

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Role of *Ahara* in Maintaining *Tridosha* Functions and *Swasthavritta* Practices

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, diet, referred to as *Ahara*, is considered one of the three essential pillars of life, known as *Trayopastambha*. It plays a crucial role in maintaining health and preventing illness. Ancient *Ayurvedic* texts highlight the importance of diet in achieving the functional balance of the *Tridoshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—which are responsible for all physiological and psychological processes in the body. An imbalance among these *doshas* can result in disease, while their proper alignment promotes health and vitality. This review examines the diverse functions of *Ahara* in sustaining *doshic* equilibrium and supporting *Swasthavritta*, the *Ayurvedic* science focused on health maintenance and disease prevention. It discusses classical concepts such as *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* (dietary guidelines), *Agni* (digestive fire), *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food pairings), as well as the dietary adjustments recommended in response to seasonal changes (*Ritucharya*) and daily routines (*Dinacharya*). In addition, this review incorporates modern scientific perspectives, drawing connections between *Ayurvedic* dietary principles and contemporary ideas such as personalized nutrition, circadian eating regimens, and gut microbiome health. By linking traditional *Ayurvedic* knowledge with modern nutrition science, the paper emphasizes the importance of individualized, mindful, and context-specific dietary practices in fostering *doshic* balance, enhancing digestion, and promoting long-term wellness. The conclusions suggest that integrating *Ayurvedic* dietary principles into current preventive health strategies may provide a sustainable and comprehensive approach to overall health and well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, an ancient system of medicine, prioritizes health maintenance (*Swasthya Rakshana*) and disease prevention through adherence to appropriate daily practices (*Dinacharya*), seasonal practices (*Ritucharya*), ethical behavior (*Sadvritta*), and, most importantly, a nutritious diet (*Ahara*). Among the core principles that support life (*Trayopastambha*)—which include *Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep), and *Brahmacharya* (self-regulation)—*Ahara* is particularly vital, as it directly provides nourishment to the body and supports essential physiological functions.^[1]

According to Ayurvedic philosophy, health is defined as the equilibrium of *Tridosha* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), *Agni* (digestive fire), *Dhatus* (tissues), *Malas* (waste), and a state of mental, sensory, and spiritual well-being (*prasanna atma indriya manah swastha iti abhidheeyate*—

Su. Su. 15/41). *Ahara*, when consumed appropriately according to one's *prakriti* (constitution), *agni*, age, season, and place, serves as the most natural and effective way to maintain this balance. Conversely, faulty dietary habits—such as improper combinations (*viruddha ahara*), excessive or deficient intake, and disregard for seasonal guidelines—lead to *doshic* disturbances and disease onset.^[2]

The *Tridoshas*—*Vata*, which represents the principle of movement; *Pitta*, the principle of transformation; and *Kapha*, the principle of stability—oversee all biological processes and demonstrate natural variations that align with circadian rhythms and seasonal changes. An individual's diet is crucial in influencing these *doshas*. Each food possesses specific qualities (*guna*), flavors (*rasa*), degrees of potency (*virya*), and effects following digestion (*vipaka*), which engage with the *doshas* to either soothe or intensify them. For instance, consuming warm and oily foods tends to soothe *Vata*, while cooling and bitter foods help to alleviate *Pitta*, and light, dry foods are effective in reducing *Kapha*.^[3]

Swasthavritta, a specialized branch of *Ayurveda* focused on enhancing health and managing lifestyle choices, emphasizes dietary

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recommendations as a fundamental aspect of preventive healthcare. Despite being rooted in ancient traditions, its principles remain highly applicable in contemporary times, especially given the rise of lifestyle-related ailments, unhealthy eating habits, and escalating metabolic disorders. The increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and digestive issues highlights the importance of re-examining the value of personalized and nutritious dietary practices.^[4]

This review seeks to examine the essential concepts of *Ahara* in connection with the *Tridosha* theory and its significance in *Swasthavritta*. It emphasizes the biological reasoning behind dietary selections in *Ayurveda*, the importance of digestion and metabolism (*Agni*), the necessity for seasonal dietary modifications (*Ritucharya*), daily eating practices (*Dinacharya*), and the risks posed by incompatible foods (*Viruddha Ahara*). In addition, it aims to align *Ayurvedic* principles with contemporary scientific research in nutrition, metabolism, and chronobiology, thereby reinforcing the enduring applicability of *Ayurveda* in today's world.

1.1. Objective

- To explore the role of *Ahara* in maintaining *Tridosha* balance
- To understand how dietary practices influence *Swasthavritta*
- To examine classical and contemporary perspectives on *Ayurvedic* dietetics.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Classical *Ayurvedic* texts: *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*
- Commentaries such as *Chakrapani*, *Dalhana*, and *Arundatta*
- Contemporary *Ayurvedic* research publications
- Review of relevant scholarly articles and textbooks on *Swasthavritta* and dietetics.

2.1. Role of *Ahara* in Maintaining *Tridosha*

Ayurveda defines health as a balance among the three biological humors, known as *doshas*—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. These *doshas* play a crucial role in managing different physiological, psychological, and pathological functions in the body. Their activity is significantly affected by *Ahara*, or diet, which directly influences *doshic* dynamics through its *rasa* (taste), *guna* (attributes), *virya* (strength), *vipaka* (after-digestive impact), and *prabhava* (specific effect).^[5]

2.1.1. *Vata* and diet

Vata dosha, composed of *Akasha* (ether) and *Vayu* (air), is characterized by dryness, lightness, coldness, subtlety, mobility, and roughness. It governs neurological, respiratory, circulatory, and excretory functions.

To maintain *Vata*:

Pacifying *Ahara* includes foods that are:^[6]

- Unctuous (*snigdha*) – ghee, oil
- Warm (*ushna*) – soups, cooked foods
- Heavy and grounding (*guru, sthira*) – wheat, dairy
- Sweet and salty (*madhura, lavana*) – rice, dates, rock salt
- Aggravating foods include dry snacks, raw vegetables, cold drinks, and fasting, which lead to dryness and instability.

2.1.2. *Pitta* and Diet^[7]

Pitta dosha, made of *Agni* (fire) and a bit of *Jala* (water), is hot, sharp, light, and slightly oily. It regulates digestion, metabolism, body temperature, and vision.

To maintain *Pitta*:

- Pacifying *Ahara* includes foods that are:
- Cooling (*sheetala*) – milk, cucumber, coconut water
- Sweet, bitter, and astringent in taste – melons, ghee, leafy greens
- Dry and less oily – barley, pulses.

Aggravating foods include:

- Spicy, sour, fermented, fried, and acidic items – tomatoes, alcohol, vinegar
- Excessive salt and pungent food – leading to hyperacidity, inflammation.

2.1.3. *Kapha* and diet^[8]

Kapha dosha, consisting of *Jala* (water) and *Prithvi* (earth), is heavy, cold, slow, unctuous, and stable. It provides structure, lubrication, and immunity.

To maintain *Kapha*:

Pacifying *Ahara* includes foods that are:

- Light and dry (*laghu, ruksha*) – pulses, green vegetables
- Warm and stimulating – ginger, black pepper, honey
- Bitter, pungent, and astringent in taste – turmeric, fenugreek, millets.

Aggravating foods include:

- Dairy, fried foods, sweets, and cold items, which increase heaviness and sluggishness.

2.2. Personalized and Seasonal *Ahara* for *Tridosha* Balance

Prakriti-based *Ahara*: Each individual's constitution requires a personalized diet. For example, a *Vata*-predominant person should prefer warm, moist, and grounding foods, whereas a *Kapha* individual benefits from dry and light preparations.

Ritucharya (seasonal adjustments): Seasons affect *doshic* expression, and diet should be adjusted accordingly:

- Summer (*Pitta* season): Include cooling, hydrating foods
- Rainy season (*Vata* season): Favor warm, spiced, light meals
- Spring (*Kapha* season): Prefer pungent, bitter, and astringent foods.

Ahara as a *Doshic* Regulator.

The daily and consistent intake of appropriate foods helps:

- Maintain *dosha prakriti sthiti* (*dosha* equilibrium)
- Prevent *dosha dushti* (vitiation of *doshas*)
- Aid in the proper functioning of *Agni* and prevent *Ama* formation
- Enhance *dhatu poshana* (tissue nourishment).

Thus, *Ahara* acts both as a preventive and curative measure in maintaining *doshic* homeostasis and health.

2.3. *Tridosha*-wise Pacifying and Aggravating Foods

Shown in table 1.

2.4. *Ahara* and *Tridosha* Balance in *Swasthavritta*

Given in flow chart 1.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. *Ahara* as the Foundation of Health and *Tridosha* Harmony

In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* serves as more than just nourishment; it acts as a healing component that affects both physical and mental well-being.

The *Tridosha* theory—comprising *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—identifies the key functional aspects that govern both normal and abnormal bodily processes. The balance of these *doshas* adapts to various factors, including food choices, seasonal variations, emotional conditions, and daily habits. Therefore, diet plays a crucial role in regulating *dosha* balance, which is essential for maintaining overall health.^[9,10]

Each food item, through its *rasa* (taste), *guna* (qualities), *virya* (potency), *vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and *prabhava* (unique effect), either stabilizes or disturbs one or more *doshas*. For example:

- Foods with sweet, sour, and salty tastes increase *Kapha* but pacify *Vata*
- Pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes pacify *Kapha* but aggravate *Vata*
- Pungent and sour tastes stimulate *Pitta*, while sweet and bitter tastes cool it down.

Such precise knowledge enables *Ayurvedic* practitioners to formulate dietary recommendations tailored to individual *prakriti* (constitutional type), seasonal variations, and health conditions.

3.2. *Ahara* and the Dynamics of *Agni* and *Ama*

Ayurveda offers a distinctive perspective by emphasizing *Agni*, or digestive fire, as a fundamental aspect of health. A well-functioning *Agni* is crucial for the proper digestion of food, enabling its transformation into *rasa*, which is the nutrient fluid that nourishes the body. This process continues as *rasa* is converted into the seven *dhatu*s, or body tissues. However, when *Agni* is disrupted – often due to inappropriate food combinations, inconsistent eating patterns, or excessive intake – the body produces *Ama*, a toxic byproduct of undigested food. This accumulation can obstruct bodily channels, known as *srotas*, and may lead to various health issues.^[11]

Different types of *Agni* are influenced by the dominant *dosha*:

- *Tikshnagni* (sharp digestion) in *Pitta*-predominant individuals
- *Mandagni* (slow digestion) in *Kapha* types
- *Vishmagni* (irregular digestion) in *Vata* types.

A diet customized to balance *Agni* not only maintains *doshic* equilibrium but also prevents the formation of *Ama*, thereby ensuring disease resistance.

3.3. Role of *Ahara* in *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya*

Swasthavritta, which focuses on health maintenance within *Ayurveda*, emphasizes the importance of diet as part of both daily and seasonal practices. According to *Dinacharya*, the daily routine, consuming meals at appropriate times – particularly a hearty lunch when *Pitta* and *Agni* are at their peak – plays a crucial role in balancing *doshas* and enhancing digestive health. Conversely, practices such as fasting or omitting meals can aggravate *Vata* and disrupt the natural rhythms of digestion.^[12]

In *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), dietary recommendations are made to balance seasonal *doshic* fluctuations:

- *Shishira* and *Hemanta* (late autumn and winter): Dominance of *Kapha* and *Vata* requires nourishing, warm, unctuous foods such as ghee, milk, wheat, and meat soups.
- *Grishma* (summer): Due to increased *Pitta*, light, cooling, and hydrating foods like rice gruel, coconut water, and fresh fruits are prescribed.
- *Varsha* (monsoon): *Agni* is weak; light, warm, and sour foods such as buttermilk and ginger are beneficial to restore *Agni* and pacify *Vata-Kapha*.

Ignoring *Ritucharya* leads to *Ritucharya-viparyaya*, a key cause of seasonal disorders.

3.4. *Viruddha Ahara*: The Hazard of Incompatible Foods^[13]

The concept of *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible food combinations) is unique to *Ayurveda* and critically relevant today due to increased consumption of processed and incompatible foods. Common examples include:

- Milk with fruits or sour foods (milk + banana)
- Heating honey
- Fish with milk.

These combinations disturb *Tridosha* and create *Ama*, leading to disorders like skin diseases, indigestion, and metabolic imbalance. The *Ayurvedic* emphasis on *Ahara Sanskara* (proper food processing, sequencing, and combination) aligns with modern food safety and functional food science.

3.5. Modern Nutrition and *Ayurvedic* Convergence^[14]

Contemporary scientific understanding increasingly supports *Ayurvedic* dietary principles:

- The gut-brain axis, microbiome modulation, and metabolic adaptation are in line with *Agni*-centric theories
- Chrono-nutrition, emphasizing meal timing based on circadian rhythms, reflects *Dinacharya* principles
- The movement toward personalized nutrition, considering genetic, metabolic, and lifestyle factors, mirrors *Ayurveda*'s *prakriti*-based approach.

Furthermore, *Ayurveda*'s *sattvika* diet—simple, fresh, plant-based foods—aligns with global trends toward sustainable and mindful eating. *Ayurveda* adds the advantage of *doshic* and *agni*-based customization, which modern systems are still exploring through nutrigenomics.

3.6. Challenges and Implementation Barriers

Despite its profound insights, practical challenges exist in integrating *Ayurvedic* dietetics into mainstream health systems:

Standardization of *dosha*-based food recommendations requires skilled practitioners and detailed assessments

Modern urban lifestyles often lack the time and resources for seasonal food preparation and personalized meals

Globalization and fast food culture promote *viruddha ahara* and irregular eating, undermining *Swasthavritta*.

- To overcome these barriers, there is a need for:
- Community education programs on *Ayurvedic* nutrition
- Inclusion of *Swasthavritta* principles in public health policy
- Interdisciplinary research linking *Ayurvedic* dietetics with biomedicine and nutritional sciences.

4. CONCLUSION

Ahara, as highlighted in *Ayurvedic* texts, serves a purpose beyond mere nourishment; it plays a crucial role in achieving physiological balance, mental health, and longevity. The intricate interaction between *Ahara* and the *Tridoshas* – *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* – is foundational for maintaining health (*Swasthya Rakshana*) and preventing diseases. An individualized and well-balanced diet tailored to one's *prakriti*, digestive ability (*Agni*), seasonal changes (*Ritucharya*), and daily

routines (*Dinacharya*) contributes to optimal *doshic* equilibrium and supports the body's natural homeostasis. This review emphasizes how appropriate dietary practices uphold *Tridosha* harmony, enhance tissue nourishment (*Dhatu Poshana*), prevent the formation of toxins (*Ama*), and maintain effective metabolic and immune responses. *Ayurvedic* texts provide comprehensive instructions regarding food quality, timing, combinations, portion sizes, and cooking methods, all vital for sustaining healthy Agni and thwarting disease onset. Adhering to these dietary guidelines within the concept of *Swasthavritta* can significantly promote overall well-being. In an era marked by irregular eating patterns, processed food consumption, and rising lifestyle-related health issues, the enduring principles of *Ayurveda* offer practical preventative measures. Modern nutritional science is increasingly echoing *Ayurvedic* concepts through innovations such as chrononutrition, personalized diets, microbiome equilibrium, and functional food strategies. This alignment enhances the relevance and integration of *Ayurvedic* dietary practices within today's preventive health frameworks. Consequently, incorporating *Ahara*-based approaches from Ayurveda into public health initiatives, clinical routines, and personal lifestyles can cultivate a more sustainable, individualized, and holistic method of health management. Continued research and interdisciplinary collaboration will be vital to scientifically endorse and adapt these principles for a broader audience, ensuring that the ancient insights of *Ahara* remain influential in contemporary health practices.

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9. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

10. DATA AVAILABILITY

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Table 1: Tridosha-wise Pacifying and Aggravating Foods

<i>Dosha</i>	Qualities (Guna)	Pacifying foods	Aggravating foods
<i>Vata</i>	Dry, light, cold, mobile, rough	Warm cooked foods, ghee, sesame oil, wheat, rice, milk, ripe fruits, soups, jaggery, dates	Raw vegetables, dry snacks, beans (excess), cold drinks, popcorn, fasting, bitter, and astringent foods
<i>Pitta</i>	Hot, sharp, oily, light, spreading	Cooling foods, ghee, milk, sweet fruits (melons, mango), coconut water, leafy greens, rice, barley, cucumber	Spicy foods, alcohol, vinegar, fermented items, tomatoes, pickles, mustard, sour fruits, fried and salty foods
<i>Kapha</i>	Heavy, cold, oily, slow, stable	Light, dry, warm foods, barley, millet, lentils, bitter vegetables, honey, ginger, turmeric, spicy foods	Dairy, sweets, fried/oily food, cold drinks, bananas, curd, rice (excess), sugar, excessive salt

**Flow chart 1:** Ahara and Tridosha Balance in Swasthavritta