



THE AYURVEDIC PRINCIPLE OF 'EATING BY CONSIDERING ONESELF' AND ITS UTILITY IN DISORDERED EATING BEHAVIOURS- A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTON: *Ahara* plays a key role in maintenance of health. It should be consumed by every person by considering himself, as needs of every individual are different and which are according to his unique individual characteristics. **Aim And Objectives:** The objective of this study is to throw light on the fundamental idea given in Ayurvedic classic text about 'eating by considering oneself' and its utility in present era in maintenance of health and in Disordered Eating Behaviours. **Materials And Methods:** This is a conceptual study based on elaboration and interpretation of references gathered from the classic Ayurvedic texts, research journals, and standard textbooks. **Discussion:** Examination of oneself for hunger, satiety, signs of previous meal digestion and other such things helps a person to choose a well fitted personalised diet for himself on everyday basis. All these things should be considered while taking every meal which takes a certain amount of conscious attention that is mindfulness. This mindful and conscious attentiveness helps a person to not slip into unmindful, uncontrolled eating patterns. **Conclusion:** Eating by considering oneself is a way to maintain health and healthy eating behaviours and in turn help to cope with Disordered Eating Behaviours.

Key Words: *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*, Intuitive Eating.

INTRODUCTION: Ayurveda has placed great emphasis on *Ahara* (Food) for maintenance of health. It is seen admired at many instances in classic Ayurvedic texts. Ayurveda considers it as one of the three sub pillars of health. Health is not just dependent on food substances (*Ahara*) but also on the way the food is eaten (*Ahara Vidhi*) as said by *Kashyapa*¹. Hence Ayurveda has given great importance to the way food is consumed as it impacts the health.

Ayurveda considers every person as unique individual with its own unique *Prakriti* (Body constitution), *Vikriti* (Morbidity), *Sara* (Tissue excellence),

Samhanan (Body bulk), *Pramana* (Physical calibre), *Satmya* (Food and activities accustomed to), *Satva* (Mental strength), *Aaharashakti* (Food Ingestion and digestion capacity), *Vyayamshakti* (Physical strength to endure heavy work), and *Vaya* (Age)². All these characteristics changes from person to person. Ayurveda considers examining every person for all their individual characteristics. Hence the treatment in Ayurveda changes from person to person even when having similar kind of disease conditions. This approach is called *Pratipurusha Siddhanta*³ that is treating every individual uniquely. As the characteristics and needs of every person

are different; so are the dietary needs and conditions, which can be determined by every person by speculating himself. Eating by considering oneself is the way to maintain health.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES: The objective of this study is to throw light on the fundamental idea given in Ayurvedic classic text about 'eating by considering oneself' and its utility in present era in maintenance of health and in Disordered Eating Behaviours.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This is a conceptual study based on elaboration and interpretation of references gathered from the classic Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtang Hridaya* and *Ashtang Sangraha* and other standard textbooks along with research articles on Intuitive eating, mindful eating and disordered eating behaviours. The correlation of these references with observations of modern dietary practices, in relation to their utility in maintenance of health and in Disordered Eating Behaviours has been done. The data has been presented in a summarised form.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In Ayurvedic classics like *Charaka Samhita*, 'Aahar Vidhi Vidhana'⁴ are mentioned, these are the scientific considerations with which the food should be consumed. These are 10 indications which should be considered and followed while eating. They are as below:

- 1) *Ushnam*: The food should be warm while eating.
- 2) *Snigdham*: The food should contain some amount of oil or ghee.
- 3) *Matravat*: The food should be eaten in a proper quantity.
- 4) *Jirne*: The food should be eaten only when the previous meal is digested.

5) *Virya-aviruddham*: The food substances and ingredients should be compatible to each other to be eaten together.

6) *Ishtadeshe-Ishtasarvopkaranam*: The food should be eaten at proper place with all the required utensils.

7) *Natidrutam-Nativilambitam*: The food should be eaten without haste or being too slow.

8) *Ajalpan-Ahasan*: The food should be eaten in silence without much talking and laughing.

9) *Tanmana*: The food should be eaten with full concentration on food.

10) *Aatmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak*: The food should be eaten by considering one's own self.

Out of all these indications, the present study focuses on 'Aatamanam Abhisameekshya Samyak'⁴ aspect of *Ahara Vidhi Vidhana* along with cross references related to this aspect.

***Aatmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak Bhunjit*:**

As Ayurveda deals with every individual uniquely (*Pratipurusha Siddhanta*), this tailor-made approach is also seen in deciding diet for an individual. As dietary requirements and dietary considerations are unique to an individual, which are in accordance to his body and mind. The person should decide them by thoroughly considering and examining himself.

Etymology:

The word 'Aatmanam' is derived from Sanskrit word 'Atman'. Atman means Breath, while it has multiple meanings when used in different contexts. Some of its meanings are: Soul, The individual soul, Self, Oneself, Supreme soul, Brahma, Nature, The person, and Whole body.⁵

The word 'Abhisameekshya' is derived from union of root 'sameeksh' with prefix

'abhi-' and suffix '-lyap'.(*Abhi* + *Sameeksh* + *Lyap* = *Abhisameekshya*)⁶

The meaning of root 'sameeksh' is to investigate or to examine or to consider.⁷

The prefix 'abhi' means, To or From or Greatly or Excessively.⁸ The suffix 'lyap' is used in past tense sense which means 'after doing something.'⁶ By combining all, the meaning of *Abhisameekshya* is 'By examining to or by examining greatly'.

The word 'Samyak' is derived from adjective 'samyach' which means, Correct, True, Accurate, Right, Fit, Proper. Hence the literal meaning of *Samyak* is Rightly, Correctly or Truly.⁹

After combining all these terms the literal meaning of 'Atmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak' is , 'By thoroughly and accurately examining our own body' that is to say, 'One should eat

after considering and examining himself accurately and thoroughly.'

Thoughts of various Acharyas and Commentators on Atmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak Bhunjit:

In *Ashtavidha Aharvidhi Visheshaytanani*, Charaka has mentioned about choosing the diet according to the person, who is about to consume it (*Upyokta*).¹⁰ This means the same, that eating by considering oneself. There are other references also seen regarding 'Atmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak Bhunjit' in other classic Ayurvedic texts and in their commentaries. When all the references collected from all the possible classic texts and commentaries the following views are gathered, which are summarised in the table given below:

Table No. 1: References and cross references on Atmanam Abhisameekshya Samyak Bhunjit

References and Cross references	Classic texts/Commentators	Views
<i>Atmanam abhisameekshya samyak bhunjit</i>	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Atmasatmya-asatmya</i> ⁴
	<i>Ashtang Sangraha</i>	<i>Satmya-Asatmya</i> ¹¹
	<i>Chakrapani</i>	<i>Okasatmya, Pratipurusha-Satmya-Asatmya</i> ⁴
	<i>Gangadhar</i>	<i>Sthooldehasya-Sharirsatmya-Satvasatmya-Atmanaam-Aatmasatmya-Swasatmya</i> ¹²
	<i>Arundatta</i>	<i>Satmya-Asatmya</i> ¹³
	<i>Hemadri</i>	<i>Prakriti</i> ¹³
	<i>Indu</i>	<i>Satmya-Asatmya</i> ¹⁴
<i>Upyokta</i>	<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Okasatmya</i> ¹⁰
	<i>Chakrapani</i>	<i>Bhoktrupurusha-Sbhyassatmya, Pathya-Apathya</i> ¹⁰

By combining all these views together it can be collectively concluded as, 'eating by considering oneself' is by taking into account all the following things:

Pratipurusha-Sharir-Satva--Satmya-Asatmya, Okasatmya, Prakriti, Pathya and Apathya. As given below in Fig.1.

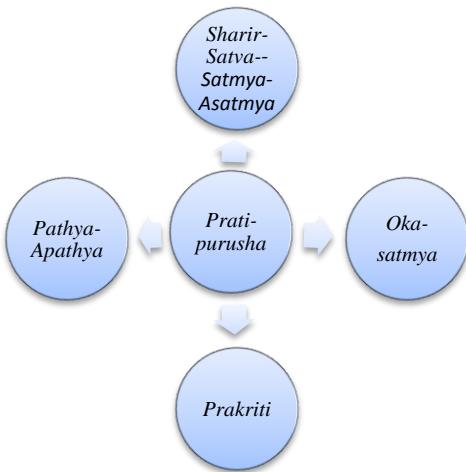


Figure 1: Pratiurusha Sameekshya Bhavas

1) Pratipurusha-Sharir-Satva-Satmya-Asatmya:

Whatever that is wholesome or suitable to one is called *Satmya* (suitability).¹⁵ *Upshaya* is synonymous with *Satmya*. Anything that brings comfort is *Satmya* to that person.¹⁶ And anything that is unwholesome or unsuitable to one is called *Asatmya* (unsuitability).¹⁷

Satmya is of various types, according to the *Rasas* it is of three types: Superior, Inferior and Average. When one is accustomed to use of all *Rasas* then it is Superior type of *Satmya*. When one is accustomed to only one rasa then it is inferior type of *Satmya* and when one accustomed to more than one but not all the *Rasas* then it is of average *Satmya*¹⁵. *Satmya* is again of two types *Samudaya Satmya* and *Avayava Satmya*. When a substance is suitable to whole body tissues it is said to be *Samudaya Satmya* and a certain item of food is particularly suitable to specific body tissue or organ it is said to be *Avayava Satmya* e.g *Keshya Dravyas* are suitable to hair, *Chakshushya Dravya* are suitable to eyes.¹⁶ There are other types of *Satmya* are mentioned in classic texts these are, *Deshasatmya* (Suitability of food substances in a particular habitat or geographical area), *Kalasatmya*

Fig.1. Pratipurusha Sameekshya Bhavas (Things to be considered individually)

- 1) *Pratipurusha-Sharir-Satva-Satmya-Asatmya*
- 2) *Pratipurusha-Okasatmya*
- 3) *Pratipurusha-Prakriti*
- 4) *Pratipurusha-Pathya-Apathya*

(Suitability of food substances at a particular time), *Vyadhisatmya* (Suitability of food substances to the disease state) *Prakritisatmya* (Suitability of food substances according to body constitution), *Swabhavsatmya* (Food substances suitable to all because of their own nature), *Abhyasasatmya* (Acquired suitability to food substances by practice), *Ritusatmya* (Suitability of food substances in a particular season), *Vayasatmya* (Suitability of food substances for a particular age), *Doshasatmya*¹⁸ (Suitability of food substances according to current status of *Doshas* (Three Humors) in the body) etc.

Deshasatmya: *Deshasatmya* considers adaption of person for a particular geographic area in which he resides in. The *Ahara* having opposite qualities as those of *Desha* is important for maintenance of health of that individual.¹⁹ Individual living in a particular geographical area get adapted with prevalent diet patterns in that area.

Vyadhisatmya: The food substances having opposite qualities that of the disease are suitable to be taken in that disease condition.¹⁹ some food substances are suitable to eat in that particular disease condition like, Milk in *Gulma*, Ghee in

Udavarta, Honey in *Prameha*,¹⁶ *Yavagu* in *Jwara*, *Takra* in *Arsha* and *Grahani* etc.

Swabhavasatmya: Some food substances are suitable by their own nature like cow milk and ghee are suitable for everyone etc.

Ritusatmya/ Kalasatmya: According to seasonal changes suitability of food substances changes. Like *Ushna dravyas* are *Satmya* in winter and *Sheeta dravyas* in summer and autumn etc.

Vayasatmya: According to the age suitability of food substances changes like breast milk is suitable to infants, milk and other food substances are suitable to the person afterwards.

Doshasatmya: According to the vitiated *Doshas* food suitability changes like ghee is suitable in *Vata* and *Pitta* vitiation, Honey is suitable in *Kapha* and *Pitta* vitiation, oil is suitable for *Vata* and *Kapha* vitiation²⁰ etc. Food substances having opposite qualities as that of *Doshas* are suitable to that *Dosha*.

Satvasatmya: *Ahara* not only nurtures the body but also nurtures *Manas* (*satva*). The definition of *Pathya* not just includes physical benefits of *Pathya* but also says that which is also delightful to mind.²¹ According to *Chhaandogyopanishada* a subtle part of ingested *Ahara* nurtures the *Manas*. Therefore, the kind of *Ahara* we take impacts the *satva*.²² According to *Bhagavad Geeta* a person likes diet according to his predisposition of dominant *Manasika prakriti*.²³ Which in term can also be said that this type of diet maintains such type of *Prakriti* of *Manas* of that person. *Ahara* which is *Satmya* to *Satva* is the one which is delightful to mind also which increases the *Satvic Guna* of mind.

2) Pratipurusha-Okasatmya:

Okasatmya is habituation acquired by practice of certain food substances. It is also called as *Abhyasasatmya*. The food item might or might not be beneficial for the health of the individual but with repeated practice he gets adapted to it without showing any particular harmful side effects.¹⁰

3) Pratipurusha-Prakriti:

Prakriti Satmya refers to suitability of food substances according to body constitution of that particular individual like food which is sweet, sour, and salty, containing fats is suitable to person of *Vata Prakriti*, food which is sweet, bitter, astringent is suitable to person with *Pitta Prakriti* etc.

4) Pratipurusha-Pathya-Apathya:

The word *Pathya* is derived from word 'Path' whose literal meaning is Channel or way or path. Anything that is beneficial to channels i.e. systems or organs of our body and is delightful to our mind is called *Pathya* and anything contradictory to this is said to be *Apathya*. The *Pathya* nature of a substance is dependent on its *Matra* (quantity), *Kala* (Time), *Kriya* (how it is prepared), *Bhoomi* (where it is grown), *Deha* (to whom it is advised), *Dosha* (in which *Dosha* it is advised) etc.²¹

A person should always think about all these things before deciding diet for himself. And examine himself for whether the food is suitable (*Satmya*) and well-practised food (*Okasatmya*) for him, whether it is suitable to his body constitution (*Prakriti*), whether it is beneficial to his body and delightful to his mind (*Pathya*).

DISCUSSION: Eating by considering oneself is not only limited to *Pathya-Apathya*, *Satmya-Asatmya*. There are many references and cross references seen in

classic Ayurvedic texts and in their respective commentaries showing many instances about examining and observing our bodies before, during and after eating. Our bodies should be examined for following things for having a healthy eating ritual.

**Extended aspect of Atmanam
Abhisameekshya Samyak Bhunjit:**

1) Eating by following *Bubhuksha*²⁴ (Hunger cues):

Kashyapa says the right time to eat is when hunger arises, that is one should always eat only when he feels hungry.

2) Eating by considering *Jirna Lakshanas* (Signs of digestion of previous meal):

One should always eat when the previous meal is digested and assimilated well. When there is clean belching, proper evacuation of bowel and urine, body and stomach feel light, the person feels cheerful, when he gets desire to eat along with hunger sensation arises then it is considered that the previous meal is digested well. One should eat only when all these *Lakshanas* arise.²⁵⁻³⁰ But if all these *Lakshanas* do not appear and there is heaviness in body and stomach, along with water brash, lack of joy, drowsiness and restlessness then it is considered as *Ajirna*.³¹ The previous meal is not digested well and one should not eat in this condition. Therefore one should always examine himself for these *Lakshanas* while deciding to eat.

3) Eating after ruling out *Dushta Bubhuksha* (False/Fake hunger):

Dushta bubhuksha is the false hunger arises in *Ajirnavastha* or *Amavastha* as stated by *Vaghbata* and *Sushruta*. The hunger sensation is devoid of other *Jirnavastha Lakshanas* and shows *Ajirnavastha Lakshanas*. One should not

eat in *Dushta Bubhuksha* as it is harmful to body.^{32,33}

4) Eating by considering *Agni* (Digestive power/fire):

One should always think about his *Agni* (digestive fire) while eating. *Agni* changes with age, with seasons, with healthy and disease state. It also depends on the digestion of previous meal, type of food items taken previously, pattern of eating etc., in short it changes constantly. Hence one should consider his *Agni* while eating.³⁴

5) Eating by considering *Matra* (Quantity):

One should always eat in a proper quantity. The quantity is dependent on *Agni*, on nature of food substances and also on the fulfilment cues given by one's body. One should always eat until his stomach feels to be filled up to two or three parts of total capacity, leaving one part always empty for the proper functioning of *Doshas* during digestion.^{34,35,36}

By combining all these together, it can be put forth that to follow a healthy eating ritual one should always examine his body for following things before, during and after eating:

- 1) Am I hungry?
- 2) Has the previous meal digested and assimilated well?
- 3) Is this real hunger or false hunger?
- 4) How is my digestive fire today?
- 5) Is this suitable for my body and mind?
- 6) Is this beneficial for my body and mind?
- 7) Is this food suitable for my body constitution?
- 8) Is this well-practiced food for me?
- 9) Is this in proper quantity for me?

This type of examination helps a person to choose a well fitted personalised diet for

himself on everyday basis. All these things should be considered while taking every meal which takes a certain amount of conscious attention that is mindfulness. This mindful, conscious attentiveness helps a person to not slip into unmindful, uncontrolled eating patterns. The techniques of 'Mindful eating' and eating by following hunger, satiety and fullness cues which often referred to as 'Intuitive eating' are now used by modern dietetics to manage disordered eating behaviours and certain eating disorders.

Eating disorders are defined by persistent disturbed eating behaviours that result in altered consumption of food and physical or psychological dysfunction. Disordered eating behaviours are conditions which do not meet criteria for an eating disorder but are certain forms of abnormal patterns of eating behaviours like, binge eating, restraint, emotional eating, strict dieting, and controlling body weight and shape through inappropriate compensatory behaviours. Disordered eating behaviours are all risk factors for eating disorders.³⁷

In many studies Intuitive eating is found negatively associated with disordered eating and eating disorder symptomatology and positively associated with psychological wellbeing.³⁸⁻⁴¹ Mindful eating is found to enable person to become more aware of their internal states of hunger and satiety cues and has shown efficacy in reducing the frequency and intensity of binge eating symptoms, and has also shown efficacy in reducing emotional eating , external eating(Eating according to external cues like presence of food, food packaging etc) and cravings.^{42,43} In one of the studies it is found that even in the absence of particular

training, mindful eating can encourage healthier eating practices⁴⁴. And by paying attention to cues given by our body for hunger, satiety, fullness, digestion, evacuation of bowels, lightness in stomach etc. one cannot get into any kind of unhealthy pattern of eating. The person needs to be conscious about what body is signalling and need to follow those signs, which definitely leads to eating in a healthy way and curb the disordered eating behaviours.

Limitations and further scope of the study:

This study is limited to which things should be taken into account when considering our body while eating. It does not deal with how to examine those things. There is further scope for study in order to throw light on how to examine our body for these things.

CONCLUSION:

Every person is unique individual with unique characteristics and needs, therefore the type of diet considerations are not one size fits for all. The consideration changes with every individual which are according to himself. One should always decide them by speculate himself before, during and after every meal. The person should always speculate himself for: 1) Hunger cues, 2) Whether it is fake hunger or real hunger, 3) Satiety and fullness cues, 4) His digestive fire, 5) Signs of digestion of previous meal, 6) Any other symptoms of indigestion 7) Signs of proper evacuation of bowel and urine, 8) Lightness of body and stomach after digestion, 9) Whether the food is suitable to his body and mind according to the region, season, disease condition, age and *doshas*, 10) Whether the food is beneficial to his body and mind, 11) whether the food is suitable to

his body constitution, 12) Whether the food is well practiced by him. 13) Whether the food is in right quantity for him. After considering oneself for these entire things one cannot indulge in any kind of unhealthy eating patterns. Eating by considering oneself is a way to maintain health and healthy eating behaviours and in turn curb the disordered eating behaviours.

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