
**AYURVEDA NUTRITION AND HEALTH WITH A FOCUS ON
PATHYA AND APATHYA.**

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda emphasises a preventive and holistic approach to health, with diet and lifestyle as fundamental determinants. The concepts of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) form the core of Ayurvedic nutrition and therapeutics. *Pathya* includes dietary and behavioural practices that maintain physiological balance, support digestion, and promote overall well-being, whereas *Apathya* comprises factors that disturb homeostasis and contribute to disease manifestation. Food is regarded as a primary factor for growth, immunity, and longevity, and is considered both nourishment and therapy. The selection of *Pathya* is individualised based on factors such as *Prakriti* (body constitution), *Agni* (digestive capacity), *Kala* (season), and disease condition. Ayurveda also highlights therapeutic dietary preparations such as *Manda*, *Peya*, and *Yavagu*, which are easy to digest and beneficial in conditions of impaired metabolism. Seasonal and disease-specific dietary regimens further support the maintenance of internal balance. The principles of *Pathya* closely align with modern concepts of functional foods and preventive healthcare. In conclusion, adherence to *Pathya* plays a vital role in maintaining health and enhancing treatment outcomes, whereas *Apathya* significantly contributes to disease progression.

KEYWORDS: Apathya, Nutrition, *Pathya*, Prakriti, *Ritucharya*, *Yavagu*.

INTRODUCTION:

Ayurveda is not merely a medical science. It is a complete life science. The first aim of Ayurveda is to maintain the health of a healthy person so that no diseases should manifest. Treatment of diseases is the second aim of Ayurveda. To maintain the health of a healthy

person, *Acharyas* had described various dos and don'ts such as *Ritucharya* (seasonal regime), *Dinacharya* (diurnal regime), etc. The concept of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) is one such concept. Apart from being a part of the regime of healthy living, *Acharyas* had also extended the concept of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) as a part of the treatment of diseases. This indicates the importance of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) in Ayurveda. The concept of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) is the peculiarity of Ayurveda.

As is evident, the first and foremost aim of Ayurveda is preventive in nature rather than curative. It signifies that "prevention is better than cure". To maintain health, Ayurveda laid many basic principles like *Ritucharya* (seasonal regime), *Dinacharya* (diurnal regime), etc. The concept of *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) is the peculiarity of Ayurveda to fulfil its aims and objectives. The word *Pathya* derives its origin from the root word *Pathya*, which literally means a way or channel. *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) are defined as the substances or regimes that do not adversely affect the body and mind are regarded as *Pathya* (wholesome); those that adversely affect them are *Apathya* (unwholesome). As evident from the above definition, *Pathya* (wholesome) and *Apathya* (unwholesome) include both material substances and specific regimes, but in general, these words have been particularly used for food articles in the texts of Ayurveda. *Charak* had stated that wholesome food is one of the causes for the growth and well-being of humans, while unwholesome food is the root of all diseases. *Charak* had counted food first in the series of three supporting pillars of life, along with sleep and controlled sexual activity. *Sushrut* further supported this by stating that food is the cause of vitality, strength, complexion, and Oja

MATERIAL AND METHOD:

Data collected from a traditional textbook of Ayurveda and a web search.

Nutrition: The process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth is called nutrition.

Significance of nutrition and dietetics¹:

Nutrition refers to food and its relation with health, while dietetics refers to the planning of meals for the well-sick. Nutraceuticals, often referred to as phytochemicals or functional foods, are natural bioactive chemical compounds that have health promoting, disease preventing and medicinal properties. The *Vedic* texts detail the importance of food, saying

that food sustains the life of living beings, and due to this, all creatures are inclined towards it. Complexion, clarity, good voice, longevity, genuineness, happiness, satisfaction, nourishment, strength and intellect are all conditioned by food and well documented in Ayurvedic texts. Ayurveda portray the human body as a product of nutrition. Nutrition forms the basis for the etymology of the human body, as indicated in Ayurveda. The Sanskrit synonyms denoting the human body (viz. *kaya*, *deha*, *sareera*) are indicative of nutrition dynamics & different metabolic aspects of nutrition, such as the term „*kaya* represents growth and development by virtue of nutrition, *deha*’ stands for anabolism, while „*sareera* „ symbolises catabolism.

Pathya and Apathya:

The *ahar vihar*, which is beneficial and nutritional to the body and also gives happiness to the mind, is known as *pathya* and the opposite of that is known as *apathya*

Need of pathya:

1. It is suggested in various places in Ayurveda.
2. It is suggested in *Swasthvritta* as a routine to maintain proper health.
3. *Pathya kalpana* must be used in *dincharya* and *rutucharya*
4. It is very much necessary for the patients to have the food that will keep their *dhatu* in a healthy state and will not let them get vitiated more from *doshas*. So the patient must follow the healthy way of consumption of food, i.e. *pathya*.

Importance of Pathya & Apathya:

The importance of *Pathya* and *Apathya* in Ayurveda can be deduced from the fact that *Charak* had stated *Pathya* as a synonym for treatment². *Charak* stated that when channels of circulation become hard due to aggravated and vitiated *Dosha*, *Pathya* helps to soften the *Srotasa* (channels of circulation) and *Dosha* alleviation³. *Charak* had elaborately described the concept of *Pathya* and *Apathya*. He had given a general list of *Pathya* and *Apathya* dravya along with specific *Pathya* and *Apathya* dravya for patients and *Sansarjana Karma* (specific food regime) for patients who have undergone *Panchkarma* therapy. Further, *Sushrut* had specifically written a chapter named *Hita-Ahitiya Aadhyay* in *Sutra Sthan*. *Kashyap* explored the medicinal potential of *Aahar* (food) along with its prophylactic value of maintaining health. *Kashyap* stated that food is the best medicine. No drug can match the benefits of food in a diseased state. Only wholesome food can keep a person healthy⁴. *Harita* stated the importance of *Pathya* and *Apathya* by stating that if a person ignores the concept of

Pathya-Apathya and devours *Apathya*, illness will never leave the body. Hence person should use *Pathya* according to his/her physical and pathological condition regularly. Even in the absence of medicine, if a patient takes only *Pathya* according to the disease, he will become healthy, but even if the patient takes more and regular medicine and avoids *Pathya Ahara* prescribed by the physician, he will never become healthy. In *Yogaratnakara*, it is said that for the treatment of disease aetiology, drug treatment, and *Pathya* are three important factors that should be studied thoroughly before starting the treatment. Judicious planning of treatment by proper understanding of these three factors always yields a successful eradication of disease. *Yogaratnakara* uses the metaphor of *Ankura* (seedling) for a progressive form of disease. This *Ankura* will dry and be destroyed if it is not nourished by water; similarly, disease will be destroyed if a patient does not consume *Apathya Ahara*⁵. *Vaidya Lolimbraja* indicated the importance of *Pathya Aahar* by stating that if a patient intakes wholesome food, then there is no need for medicine, and if a patient continuously consumes unwholesome food, then also there is no need for medicine. In the latter case, medicine will not be effective. *Charak* had also given equal importance to *Pathya Vihar* (wholesome routine) along with *Pathya Aahar* for the maintenance of health. As *Charak* has stated that in conditions of *Chinta* (anxiety), *Shoka* (sorrow), *Krodha* (anger), *DukhaShaiyaa* (uncomfortable bed) and *Ratrijagarana* (insomnia), even a small amount of *Pathya Ahara* is not digested, thus have given equal importance to both *Pathya Ahara* and *Vihar*⁶. *Bhela Samhita* also explains the merits of *Pathya* and demerits of *Apathya* in the *Sutrasthana*.

General *Pathya* and *Apathya*⁷:

Acharya Charak indicated some food articles that should always be consumed by healthy persons. These food articles include *Shashtika* (variety of rice), *Shali* (variety of rice), *Mudga* (*Phaseolus radiatus* Linn.), *Saindhav*, *Amalaka* (*Embllica officinalis* Gaertn.), rain water, Ghee (butter), meat of animals dwelling in an arid climate and honey. Similarly, *Acharya Charak* had also indicated some food articles that should be avoided by healthy persons. Such food articles are *Vallura* (dried meat), dried vegetables, lotus rhizome and stalk, and one should never consume meat of diseased animals⁸

<i>Varga</i>	<i>Pathya</i>	<i>Apathya</i>
<i>Shuk dhanya</i>	<i>Raktshali, shashtika and type of shashtika</i>	<i>Yavaka</i>
<i>Shami dhanya</i>	<i>Ajmeda, vasa, jangla, mansa</i>	<i>Gomansa, frog, kumbhir, kakamudga.</i>
<i>Shak varga</i>	<i>Vastuka, patha, sunishka, jeevanti,</i>	<i>Sarshapa shak, kusumbha shak.</i>

	<i>patola, nadi.</i>	
<i>Phala varga</i>	<i>Dadima, amalaki, haritaki, mridvika.</i>	<i>Nikucha.</i>
<i>Harita varga</i>	<i>Baal moolak, sursa, haridra, dhanyaka, yavani.,</i>	-
<i>Madya varga</i>	<i>Purana madya, madhvika.</i>	-
<i>Jala varga</i>	<i>Eindriya jala, sheet jala.</i>	<i>Kalusheeta jala</i>
<i>Ikshu varga</i>	<i>Gud, sharkara, madhu</i>	<i>Phanila.</i>
<i>Kritanna varga</i>	<i>Manda, peya, krushara, audana.</i>	-
<i>Aharyogi varga</i>	<i>Taila, vasa, hingu</i>	-

General parameters to decide *Pathya-Apathya*:⁹

Meat of animals that have died a natural death, who are emaciated or dried up after death, who are fatty in excess, who are old, who are too young, who are killed by poisonous arrows, who gaze in a land not commensurate with their natural habitat and who are bitten by snakes and tigers, etc., are unwholesome. Otherwise, meat is wholesome, nourishing and strength-promoting. Vegetables infested with insects, exposed to the wind and the sun for a long time, dried up, old and unseasonal are wholesome. When they are cooked without fat, and the residual water after boiling is not filtered out, vegetables become unwholesome for use. Fruits that are old, unripe, afflicted by insects and serpents, exposed to snow or sun for long, growing in the land and season other than the normal habitat and time and putrefied are unwholesome.

Practical application of the concept of *Pathya-Apathya*.

Pathya-Apathya in a particular season: *Acharya* had described specific *Pathya-Apathya* for every season. The practice of *Pathya-Apathya* as per season will improve overall health, e.g. in the winter season, meat of aquatic and marshy animals and burrow-dwelling animals should be consumed. Other wholesome food articles for the winter season include preparations of cow milk, cane juice, fat, oil, new rice, etc. On the other hand, dieting and intake of gruel should be avoided. In *Vihara*, fomentation and warm clothes are wholesome to practice.

Concept of *Kritanna Varga*:

All these benefits of *Pathya Aahara* can be ripped off with the help of *Kritanna Varga*, described in various ancient texts. Properties of these *Kritanna* differ from each other depending upon the method of preparation, even if the material used is the same. In the case of *Manda, Peya, Yavagu* and *Vilepi*, the amount of water used for cooking and the amount of

liquid and solid content is different for each of them. These *Kalpna* become easy to digest according to their state and attain various physiological actions as well. Thus, these can be prescribed for the patient as a meal.

Pathya-irrespective of disease condition:

These *Pathya Ahara* are described specific to a particular disease condition. According to *Bhavaprakasha*, taking ginger and salt before food is always good, and it enhances *Agni* (digestive fire). Taste, clear tongue and throat. *Charaka* and *Vagbhata* also describe some regularly consumable food articles. *Rakta shali*, *Mudga*, Rain water, *Saindhava* (rock salt), *Jivanti*, meat of *Aina*, *Godha*, *Rohita Matsya*, cow's ghee, cow's milk, *Tila Taila*, ginger, grapes, pomegranate, and sugar are considered as most conducive among food articles.

Pathya-for specific disease condition: Disease-specific *Pathya* (wholesome diet/ foods to be consumed) and *Apathya* (unwholesome diet/ foods to be avoided) are explained in various classical texts like *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtangahridaya*, etc., but there are detailed descriptions about them in other texts like *Sharangdhara Samhita*, *Pathyapathya Vibodhika*, *Bhaishajyaratnavali*, etc.

DISCUSSION:

Ayurveda has a holistic approach to health management. It gives due importance to food in the management of disease, both as a causative factor (*Apathya*) and as a part of therapy (*Pathya*).

As per Ayurveda, most of the ailments develop due to faulty eating habits so Ayurveda deals with the *Pathya Vyavastha* (planning of diet and dietetics) in a very scientific way. Day-to-day activities, seasonal regimes, etc., also play an important role in the maintenance of health and thus have also been included in the concept of *Pathya Apathya* by the *Acharyas*. The above-described facts are about the general concept of *Pathya-Apathya* in Ayurveda. The specific *Pathya-Apathya* for a particular person may differ, as Ayurveda believes in the concept of the uniqueness of each individual¹⁰. The exact *Pathya-Apathya* for a particular person should be decided after analysing *Prakriti* (body nature), *Kalpna* (preparation to be given), *Kaal* (time of intake of food), *Matra* (quantity), etc. As discussed above, many dietary specialised recipes are explained in various diseases as *pathyakalpna* for those disorders

The only thing is that some of these Ayurvedic preparations must be prepared fresh and consumed. In accordance with the definition of functional nutraceuticle these *yavagus* are used as adjuvant treatment comprising nutrition as well as medicines.

CONCLUSION:

Pathya is the one that keeps the person healthy, maintains normal body functions, leads to proper functioning of the organs, nourishes the mind and intellect, prevents diseases, and at the same time corrects the irregularities that may occur in the body. Thus, everyone should refrain from *Apathya* and follow *Pathya* (wholesome to the body) as prevention is better than a cure.

Yavagu is the *Pathya Kalpana*, which is easy to digest, and can be used in a patient who has low digestive power, i.e., *Agnimandya*. *Yavagu* is easy to prepare and easy to digest, so it is more convenient than any other food. *Yavagu* acts as a mediator to give medicines to patients who cannot digest food properly. Along with nutrition, *pathya yavagus* act as an adjuvant medicine in many of the diseases. Considering the nutraceutical concept and its definition as a medicine that is administered through food. Rapid changes in diet and lifestyle led to a major emerging shift towards non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as lifestyle-related disorders (diabetes, obesity, arthritis, mental illness, cardiac diseases, cancer, etc.), and Ayurvedic principles certainly play an important role in their prevention and management. Health-promoting regime (*pathya vyavastha*) is the hallmark of Ayurvedic therapeutics; specific diet and lifestyle guidelines are always prescribed along with the drugs and therapies to facilitate restoration of homeostatic bio-mechanisms (*dhatu-samyata*) and wellbeing.

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