

HEALTH THROUGH AYURVEDA AAHAR  
AAHAR: CLASSICAL INDICATIONS WITH MODERN APPROACH

By

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Aahar is basic need of all living individuals. Animals and plants both need food for survival as all vital activities need energy which comes through the Aahar in simple words called food. In case of plants they can prepare their food by their own process with the help of sun light but in animals they are dependent because they don't have capacity as plants have. Human beings are also part of animal kingdom, but they are more evolved in terms of intellect so on one hand all animals eat raw food material whether herbivorous or carnivorous ,on the other hand human evolution reveals the fact that we have always been curious to develop taste and make our food more acceptable in terms of palatability, energy value, keeping comfort or storage for long duration.

In above context it is also relevant that **“What does aahar really mean?”**

**Whatever is taken through mouth is Aahar or which provides essential components for living healthy life is Aahar ?**

If we observe our body structure there are two pipes in the middle ; one to intake food we eat i.e. food pipe or esophagus and other is for respiration that carries air to lungs i.e. wind pipe or trachea. In all combustion engines there are two pipes ;one for fuel and other channel to burn it in order to produce energy, so it can be assumed that in our body too a combustion engine is functional all the time. Now it is essential that one should know;

- a) What type of food or fuel should be taken,
- b) in which quantity it should be taken because we don't have over flow process as in fuel tanks ,if our intake is more than requirement that gets accumulated in other parts of body and may be harmful.
- c) How can we keep our fuel combustion process adequate that is call *agni* in ayurvedic terms.
- d) What should be composition and ratio of food that can be broken easily to provide energy.

All these issues are kept in mind in Ayurvedic classics to provide an ideal food regimen for human beings.

Before discussing Aahar one should analyze his or her own personal profile on following parameters.

## **Individual bio parameters for evaluating food ( Aahar) requirement**

- 1- Age and gender
- 2- Body weight and height
- 3- Level of body activities ( sedentary, semi sedentary, mobile, highly mobile , rigorous)
- 4- Level of mental stress ( stress level almost ignorable, mild, moderate, severe)
- 5- Sleep ( you awake fully fresh state of mind , mild disturb sleep, moderate or severe distressed sleep )
- 6- Addictions like (tobacco, smoking, liquor )
- 7- Desire to eat ( normal on time with desire, eat on time without proper desire, irregular eating habits)
- 8- Bowel habits ( normal, disturbed, constipated, unsatisfactory with multi episodic nature)
- 9- Disease suffering or not suffering from disease but have heredity pattern)

There are other parameters of self evaluation too but these are chief ones. Except gender all other are important in selection of quantity and quality of food.

**Neuropsychiatric status :** It is essential that psychological state of an individual plays key role in food intake as well as in it's utilization . It is described in Ayurvedic classics but now it is termed as neuropsychiatric profile in dietary habits, because it is essential that food intake is of less worth when an individual is under stress. Food is not only meant for fulfilling appetite or to take as a compulsion without natural desire. The digestive juices get signals from brain to secrete and initiate digestion.

That is the reason in traditional practices “ Shanti Mantra “ is recited before taking meal because it brings spiritual involvement that releases stress and neuropsychiatric comfort zone develops to digest the aahar.

**Quantity of food:** it is important that how much food intake we need.

**Calorie calculation:** It is revealed through various studies that in normal life style ( without rigorous work) **1 calorie per minute** is consumed. When we do some thing it is little bit increased and during sleep it is reduced.

### **General calorie consumption scale:**

In normal life style as per above description we need 1cal/ min

i.e.  $1 \times 60 = 60$  cal /hour and  $60 \times 24 = 1440$  cal /day

it is assumed that in normal life style we need about **1600 cal /day**

In mobile to rigorous life style it should be calculated maximum as 1.6 cal/min

i.e.  $1.6 \times 60 = 96$  cal /hour and  $96 \times 24 = 2304$  cal/day approx.,2300 cal /day

**Meal diversification** :Now this need should be classified as following;

50% - morning meal

30%- mid day meal

20%- late evening meal

3 hours fasting before going to bed, but 200 ml luke warm water must be taken before sleep.

A glass of water in the morning is essential because body is mildly dehydrated as we wake up due to 8 hours long fasting.

**Types of food and it's ingredients:**

A) **On biochemical basis** food contains 1- carbohydrates – calorie value 4 calorie/gram

2- Fats – calorie value 9 calorie/gram

3- Protein- 4 calorie /gram

4- Minerals

5- Vitamins- Not available in body in natural form .They are taken from outside whereas carbohydrates , fats ,proteins , minerals are also available in natural form in body.

6- Fibers – No calorie value or negligible

**B) On basis of energy providers and fillers;**

Some food ingredients are energy provider as well as filler like carbohydrates, fats , proteins but their form decides to which extent these are metabolized to provide energy and how much portion is excreted without any change ( no energy output).

There are certain food ingredients which are fillers but harmless, like fibers present in fruits. Where as junk foods are merely fillers but harmful because they contain high amount of taste developing chemicals, preservatives and also have high calorie value with less solubility in water like cheese Etc. Therefore these should be avoided.

**C) On the basis of preparation;**

a) **Properly cooked food**: That is termed as ‘ **Sanskarit aahar**’ in classics. It is best for health if taken freshly prepared with appropriate ratio of ingredients.

b) **Processed Food** : When food ingredients are mixed and processed to keep them eatable for long time with a specific taste that is processed food. It is basically for those individuals who are unable to take freshly cooked food due to certain reasons. It can be taken in unavoidable conditions ( army personals, on mission , travelling phase Etc) .Sometimes can be taken as taste changer but long term use is harmful.

c) **Fast food** : Which is instantly prepared. Now a days green tea, black coffee , organic tea, soups are fast foods but these are not energy providers. In old traditions powdered cereals dissolved in water like sattu is good fast food.

d) **Preserved food**: It is preserved for long time . It should be taken as additional food item like catchups, sauces, pickles etc but only as taste enhancer in low quantity. Though murabbas are supposed to be good preserved food items.

**Calculate your quantity and quality of food :**

As per above details an individual should decide and calculate energy required and rest requirement should be fulfilled with fiber and liquid intake ( fruits, water, skimmed milk, diluted curd )

Observe what is being eaten by you in terms of biochemical components like carbohydrates, fats , proteins, minerals and vitamins. Calculate the calorie value and your requirement as per one's life style.

High carbohydrate and fats should be avoided and appetite satiety can be achieved by long time fillers like green salads and fruits, tomato, curd preparation like raita etc.

**Deep oil frying should be strictly avoided.**

Four fruits are of high sugar value **1-mango, 2-banana, 3-grapes, 4-cheeku fruit** should be avoided . Rest all fruits can be taken without fear because they have more fibers and less **glycemic index value** so they does not increase sugar value in blood.

**Mode of eating:** It is very important and also described in Ayurvedic classics that one should not eat very fast neither very slowly, mindset should be calm and stress free for that phase at least when you are eating, and at last extend gratitude to Almighty that you are having food otherwise one would be shocked when see the global hunger index.