

Preface

Despite the consistent stress throughout the Ayurvedic classics that is placed on Ahara as a fundamental principle related to health and the elimination of disease, it is a painful revelation that we find it nowhere in contemporary Ayurvedic practice. Of the three basic components of the package offered for comprehensive health care in Ayurveda, Aushadhi came to overshadow the two other equally important components: Ahara and Vihara. The other two components gradually faded as elements of health care following the quick, tangible, and manageable effects on health offered by drugs. Only later, with the sudden and phenomenal upsurge of metabolic and degenerative diseases that have become the hallmarks of modern society, was it realized what was missing. Ayurveda stresses Aushadi, Ahara, and Vihara as the three pillars of a healthy and meaningful life. Throughout the period of the modern scientific renaissance, we have been trying to walk on one leg while ignoring the other two supports provided by the other leg, which we have had all along. The results are obvious; it has led to imbalances in our health and to disease.

Although it is now universally accepted that food plays a pivotal role in building and maintaining health and that Vihara, or lifestyle, significantly affects our overall health, it is still difficult to bring these two together in as accessible a format as drugs. Ultimately, the application of Ahara and Vihara to maintain and sustain health requires more than the mere application of a few set formulas aimed at curing or preventing a few disease conditions. This will possibly require a retuning of our minds to look inwardly at the preventive aspects of these interventions rather than looking into the immediate curative effects they might offer.

But promoting Ahara as a reliable approach to caring for one's health has not been easy. Ayurvedic fundamentals regarding diet and nutrition are too elaborate to be confined in to a small deliverable package of health care for all seasons. These principles must be applied with the highest precision on an individual basis to yield optimum results. Thus, Ayurvedic principles of food and nutrition can be subdivided on the basis of their generalizability and on the basis of their specificity for individuals based on a number of variables like *prakriti* (constitution), *agni* (metabolic status), *kala* (age/time/season), *desha* (geographical specificity), *satmya* (compatibility), and many more.

It would be desirable to test all Ayurvedic fundamentals on the basis of their variability and applicability in different population sets to attain the desired results. This would certainly require a thorough reconsideration of Ayurveda's claims regarding diet and nutrition and a reconsideration of conventional scientific approaches to verify the testability of traditional wisdom. If the traditional wisdom cannot be tested, it may be necessary to redesign many of the tools of conventional research to reveal what is not made evident by them. As a modest beginning, we can revisit all available scientific knowledge regarding Ayurvedic principles of food and nutrition. This would involve an exhaustive exploration of avenues perhaps not directly connected to Ayurveda, but a careful enquiry might uncover a fascinating applicability to what is taught in Ayurveda. The scientific exploration of the existing body of knowledge with reference to Ayurvedic principles of food and nutrition constitutes the theme of this book. This is certainly just the beginning. We still have a long way to go before we truly understand how to remain healthy with the help of the strongest medicine ever evolved – food.

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