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Importance of dining method based on Ayurveda: A classical review

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Abstract

Food (Āhāra) is an important part of human life. It gives us the energy and nutrients to grow and develop. Healthy food acts as strength and medicine. Limited food has been prescribed to keep indigestion at bay. Cāṇakya says: *Mitabhojanam swāस्थ्यam* (That is, health lies in limited eating). It entails that limited food amounts to health, that is, it is the main cause of health. We should make our children and other family members understand well that eating frequently is the most harmful habit for health. The children in particular should be inculcated with the habit of eating to the prescribed times, so that they can abide by this golden rule and lead a happy life throughout.

Keywords: Upaniṣada, Āhāra, Āyurveda, Food

Introduction

Food is very important for life and purity of food is considered to be the path of salvation. In Indian spirituality and *ayurvedic* tradition, a deep and broad description of food is given. According to Upaniṣada Purity of food purifies the mind and purity of mind results in the perseverance of memory. Perseverance of memory means that the person in higher consciousness lives with awareness. At every moment he is aware of his duties. So he is always carefully determined to his duty. There is not even a single mistake in his behaviour. Hence due to restorative memory all the knots of ignorance, sensuality, attachment, and malignity are opened and he will be devoid of egoism. Seeker becomes fetterless and joyous. The ultimate source of human welfare is the purity of food. Practicing appropriate diet-regimen, pertinent demeanor, appropriate sleep and wake up makes a person devoid of distress. In this statement of the *Bhagavad Gītā* ^[1], an appropriate diet is also considered as the main source of healthy living. There is a context in '*Caraka Saṁhitā*' ^[2] (a famous treatise of *Āyurveda*) that a great council of sages in Himalayan valley to strongly pondered over the causes of disease and health. At the end they concluded that food is the chief cause of health and diseases. There, in conclusion, it stabilized the theory that balanced diet promotes health where as unbalanced diet causes disorders ^[9].

To avoid this, the ancient sages have instructed the methodology of meals. According to the *Kāśyapa-saṁhitā* ^[3] following points were suggested regarding the methodology of meals. A person who partakes food according to it is never afflicted with disorders.

Methodology of meals ^[2-12].

Indigestion lies at the root of ailments, and the basis of indigestion is irregularity of meals. To avoid this, the sages have instructed the methodology of meals. We shall now present an extract from the *Kāśyapasamhitā* regarding the methodology of meals. A person who partakes food according to it is never afflicted with indigestion and other ancillary ailments. According to *Kāśyapa* 24 types of eating norms is described here-
Tasmāt Kāle sātmyam mātṛā vaduṣṇam snigdhamavirodhi śucau deśeśuciṣupātreṣuśuciparicareṇo paṇītaṁ prāṇmukhastūṣṇīnstanmanā āsvādayam nātidrutam nātidravam nātilambitam nātyuṣṇam nātiśītam nātirukṣam nātiśnigdham nātibahu nātiśtokam nātiśuṣkam nākāmṣito na pratānto naikarasaṁ vārogyāyurbalārthī samdsnīyāt.

A person desirous of having health, long life and vitality should partake food as per the following instructions:

1. Proper time (Tasmāt Kāle) ^[5]: The food eaten at a proper time tastes good, satisfies the heart and invigorates the body. The food taken at a proper time is digested blissfully and it

does not cause any grief (owing to increase in maladies) and indigestion. Suśruta ^[11] too has said, 'Kāle bhuktaṁ pṛṇayati.' (Su. Sū. 46.466)

2. Appropriateness (Sātmyaṁ) ^[5]: The food, that is continuously consumed becomes naturally favorable to a person, it is called appropriate for him. Caraka-saṁhita¹⁰ has said, 'Sātmyaṁ nāma tad yadātmanyupaśete. Sātmyārtha hyupaśayārthaḥ'. (Ca.Vi. 1.20); The Sushruta-saṁhita ^[11] states, 'Sātmyamannaṁ na bādhatē'. (Su. Sū. 46.466). (That is, appropriate food does not cause any disorder in the body.)

3. Proper Quantity (Vātrā-vad) ^[5]: Even the small foods should not be eaten with a lot of satisfaction, and major foods should be taken in a small quantity. The food taken in adequate quantity in this manner is digested well, and it does not negate the daily routine of a healthy person, his appetite and bodily functions. It has also been said in the Caraka-saṁhita that food should be quantified. the Suśruta-saṁhita¹¹ too says, 'Sukhaṁ jīryati mātrāvat'. (Su.Sū. 46.468). (That is, the food taken as per the quantity is happily digested and does good).

4. Warm Food (Uṣṇaṁ) ^[5]: The warm food tastes good, pacifies the phlegm, is digested well, cultivates interest in food, and cultivates vitality in the body. The sage Suśruta¹¹ too says, 'Snigdhoṣṇaṁ balavahnidam'. (Su. Sū. 46.467). (That is, oily (snigdha) and warm food gives vitality and illuminates the appetite.)

5. Snigdha Food (Snigdham) ^[5]: The *snigdha* (soft) food satisfies the body, enhances vitality, increases humours, augments strength and improves the complexion.

6. Unfavorable Food (Avirodhi) ^[5]: The unfavorable food should not be taken even if it is cooked well. Unfavorable food quickly destroys life of beings, as honey and ghee taken together in equal quantities. A person who consumes favorable food attains health, long age, complexion, vitality and happiness. On the contrary, a person who consumes unfavorable food attains a condition just opposite to the above; that is, his age, complexion, vitality and happiness are depreciated.

7. Hygienic Food (Śucau deśēśuciṣu pātreṣuśuciparicareṇopanitaṁ) ^[5]: Food should be taken in clean pots and at a clean place. The person should clean himself by bathing etc. This satisfies him and the body is pleased and nutritified. A person should not consume food which is not desirable or which is not pleasing to the mind, else the mind is injured. A person desiring to have long life and health should not eat at a place which is not pleasing.

8. Eating Facing to the East (Prāṇmukha) ^[5]: A wise person who faces the east direction while eating attains a long life.

9. Prāṇmukhastuṣṇīm ^[5] A person who eats food silently attains pleasure of all senses and favorableness of the mind.

10. Eating attentively (Tanmanā) ^[5]: A person who eats attentively attains the traits described above; he keeps in mind the quantity, digestion and method. Therefore, a

healthy person should focus his mind on the food and should not talk much while eating.

11. Eating Food Tastefully (Āsvādayam) ^[5]: A person having sense to ingredients, who eats food enjoying the ingredients can feel the diversity of the ingredients, and also attains their qualities.

12. Not Eating Rapidly (Nātidrutam) ^[5]: When food is gulped down rapidly, it does not reach its state. He cannot realize the importance of sequence of foods (that is, which one to eat prior to others). Owing to quick eating, the excellence or qualities of ingredients cannot be experienced by him. A person who gives up hurry and takes food patiently attains all the above qualities. Eating in this way pleases all his senses and the wind is passed through the anus.

13. Not Eating Too Slow (Nātilambitam): When food is eaten too slowly, it cools down. In this way, food is eaten in a larger quantity yet it does not satisfy. As this type of eating involves cool food, more than necessary food and out of sync, it leads to difficulty in digestion.

14. Not Eating Too Hot Food (Nātyuṣṇam) ^[5]: If extremely hot food is partaken, it causes burning sensation to the tongue, throat, lips, heart and stomach, and it does not tell the food's taste well. Very hot food can lead to terrible diseases like mouth's swelling, eye's swelling, fever, bloody bile, confusion etc.

15. Not Eating Very Cold Food (Nātiśītam) ^[5]: A person who consumes very cold food suffers from stomachache, softness of pharynx, increase in *Kapha* and *Vāta*, as well as diseases like cough and hiccups.

16. Not Eating Hard Food (Nātirukṣam) ^[5]: Hard food causes swelling of the abdomen, stomachache, colorlessness and feeling of being unwell. It leads to eating more than adequate quantity. Hard food causes wind malady and lack of watery substance leads to obstruction of urine.

17. Not Eating Extremely Oily Food (Nātisnigdham) ^[5] : A person who partakes very oily food suffers from lethargy, dissatisfaction, indigestion and other ailments of the stomach; it also causes maladies relating to *Kapha*, ailments arising from the stomach as well as ailments pertaining to the throat.

18. Not Eating Too Much (Nātibahu) ^[5]: A person who eats in a very large quantity suffers from ailments like stomachache, agitation, uneasiness, sluggishness and cholera etc.

19. Not Eating Too Little (Nādistokam) ^[5]: A person who eats too little food suffers from excessive appetite and the maladies occurring from it like weakness, confusion, dissatisfaction, famished body etc. It causes ailments pertaining to drowsiness; weakness in relieving faeces and urine; and loss of vitality etc.

20. Not Eating Too Liquified Food (Nātidravam) ^[5]: When a person partakes too much of liquified food, he suffers from nausea, polyuria (excessive urination), pain in

sides, cold, watery faeces.

21. Not Eating Too Dry Food (Nātīsuṣkaṁ) ^[5]: When very dry food is eaten, it causes difficulty in digestion in lack of watery substance. It mixes in itself the earlier juice and decreases urination and *Kapha*. Therefore, very dry food should not be eaten.

22. Not Eating When Not Hungry (Nākāṁkṣito) ^[5]: A person who, owing to stupidity, sluggishness or taste, eats food when he is not hungry or when he has no interest in food suffers from indigestion, disinterest, vomiting, ache and hardness of stomach etc.

23. Not Eating When Troubled by Eating (Nāpratānto) ^[5]: When a person eats food despite his suffering from heightened maladies, suffers from ailments like thirst, unconsciousness, lack of appetite, body ache, fever, weakness, dysentery and eyesight ailment.

24. Not Eating One Type of Food (Naikarasam) ^[5]: A person who consumes only one type of food suffers from weakness and infirmity (lack of vitality). On the contrary, a person who consumes all types of foods in keeping with the season gets control over all types of ailments. His humours and blood etc. coordinate well; his strength and age increase; and he attains the benefits of health and illumination of appetite. Therefore, a person who wishes to have health should give up eating one type of food continuously.

A person who partakes food as per the above timings and following the adequate methodology realizes all the positive attributes, and he does not suffer from any maladies pertaining to these timings or methodology.

Discussion

When Doṣa are in their favourable state and when different types of ailments are eradicated, it is called health⁶. Health (Ārogya) depends on meals, and expects proper methodology of meals. The scholars term the period as 'period of meals' when Doṣa are located in their respective places; when body channels have been cleared of all wastes and when there is desire for eating. That is, until Doṣa are no more located in their places; until the body channels are free from waste materials; and until there is desire for eating, a person should not partake food. A person who partakes food as per the above timings and following the adequate methodology realizes all the positive attributes, and he does not suffer from any maladies pertaining to these timings or methodology.

Conclusion

Āyurveda which is merely not a medical system but an overall philosophy of life says that the proper and salutary diet regimen, fair deal, proper sleeping awakening and proper daily routine make the humans healthy and happy. A person who regularly follow salutary diet regimen, works deliberately, remain detached to sense-topics, is generous and honest, maintains evenness in twit-praise, value-offend, profit-loss, vicissitudes, etc. conflicts, adopts placability and company of wise men always remain healthy.

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