



Review Article

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AGNI AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN HEALTHY AND DISEASED INDIVIDUALS: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Agni is a vital factor for life. Maintenance of health depends upon agni. Agni digests ahara on which strength of body, complexion, and ojas depends. Agni should be maintained for overall health. Due to improper lifestyle or bad dietary habits, agni gets vitiated, which leads to ama formation and diseases. Aamvata and udara roga are examples of agni vitiation, which decrease the quality of life and health. Ayurveda has elaborated that ahara vidhi vidhana and ahara vidhi visheshayana, and dwadsha asana vichara are codes and conducts for a diet which is essential for physiological and functional activities. Ritucharya and dinacharya should be followed for the restoration of agni. According to digestive power, ahara vihara should be taken properly to keep agni healthy. The health of the agni is directly proportional to an individual's physical and mental health. This article aims to emphasize the importance of agni in a healthy state, the role of agni in an individual's diseased state, and what one should do to maintain agni.

Keywords: Agni, Health, Ayurveda, Ahara, Jathragni.

INTRODUCTION

Ahara, nidra, and brahmacharya are the three sub-pillars elaborated in Ayurveda.¹ Ahara is the fundamental component of living beings. Body tissue gets nourishment from ahara. It and ahara gets absorbed after proper digestion. Then it undergoes ahara paka (digestion) by agni (digestive fire) and transformation of the complex ahara into nutrients which provide nutrition to body tissues. Agni is a vital factor for life; without agni, there is no possibility of digestion and metabolism. The proper functioning of agni leads to good digestion and absorption of nutrient part of ahara and extracts the waste products from the body. If agni is not working correctly, ahara will not be adequately digested, leading to the formation of ama, which is the root cause of many diseases. Different Ayurveda scholars explained agni.

Nyaya and Vishesika Darshana categorized into four types

Bhauma: Fire in the living body

Divya: The celestial fire like lightning, rays of sun, moon and stars.

Audarya: Fire which is responsible for digestion and metabolism.

Akaraja: Present in the metals like gold and silver

Acharya Charaka: Agni is situated in pitta, which leads to benefits in a healthy state and adverse effects in diseased conditions.²

Acharya Sushruta: Pitta is the same as agni; hence pitta is known as agni.³

Acharya Vagbhata: Pachaka pitta with samana vayu is explained concerning digestion.⁴

Acharya Sharangdhara: Agni is the form of pitta located in the agnashaya of tila pramana.⁵

Types of agni

Different Acharyas explained different types of agni.

Acharya Charaka: 13 agni in which 1 is jathragni, 5 is bhutagni, 7 is dhatvagni.⁶

Acharya Sushruta: 5 agni as pachakagni, ranjakagni, alochakagni, sadhakagni, bhrajakagni.⁷

Acharya Vagbhata: 13 agni in which 1 is jathragni, 5 is bhutagni, 7 is dhatvagni.⁸

Acharya Sharangdhara: 5 pittas are considered as agni.⁹

Ahara paka occurs at different levels: jathragni, bhutagni and dhatvagni. After that, it becomes available to body tissue as nutrients that provide energy and maintain the body. The majority of diseases are the result of malfunctioning agni which is a vital factor for health. It absorbs macronutrients as well as micronutrients and it destroys pathogens also. Ahara, which is not digested, is called ama.¹⁰ Proper functioning of agni (digestive fire) is evident from the healthy digestive system, circulatory system, immunity, tissue growth and body complexion. It is the source of intelligence and nutrition.¹¹ It is coordinated with many physiological activities of the body from digestion, sensation, formation of energy and mind.

Consumed complex ahara is first digested by jathragni in heterogeneous portions. These portions undergo further modifications by bhutagni to form homogenous qualities in nutrients so that body can absorb them. But it is also modified by dhatvagni to make available every nutrient to each dhatu (body tissue) for further growth and development, and the kitta portion (waste part) is extracted. Jathragni represents digestion and metabolism to maintain the physiological functions of the body. The health of an individual depends upon the strength of the agni. In ahara parinamakara bhava (factors responsible for digestion) out of six factors first one is ushma which is the guna of agni.¹² Ayurveda elaborated four types of agni according to strength. Teekshna (intense), manda (mild), sama (regular), vishama (irregular).¹³

Teekshnagni: This agni is predominantly influenced by pitta. It is swift in action and quickly digests heavy food.

Mandagni: Mandagni is opposite of teekshnagni. This agni is unable to digest a small quantity of food. It is affected by kapha.

Samagni: This is the equilibrium state of agni. It digests food on time without any irregularity. A healthy stage is get affected by improper regimen. This is the equilibrium state of three doshas.

Vishamagni – Agni is irregular; it is affected by vata dosha. Sometimes it can digest food quickly, inhibiting or slowing its action.

Agni plays a significant role in maintaining the health of an individual. Mandagni is the root cause of all diseases.¹⁴ Due to a busy life schedule or improper regimen, lousy food habits lead to agni vitiation and form ama (undigested food), the root cause of disease. Diseases like udara roga, atisara, aamvata (rheumatoid arthritis) and lifestyle diseases. Agni plays a vital role in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Before treatment, agni pariksha is done to check the digestion efficacy. These medicines are prescribed according to agni bala.

Agni can be related to enzymes, hormones, catalysts, and other secretions involved in digestion and metabolism. Agni facilitates proper functioning and secretions of digestive juices and enzymes. Any defect in the activity of these can lead to multiple digestive issues. Agni should be protected by adequate food intake.

Overeating and irregular food intake may disturb agni. Ayurveda elaborated ahara vidhi vidhana (rules for food intake), which also maintains agni and health. Ahara vidhi vidhana includes ushna, snigdha, matravata etc., for healthy patients.¹⁵ It facilitates digestive fire and its function correctly. Ahara vidhi vidhana and dwadasha ashana vichara are the codes and conducts for a diet essential for physiological and functional activities, e.g., natidrutum, nativilambita, i.e., one should not eat their food fast or slow. This leads to mixing of bodhaka kapha, which slows the mixing of bodhaka kapha and sets back sanghata (break down), leading to vitiation of agni and indigestion. Nativilambita i.e. one should not eat food slowly because the enzymes and other secretions (agni) responsible for digestion mix with food gradually, and improper manners lead to irregular digestion.¹⁶ Irregular digestion due to vishamagni, teekshnagni, or mandagni leads to different diseases like udara roga, bhasmaka roga and ama rogas like visuchika, alaska etc. To maintain health, agni should be maintained.

Ayurvedic scholars described ritucharya (seasonal regimen) to maintain health. Six ritus are explained, divided into uttarayana (north direction of the sun) and dakshinayana (south direction of the sun).¹⁷ According to these directions, physical and agni strength is explained. In uttarayana, the physical and agni strength is weak compared to dakshinayana. So, ahara vihara and do's - don'ts for every ritu was given, e.g. in rainy season, agni is weak along with body strength. One should use honey, barley, wheat, old rice, and mudga yusha. Day sleep, exercise, sunlight, and sexual indulgence should not be done in this season.¹⁸ In hemanta (winter), agni is strong; one should snigdha (unctuous), amla (sour), mamsa (meat), and dairy products to maintain agni. One should not eat vatala ahara.¹⁹ By following ritucharya, one can balance their agni bala and physical strength.

DISCUSSION

Agni plays a vital role in the maintenance of health. According to Sushruta, balanced doshas, agni, dhatu, and mala lead to good health. To maintain agni, all doshas, ahara vihara is responsible. Agni maintains all biochemical activities in the body and is accountable for immunity also. Most diseases are due to the vitiation of agni. Proper regimen dinacharya, ritucharya and proper ahara according to prakriti (body type), agni, and dosha should be taken. Spicy food, junk food and packed food should be avoided. Lifestyle modification and proper time management of food intake, sleep and physical activity are necessary. Imbalance, any of them, leads to agni vitiation and diseases. To maintain health, agni is to be hold.

CONCLUSION

Agni is a vital factor in one's life. It is not essential for digestion only, but it plays a critical role in maintaining overall health, including mental and emotional health. Transformation, digestion, absorption, assimilation, and all the metabolic activities depend upon agni, which leads to tissue nutrition. Ahara vihara is the most crucial factor in maintaining a healthy state of agni. When the qualities of ahara are muted, the strength of agni is impaired and becomes the causative factor for diseases. Other factors, such as unsupportive lifestyle and emotional disturbance, change cellular level and form AMA.

One should follow a daily regimen (dinacharya) and ritucharya, explicated by Ayurvedic scholars. Ahara vihara should be according to (prakriti) body constitution, and the most crucial ahara intake according to digestive power to overcome the consequences of agni vitiation.

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