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Understanding food incompatibility according to Ayurveda

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Abstract

As per Ayurveda principles *tri-upstambh* plays a significant role in physical social and mental wellbeing of a human being. First *upstambh* i.e. *ahara* plays a very basic and important role out of three. Its importance has increased more into today's era due to tremendous change in food and life style. Use of food preservatives, adulteration, food processing, use of artificial food substances and new combinations of food has spoiled our generation and made our body system weak and hollow. There is no other way out, so world is looking towards age old science Ayurveda which can help us to save ourselves. Ayurveda talks about *aahar*

vidhi, aahar vishesh aytanam. Ayurveda experts have given detailed description about *Viruddha Aahar* and described its 18 types with examples in *samhitas*. There is need to go through it and understands its basic importance and its utility in today's era to prevent our self from unwanted autoimmune, chronic untreatable diseases. This article entitled Understanding food incompatibility according to Ayurveda principles is just the first step in this direction. *Viruddha aahar* acts as a slow poison vitiating all *sapta dhatus* and leading to major health problems and even genetic changes.

Keywords: *Ahara, Viruddha Ahara, Viruddha Anna, Food Incompatibility, Trophology*

Introduction

Ayurveda has given prime importance to *Ahara* (diet) amongst three sub- pillars of life. Diet should be wholesome as well as in accordance with *Desh, Kala, Prakriti*, and *Vayah*. Right diet and regimen are essential components of our right lifestyle. In Ayurveda food is considered as the fuel for the maintenance of *Agni*. If used in right manner it helps to increase *Bala, Varna & Oja* of an individual. If not used properly according to Ayurveda principles my lead to short term and long term poisonous effects^[1].

Description on *Viruddh Ahara*^[2] is a unique contribution from Ayurveda. *Acharyas* have explained in detail that person who consumes *Viruddha Ahara* is prone to dis-balance of *dosha* leading to many disorders^[3]. It is amply clear that certain diet and its combinations interrupts the metabolism of tissue, which inhibits the process of formation of tissue and have the opposite property to the tissue, due to that action of such food, it is called *Viruddha Anna* or antagonistic diet. *Charakacharya, Chakrapani* and *Gangadhara* have explained this unique concept of *Viruddha* in detail. They have described total 18 types with proper examples of food products and food to food interactions, which should be used by layman in day to day life^[4]. They have stated that *Viruddha Anna*, plays a major role in causation of several types of diseases. The food materials opposite in combination can lead to inappropriate processing, consumed in wrong dosage, and/or consumed at improper time of the day and in inappropriate climatic conditions can lead to *Viruddha Ahara*. With advancement of modern technology and biochemistry, it becomes easy to elaborate the effect of *Viruddha Ahara*. Food–food interaction is a serious issue, requiring much attention to prevent the health, from its possible chronic harmful effects on our body organs. Despite of the fact that many of these food–food interactions are harmless at the spot, but it is always better to know about its long term adverse effects. In present scenario, the increasing complexity of modern industrial society and the wide ranging nature of the International food trade, has increased the risk of contamination of food by chemical and biological agents. These agents' changes *Veerya, Guna, Rasa* and *Swabhava* of that food item which in turn leads to incompatibility i.e (*Viruddha Aahara*). Therefore there is need to explore the concept of *Viruddha Aahara* with proper understanding of their types, their role in disease pathogenesis and line of treatment in present era.

This concept of *Viruddha Aahara* is similar to the concept of Agonist-Antagonist. The substance that acts like another substance and therefore stimulates an action is called as Agonist. So the use of the Antagonist to can be implemented as treatment, after thorough research, studying food interactions and incompatible diet.

Conceptual review of literature

18 types of *Viruddha ahara* as mentioned in classics [4]

1. **Desh Viruddha:** Consuming dry or pungent substances in a dry place or eating greasy food in a marshy place.
2. **Kaal Viruddha:** Eat dry and cold things in the cold and consume spicy and hot food on summer days.
3. **Agni Viruddha:** If the digestion capacity is medium and the person eats heavy food, it is called a diet against *Agni*.
4. **Matra Viruddha:** Inappropriate combination for e.g. *Ghee* and *Honey* are harmful if taken in equal quantities.
5. **Satmya Viruddha:** A person who has a tendency to eat salty food has to eat sweet juicy foods.
6. **Dosh Viruddha:** Using medicines, food that is going to increase the fault of the person and against his nature.
7. **Sanskar Viruddha:** Many types of food, cooked improperly, become heterogeneous and harmful. If curd or honey is heated, they become deadly toxic instead of benefits.
8. **Kostha Viiruddha:** A person who has constipation if given a light, small and low fibrous food, or on the contrary, giving a person with a loose anus more hot and more fibrous food.
9. **Virya Viruddha:** Take things that are hot with cold natured items.
10. **Awastha Viruddha:** Eating *vata* aggravating food after exercise & fatigue.
11. **Krama Viruddha:** If a person consumes food before passing stools or when he is not hungry or when he is starving due to excessive hunger.
12. **Parihar Viruddha:** Eat things that a person should not eat according to the physician, such as people who cannot digest milk, consume milk-made substances.
13. **Upchar Viruddha:** Intake of contraindicated food (non-edible) in a specific treatment method. For example, eating cold things after eating *ghee* (after *snehan*).
14. **Paka Viruddha:** If the cooking is not appropriate. The food is left undercooked or burnt from somewhere.
15. **Sanyaoga Viruddha:** Consumption of acidic substances with milk.
16. **Hrudya Viruddha:** Eat food that does not look interesting and tasty.
17. **Sampad Viruddha:** If more processed food is eaten. This type of food leads to extinction of nutrition. Nutritional properties are also removed in the process of purification or refining (refined or matured foods)
18. **Vidhi Viruddha:** Against *Ayurveda* Principles sit in a public place and eat food.

Apart from all adverse effects of *Viruddha Aahara* as mentioned above, a food which is not liked by the person; also acts like *Viruddha Aahara*. This may lead to continue indigestion too. *Acharya Sushruta* has explained some different types as *Rasa Viruddha*, *Veerya Viruddha*, *Vipaka Viruddha* [5].

Mode of Action: *Charakacharya* has stated that regular consumption of certain food items and drugs aggravates *Sharirastha Prakruta Doshas* but does not eliminate them from body, according to *Chakrapani* this is the unique characteristics of *Viruddha Anna* [6]. As these vitiated *Doshas* stay in body, they interact with *Sharirastha Viguna Dhatus* and lead to many diseases.

Diseases due to Viruddha Aahara: From the above information it can be understood that regular consumption of any type of *Viruddha Ahara* can lead to number of disorders. *Acharya Charaka* has enlisted them in his *Samhita*. Some of them are acute while some are chronic diseases [3].

All those can be classified as follows

1. **Indriyopghatakara:** Disease which hampers functions of *Indriya*. e.g. - *Andhya*, *Shandhya*, *Bhagandara*, *Jwara*, *Pinasa*,
2. **Dhatu Parinamkar:** Diseases which hamper *Rasadi Sapta Dhatus*. e.g. - *Dakodara*, *Visarpa*, *Pandu*, *Aamvisha*, *Kushtha*, *Santandosh*, *Visphota*, *Moorchcha*, *Aadhmana*, *Galagraha*, *Kilasa*, *Grahani*, *Shotha*, *Amlapitta*, *Mriyu*.
3. **Manasa Vyadhi:** Diseases which hampers Psychological condition of person. e.g.:- *Unmada*, *Mada*.

Viruddha Aahara leads to disorders affecting all the *dhatu*s and may lead to impotency and infertility thus it has an impact up to *Shukra Dhatu Dushti*, moreover it can cause *Mriyu* (death) which means it has impact on *Oja* also. In aspects of modern science *Viruddh Ahara* (incompatible foods) affects our Immune system, Endocrine system, Digestive system, Nervous system and Circulatory system. It has also been observed that many people who consume *Viruddha Anna* remain unaffected by it. *Charaka* has explained this condition too. He described that a person who is young in age and performs regular exercise, who is habitual to *Viruddha Ahara*, whose digestive power (*Agni*) is high and has consumed *Viruddha Aahara* in less quantity remains unaffected of it [7].

Line of Treatment

As advised by *Charak* using this plan of treatment one can overcome the hazardous effects of *Viruddha Aahara*. *Charaka* has described 3 different ways to treat the patient.⁸

1. **Shodhana:** *Shodhana* means intoxication of the body with the help of *Panchkarma*. For *Viruddha Aahara*; *Virechana* is preferably used treatment than *Vamana*. It helps in eliminating long term effect of *Viruddh ahara*.
2. **Shamana:** When person is not a regular consumer of *Viruddha Aahara*, there is much effect on *sharir doshas*; then by using drugs having exactly opposite properties to that of *Viruddha Ahara* can settle down the *Vikruta Doshas*.
3. **Nidana parivarjana:** Prevention is always better than cure. By consuming healthy and *Pathyakara Aahara* and avoiding consumption of *Viruddha Ahara* one can prevent himself from all the hazardous effects of *Viruddha Ahara*. This is actually the first step towards the treatment of diseases.

Modern Concept of Incompatible food

As the importance given in *ayurveda* to *Viruddha ahara* there is no such description in modern dietics. However in Modern Medicine; role of diet induced changes in the drug activity and exacerbation of certain disease conditions after consumption of particular type of food is well known.

Viruddha: Viroddha Vishishtha (ref-Sabda kalpadrum)

The literal meaning of word *Viruddha* is opposite. It sounds that the food combination of certain type of food may have -

- Opposite properties
- Opposite activities on the tissues
- May exert some unwanted effect on the body when

processed in a particular form

- May exert undesirable effects, when combined in certain proportion.
- May have unwanted effect if consumed at wrong time.

Some topics which have similarity with incompatible food are as follows

1. Agonist and Antagonist
2. Free radicle formation
3. Food Allergies
4. Food poisoning
5. Food additives (preservatives)
 - **Agonist:** A substance that acts like another substance and therefore stimulates an action. Agonist is the opposite of Antagonist.
 - **Antagonist:** one that contends with or opposes another. Antagonist is the opposite of Agonist. Antagonists and agonists are key players in the chemistry of the human body and in pharmacology.
 - **Food Allergies:** These illnesses are sometimes called individualistic adverse reactions to foods because they affect only certain individuals in the population. These individualistic reactions are also termed as Food sensitivities.
 - **Food poisoning:** This type of illness arises from eating contaminated food. It may be contaminated by bacteria, viruses, environmental toxins or toxins present within the food itself. E.g. mushrooms, seafood.
 - **Food additives (preservatives):** These are used to preserve the natural characteristics of food and to increase the shelf life of food and inhibit natural ageing and discoloration that can occur during food preparation.

Discussion

- **Effects of viruddha ahar can be compared with dushi vish**

Susruta and Vagbhata described *Dushi Visha* as any kind of poison originating from inanimate or animate sources or any artificial poison (*Kritrima Visha*) retained in the body after partial expulsion or which has provisionally undergone detoxification, by the anti-poisonous drugs, forest fire, the wind or the sun is termed latent poison (*Dushi Visha*)^[9]

Polluted land (*Dooshita desha*), deranged seasons (*Kala*), toxic food (*Anna*) and daytime sleep (*Diwa swapna*) are factors that aggravate latent poison (*Dushi Visha*). Existing latent poison (*Dushi Visha*) can aggravate in the presence of these factors. When *Dushi Visha* is retained in stomach (*Amashaya*), it produces the diseases due to derangement of *doshas*, *Kapha* and *Vata* leading to several disease conditions i.e. unconsciousness, vomiting, diarrhea, tympanitis, burning sensation, tremors, altered sensorium etc. When located in intestines (*Pakwashaya*), it produces diseases of deranged *Vata* and *Pitta doshas*, such as burning sensation all over the body, fainting, diarrhea, tympanitis and anemia^[9]

- **Viruddha Ahara as causes for Sroto Dusti**

And *Viruddha Ahar* is one of the *dushti karan* of *Majjavaha srotas*. So effects of *Viruddha Ahara* can also be explained in terms of *Majjavaha Srotas dusti lakshanas* also, as explained by *Charka* in *Sutra Sthana*. According to *Charaka*, *Majjavaha Dushti Lakshana* are *Parvaruk* (pain in small joints), *Bhrama* (giddiness), *Murcha* (Unconsciousness), *Tamadarshana* (darkness or occasional blackouts), *Arumsha* in *Sandhi Mula* (Deep seated wounds in the joints)⁻¹ *Susrutha*

also have the same opinion on *Majja Dhatu dushti* and he says *Majjadushti* will exhibit with *Tamadarshana*, *Murcha*, *Bhrama*, *Parva ruja* and *Sthulamula ruja* (Pain in smaller and bigger joints), *Netraabhishtyanda* (Oozing from the eyes)^[11]

- **Effects of Viruddha Aahar**

Viruddha Ahara can lead to inflammation at molecular level. Although food combinations today are of different nature, principles remain the same and it is required to identify new food incompatibilities based on the basic principles of antagonism mentioned in Ayurveda and categorized in appropriate category of antagonism. Experts in nutrition believe that these epigenetic changes can affect the expression of certain genes. This could have implications for fetal development, cancer, aging, and other biological processes. The research in this field is in the early stages and much is still unknown about this area of nutrition. However, as researchers will learn more, they will have a better understanding of the best dietary recommendations to reduce the risk of disease and improve health. In the quotation of *Charaka* about the effects of *Viruddha Ahara*, he has mentioned *Shandhatva*. *Shandhatva* can be congenital, which can be due to certain genetic expressions in *foetus* if the parents have consumed regular *Viruddha Ahara*.

- **Incompatible Food or Viruddhahara in Today's prospective**

Many food incompatibility references can be found in old Ayurveda texts, for example, *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhitas*. However, at the present time, this kind of food combination can hardly found. We need to explore and distinguish new food incompatibilities according to Ayurveda point of view, which can be utilized today. We have many new fusion of food. It has become a trend for the people to have fusion food; it's the nature of man to search for new. He looks for new taste by fusing varieties of food. These food incongruences can likewise be arranged into *Karma Viruddha*, *Krama Viruddha*, *Veerya Viruddha*, etc. *Viruddha ahara* gets aggravated in the micro molecular level. Many food blends can demonstrate destructive fuction, which might be giving its untoward impacts on the resistant framework, cell digestion, development hormone, and Dehydro-epiandrosterone-sulfate (DHEAS).

Trophology^[12] (a science of food combining) is rising, which tells proteins not to be taken in combination with starch and sugar, because of the absorption process of both. More clearly, for digestion and absorption starch requires an amylase present in saliva called ptyalin. This helps starch to break down into maltose and further breaks it into glucose, fructose, and galactose and stores it in liver, however having fat or protein with starch/sugar delays this process. When we consume incompatible food on continuous basis, the side effect of this will not be contained in the stomach, it starts influencing the body slowly. Many immunologic issues are also occurs due to such effects.

- Following are ten incompatible food combinations that compromise the digestive system according to modern science.

1. Proteins and Starches

Many American favorites such as hamburgers with a bun, spaghetti and meatballs, and so on, are antagonistic. Dr. Herbert Shelton, the champion of the original Natural Hygiene ideas, states that when mixed together, an acid food

such as protein, and starch, an alkaline food, don't digest. The chemicals neutralize each other so that meat will begin to decay within the stomach.

2. Fruits and Starchy Vegetables

Fruits are mechanically digested in the stomach, but chemically digested in the small intestine. Vegetables begin breaking down in the mouth and take longer to digest than the fruit. By the time the stomach does release the food, the fruit has fermented.

3. Liquids and Eating Meals

Liquids in the stomach dilute digestive enzymes inhibiting the digestion process.

4. Multiple Proteins Together

Proteins necessitate different courses of action to digest. When meat is eaten, there is an intense enzymatic response in the first hour. Milk and eggs require longer time frames to be digested.

5. Pure Fats and High Starches

Starches, including cereal, bread, pasta, potatoes, and rice require alkaline digestion which occurs mainly in the small intestine. Fats, such as butter, bacon, or cream need bile salts from the gall bladder and liver to digest. Fat, emulsified by the bile, releases fatty acids, which neutralizes the alkaline secretions in the small intestine. The undigested starches, then ferment, producing gas.

6. Melons with Any Other Food

Eaten alone, melons pass quickly through the stomach and are digested in the small intestine. When combined with other foods, the passage through the stomach is delayed, and the soft fruit quickly ferments.

7. Orange Juice with Cereal

Orange juice is an acid fruit. These fruits contain acid that breaks down enzymes that work to digest starches.

8. Tomato Spaghetti Sauce

Tomatoes contain acid and destroy the enzyme that is responsible for digestion of starches.

9. Protein and Sugar

A study at the Mayo Clinic revealed that sugars both restrain the release of hydrochloric acid in the stomach and also combine with the stomach acid. This restricts the stomach's ability to digest protein, which produces more gastric juices that the sugar then combines with. The sugar, delayed from passing through to the small intestine, ferments.

10. Starch and Sugar

Sugar stops the secretion of the alkaline enzyme responsible for starch digestion. Starch digestion begins in the mouth, and without the proper enzyme, remains undigested. Sugar passes through to the small intestine and ferments before the release of the meal.

Various Diseases Due to Viruddha Ahara or Food Incompatibility

Digestive System effects

- Impaired metabolic process
- Abdominal distention

- Diseases of intestines
- Digestive issues
- Ascites
- Bullous,
- Indigestions,
- Gastritis

Circulatory system

- Different types of anemia
- Bleeding
- clotting of blood

Musculoskeletal System

- Stiffness in neck
- Shoulder stiffness and pain

Immune system

- Auto immune disorders
- Skin disorders such as psoriasis or eczema

Others common problems

- Impotency and Infertility.
- Erysipelas
- Blindness
- Various skin diseases
- Anal Fistula
- Syncope, Coma or fainting,
- Mal tissue formation
- Intoxication,
- Edema
- Fever,
- Rhinitis

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that *Viruddha Ahara* is an important aspect of today's improper dietary habits. *Viruddha Anna* can lead to disorders up to impotency and infertility, thus it has an impact up to *Shukra Dhatu Dushti*. This unknowingly can lead to several hazardous diseases even death in the patients. Therefore, it is important to enlist the causative incompatible dietary factors and advise the patients to avoid such etiological factors (*Nidana Parivarjana*) especially, the children who nowadays consume a lot of flavored food items and fried chips. By chance if any disease occurs *Shodhana* and *Shamana* type of *chikitsa* can be given to eradicate that disease. Similarly patients of food poisoning and adverse effects of preservatives may be treated with same line of treatment. The article also opens a new research window in the field of *Ayurvedic* dietetics to research upon a variety of incompatible factors to observe their effects. Therefore in *Ayurvedic* system, the dietary guidance and restrictions have been elaborately described by all the *Ayurvedacharyas*. Moreover, *Charaka* emphasizes that if a man controls his mind and senses and consumes good and restricted diet, he can live up to the very ripe age of one hundred years without any diseases.

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