Understanding the Concept of Ahara and Its Metabolism- A Review

Namit Vashistha\(^1\), Preeti Sharma\(^2\)

\(^1\)Associate Professor, Department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, KSV Ayurveda Medical College and Research Centre, Shobhit University, Gangoh, Saharanpur, UP
\(^2\)Assistant Professor Department of Maulik Siddhant and Samhita, KSV Ayurveda Medical College and Research Centre, Shobhit University, Gangoh, Saharanpur, UP

Corresponding Author: Namit Vashistha

ABSTRACT
The life relies only the Ahara. This is the universal truth told by Acharyas in Ayurveda. A proper and balance diet is the key source for the formation of body. Ahara (food) is the prime necessity of life. Food which we eat is used for the maintenance and growth of the body. Food also provides energy for doing work. Proper and wholesome diet also provides us good immunity. But all things can be possible if taken in accordance with the rules and are useful for all living beings. Such kind of food provide fuel to the fire of digestion and promote mental as well as physical strength, complexion and clarity of sense organs and also give proper energy to mind. Proper maintenance of the power of digestion, which is the supporter of vital energy (prana) also depend upon the intake of proper diet.

Keywords: Ahara (Food), immunity, physical strength, digestion, energy

INTRODUCTION
Ayurveda is the most ancient science of life. The main aim of Ayurveda is “Swasthasya Swasthaya Rakshanam” which means to maintain the health of healthy person and “Aturasya Vikaras Prasamanam Cha” means to cure the disease of diseased person. The substance, their specific tastes, qualities, potencies and digestive transformation are responsible for equilibrium of the Doshas and Dhatu(fundamental support of body). According to one quotation of Sushruta “Sankshepta Kriya Yogo Nidaan Parivarjnam”\(^1\) i.e. treatment in short is to avoid the causative factors. Aahar is one of the Traya Upstambha (like pillar which supports building) in Ayurveda.\(^2\) Basically Ayurveda is having an concept that the health and disease both are the product of Ahara.\(^3\) Ahara has been placed first which shows that it is most important to maintain and sustain the life. \(^4\) According to Kashyap Samhita, food as always been an important way to treat illness and maintain health and that’s why he called food as Mahabhaishyajya.\(^5\) (great medicine) It is true that researchers have made great contribution regarding the current knowledge about nutrition in medical field by denoting the deficiency diseases and their respective treatments. But much progress has not been yet made in regard to understanding the principals of Ayurveda about Ahara, so in present paper an attempt has been made to understand the concept of Ahara in Ayurveda

MATERIALS AND METHODS
The word Ahara is very much familiar since time immemorial. Various classics / dictionaries describe Ahara in their own unique way. Shabda Kapla Druma explains that Ahara is a substance which is swallowed through throat after eating.\(^6\) According to Taber’s Dictionary food is defined as any material that provides the nutritive requirements of an organism to maintain growth and physical well-being.\(^7\)
Metabolism of balanced diet and its correlation with Rasas-

Metabolism is the process in which food substances undergo chemical and energy transformation.

Carbohydrates Metabolism

All carbohydrates share a general formula of approximately \( \text{C}_n\text{H}_{2n}\text{O}_n \); glucose is \( \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 \). Monosaccharides may be chemically bonded together to form disaccharides such as sucrose and longer polysaccharides such as starch and cellulose. This phase commences from the entry of food into the mouth. Propulsion of food from the mouth to the upper part (Urdhva amasaya) of it commences in the mouth. Under the influence of Bodhaka Kapha (one type of Vatadosha) the process of digestion, especially the fraction of Stomach) of it commences in the mouth. The insoluble starch polysaccharides are converted to soluble dextrin, under the influence of salivary amylase (ptyalin). Salivary amylase action is \( \text{bhinnasamghata} \) (spitting) brought about by hydrolysis. The insoluble starch polysaccharides are converted to soluble dextrin, under the influence of salivary amylase (ptyalin). Concept of Bodhaka Kapha parallel to saliva secreted by the salivary glands. The action of Bodhaka Kapha on food, converts insoluble madhura (sweet) portion to soluble and mixes up with the frothy Kledaka Kapha (mucous) present in Urdhva amashaya.

Final Products of Carbohydrate Digestion

Final products of carbohydrate digestion are monosaccharides, which are glucose, fructose and galactose. Glucose represents 80% of the final product of carbohydrate digestion. Galactose and fructose represent the remaining 20%.
Metabolism of Proteins & Fats

Digestion of proteins and fats occur in this stage by Pachaka pitta (HCl) secreted by the cells of the mucus membrane of the stomach. This makes the commencement of the Amla bhava or the acid (sour) phase of prapaka (first stage of digestion according to Ayurveda). This Paka (digestion) involves the conversion of insoluble proteins into the soluble ones under the influence of enzyme pepsin in the presence of HCl. This aspect of prapaka does not seem to have anything to do with the digestion of the end products of Madhura Paka. The outcome of this phase is acidified chyme. It is in pakwapakwam stage (not fully digested and 2nd stage of digestion according to Ayurveda). It has to go for further digestion in adhoamashaya. The partly digested food which has attained amlabhava (sour) is moved down and stimulates the humoral mechanism in Adho Amashya and discharge of Accha Pitta into it. Achchapitta (pancreatic juice) is secreted. The concept of accha Pitta includes the gall bladder, bile and pancreatic secretions, responsible for digestion of fats, proteins and carbohydrates. Acidified chyme passes down from the pylorus to the duodenum. It stimulates the Brunner's (duodenal) glands to secrete a number of intestinal juices. These are responsible for bile and pancreatic secretion to the duodenum for further digestion of partly digested carbohydrates, proteins, and fats of the chime. It is the third phase of Avasthapaka (final stage of digestion) describes the events in the pakwashaya (large intestine) leading the formation of faeces and gases. This aspect relates to the acrid and pungent (katu) nature of reactions that occur in the large intestine. The material passed down from the amashaya (stomach) and reached the pakwashaya (Intestine) is dehydrated (soshyamana) and converted into lumps by heat, an acrid and pungent (katu) gas being produced in the process. The foregoing modern contribution is seen not only to confirm but also amplify the ancient Ayurvedic version of events that take place in the large intestine and the formation of faeces with production pungent Vayu.

Post-Digestive Effect

The ultimate change in the Ahara rasa that occurs at the end of digestion of Jatharagnipaka (digestive fire) is called as Vipaka. (Post digestive effect). According to Acharya Charaka, the six rasas yield three kinds of Vipaka. Madhura (sweet) and Lavana (salty) rasa yield Madhura vipaka (sweet). Amla Rasa to Amla Vipaka (sour). Katu, Tikta, Kasaya Rasa to Katu Vipaka (acid, pungent).

Secondary Digestion – Metabolism:

The Bhutagni paka (digestion of food by fire according to panchmaha-bhootha) and Dhatvagni paka (digestion of food as per respective dhatus fire and dhatus are fundamental support of body) comes under Secondary Digestion and Metabolism.

Bhutagni paka Bhutagni is the one that is present in a basic element (Bhutas). Each and every cell in our body is composed of the five Mahabhutas (panchabhoutika). Each cell (dhatu paramanu) consists of these five Bhutagni also. All the nutrients in this world that we eat also consist of the same five basic elements with their respective agni. Thus, they are completely similar with respect to the five basic elements with their Bhutagni in our body cells as well in the entire outside nutrient that we ingest for the nutrition of our body. The five Bhutagnis digest their own part of the element present in the food materials. So, all the exogenous substances must be subjected to Bhutagni paka to become endogenous. Thus cause appropriate nourishment of tissues. In the modern physiological perspective, the action of the Bhutagni paka can be equated with the conversion of digested materials in the liver. The Vitamins, Essential amino acids, Essential fatty acids are to be supplemented.
essentially through the food for the conversion of concerned molecules in to the body tissues on to yield energy. The process of Bhutagni paka should start immediately after digestive process in GIT. After that the Bhutagni functions are carried in the portal system, liver and vascular system through which Ahara rasa is circulated in the body for nourishing the rasadi sapta dhatus (fundamental support of body). Hence liver is considered as centre of Bhutagni japara (working area of bhutagni). According to the physiology of Ayurveda, Bhutagni paka follows jatharagni paka and it completes the process of intestinal digestion.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda since long is describing the beneficiary effect of Ahara as well as its adverse effects. Acharya Charaka stated that the ideal diet is that, which rebuilds the worn-out systems, nourishes dhātus and maintains equilibrium of the body constituents. Not only diet but also method of food intake has an important role in the continuity of healthy life. So understanding the concept of Ahara is of very much importance.

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How to cite this article: Vashistha N, Sharma P. Understanding the concept of ahara and its metabolism- a review. International Journal of Research and Review. 2021; 8(3): 502-506.