

GUEST EDITORIAL



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Ayurvedic Aristology: Dining Etiquette in Ayurveda

“Food is the vital breath of living beings.”

—*Charaka Samhita*, Sutra Sthanam XXVII:349.

While nutrition and diet are an integral part of both Ayurvedic and modern medicine, Ayurveda pays equal attention to culinary etiquette, or *ahara vidhi vidhana*. Food is considered the ultimate medicine, or *Mahabhaishajya*. Just as the route and method of administration of a drug is as important as determining the correct nature and dose of a drug, dining etiquette is an important as food itself. Table 1 summarizes the teachings of Ayurveda in this regard.^{1,2}

Table 1. Ayurvedic Aristology

Meal preparation

- Consume warm food
- Consume unctuous food

Meal pattern and portion size

- Consume food in proper quantity
- Consume food only after previous meal has been digested

Medical aspects

- Consume food that is not contraindicated in medical illness
- Consume food in comfortable ambience and atmosphere, using preferred accessories

Manners and social grace

- Do not consume food too fast or too slowly
- Do not speak or laugh while eating

Mindful eating

- Consume food after due consideration of one's needs

In this editorial, we discuss aristology, or the art and science of dining, from an Ayurvedic perspective.

MEAL PREPARATION, PORTION SIZE AND PATTERN

Consuming warm food (*ushnam bhunjita*) is a cardinal rule of Ayurveda. People are cautioned against consuming very hot, cold as well as reheated food. At the same time, patients with severe *pittaja* diseases, exhaustion or internal hemorrhage should be administered medicated cold infusion (*shadanga paniya*) if they have fever.

Consuming food that is unctuous (*snigdham bhunjita*) is advised, as it is easily digested and contributes to growth, strength and complexion. This guidance is not meant for persons with *kaphaja* diseases such as obesity, dyslipidemia (*meda dhatu* related disorders), diabetes (*prameha*) and ascites (*udara*), as high fat meals may aggravate their condition.

Consuming food in proper quantity (*maatratvat bhunjita*) is necessary to achieve health and longevity. As mentioned in Sutra Sthanam, *Charaka Samhita*, heavy foods should be consumed till half satiety, and intake of lighter foods should not exceed satiety levels. It is suggested that food intake should be according to the level of one's digestive fire, and should fill just half or one third of the stomach's capacity.

Consuming food after digestion of previously consumed food (*jirne bhunjita*) is another pillar of Ayurvedic culinary medicine. One should not take a meal until the previous meal has been digested. While healthy persons may manage with a 2-meal pattern (morning and

evening), other may need 3 hourly meals. Another person-centered way of understanding this advice is to take food only when one is hungry.

Consuming food that is not contraindicated (*virya virudham bhunjita*) is a reminder that foods which are incompatible with, or contraindicated in, particular disease states, should not be taken. Similarly, some foods may become incompatible of combined, e.g., a substance with *sheet virya* (cold potency) cannot be clubbed with one that has *ushna virya* (hot potency).

DINING STYLE, SPEED AND SOCIAL GRACE

Dining etiquette or aristology, finds prominent mention in Ayurveda. Consuming foods in places that are pleasant to mind, and with required cookery (*ishte deshe ishta sarvopaka bhunjita*) is an Ayurvedic injunction. One should dine in a comfortable ambience, using preferred accessories (crocker and cutlery). One must not eat in unsheltered places, on one's bed, under hot sunlight or in a dark place, and should not use broken or soiled utensils.

Neither consuming food too fast (*naatidrutam bhunjita*) nor too slowly (*naativilambitam bhunjita*) is recommended in Ayurveda. Not speaking or laughing while eating (*ajalpan ahasan tanmana bhunjita*) is suggested as well. These timeless concepts have been given the modern label of mindful eating.

ALCOHOL USAGE

This etiquette extends to the use of alcohol or wine as well. Chapter XXIV of the Chikitsa Sthanam, *Charaka Samhita* describes drinking etiquette in depth and detail.³ It suggests that one drinks only if one is "pure and perfumed, sitting or reclining comfortably, using clean vessels and attended by trained bartenders". Pre-drinking preparation is based upon the predominant dosha of the individual: massage, bath and unctuous hot food for *vaatik*, cooling regimens and sweet, unctuous cold food for *pittaja*; and hot regimens, barley, wheat and meat seasoned with black peeper for *kaphaja* individuals. "Suitable fruits, wholesome green vegetables, salted and seasoned seasonal food items; various roasted meat" preparations are recommended for consumption with wine.

Chikitsa Sthanam describes how to identify satvik, rajsik and tamsik drinking companions, and how to bond with

suitable friends. Ayurveda reminds us that wine is like nectar if taken in moderation, with wholesome food, according to individual disposition, but can act like poison if taken in an unwholesome manner. It describes the stepwise progression of *mada* (intoxication), and explains how to manage it. With insight and intuition, it suggests that just like rain stimulates the growth of crops, so does wine stimulate men. And just as fire exposes the nature of gold, whether superior, average or inferior, so does alcohol expose the nature of men.

PERSON-CENTERED DIET

A phrase that is thought to have been created by modern medicine, person-centered care,⁴ actually finds mention in ancient South Asian medicine.⁵ *Charaka Samhita* describes the Quadruple of Atreya, and expounds upon individualized, person-centered dietary therapy. Here, it is prescribed that one must consume food after due consideration of self (*aatmanam abhisameekshija samyak bhunjita*). Ayurveda shares the basic rules of dining and dieting, and then clarifies that autognosis or self-diagnosis, and self-awareness and self-consideration are important contributors to choose of eating styles and patterns. Food should be consumed after an assessment of one's needs and requirements. One should not follow any rules blindly, without understanding their necessity and relevance in one's own context.

"One taking wholesome food, with controlled self, lives healthy for 100 years, and is liked by the good men."

—*Charaka Samhita*, Sutra Sthanam XXVII:348.

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