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Dietary Principles of a Wholesome Diet in Prameha: In the Purview of Diabetes Mellitus – A Classical Ayurvedic Review

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Abstract

Introduction: Prameha, a metabolic disorder broadly correlated with diabetes mellitus, is a chronic condition described in Ayurvedic texts that arises from Kapha aggravation and Medas accumulation due to improper diet and lifestyle. Pathya Āhāra (wholesome diet) plays a crucial role in the onset, progression, and management of Prameha, with classical authors emphasizing that appropriate dietary regulation itself can act as a primary therapeutic measure and prevent complications.

Methods: Classical Ayurvedic texts—Caraka Saṃhitā, Suśruta Saṃhitā, and Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya—were reviewed for descriptions of Pathya and Apathya in Prameha. Dietary principles were extracted with emphasis on Rasa (taste), Guṇa (qualities), and Vīrya (potency), rather than enumerating individual food items.

Results: Foods that are laghu (light), rūkṣa (dry), and predominantly kaṣāya, tikta, and kaṭu in rasa are considered beneficial in Prameha due to their capacity to alleviate Kapha and Medas. Conversely, foods that are snigdha (unctuous), guru (heavy), and excessively madhura in nature—including fresh cereals, curd, and certain types of meat—are contraindicated, as they contribute to disease progression.

Discussion: The Ayurvedic principles of Pathya Āhāra promote metabolic balance through light, dry, and astringent dietary patterns, which parallel contemporary low-glycaemic load diets known to improve insulin sensitivity in type 2 diabetes mellitus. This review synthesizes classical Ayurvedic references to delineate the foundational principles of Pathya Āhāra in the management of Prameha.

Keywords: Prameha, Ayurveda, Diabetes mellitus, Pathya Āhāra

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Introduction

Diabetes mellitus has become one of the leading health challenges of the 21st century, earning India the title of the “Diabetes Capital,” as it ranks among the top five countries with the highest number of affected individuals.[1] The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly 422 million people worldwide live with diabetes,[2] and approximately 1.5 million deaths each year are directly attributed to it. Over the past few decades, the prevalence and incidence of diabetes have shown a consistent and alarming rise. Urbanization, sedentary lifestyles, and changes in dietary patterns are major contributors to this growing burden.

Adopting a healthy routine, performing regular exercise, and reducing intake of fast foods can help prevent and manage diabetes effectively. Among lifestyle factors, dietary habits play a pivotal role in both prevention and management, as a well-balanced diet can significantly reduce the risk of complications associated with poorly controlled diabetes.

In Ayurveda, Pathya refers to that which does not harm the body channels (srotas) and supports their proper function, whereas Apathya denotes unwholesome food and lifestyle practices that disturb the balance of doṣas and srotas. Pathya Āhāra is a diet and

regimen that is conducive to health, providing nourishment and comfort to the body and mind, while Apathya promotes disease and imbalance.

Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this article is to explore and evaluate the significance of Pathya Āhāra in the holistic management of Prameha.

Materials and Methods

Information related to Prameha and Pathya Āhāra was collected from classical Ayurvedic texts. Commentaries on the Ayurvedic Saṃhitās and relevant modern medical journals were also reviewed. Data were then analyzed and synthesized to provide a comprehensive discussion on dietary principles for Prameha.

Pathya in Prameha

Prameha, as described in Ayurvedic texts, is characterized by excessive urination (bahu-mūtratā in both frequency and volume) and turbidity (avilamūtātā).[3][4] The condition involves the derangement of doṣas and dhātus, such as bahu drava śleṣma and bahu abaddha medas.[5] It is categorized among santarpanajanya vikāras (diseases caused by overnutrition), resulting from excessive consumption of heavy, sweet, and unctuous foods (guru, madhura, snigdha), sedentary habits, and lack of physical activity.[6]

Acharya Kaśyapa describes anna (food) as mahabheshaja (great medicine).[7] Pathya, which encompasses diet and lifestyle practices that calm the mind, benefit the body, and provide proper nourishment, is contrasted with Apathya, which is harmful.[8] Acharya Caraka notes in Śārīra Sthāna that an individual who follows wholesome diet and conduct, exercises moderation, refrains from

excessive sensual pleasures, practices generosity, maintains equality, speaks the truth, exercises forbearance, and is devoted to venerable persons, remains free from diseases.[9]

Thus, the principle of Pathya Āhāra forms the foundation for both preventive and therapeutic strategies in Ayurveda. Following āhāra-ja pathya is therefore a prudent choice for the maintenance and management of Prameha.

Table 1: Āhāraja Pathya for Prameha in Classical Texts

Ahāra	Caraka	Suśruta	Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdaya	Glycemic Index
Yava Apupa Vātya & Śaktu (different preparations of barley)	✓		✓	25
Trṇa dhanya (millets)	✓		✓	45–55
Muḍga (green lentils)	✓		✓	38
Pūraṇaśāli (a type of rice)	✓	✓	✓	50–60
Pūraṇaśaṣṭika (a type of rice)	✓	✓	✓	55
Amla		✓	✓	15
Tila (sesame)		✓	✓	15
Jambu (Jamun – Indian blackberry)			✓	25
Tikta śaka (bitter vegetables)	✓	✓	✓	<20
Madhu (honey)		✓	✓	45–64
Vihaṅga māṃsa (bird meat)	✓			Negligible
Dhanva (deer meat)	✓		✓	Negligible
Viṣkīra māṃsa	✓			Negligible
Pradūta māṃsa	✓			Negligible
Godhuma (wheat)		✓	✓	75
Kaśāya śaka (astringent vegetables)	✓	✓	✓	<20
Cāṇaka (black gram)		✓		33
Adhaki (yellow lentils – pigeon pea)		✓		46
Kuḷātha (horsegram)		✓		51
Lahśuna (garlic)			✓	10–15
Pālandu (onion)			✓	10–15
Śyāmaka (barnyard millet)	✓			50

Pathya Āhāra in Prameha: Classical Insights and Modern Relevance

Specific Dietary Items

Yava (Barley) – Due to its kaṣāya (astringent) rasa, laghu (light), rūkṣa (dry), and lekhanā (scraping) properties, Yava possesses Kapha and Medo-nāśaka (fat-reducing) qualities and is recommended in Prameha.[13] Classical texts describe various preparations such as Yava chūrṇa, Yava udana, Yava śaktu, and Vātya (barley porridge).[14]

Muḍga (Green Gram) – With laghu and rūkṣa qualities and kaṣāya rasa, Muḍga yūṣa (green gram soup) is advised for patients with Prameha.[15]

Śaṣṭika Śāli (a type of rice) – Possessing snigdha (unctuous) quality, śīta vīrya (cold potency), tridoṣaghna (pacifies all doshas), and sthirātmaka (stabilizing) properties, it is recommended in Prameha management.[16]

Śyāmaka (Barnyard millet) – Due to its kaṣāya rasa, laghu, rūkṣa properties, kaphapittaghna (balances Kapha and Pitta), and śīta vīrya, it is advised for Prameha patients.[17]

Godhuma (Wheat) – Exhibiting jīvana (nourishing), bṛṃhana (strengthening), vṛṣya (aphrodisiac), snigdha, and sthairyakara (stabilizing) properties, wheat is recommended in moderation for Prameha.[18]

Jambu (Syzygium cumini / Jamun) – With kaṣāya rasa and rūkṣa guna, it acts

as kaphaghna (pacifies Kapha) and is advised in Prameha.

Madhu (Honey) – Madhu is pitta-, rakta-, kapha-hara and exhibits guru, rūkṣa, kaṣāya, and śīta vīrya properties. Additionally, it is yogavāhī, enhancing the potency of other drugs or foods used concurrently. Therefore, it is often included in Prameha management, particularly for Kapha-Medohara and Mehahāra preparations. However, it should be used in small amounts to prevent Vāta vṛddhi (exacerbation of Vata).[19]

Haridrā (Turmeric) – With tikta rasa, rūkṣa guna, and Kapha-Pitta- and Meha-jith properties, turmeric is recommended for Prameha. Curcumin and bisdemethoxycurcumin in turmeric exhibit antioxidant and anti-diabetic activities, supporting modern biomedical evidence.[20][21]

Discussion

Pathya Āhāra is not merely supportive but often constitutes a primary therapeutic modality in the management of Prameha. Most cases are precipitated and aggravated by unhealthy lifestyles. Dietary (Āhāra) and lifestyle (Vihāra) modifications, along with adherence to Pathya, can delay disease progression and restore metabolic balance.

Classical texts describe Pathya Āhāra as possessing Kapha-Vāta hara, tikta, kaṣāya, katu rasa, uṣṇa vīrya, laghu, rūkṣa guna, katu vipāka, and a low glycemic index. Uṣṇa vīrya and tikta-kaṣāya rasa help normalize jatharagni (digestive fire) and dhātwagni (tissue metabolism). Adherence to āhāra-ja pathya and nidāna parivarjana (avoidance of causative factors) is more effective than pharmacotherapy alone. Administration of drugs without dietary discipline is often ineffective, as apathya (unwholesome diet) can negate therapeutic effects.

Modern parallels can be drawn: these principles resemble low-glycemic, high-fiber, astringent, and bitter diets, which improve insulin sensitivity, regulate glucose, and reduce obesity-

related complications. Thus, Pathya Āhāra serves as a bridge between classical wisdom and contemporary diabetes management strategies.

Conclusion

Adherence to Pathya Āhāra recommendations, along with lifestyle modifications and nidāna parivarjana, constitutes a holistic management protocol for Prameha. The dynamic concept of Pathya highlights the importance of personalized medical nutrition therapy in chronic metabolic disorders. Dietary regulation, grounded in classical Ayurvedic principles and adapted to individual needs, is integral to both prevention and management of Prameha, complementing pharmacotherapy for optimal outcomes.

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