

Ayurvedic Proverb:

“When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use.

When diet is correct, medicine is of no need.”

Ayurvedic texts describe the word food as *ahara* which means the food which is ingested. Since ancient time’s food has always been of great value for the following reasons: it is responsible for health, growth, strength, immunity, it is also a key factor in providing essential nourishment to the body as well as protecting life. Food is also necessary for the development of the sense organs, mind and body; all these factors depend on the intake of healthy food. Food is considered to be one of the three main pillars of health in Ayurveda (Food, Sleep and Celibacy). [See article on Trayoupasthambha]

Ayurvedic literature has a very different point of view of how food should be consumed. It is said that eating an adequate amount of food is not beneficial to maintain perfect health, but rather every individual should follow a specific set of directions when it comes to consuming food. This is known as Ahara Vidhi Visheshyatan (8 important aspects of food):

1. Prakriti – the nature of food

Prakriti means the natural quality of the food as well as medicines. The natural qualities of rain water, red rice, *Shastika Sali* (special variety of rice), green gram, game meat (deer) is light in nature and easily digestible. Whereas milk, sugarcane, black gram and fish are considered heavy and thus they are not easily digested. The important thing to remember is that one should always be aware of the nature of the food they are consuming and the effects it will have on their body. For example an individual having an increase of Vata Dosha in the body should avoid cold and dry foods.

2. Karana – the processing of food

This refers to the alteration or transformation of the food by various processes such as washing, cooking, baking, churning, roasting, storing, flavouring, churning etc. For example food cooked on an open fire has a better taste than food cooked on electric stoves,

wholesome food that is washed and cleaned helps promote good hygiene and prevents the spread of diseases and rice that is washed with water and then cooked by boiling helps transform the qualities of the raw rice from heavy to light.

3. **Samyoga – combining food substances**

The combination of two or more substances results in the development of new properties of the food or medicine and is not seen individually. For example the combination of honey and ghee in equal quantities has a toxic effect on the body, but individually they are not toxic. Another example mentioned in literature is the combination of honey, milk and fish when these are mixed together and consumed they give rise to skin diseases, but if used individually they are not harmful to the body.

4. **Rasi – quantity of food**

The proper quantity of food that should be taken differs for everyone as we all have different digestive capacities. One should understand that a proper quantity of food can be regarded as the amount of food consumed that does not disturb the natural equilibrium of the body, and which gets digested and metabolized in proper time.

Proper digestion is disturbed by too little or too much food. For example not consuming an adequate amount of food can lead to constipation. If the food is heavy then one should consume food till the stomach is half full. If the food is light one should not consume an excessive amount because it is not conducive for digestion.

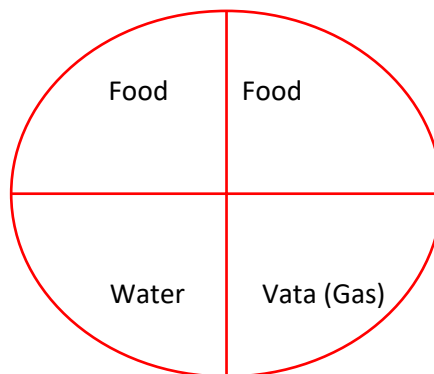


Fig 1 Quantity of Food in Ayurveda, and the 4 parts of the stomach

The figure above is an indication that one should take food such that two parts of stomach gets filled by the food consumed, one part to be filled by water or other liquid material and one part should be kept free for the movement of Vata(Gas).

There are two types of Rasi in Ayurveda:

- Total quantity of food in a meal this includes all the ingredients, substances in its totality that is in a meal
- Individual quantity or the quantity of each ingredient in a meal

5. Desha – place

This relates to the habitat where the food or medicine is cultivated. Different places influence the characteristics of the food. There are 3 types of regions marshy, arid and normal. Foods grown in arid places aggravate Vata Dosha and gives rise to a number of diseases of the nervous system, while foods from the same arid place would be beneficial for someone who has Kapha Dosha as they are opposite in quality. It is always better to eat foods and have medicines that are easily accessible locally.

6. Kala – time

Consuming food at a proper time helps correct our metabolism and promote good health. If we are often engaged in activities and do not eat timely meals this can disrupt our biological clock and offset our metabolism which can cause an obstruction to the downward movement of *Vata*, the food will then undergo digestion with difficulty and this makes the body weak which will spoil the desire to eat food. Ultimately a poorly functioning digestive fire is the root of manifestation for all disease.

There are 2 types of time periods considered in Ayurveda namely Daily (Seasonal) time and Conditional time.

- Nityaga Kala (Daily Time) refers to the natural time of day for example it is not beneficial to eat food at midnight, but it is beneficial to eat during pitta time which is when the sun is at its highest point this is between 10:00am and 14:00pm. One should also consume food according to particular seasons for example during the summer the Sun draws up excessive amounts of moisture. Therefore in this season Sweet, cold, liquid food and drinks are very beneficial.
- Avasthika Kala (Conditional Time) this refers to consuming food which is conducive to a specific disease for example fasting is indicated in cases of diarrhoea, while non-vegetarian and spicy food should be avoided in Jaundice. It also refers to consuming foods according to one's age this is important for deciding the nature and quantity of food that should be eaten.

7. Upayoga Samstha – classic Ayurvedic Dietetic rules

This refers to the dietetic rules mentioned in Ayurvedic texts (see below). These rules are important and should be followed to ensure proper digestion and prevention of metabolic toxins (ama).

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The food should be fresh, warm, tasty, unctuous and easily digestible○ Proper quantity of food should be taken○ Eat only when hungry and when the previous meal has been digested○ Eat in a place that you feel comfortable and happy○ Eat with concentration○ Food should be chosen according to one's individual health needs○ Eat after proper self-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Avoid eating food which is incompatible e.g. Fish and Milk○ Avoid eating too fast or too slowly○ Avoid talking and laughing while eating

8. Upayokta – the person who consumes the food

Every person must take into consideration their own constitution, capacity of digestive power, the season, time of day and whether the previous meal has been properly digested or not. He is the one who must take in to consideration all this facts of food and consume it accordingly.

This sums up the rules that we all should adhere to live a long and healthy life.