When milk is brought to a boil and consumed while warm, it helps balance and reduce excess Kapha and Vata dosha. In contrast, excess Pitta dosha is alleviated when milk is boiled and cooked.

Gorasa Varga (Classification of Milk)

The various types of milk include gokshira (cow milk), mahisakshira (buffalo milk), ustrakshira (camel milk), ekasaphakshira (horse and donkey milk), chagakshira (goat milk), avikshira (sheep milk), hasthikshira (elephant milk), and streekshira (woman milk), each with its unique nutritional properties and benefits is described by Acharya which is mentioned below in Table 1. [4]

Properties of Milk Collected in the Morning and Afternoon, Evening/Night Timing and its Effect

Different properties of milk at various times of the day are mentioned in Table 2.

Nindita Dugdha Lakshana

The phrase "Nindit Dugdha Lakshana," which refers to milk unsuitable for consumption, is elaborated upon in Table 3, describing its properties according to various Acharyas.

Effect of Milk Taken at Different Time

Consuming milk at different times of the day results in various properties, which are outlined in Table 4. [9]

Indications and Contraindications

The conditions under which milk should or should not be consumed are provided in Table 5 and Table 6.

Milk with special reference to Virudha Ahara

"Vairodhika" refers to substances that create antagonism within the tissues. The traits that help identify this antagonism can be regarded as the defining qualities of contradictory or incompatible foods, also known as virudha ahara. The primary characteristic of an antagonistic substance is that it may reduce the partial disturbance of the doshas but does not entirely rectify it.[12]

Acharya has described various types of virudha (incompatible combinations), with Acharya Charaka identifying 18 main types of such contradictions. [13]

Since the focus here is on milk, several theories have been presented by the Acharya regarding its combinations, how it should be consumed and what combinations are not to be taken, which are discussed in Table 7.

Table 1: Different animal milk and its properties

Animal's milk	Properties
Gokshira (Cow milk)	It is swadu rasa (sweet), sheeta (cold) in potency, mridu (soft), snigdha (oily), bahala (thick), slakshan (smooth), picchila (slimy), guru (heavy to digest) and manda (slow). It is considered as best jivaniya and also acts as rasayana.
Mahisakshira (Buffalo milk)	It is heavier and colder in potency, more unctuous than cow's milk, and is beneficial for insomnia and pacifying excess power of digestion (atyagni).
Ustrakshira (Camel milk)	It is slightly dry, hot, saltish, and light and is recommended for Vata and Kapha disorders. It is also helpful for constipation, parasitic infection,oedema, abdominal disorders, and haemorrhoids.
Ekasaphakshira (Horse and donkey milk)	It is strengthening, stabilizing, light, hot, slightly sour, saltish and dry. It is effective in treating Vata disorders of the extremities.
Chagakshira (Goat milk)	It is astringent, sweet, cold in potency, and light, and it is effective in treating bleeding disorders, diarrhoea, wasting, cough, and fever.
Avikshira (Sheep milk)	It causes hiccups and dyspnoea, is hot in potency and increases Pitta and Kapha dosha.
Hasthikshira (Elephant milk)	It is strengthening, heavy to digest, and best for stabilizing the body.
Streekshira (Woman milk)	It is invigorating, nourishing and wholesome. It is helpful as a nasal medication in bleeding disorders and soothing to persons with eye pain.

Table 2: Milk intake at different times of the day

Authors	Morning	Afternoon	Night
Acharya Sushruta [5]	It is guru (heavy), vishtambhakaraka (causes constipation) and sheeta (cooling) in quality.	During the day, as the cows graze in the sun, partake in physical activity, and are subject to the wind, the milk removes klama (tiredness), is netrya (good for eyes), and causes Vatanulomana.	During the night, the soma (cool) guna dominates and due to the lack of physical activity of the cows, the milk is guru (heavy) and sheeta (cold) in quality.
Kaihdev Nighantu	It is ushna (heating), guru (heavy), vishtamba (constricting or obstructing), dhatuvardhaka (tissue builder), Kaphakaraka (promotes Kapha dosha), shitala (cooling), ballya (strengthening), and abhishyandhi (channel blocking)	Milk is characterized by qualities of both guru (heavy) and sneha (oily) gunas, and it can be considered either guru or laghu (light), depending on its preparation and consumption.	During the pradosha kala, it is known to alleviate both Vata and Kapha dosha. When consumed with food, it helps balance Pitta, supports eye health, reduces fatigue, and pacifies Vata.
Bhavprakash [6]	It is guru (heavy) and sheeta (cold) in gunas.	In the daytime, as the cows graze under the sun, engage in physical activity, and are exposed to the wind, the milk is laghu in guna, which mitigates Vata and Kapha dosha.	The moon's soma guna and the cows' reduced physical activity at night are believed to give their milk aphrodisiac and strengthening properties. It boosts the digestive system, increases strength, and balances Kapha and Pitta dosha. It's considered beneficial for children's growth, can slow ageing in middle-aged individuals, and enhance stamina in older people.

Table 3: Nindit Dugdha Lakshana according to different Acharya

Authors	Nindita Dugdha Lakshana
Acharya Sushruta [7]	This type of milk is recognizable by its unpleasant odour, sour taste, discolouration, altered flavour, presence of sediment, and clotted texture.
Kaihdev Nighantu	It is characterized by **a** mixed colour of milk, an unpleasant odour, sour or salty; it contains granules and should not be mixed with sour or salty substances as this combination can cause Kushtha (skin disorders).
Bhavprakash [8]	Milk that is discoloured, unpleasant in taste, sour, foul-smelling, and has solidified should be avoided, especially when mixed with sour or salty substances, as it can lead to serious health issues like Kushtha (skin disorders).

Table 4: Effect of Milk Taken at Different Time

Drinking milk in the early morning	It is shukravardhaka (affects sperm and ovum health), brinhana (body building), agnivardhaka (stimulates digestive fire)
Drinking milk in the afternoon	It is balya (promotes strength and vitality), Kaphapittaa nashaka, agnideepaka (enhances digestive capacity)
In childhood	Consuming milk during childhood is Shareeravruddhikara (promotes physical growth and development) and balya (promotes strength and vitality)
In old age	Consuming milk in old age is believed to be shukravardhaka (affects sperm and ovum health)
At night time	It is pathya (suitable for health), doshanashaka (balances or corrects imbalances in the three dosha) and netrya (good for eye health).
At night time, without having food	Drinking milk on an empty stomach can cause ajeerna (indigestion) and nidranashaka (reduces sleep disturbances).
Daily at night time	Eating dinner that includes vidahi anna pana, food or drink that causes burning sensations or irritation) Drinking milk can lead to a daha (burning sensation).

Table 5: Indications of Milk

Authors	Indications
Acharya Sushruta [10]	It is beneficial for Jeerna Jwara (chronic fever), Kasa (cough), Swasa (asthma), Shosha (emaciation or wasting), Kshaya (tuberculosis or general wasting), Gulma (abdominal tumours or swelling), Unmada (psychosis), Udarrog (abdominal disorders), Murcha (fainting), Bhrama (dizziness), Madataya (intoxication), Daha (burning sensation), Trishna (thirst), Hridrog (heart diseases), Mutrarog (urinary disorders), Pandu (anaemia), Grahni (irritable bowel syndrome or digestive disorders), Arsha (piles), Shoola (pain, especially abdominal pain), Udavarta (distention or bloating), Atisara (diarrhoea), Pravahika (dysentery), and Strirog (female disorders).etc and increases longevity. Best for young, old, emaciated, and weak individuals (due to hunger, physical exertion, or sexual intercourse).
Kaihdev Nighantu	Useful for conditions like Abhishyandi (excessive secretion or congestion), Vata-Rakta (gout or vata-pitta disorders), Pittaja Roga (pitta-related diseases like inflammation or ulcers), Manasa Roga (mental health disorders), Arsha (piles), Hridroga (heart diseases), Jeerna Jwara (chronic fever), Kaasa (cough), Shotha (swelling or oedema), Pandu (anaemia), Pravahika (dysentery), Atisara (diarrhoea), Trishna (excessive thirst), Moorcha (fainting), Yakshma (tuberculosis or chronic wasting diseases), and others. It is also beneficial for Parisheka (external application or pouring), Avagahana (immersion or soaking), Aschottana (pouring over or drenching), Pradeha (application or spreading), and more. Acts as Sthanyavardhaka (promotes breast milk production), Vishagna (detoxifying or antidote), Deepana (stimulates digestion), Aayuvardhaka (longevity-promoting), Rasayana (rejuvenating), and Ojovardhaka (boosts vitality).
Bhavprakash [11]	Jeerna Jwara (chronic fever), Kasa (cough), Swasa (asthma), Shosha (emaciation or wasting).

Table 6: Contraindications of Milk

1	Milk should not be consumed in Kushtha diseases.
2	Milk and its byproducts, like buttermilk and curd, should not be consumed in Shopha (oedema).
3	All other milk except goat's milk are contraindicated in Atisara (diarrhoea).

Table 7: List of Common Incompatible Foods with Milk

Authors	Different Theories
Acharya Charaka [14]	1. **Samyoga Viruddha:** Milk should not be consumed with sour foods, as this combination is considered incompatible.[16] 2. **Meat and Milk**: Milk should not be taken with the meat of domestic, marshy, or aquatic animals, as it can lead to deafness, blindness, and tremors. 3. **Vegetables and Milk**: Milk should not be combined with the meat of rohini (a type of fish) and kapota (pigeon) animals fried in mustard oil or with honey and milk together, as this can cause circulation problems, epilepsy and goitre. 4. **Milk and Certain Foods**: Avoid drinking milk after consuming foods like mulaka (radish), lahsuna (garlic), krsnagandha, arjak, and surasa (tulsi), as this combination can lead to skin disorders. 5. **Milk and Nikucha (Monkey Jack Fruit)**: It is harmful to combine milk with jatuka leaves or ripe nikucha, as it can cause weakness, sterility, or even death. 6. **Milk and Sour Substances**: Sour foods such as amra (mango), amrataka, nikucha and others should not be taken with milk, as they are inherently contradictory. 7. **Milk and Certain Beans**: Milk should not be consumed with beans like kangu (millet), vanaka (wild rice), kulattha (horse gram), masha (black gram), and nishpava (rice bean), as they are incompatible. 8. **Fish and Milk**: Combining fish with milk is not recommended due to their incompatible properties, leading to "guna viruddha" (contradiction of qualities). 9. **Milk Pudding and Mantha**: Milk pudding should not be taken with mantha (a type of drink or mixture), as this aggravates the Kapha dosha. 10.**Sour Foods and Milk**: All sour foods, whether liquid or solid, should not be consumed with milk due to their incompatibility based on amla vipaka.

Acharya Sushruta [15]	1. **Meat and Milk**: Do not combine milk with meat from domestic, marshy, or aquatic animals. 2. **Vegetables and Milk**: Avoid consuming rohini and jatuka vegetables with milk. 3. **Mulaka(Radish) and Milk**: It is advised not to consume mulaka (radish) together with milk. 4. **Fish and Milk**: Do not combine fish, especially chilchima (a type of fish) with milk. 5. **Banana and Palm Fruit**: Avoid eating banana with palm fruit, milk, curd, or buttermilk. 6. **Lakucha Fruit and Milk**: Refrain from consuming lakucha fruit with milk, curd, or black gram soup before or after drinking milk.

Complications that arise due to the intake of Viruddha Ahara

The consumption of viruddha ahara (incompatible food combinations) can lead to a wide range of complications, including Shandhya (infertility), Aandhya (blindness), Visarpa (erysipelas), Dakodara (ascites), Visphota (eruptions), Unmada (insanity), Bhagandara (fistula in ano), Murcha (fainting), Mada (intoxication), Aadhmana (abdominal distension with pain due to lower gut obstruction), Galagraha (spasmodic obstruction in the throat), Panduroga (anaemia), Amavisha (intoxication due to improper digestion), Kilasa (vitiligo), Kustha (skin disorders), Grahani (dysentery), Shotha (oedema), Amlapitta (hyperacidity), Jvara (fever), Pinasa (coryza), Santana dosha (fetal disorders), and Mrityu (death).[17]

These outcomes highlight the importance of avoiding incompatible food combinations to maintain health.

DISCUSSION

In Ayurveda, milk and its derivatives, such as buttermilk, curd, butter, and ghee, are frequently used in medicinal formulations or recommended in conjunction with other treatments. The tradition emphasizes the importance of treating cows with care and respect to ensure their milk is classified as "Sattvic," or pure. However, adulteration often involves adding vegetable protein, milk from different species, whey, or water, which are economically motivated but not highly harmful. However, some adulterants like urea, formalin, detergents, ammonium sulphate, boric acid, caustic soda, benzoic acid, salicylic acid, hydrogen peroxide, sugars, and melamine can have serious health risks.[18]. Ayurveda recognizes milk from eight different animals: cow, buffalo, goat, camel, human, sheep, elephant and horse with cow's milk regarded as the most superior. Cow's milk and its products are esteemed components of a balanced diet, providing essential nutrients such as calcium, protein, and vitamin D, vital for bone health.

Nevertheless, Ayurveda recommends avoiding the combination of milk with foods that disrupt digestion and balance (called Viruddha Ahara), as these pairings can lead to health problems, including infertility. In the present scenario, the food combinations like banana and cow milk found a significant increase in SGOT, serum urea, cholesterol, triglycerides, HDL, and a decrease in LDL, food intake, faecal wet weight, faecal water, and food conversion ratio. Histological results showed mild to moderate myocarditis, fatty liver changes, and increased white pulp in the spleen, indicating potential toxicity.[19] In the case of green or black tea with milk, the beneficial catechins in tea are reduced due to the interaction with milk proteins (caseins), so it's advised not to consume them together.[20] Additionally, combining milk and yoghurt can cause milk precipitation in the stomach, leading to gastric irritation and vomiting, so avoiding this combination is best.[21] Prolonged consumption of incompatible food combinations can disrupt multiple bodily systems, such as the immune, endocrine, digestive, neurological, and circulatory systems, leading to various health issues. In the digestive system, such combinations may result in problems like indigestion and bloating. The immune system can also be affected, resulting in diminished vitality. Additionally, skin health may suffer, causing disorders such as acne. Endocrine and reproductive health can be compromised, potentially leading to infertility. Furthermore, neurological health may decline due to increased mental stress, while the circulatory system can experience complications related to blood issues. Overall, the impact of these incompatible combinations underscores the importance of mindful dietary choices for maintaining holistic health.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ayurveda offers profound insights into the nourishing properties of milk and its role in health promotion. However, the science behind Viruddha Ahara suggests that while highly beneficial, milk can have adverse effects when combined with incompatible foods. Correct food combinations**,** seasonal considerations, and appropriate preparatory methods are crucial for maintaining the body's digestive balance and overall vitality. Modern concerns about milk's processing, hybridization, and excessive fat content also raise questions about its health benefits, making the discussion on milk and its compatibility with other foods increasingly relevant in Ayurvedic and modern nutritional contexts**.**

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