

# Diets and prohibitions (*Pathya* and *Apathya*) in certain gastro-intestinal disorders according to Ayurveda

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## Abstract:

Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine can be aptly defined as the "Science of life" or science of healthy living. The whole philosophy of Ayurveda is based on achieving, maintaining and promoting positive health. The equilibrium of various structural and functional units of the body named as *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, *Agni* and more important the mind results in health and dis-equilibrium causes disease. Correction of disturbance of *milieu interior* is the aim of the ayurvedic management.

The Ayurvedic texts place great importance on the compatibility and incompatibility of foods. *Pathya* means which is good for the channels and *Apathya* is considered as harmful for the channels.

Ayurveda, the most ancient system of medicine not only emphasis on proper diets and conducts as a part of treatment of every disease but also considers that improper diets and conducts are the major causes of several diseases. This can be understood on the basis of *Tridosha*(vata, pitta,kapha) , *Panchamahabhoota* and *six rasastheory*.

This uniqueness of Ayurveda in the management of diseases proves its superiority over the modern system of medicine. Now modern system of medicine is also recognizing several do's and don'ts related to the diseases.

This review will put a light on several wholesome and unwholesome diets and conducts and their mode of action on the basis of Ayurveda, in general gastrointestinal disturbances.

**Key words:** *Apathya*, conduct, diet, *Pathya*, unwholesome

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## Introduction:

W.H.O. defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social and spiritual well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." This is achieved without giving rise to any of the side effects or untoward effects commonly seen in its modern counterpart.

Ayurveda deals not only with the curative aspect of disease but emphasis more on the preventive aspect .The aim of the Ayurveda is to promote and preserve the health, strength, and longevity of the healthy person –preventive aspect, and to cure the disease in the ailing and afflicted –curative aspect.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the concept of Ayurveda, all diets consist of five elements of body (*Panchamahabhutas*)and are having the predominance of any of the six tastes (*Rasas*). These five elements of body and *Rasas* are responsible for maintaining the equilibrium stage of humours (*Tridosas*) of the body. Moreover, the substances with their specific tastes virtues, potencies (*Virya*) and reactionary or chemical trans formation (*vipaka*) tend to diminish or increase the deranged humours (*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapka*) of the body.

Consequently *Pathya*(whole some) are the diets and conducts which are advisable in disease along with the medication and are helpful in preserving the equilibrium stage of *Tridoshas*.

Defining the diseases due to intake of unwholesome food, *Charaka* emphasis that the intake of unwholesome food is responsible for the causation of many diseases like sterility, blindness, *Visarpa*(skin disease), ascites, sprue, leprosy, oedema, acid dyspepsia, fever, fatal disease and even death.<sup>2</sup>



Among these disorders, gastrointestinal disorders are primarily caused due to unwholesome food, as food primarily affects the gut after the ingestion. These unwholesome diets and conducts, slows down the digestive fire and are responsible for causing most of the gastrointestinal disorders.<sup>3</sup>

Thus preventing intake of unwholesome diet and conduct and promoting intake of wholesome food would be beneficial in the treatment of disease. Consequently understanding about *Pathya-Apathya* will provide a better approach in the management of disease.

### **Pathya/apathya diets in some gastrointestinal disorders:**

#### **Pathya-apathya in Grahni (Mal absorption diseases and Irritable bowel syndrome and)**

*Grahni* is a clinical entity which is frequently correlated with irritable bowel syndrome and mal absorption diseases of modern system of medicine. Mal absorption diseases and irritable bowel syndrome are the diseases which are characterised by altered stool frequency and stool form (stool is sometimes loose and sometimes hard).<sup>4</sup>

Diets which are stool binding, light in digestion and improves digestive fire are wholesome whereas foods which are laxative in action and heavy in digestion should be avoided in patients suffering from *Grahniroga* (mal absorption diseases).<sup>5</sup>

Easily digestible foods like *Sali* and *Sasthi* variety of rice, pulse soup of *Masoor*, *Mudga* (green gram), curd, cow milk, meat of carnivorous birds, meat soup of rabbit, *Ena* (black deer), all types of small fishes etc. are frequently advisable.

Stool binding foods like pulp of fresh *Bilva* (aegel) fruits, pomegranate, *Sringataka* (water chestnut / *Trapabispinosa* Roxb.), *Jambu* (black plum / *Eugenia jambolana* Lam.), bark of *Kutaja* (*Holarrhena antidysentrica*), *Vijaya* (*Cannabis sativa* Linn), *Jatiphala* (Nutmeg / *Myristica fragrans* Henlt.), and foods which promote digestion like *Mahanimba* (*Melia azedarach* Linn), cumin seeds, coriander, liquor, all types of sour liquids etc. are considered as wholesome.

Ayurveda considers that the *ghee* of cow's or goat's milk is wholesome as it is helpful in promoting digestive fire.

Among other eatables, buttermilk has been considered as very useful in mal absorption diseases because it is light and also helpful in promoting digestion and the fresh butter milk does not produce burning sensation as well according to the ayurvedic texts.<sup>6</sup>

Diets which are laxative by action like sugarcane, mango, *Yavakshara*, berry, milk, jiggery, cow's urine, *Draksha* (*Vitis vinifera* Linn.), leafy vegetables, ripe drum-stick, ginger, *Sauvir* (barley and wheat's kanji), sour eatables, salts, contaminated water etc. are unwholesome and diets like *Urada* (black gram / *Phaseolus mungo* Linn.), *Rajamasha* (cow peas / *Vignacatiang* Walp.), barley, potato and other tubers, puddings and *puris*, beans, peas, etc. are heavy in digestion and thus should be avoided in irritable bowel syndrome / malabsorption diseases.

According to Ayurveda, the wholesome food even taken in proper quantity do not get properly digested in the individual afflicted with passion, anger, greed, confusion, envy, grief, anxiety and fear as these psychological factors are the causative factors of the formation of *Amadosha* (undigested food).<sup>7</sup>

Measures like sleeping, fasting (*Langhana*), are recommended, as these conducts are helpful in digestion of food. Mild emesis is also beneficial, as it is useful in expulsion of *Ama* (undigested food).

Conducts like excessive drinking of water and night awakening are considered as unwholesome as these conducts may cause low digestive fire.

#### **Pathya-apathya in Atisara (diarrhoea)**



*Atisara* is an ailment in which the patient passes stool with loose consistency frequently. This condition can be comparable to diarrhoea.

According to Ayurveda, diarrhoeal patients should be given light and constipating/stool binding type of food, whereas foods which are heavy in digestion and laxative in action should be avoided in diarrhoeal patients.<sup>8</sup> Stool binding diets are advised in the later stage of diarrhoea, not in the initial stage (*Amavastha*). In diarrhoea, along with low digestive fire, *Vata* (wind) is predominantly aggravated, which is primarily responsible for increased intestinal movements. Thus, *Vata*(wind) alleviating diets and conducts are also advisable in diarrhoea.

If the patient of diarrhoea is hungry, he should be given light food to eat. *Peya* (thin gruel without containing any grains prepared by boiling appropriate drugs or paddy) and *Manda*(that does not contain *Siktha*) are frequently advised to the patients. *Manda* and *peya* are easily digestible and promotes digestive fire.

Other light and easily digestible edibles which can be advisable to diarrhoea patients are old *Sali* and *Sasthi* variety of rice, soups of lentil and pigeon pea, meat soup of rabbit, *ain* (black deer) lava bird, deer, (*Partridge*) all kind of small fishes, *Madhuralika* (a kind of fish), curd and milk obtained from goats and cows, butter milk, etc.

Fresh banana fruits, *Jambuphala*(chestnut/ *Eugenia jambolana*Lam.), unripe *Bilva*(*Aegelmarmelos*Linn.Conr)fruit, *Jatiphala*(Nutmeg/*Myristicafragrans*Henlt.), *Vijaya*(*Cannabis sativa*Linn.) etc. are the stool binding foods and thus beneficial in diarrhoea. *Tenduka*(*Disopyrosembryopteris*Pers), *Dadima*(pomegranate), *Cangeri*(Indian sorrel/ *Oxalis corniculata*Linn), *Hribera*(*Valerianawallichii*D.C.), *Kustumbru*, dried ginger, *Mahanimba*(*Meliaazadarach*Linn), cumin seeds, *Kapitha*(Wood apple), etc. are the digestives and appetisers and thus are wholesome in diarrhoea. Measures like fasting, day sleeping are beneficial in diarrhoea patients, as these measures are considered helpful in digesting the undigested food.

If the patient suffering from diarrhoea is having excessive indigestion and heaviness, mild emesis can be advisable as it may be helpful in expulsion of undigested food (*ama*), whereas strong emesis is contraindicated because it may aggravate *Vata* (wind) and thus may also cause dehydration.

The eatables which are heavy in digestion are to be avoided by diarrhoea patients. These include wheat, barley, *Urada*(black gram), *Nispava*(flat bean/*Dolichos lablab*), *Madhu*(honey), *Sigru*(drumstick), mango etc.

Diets like sugarcane, liquor, *Draksha*(*Vitisvinifera*Linn.), *Amlaveta*(*Garciniapedunculata*Roxb.), garlic pearls, *Mastu*(curd water), *Amalaki*(goose berry), all kinds of leafy vegetables, *Ksara*(alkali), *Yavaksara*(alkali prepared with oat), salts and sour eatables, contaminated water etc. are laxatives and thus are unwholesome in diarrhoea.

Measures like excessive drinking of water, massaging with oil and aggravation of emotions like anger may further slow down the digestive fire in diarrhoeal patients. Conducts like intercourse, working upto late hours, bloodletting and withholding of natural eruptions are responsible for aggravating the *vata* (wind) in diarrhoeal patients. Thus, all these conducts should be avoided by the diarrhoeal patients.



### **Pathya-apathya in Udavarta(Constipation and related disorders)**

*Udavarta* is a disease which is caused by frequent suppression of natural urges like defecation, eructation, urination, thirst, sleep etc. This disease manifests with symptoms like distension of abdomen, abdominal colic, constipation, difficulty in micturition etc.<sup>9</sup> Thus, diets and measures which are laxative, *Vatahar*(wind pacifying) and light in digestion are wholesome in *Udavarta* whereas diets and measures which are constipating and heavy in digestion are not advisable in *Udavarta*.<sup>10</sup>

Eatables like castor oil, *Harada* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), leaves of *Snuhi* (*Euphorbia nerifolia* Linn.), *Aragavatha* (*Cassia fistula* Linn.), *Nishotha* (*Operculinaturpethum* (L.) Salve Manse), cow urine and grapes are laxative in action and foods like ginger, *Jambir* variety of lemon, *Hingu* (asafoetida), clove, salt and liquor etc. primarily improves the digestion and thus are beneficial in constipating diseases.

Diets like meat soups of land animals and birds and conducts like oleation, hot fomentation, *Basti* (medicated enema), *Palvarti* (suppository) are beneficial in constipating diseases as these are helpful in pacifying *Vata* (wind).

All types of constipating foods, heavy digestive foods like *Sami* variety of paddy, *Kodrava* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*), *saluki* (roots of *kumuda*), *Karkati* (snake cucumber), *Pinyaka* (by-product of sesame), all types of potato, sprouts of bamboo fruits, products like *Pisthi* (*Kalka* of sesame having no oil content) etc. and astringent taste (*Kashaya rasa*) predominant fruit like *Jambu* (*Eugenia jambolana* Lam.) are not advisable in constipating diseases.

Conducts like vomiting, obstructing the flow of natural urges etc. should be avoided in *Udavarta* patients, as these measures may aggravate *Vata* (wind).

### **Pathya-Apathya in amlapitta(Hyperacidity/ gastro-oesophageal reflux)**

*Amlapitta* or gastro-oesophageal reflux disorder is a clinical entity in which excessive of acid is formed in the stomach, due to which patient feels burning sensation in the throat and heart region, acid eructation, nausea, loss of appetite indigestion etc.<sup>11</sup>

*Tikta-madhurasapadhana* (bitter -sweet taste predominant), *Kapha-pitta Hara* (bile and mucous alleviating), light and easily digestible diets are considered as wholesome in hyperacidity patients.<sup>12</sup>

*Tikta* (bitter) diets like *Patola* (*Tricosanthes dioica* Roxb.) leaves, fruits like unripe banana fruit, pomegranate, *Amalaki* (goose berry/*Embilica officinalis* Gaertn), *Kushmanda* (*Benincasa hispida* (Thunb.) Cogn.) are advisable in hyperacidity.

Light and easily digestible foods like old *Sali* (rice/*Oryza sativa*), *Yava* (Barley/*Hordeum vulgare*), wheat, *Mudga* (green gram), meat, meat soups, honey etc. are considered wholesome in hyperacidity.

Diets which are having *pitta* (bile) aggravating properties like sesame, *Urada* (black gram), *Kulatta* (horse gram/*Dolichos biflorus* Linn.), etc. are prohibited in hyperacidity patients.

Measures which are considered as beneficial for patients suffering from GERD are purgation and emesis. In hyperacidity primarily associated with water brash (*Udharva Amlapitta*), emesis is advised and in hyperacidity primarily associated with burning in anal region (*Adhoga Amlapitta*), *Virechana* (purgation) therapy is helpful.

### **Pathya-apathya in parinamashoola (peptic-ulcer disease)**

*Parinamashoola* is defined as abdominal pain occurring during the phase of digestion. Symptoms of *Parinamashoola* are burning sensation, nausea and vomiting. *Parinamashoola* can be compared with peptic-ulcer disease which includes duodenal and gastric ulcers.<sup>13</sup>

According to Ayurveda, *Parinamashoola* is a *Vata-pitta* (wind-bile) predominant *Tridosha* disease.



In peptic-ulcer disease, *Pitta* (bile) aggravating diets like alcohols, fermented preparations, sour eatables, sesame seeds, *Vata* (wind) aggravating foods like *Simbi* variety of paddy i.e. *Masha* (black gram), and edibles containing cold potencies are contraindicated.<sup>14</sup>

Patients of peptic-ulcer disease are advised to avoid walking in sun, walking for long hours, getting angry, indulging in grief, avoid sexual intercourse as all these aforesaid measures are *Vata-pitta* (wind-bile) aggravating factors and hence are prohibited.

### Discussion:

The diet is regarded as Brahman as it holds such supreme importance.

According to Ayurveda the diet play a very important role for the maintenance of health. Out of three *Upstambas*, the *Ahara*, *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya*, the diet has been recognized as an essential factor for the smooth functioning of life also among all *Upstambas*, *Anna* is the best sustainer of life.<sup>15</sup> Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, genius ness, happiness, satisfaction, strength and intellect are all conditioned by food. Highlighting on the balanced diet *Charaka* says that a man votary of wholesome diet and controlled habits survives for thirty six thousand nights in diseased free state. and emphasising on the effects of unwholesome diet, *Charaka* says that the milk often acts like poison, if given without proper consideration, and on the other hand the poison also acts like best medicine if administered properly.<sup>16</sup>

As per the modern system of medicine all the dietetic materials can be categorized under six main headings. 1) Carbohydrates 2) Proteins 3) fat 4) Vitamins 5) mineral 6) water.<sup>17</sup> Depending upon the dietic responses on the body they can be further grouped under four categories 1) energy producing i.e. carbohydrate and fat such as rice potato ghee 2) body building protein and carbohydrate such as meat egg milk etc. 3) protective food (minerals and vitamins) such *Amalaki* (goose berry), lemon, carrots etc. 4) other groups such as cold drinks tea coffee etc.

Looking these descriptions it appears that that the modern science no doubt deals with greater details of dietic components and its responses on the body but doesn't explains the description of modes of uses. In addition ancient system of medicine pays more importance to the mode of its use. Instead of dealing with the biological responses, the physical characteristics of diets have been also elaborately described in the ancient texts. If taken according to the rules they provide fuel to the fire of digestion, promote mental and physical strength, enrich the tissue elements and complexion, otherwise they are harmful.

Describing the relation of food with the body and diseases *Charaka* says that the pure as well as the waste products of digestion and metabolism enter into the various channels of circulation. These channels carrying specific nutrient material provide nourishment in required quantity to various *dhatu*s. Intake of wholesome and unwholesome food is responsible for the maintenance of health and production of diseases respectively.

Acid-peptic disorders, mal absorption diseases, diarrhoea, chronic constipation etc. are the diseases which are very common in gastrointestinal OPD. If the patient's history taken very thoroughly, we find several improper diets and conducts are the causative factor of such diseases, and even it seems to be very difficult to cure these diseases only on the basis of medication alone.

Thus, Ayurveda, despite being one of the oldest systems of life science and health care, possesses a fairly well-developed knowledge base on food science with a range of hitherto unknown dimensions of food science on the one hand and a number of other unique principles and practices on the other, which, if combined with today's nutrition biology, could provide significant benefits to contemporary food science



and nutrition .A pronature approach, holistic considerations, and personalized dietary planning constitute the basic features of the Ayurvedic conception of dietetics and nutrition, features that are sorely lacking in modern approaches to nutrition.

### Conclusion:

A disease cannot be treated by the medication alone but preventive aspect of disease is equally useful in its management.

All the clinicians must follow *Pathya* and *apathy* described in Ayurveda, this may not only helpful to control the disease but may also prove to be beneficial to cure the disease. These does and don'ts in Ayurveda possess scientific cause to cure the disease and thus should be followed.

Thus having a rich knowledge pertaining to dietics, Ayurveda can contribute promising attribute to the restoration of health through prophylactic and interventional diets.

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