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IMPORTANCE OF DIET AS PER RITUS

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Abstract

India is a country in which we experience various seasons. In a year broadly we enjoy six ritus or seasons which are divided on the basis of the position of sun with respect to earth. These 6 seasons are winter, spring, summer, monsoon, autumn and late autumn / prewinter. In Ayurved these are called *Shishira*, *Vasanta*, *Greeshma*, *Varsha*, *Sharad*, *Hemanta* respectively. With every season our body is bound to face different variations of *Dosha*, *bala* (Strength) and *Agni* (digestive power). So our *Acharyas* after having deep study on effect of seasons on our body very precisely prescribed not only the *Ahara* (diet) but also *vihar* (activities) as per each & every *ritu* under the heading of *ritucharya*, where *Acharyas* have also described do's and don'ts about diet. There is a strong need to follow these regimens in order to remain healthy, especially in this era where generation has developed the habit of eating fast foods.

Change in diet with *ritus* can attain health by preserving the equilibrium of *dosha* through the concept of *samanya* and *vishesha* (similarity and peculiarity). So it is important to have knowledge and regular *observance* of suitable *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) in order to maintenance of health and prevention of diseases.

Let us have a look why it is necessary and important to change our diet according to every season.

Key Words: Ritu, Diet, Dosha, Bala, Agni, Samanya, Vishesh

HEMANT RITU:

Cold wind stimulates the *Agni* (digestive power) of healthy individuals and *Agni* is also obstructed in body by the atmospheric cold. So *Agni* becomes strong or powerful enough to digest food that is heavy in digestion and in excess quantity. If person cannot get adequate food, then this increased *Agni* (digestive power) start consuming / absorbing the seven *dhatu*s (*ras*, *rakt*, *man*, *meda*, *asthi*, *majja*, *shukra*) of body and leads towards emaciation, this condition further creates the vitiation of *Vaat Dosha*.

Deit:- As *Agni* (digestive power) is stimulated, Unctuous, Sweet, sour and salty food items should be consumed predominantly. Milk products, sugar cane products, fats and oils, new rice and warm water should be taken during *Hemant Ritu*. *laddu*, *sheera*, *bhajiya*, *sukhadi*, *kheer*, soup, fried items, alcoholic preparation etc. should be taken regularly. Hot soups, *ghee*, nuts, avocado, butter milk, olives, cheese, eggs, warm spices like ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, flax seeds, pumpkin seeds should be consumed. Meat of fatty, aquatic animals should be taken. After that one should consume *madira* and *sidhu* (the alcoholic preparation (wine) made out of uncooked materials)

Avoid factors :- One should avoid the intake of food and drinks that cause *vata* vitiation and inherently light to digest in property. Avoid cold & carbonated drinks, frozen fruits and drinks, left over from the refrigerator. Avoid to exposure of strong winds, inadequate quantities of food and diluted gruel.

SHISHIRA RITU

Hemanta and *Shishira* seasons are almost similar in characteristics. Due to the onset of *adankala* (low strength period), dryness increases and due to clouds, winds and rain, cold prevails in *Shishira ritu*. Therefore, the whole regimen advised for *hemanta* should also be followed in *shishira ritu*. In addition to that, one should specially stay in less windy and warm shelters.

Avoid factors: Food and drinks that are predominantly pungent, bitter and astringent in taste.



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Lifestyle:- In *Hemnta & Shishir ritu*, *abhyanga* (oil application), *utsadana* (anointing), *murdhni taila* (applying oil on the head), fomentation by *jentaka* (a type of fomentation / sudation) method, sunbath, spending time in hot underground, inner rooms of the house is indicated. One should always wear thick and warm clothes and the body should be anointed with thick paste of *aguru* (eagle-wood). Always wear footwear.

VASANTA RITU

Shleshma (*kapha dosha*) accumulated in *Hemanta ritu* gets liquefied by hot rays of the Sun in *Vasanta ritu*, which in turn disturbs / decreases the digestive power and ultimately causes many diseases.

Deit:- As *agni* is weak one should take food which is easily digestible, preparation of old barley and wheat. One should drink clean alcoholic drinks like *sidhu* and *madhvik* (types of wine preparations) in *Vasanta*. Honey should be taken predominantly to normalize the vitiation of *Kapha*. Drink water processed with ginger, *Nagarmotha*, honey etc. ingredients which stimulate the *Agni* and pacify the excess *Kapha Dosha*.

Avoid factors:- One should avoid heavy to digest, cold, sour, unctuous and sweet food items like newly harvested rice, wheat, milk products. One should not sleep during the daytime.

Lifestyle :- As *Kapha Dosha* is aggravated in *vasanta ritu*, *vaman* (therapeutic emesis), *nasya* etc. purification procedures should be done. At the advent of spring, when flowers blossom one should regularly resort to physical exercise, dry massage, medicated smoking, gargling, and collyrium which pacify the aggravated *Kapha Dosha*. Always use lukewarm water for Bathing and cleaning of excretory orifices. A person should apply the paste of *Chandana* and *Agaru* (Eagle-wood) on the body and enjoy the youthfulness of gardens.

GRISHMA RITU

In *grishma ritu* (summer season), the Sun, by its rays, excessively dries up the environment. In this season *agni* (digestive power) is hampered so light foods which are easily digestible should be taken regularly.

Diet:- Sweet, cold, liquid and unctuous qualities food and drinks are considered as wholesome. One should take cold and sweet *mantha* (a type of liquid diet like *sakttu* made from roasted barley or gram with cold water), *ghee* and milk with *shali* rice. Take corn flour mixed with cold water and sugar. Boiled rice, which is white in color, should be eaten along with meat of desert animals. One should use cool water kept in mud pot along with *karpura* (camphor) for drinking. One should take plenty of fruit juices and juicy fruits. Buffalo milk mixed with sugar and cooled by moonlight and stars should be used for drinking.

Avoid factors:- One should consume alcoholic beverages in little quantities or should not be consumed at all. If taken, should be diluted with plenty of water. One should not consume salty, sour, pungent and hot food. Physical exercise should be avoided.

Lifestyle- One should sleep in a cool shelter during daytime. During night one should apply the paste of *chandana* on the body and then sleep in the airy roof / terrace of the house which is cooled by the Moon-rays. In summer, one should enjoy the coolness of gardens, cold water and flowers, wearing garlands, wearing of very light and thin dress.

VARSHA RITU

Due to *adankal*, due to evaporating vapors from the earth, rainfall and acidic transformation of water, the *Agni* (digestive power) is weakened, thus leading to the further vitiation of *vata* and other *Dosha* in *Varsha ritu*.

Diet:- In rainy season, diet and lifestyle which balance all three *doshas* should be adopted as all three *doshas* are vitiated. When the days are cooler due to wind and rain, one should take mainly sour, salty and unctuous food to alleviate *vata*. A



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person should consume easily digestible food which is prepared from old barley, wheat and *Shali* rice along with meat of wild animals and processed soup as per digestive capacity. All the food preparations should be processed with carminative drugs like cumin seeds, *panchakola* (Five drugs *Pippali*, *Pippali mula*, *Chavya*, *Chitraka* and *saunth*) etc. Whenever *madhvik* or other fermented liquors and water are consumed, they should be mixed with a little amount of honey. Always use boiled water for drinking. One should use food and drinks mostly added with honey in small quantity to pacify the *kleda* (moisture) of rainy season.

Avoid factors:- One should avoid diluted *mantha* (excess liquid diet), sleeping during the day, and exposure to dew, river water, physical exercise, sun rays.

Lifestyle:- In the rainy season, one should practice *pragharsha* (friction massage), *udavartana* (dry massage), *snana* (bath), use of fragrance, garlands, wearing light and clean clothes and should reside in the place which is free from humidity. Always wear fumigated clothes. One should do purification procedures mainly *asthapana basti* (dry enema) to normalize *Vata Dosha*.

SHARAD RITU

Body is habituated to cold and rain in *Varsha ritu*. Suddenly due to the heat of sun-rays in the *Sharad* (autumn) season, the accumulated *pitta dosha* in the body often gets aggravated.

Diet: In this season food and drinks predominantly of sweet, light, cold and slightly bitter qualities and having *Pitta* alleviating properties should be taken in proper quantity. One should eat only when there is good appetite. One should eat preparation of old barley, wheat, green gram. In *Sharad*, whenever the rain clouds disappear, the intake of *tikta ghee* (ghee medicated with bitter items), use of purgatives are indicated.

As per Ayurved in *sharad ritu* water naturally heated with sunrays during daytime and cooled with moon rays during night is well purified and detoxified by the course of time and effects of *Agastya* (the star Canopus) is called *Hansodak*. It is clean and clear. This water is beneficial as nectar when used for the purpose of bathing and drinking.

Lifestyle:- In *sharad ritu*, garlands of seasonal flowers, clean clothes (apparels), and exposure to moon-rays in early nights are very beneficial. Avoid factors Exposure to Sun and dew, intake of muscle fats and oils, meat of aquatic and marshy animals, alkaline preparations and curd are contraindicated in *sharad ritu*. One should not sleep during daytime and restrict exposure to easterly wind.

CONCEPT OF RITUSANDHI

Ahara in ritu sandhi is as important as *ahara* as per *ritu*. The last seven days of preceding *ritu* and first seven days of following *ritu* are together known as *Ritusandhi*. During this period the regimen of the previous season should be discontinued gradually and those of the succeeding season adopted slowly. Particular *padanshika krama* (sequential regimen) has to be adopted i.e. Unhealthy things which one has become accustomed should be discontinued gradually and healthy things should be adopted gradually with intervals of one, two or three days. On the other hand, if they are discontinued or adopted suddenly, diseases due to unaccustomed foods and activities develop. It is a significant advice, as the changeover of external environment from one season to other is very rapid, but our endogenous system needs some time for smooth change over.

Ayurveda is a science of life it emphasis on preventive aspects. *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) is a preventive aspect. In every season *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha dosha* are in different state, as changes in nature also affect the body, *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) is designed as per the changes in *dosha*, *bala* and *agni* (digestive power) of body as per season.



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CONCLUSION

In *shishira* and *hemant* season *agni* (digestive power) is strong so heavy food can not hamper the health. *Kapha dosha* is provoked during *vasanta ritu* and *agni* is weak so in this season *kapha* reducing diet and therapy are advised by our ancient *rishis*. In *grishma ritu* *agni* is weak and strength is minimum, so *madhur* and liquid diet is suitable. *Varsha ritu* is more prone for disease origin because all 3 *doshas* are vitiated during this season. *Sharad ritu* is predominated by *pitta dosha* so in this period *pitta* reducing diet and therapy are advised. So there is a great impact of *ritucharya* in individual health. *Acharya Charak* also said that by adopting seasonal regimen one can get good health, strength, complexion and long life. *Ritucharya* is advisable for healthy person. Modification in *ritucharya* is required in disease condition. Following *ritucharya* one should also keep in mind the *Prakruti* of an individual (constitution of body according to *Dosha*). These 6 ritus find only in India so for other places as per characteristic features of atmosphere one can decide about particular season.

In today's era we saw the effects of global warming on seasons also. One can identify the particular season by its characteristics not depending on months. In disease condition application of *ritucharya* depends on patient's condition. Diet and lifestyle which are followed according to season maintain healthy status and also improve immunity of individual. Adoption of *ritucharya* is most important for fulfilling the aim of Ayurveda i.e. maintenance of health and prevention from diseases.

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