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Integrating Ayurvedic Dietetics with Modern Nutrition A Critical Review on Ahara and Contemporary Health Practices

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“Integrating Ayurvedic Dietetics with Modern Nutrition: A Critical Review on Ahara and Contemporary Health Practices”

ABSTRACT:

INTRODUCTION: Ayurveda, an ancient Indian medical system, emphasises individual constitution (*prakriti*), digestive fire (*agni*), seasonal fluctuations (*rtucaryā*), and dietary incompatibility (*viruddha āhāra*) in its holistic approach to nutrition and health. As metabolic syndromes and lifestyle-related disorders become increasingly common, Ayurvedic dietetics provides a valuable foundation for personalized and preventive nutrition. This explores the six tastes (*ṣaḍ rasa*), food energetics (*vīrya*), and post-digestive effects (*vipāka*), which are the core concepts of Ayurvedic nutrition. Their relevance to contemporary nutritional research is examined.

METHODS: By comparing modern nutritional theories with ancient Ayurvedic concepts, the study finds areas of convergence, such as gut health, chrononutrition, and mindful eating.

RESULTS: It then makes recommendations for integrative strategies that combine conventional wisdom with empirically validated techniques. By improving individual health, this combination also contributes to social and economic development.

CONCLUSION: As a result, this study attempts to relate Ayurvedic *āhāra* to the modern diet.

KEYWORDS: *Pathya āhāra*, *Apathya āhāra*, Ayurveda, Nutrition, *Āhāra*

INTRODUCTION: -

Nutrition plays a vital role in maintaining health, preventing illness, and promoting longevity. Despite the tremendous advancements in contemporary nutritional research, the traditional Ayurvedic method provides a more comprehensive and individualised approach to nutrition and health^[1]. Food (*āhāra*), sleep (*nidrā*), and balanced living (*brahmacarya*) are regarded in Ayurveda, the “science of life,” as essential pillars of life (*trayopasthambha*), in addition to being sources of physical sustenance^[2].

Āhāra vidhi-vidhāna (principles of dietary regimen), *ṣaḍ rasa* (six tastes), *tridoṣa* (Vāta, Pitta, Kapha), *agni* (digestive fire), and *guṇa* (qualities) are foundational concepts of Ayurvedic dietetics^[3]. The balance of *doṣa* and *agni*, considered cornerstones of robust immunity and overall health, depends on an Ayurvedic diet (*āhāra*), which is seasonal and *prakṛti*-based (constitution-dependent)^[4]. The concepts mentioned above highlight the significance of appropriate digestion and absorption, the quality impact of food on the body and mind, and the necessity of customised diets according to age, season, geography, and constitution (*Prakriti*)^[5]. In contrast to the primarily quantitative focus of contemporary nutrition, Ayurveda emphasises the qualitative role of food in preserving homeostasis and preventing illness^[6].

In the current period, when lifestyle illnesses like diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and digestive issues are becoming more common, the Ayurvedic approach to nutrition offers important insights for both prevention and treatment^[7]. Modern nutrition and public health research is becoming more and more interested in ideas like gut health, detoxification, seasonal and locally

tailored diets, and mindful eating^[8]. Additionally, the tailored nutrition concept of Ayurveda aligns with the current trend of functional foods and precision nutrition^[9].

Because of this, interpreting traditional Ayurvedic dietetics in the context of modern nutrition not only connects traditional knowledge with current scientific understanding, but it also provides a thorough foundation for achieving holistic health^[10]. The paper aims to critically examine the present relevance of Ayurvedic food and nutrition concepts, emphasising their potential contribution to sustainable health practices.

AHARA (TRADITIONAL DIETICS): -

Āhāra, along with *nidrā* (sleep) and *brahmacarya* (balanced living/self-control), is regarded as one of the three foundations of life in Ayurveda^[11]. *Ahara* in Ayurveda refers to food and nutrition, which are regarded as the most important components in preserving health and averting illness. In addition to being a source of energy, food is described in classical writings as an essential element that affects the equilibrium of *doṣas* (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), *dhatu*s (body tissues), and *ojas* (essential essence of immunity and vigor)^[12]. The term “right quantity” refers to the amount of *āhāra* that does not adversely affect an individual’s health. The food (*Ahara*) is reliant on *Agnibala*, or fire strength. *Ahara* is essential to a person's everyday existence, and its disruption results in a number of illnesses or ailments that are detrimental to the body.

Āhāra vidhi-vidhāna (principles of dietary regimen):

Dietary guidelines for a healthy digestive system are recommended by Ayurveda:

- consume food that is fresh, warm, and easy to digest.
- Eat in moderation and only when hungry (*mātrā*).
- Steer clear of irregular and excessive eating.
- When eating, one should be in a relaxed frame of mind.
- For balance, include all six flavors.

Six tastes are identified in food, and each one differentially influences the *doṣas*^[13].

- *Madhura* (sweet): nourishes, increases Kapha, and pacifies Pitta and Vata.
- *Amla* (sour): Boosts Pitta and Kapha and stimulates appetite.
- *Lavaṇa* (salty): enhances taste, increases Kapha and Pitta.
- *Kaṭu* (pungent): improves digestion, reduces Kapha, and increases Pitta and Vata
- *Tikta* (Bitter): lowers Pitta and Kapha and detoxifies.
- *Kaṣāya* (astringent): absorbent, reduces Kapha and Pitta, and may increase Vata.
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Table Number 1: INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN AGNI AND AHARA:

<i>Agni</i> Breaks Down <i>Ahara</i>	A regulated Agni is necessary for the effective digestion and use of food (<i>Ahara</i>).
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<i>Ahara</i> Feeds <i>Agni</i>	<i>Agni</i> is strengthened and maintained by a healthy, proper <i>Ahara</i> . It is weakened by poor eating choices.
Weak <i>Agni</i> causes the formation of <i>Ama</i> .	<i>Ama</i> (toxins) are created when food is only partially digested because to weak or inconsistent <i>Agni</i> .
Health is maintained by Strong <i>Agni</i>	Immunity, vitality, and clarity are the results of efficient digestion and metabolism, which are ensured by strong <i>Agni</i> .
<i>Ahara</i> is incompatible	Overeating, undereating, or eating at the wrong time may all upset <i>Agni</i> and cause imbalances.

Table Number 2: INFLUENCE OF AHAR (DIET) ON EACH STAGE OF KRIYA KALA:

Stage	Meaning	Effect of Diet
1.Sanchaya (Accumulation)	<i>Doshas</i> begin to accumulate in their typical location: (<i>Pitta</i> in the small intestine, <i>Kapha</i> in the stomach, and <i>Vata</i> in the colon).	Food that is heavy, incompatible, or excessive causes a dosha imbalance.
2. Prakopa (Aggravation)	<i>Doshas</i> get even more agitated.	The imbalance is exacerbated by persistently poor eating habits.
3. Prasara (Spread)	Aggravated <i>doshas</i> begin to disseminate and leave their places.	Eating while <i>Agni</i> is weak or when indigestion is present distributes <i>Ama</i> (toxins), which exacerbates the systemic effect.
4. Sthana Samskraya (Localization)	Weak or genetically predisposed tissues are where <i>doshas</i> are found (<i>Dhatus</i>).	Inappropriate eating causes doshas to lodge in particular organs and inhibits tissue nourishment (<i>Dhatu Poshana</i>).
5. Vyakti (Manifestation)	Disease symptoms and indicators become evident.	Conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, and ulcers appear. Progression is accelerated by ongoing dietary mistakes.
6. Bheda (Complication)	There are three types of disease: degenerative, complex, and chronic.	The prognosis deteriorates with prolonged nutritional imbalances. Contemporary analogs include metabolic syndrome and autoimmune diseases.

Table Number 3: REVERSE OF KRIYA KALA VIA DIETARY MODERN FRAMEWORK:

Kriya Kala Stage	Ayurvedic Description	Modern Context Equivalent	(Modern-Ayurvedic Integration)
Sanchaya (Accumulation)	<i>Doshas</i> start to accumulate in their position.	Mild imbalance; heaviness, bloating, and exhaustion	Eat seasonal vegetables, limit snacking, and eat light meals. Begin with whole grains, ginger tea, and warm water.
Prakopa (Aggravation)	<i>Doshas</i> get agitated or aroused.	Acidity, irritation, gas, and indigestion	Use spices that reduce inflammation, such as cumin and turmeric.
Prasara (Spread)	<i>Doshas</i> overflow and circulate	Mild allergies and systemic inflammation	Start with a mild detox (herbal teas, kitchari). Eliminate processed foods, dairy, and sugar.
Sthana Samshraya (Localization)	<i>Doshas</i> settle in weak tissues	Onset of PCOS, eczema, migraines, and IBS	Support for the gut: fermented vegetables, buttermilk, and ghee
Vyakti (Manifestation)	The disease's symptoms become recognizable.	GERD, diabetes, and arthritis have been diagnosed.	low glycemic, anti-inflammatory, and gluten-free when required
Bheda (Complication)	As the disease progresses, it becomes chronic.	Chronic weariness and autoimmune diseases	Rasayana Use

AGNI AND AMA: THE CORE LINK BETWEEN AHAR AND DISEASE:

- Food is transformed into energy and body tissues by the digestive fire (*agni*).
- Weak *agni*, due to improper diet, leads to the production of *āma* (toxic, undigested material).
- According to Ayurveda, the formation of *āma* is considered the root cause of most illnesses.
- An example would be
 1. junk food and irregular meals, which weaken *agni* and lead to *prakopa* and *sañcaya*.

2. Inappropriate dietary combinations (e.g., fruit with dairy) promote *sthāna saṁśraya* through the formation of *āma*^[14].
3. Persistently unhealthy eating despite symptoms may result in *vyakti* and subsequently *bheda* (manifest chronic diseases such as IBS, obesity, and arthritis).

Classification of Ahara: -

According to Ayurveda, it is advised that Ahara be consumed in various forms.

- *Ashita* (अशित): Food that is consumed (solid food that is chewed and swallowed).
- *Pita* (पीत): Drunken Food (water, soups, buttermilk, milk, etc.).
- *Lehya* : Food that is licked, such as semi-solid preparations, such as herbal jams like Chyawanprash.
- *Chavya* (चव्य): Foods that must be thoroughly masticated, such as fresh vegetables and nuts.
- *Līḍha* refers to food that is licked or smeared; it often overlaps with *lehya* and is applied to semi-solid foods or therapeutic pastes.
- *Peya* (पेय): Drinkables (such as soups, herbal teas, and decoctions).
- *Khadya* (खाद्य) is a broad term for eatables that refers to food that is masticated and consumed.
- The main meal is called *Bhojya* (भोज्य), and it consists of well-cooked, basic meals like rice and wheat.
- Snacks, side dishes, and other items that are chewed or bitten are classified as *bhakṣya* (भक्ष्य).

These classifications reflect Ayurveda's detailed attention to digestive processes and the form in which food is consumed, aiming to enhance Agni (digestive fire) and maintain a balanced dosha. Hence, this classification guides the structuring of a daily meal, which typically includes rice, pulses, vegetables, papad, salad, milk, buttermilk, chutney, and sweets.

PATHYA (REGULAR PROPER MEAL): -

Rice:

- *Shali* – *Mutrala*, *Balya*, easily digestible, Nutritive, and safe^[15].
- Millets- *Kapha-Medohara*, weight management, improve metabolism, Cholesterol.

Pulses:

- *Mudga*: *Bālya*, *Pittahara*, *Agnivardhaka*; helps regulate blood sugar, supports detoxification, and has anti-inflammatory properties.
- *Arhar*: *Agnivardhaka*, *Raktastambhaka*, High in protein, Rich in iron.
- *Masha (Urda)*: *Vrishya*, *Rasayana*, *Vata Nashaka*, skin rejuvenation, muscle disorders, joint pain

Vegetable:

- Bitter gourd (*Karavellaka*): useful in *Madhumeha*, acts as *Deepana-Pachana*, has mild laxative action, supports liver health, is *raktashodhaka*, and *krimināshaka*.

- *Patola*: *Raktashodhaka*, Pitta dominant fever, *Anulomana*, *Agni samyakaraka*, Respiratory condition.
- *Moringa*: Analgesic, Anti-inflammatory, *Agnivardhaka*, *Ama nashaka*, *Deepana-Pachana*, *Mutrala*.
- *Lauki (Alabu)*: Hridya roga, Blood pressure regulator, reduces cholesterol level, helps in Hypertension, Diuretic.

Chutney:

- Amla chutney: *Ojovardhaka*, *Agnideepaka*, *Rasayana*, *Keshya*, *Tvachya*, *Cardiotonic*.
- *Dhaniya*: Detoxification, Digestive, helps in kidney diseases.
- *Pudina*: Cooling, carminative, refreshing
- *Dhaniya+Lahsun+Adraka Chatni*: Reduce Cholesterol level

Lahsun: *Agni Deepana*, *Vatashamak*, Antioxidant, Appetiser.

Pickles: *Deepana*, *Pachana*, probiotic

Sweets: balance Vata and Pitta; examples include Amla Murabba (*Rasayana*), *Panchamrita*, and *Chyawanprasha*.

Salad: *Rochan*, *Deepan*, Balancing *Tridosha*, Weight management, Cooling effect, Mild diuretic

Kheera+Kakadi+Black Salt = Helps in Kidney diseases, Diuretic, and Detoxifier.

Papad: Protein rich, *Deepan*, *Pachan*, *Balya*, *Laghu*

Milk: *Balya*, *Rasayan*, Improve Sleep, *Oja-vardhaka*

Night is ideal – Helps nourish, calm the mind, and promote sleep.

Buttermilk: *Deepana*, *Pachana*, useful in *Grahani*, Probiotic, and Weight management

Buttermilk+*Cumin* = *Deepana*

Buttermilk + *Ajwain* = relieves colic and flatulence.

Buttermilk+*Hinga* = Helps in Indigestion

FOOD THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED (APATHYA AHARA): -

Apathya āhāra refers to unhealthy or inappropriate dietary practices that may disturb health and lead to illness. Eating too quickly or under stress, overeating, or missing meals

- Foods that are excessively hot, sour, salty, or sweet may disturb the doshic balance when consumed in excess.
- Stale or overprocessed food: Food that has been microwaved or canned.
- For some individuals, fermented foods preserved for several days may be unsuitable.

- Foods that are deep-fried, pakoras, and cold or refrigerated.
- Cold beverages, ice cream, and leftover food.
- Processed and Junk Foods.
- Fast food, sugary cereals, canned food, and chips
Reason: These foods often contain chemicals and preservatives and are considered low in *prāṇa* (life energy).
- Sweets, and refined sugars; cakes, pastries, and candies
Reason: Causes weight gain, lethargy, and an increase in *Kapha*.

DISCUSSION:

The growing acceptance of nutraceuticals and functional foods represents a significant area of convergence. The current emphasis on antioxidants, probiotics, and anti-inflammatory foods aligns with Ayurveda's concepts of *pathya* (wholesome diet) and *rasayana* (rejuvenative foods and herbs). Ayurvedic principles such as *satmya* (habitual appropriateness) and *ahara vidhi* (rules of eating) resonate with contemporary global movements toward plant-based diets, mindful eating, and promotion of “gut health.”

In contrast to Ayurveda, which relies on holistic observation and experiential knowledge, modern nutrition emphasizes scientific evidence, randomized clinical trials, and measurable biomarkers ^[16]. It takes translational research that uses contemporary scientific methods gut microbiome investigations, metabolomics, and clinical nutrition trials to analyze Ayurvedic dietary recommendations in order to bridge the gap between the two.

Modern nutrition and Ayurvedic dietetics should thus be regarded as complementary disciplines rather than opposing perspectives. Modern nutrition gives scientific precision and universal application, whereas Ayurveda offers a comprehensive, customized foundation. In a society where obesity, metabolic syndrome, lifestyle problems, and dietary deficiencies are all prevalent, they can enhance preventative and therapeutic approaches to health when combined.

CONCLUSION: -

According to Ayurveda, food is not only a source of nourishment but also medicine and the primary factor influencing lifespan, health, and the avoidance of disease. Its dietary tenets individuality, seasonal adaptability, and body-mind-spirit balance remain extremely pertinent for managing illnesses associated with contemporary lifestyles. Modern nutrition offers precise tools for quantifying nutrients and understanding biochemical processes, yet it often lacks the holistic and individualized focus of Ayurveda.

A more comprehensive approach to dietetics can be achieved by integrating contemporary nutritional research with traditional Ayurvedic knowledge. Such integration acknowledges both the quantitative aspects of food (calories, proteins, vitamins, and minerals) and the qualitative attributes (taste, potency, and compatibility). An integrated approach could guide preventive healthcare, promote well-being, and enhance the management of chronic illnesses.

Re-examining Ayurvedic dietary principles alongside evidence-based nutrition can foster mindful eating, sustainable dietary practices, and contribute to global health objectives. To create a balanced pathway toward holistic health, Ayurveda and modern nutrition should be

regarded as complementary systems, with ancient principles enriching the scope of modern dietetics. This study was chosen for awareness among society about Ahara(Nutrition), as Ahara plays an important role in health and disease.

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