

Determinants of Health in Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Swasthya is the status of *Shareera* which results from actions that establish *Samayogavaahitwa*. Any cause (*Nidaana*) that deters *Samayogavaahitwa* causes *Roga*. *Roga* depletes the energy reserves and inhibits the proper nourishment of *Shareera*. The *swasthya* state of the individual is determined by numerous interrelated factors. To understand the concept of determinants of health as per *Ayurveda*. The *Samhitas* of *Ayurveda* along with their commentaries, other *Ayurvedic* texts, books of contemporary medical sciences, relevant information from articles, periodicals, journals, and other published works and websites will be referred to fulfill the objectives of the study. *Ayurvedic* principles regarding Health includes one's reserve of physical strength as well as mental stability in order to lead a normal daily life. Only a healthy individual of sound body and mind can endure social and cultural pleasures. And as the mutual relationship exists between the *Poshana* and *Swasthya*, proper *Poshana* in all aspects is essential to determine the status of health. Nature and nurture affect the *Shareera*. *Ayurveda* tries to control the impact of the determinants of health through regimens like *dinacharya* and *ritucharya*.

KEYWORDS: *Swasthya*, *Ahara*, *Epidemiology*, *Inequality*

INTRODUCTION

A long healthy life is the wish of every being since antiquity, *Ayurveda* is the science of life with the aim of attaining health and curing the diseases of the ill. *Ayurveda* defines perfect health as "a balance between body, mind, spirit, and social wellbeing." *Ayurveda* emphasizes the unshakable connections between the *Shareera*, *Manas*, and *Atma*. However, *Ayurveda*'s link extends far beyond the individual reaching the Universal. At first, we all are connected within ourselves, to the surrounding creatures, to our immediate environment, and the Universe. This balanced connectivity ensures good health. And this Good Harmony of health which isn't limited to self and connected to the *Loka* can be defined as a Healthy Life. And a healthy social life comprises healthy societies, pollution free air, water, land, good health education, etc and this is very clearly evident in our *Ayurvedic Samhitas*.

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How to cite this paper: Dr. Nishath M Ingalagi | Dr. Mahantesh R Sajjanashetty | Dr. G N Kannolli "Determinants of Health in Ayurveda"

Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-6 | Issue-3, April 2022, pp.54-57, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd49478.pdf



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the proper nourishment of *Shareera*. Many factors are determining the status of *Swasthya* are explained in *Ayurveda*. Few among them include the physical environment, individual's constituent, and behaviors, socio-economic environment, etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To understand the concept of determinants of health as per *Ayurveda*. This is done by looking into the physiological, behavioural, epidemiological and pathological determinants of *Swasthya*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The *Samhitas* of *Ayurveda* along with their commentaries, other *Ayurvedic* texts, books of contemporary medical sciences, relevant information from articles, periodicals, journals, and other published works and websites will be referred to fulfill the objective of the study.

DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH:

The various factors which decisively affect and determine the status of *Swasthya* are to be considered as Determinants of Health. WHO mentions that the

most common determinants affecting health status are physical environment, individual's constituent and behaviors, socio-economic environment, and many other factors like education, genetic factors, income, social status, health services, etc impact considerably in determining the status of health.

Ayurveda recognized health as the state of equilibrium of three *Doshas*, *Sapta Dhatu*, and feeling of ease. *Swasthya* is defined as the condition in which the individual has the equilibrium state of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*, and *Agni*, along with the pleasing senses, mind, and soul¹.

Ayurveda with the primary aim to preserve the health of an individual² laid down all the preventive principles which are necessary for the maintenance of health under *Swasthavritta*, which includes the adaption or observance of regimens or practices daily. Health is not just what we inherit, it has to be attained by observing the laws of nature.

Ayurvedic principles regarding Health include one's reserve of physical strength as well as mental stability in order to lead a normal daily life. Only a healthy individual of sound body and mind can endure social and cultural pleasures. And as the mutual relationship exists between the *Poshana* and *Swasthya*, proper *Poshana* in all aspects is essential to determine the status of health.

Thus, with the above considerations of health mentioned in classics, Determinants of Health in *Ayurveda* can be understood in the following four aspects. They are:-

The physiological, Behavioural, Epidemiological, and pathological concepts.

1. PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH

Aahara Dravya are *Rasa Pradhaana*³. Hence, the *Ayurvedic* perspective on *Poshana* is based on the action of *Rasa-Aadi* on *Shareera*. Therefore, for proper nourishment *Ayurvedic* diet involves *Sarva-Rasa*⁴. Intake of all *rasas* is considered as superior and wholesome to the body. *Sarvarasa ahara sevana* is the best among strength-enhancing factors. This has been also mentioned in the context of a sequence of intake of *rasas* while taking meals. One should consume food with full concentration beginning with *Madhura Rasa*, *Amla* and *Lavana* in the middle and *Katu*, *Tikta* and *Kashaya* in the end, to pacify physiologically aggravated *Vata*, *Kapha* and *Pitta* respectively⁵.

One should also keep in mind the nature of *Deha* (*Prakruti*), *Desha* and *Kaala*⁶ while consuming *Aahara*. *Maatra*, and *Guna* of *Aahara* are also emphasized in *Charaka Samhita*. A general principle

for *Maatra* would be, to eat only so much that 1/3rd of your stomach remains empty. And also, in the eight types of special considerations while taking food, where it is considered under *Rashi* that is *Sarvagraha*, which can be compared to total caloric intake and *Parigraha* that is the quantity of each component like macronutrients and micronutrients specifically.

And the rule in relation with *Guna* is — one can eat as much *Laghu Aahara* as it pleases him, but guru *Aahara* needs to be consumed only half of one's digestive capacity⁶. *Maatravat Aahara Sevana* is linked with the *Swasthya*. One should keep in mind the differences between *Jarana Shakti* and *Abhyavarana Shakti* in the context of *Poshana*. Eating more or less than one's *Jarana Shakti* can disturb *Agni* and lead to *Ati-Poshana* or *Ku-Poshana Janya Vyaadhi*.

2. BEHAVIOURAL NORMS :

The second concept concerns with the Behavioural norms related to *Swasthya*.

For proper nourishment, one's eating habits should be in tune with the physiology of digestion.

Therefore, *Ayurvedic* texts have dealt with the importance of the eating method in the context of *Aahara Vidhi Vidhaana*⁷.

Charaka Samhita advises that, a healthy individual should eat food that is -

1. *Ushna*
2. *Snigdha*
3. *Maatravat*
4. After the digestion of previously consumed food i.e., *Jeerna-Nantara*
5. *Veerya-Aviruddha Aahara*
6. One should eat by sitting in *Ishta Desha*
7. One should not eat very fast i.e., *Na-Ati Drutam*
8. Nor too slow i.e., *Na-Ati Vilambitam*
9. One should eat without talking or laughing, and should enjoy the food i.e., *Ajalpana, Ahasana, Tanmanabhunjeeta Aahara Sevana*
10. One's food consumption should also be in accordance with her *Saatmya*.

Besides this, indulging in *Karma* (activities) that subvert the functioning of *Agni* could also lead to *Ku-Poshana Janya Vyadhi*.

For example, *Ati-Vyaayama*, *Raatri-Jagarana* and *Ati-Vyavaaya* disturb the functioning of *Vaata Dosha*, which in turn disturbs the functioning of *Agni*, and leads to *Ku-Poshana*.

3. BROADER EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CAUSES

Broader Epidemiological causes also determine the status of *Swastha*.

A consequence of Adharma and advise to follow the dharma:

In *Janapadodhwams adhyaya* it is mentioned as to when an epidemic breaks out in a region, it affects a large number of people in the community who are not similar in all respects. People in antiquity had recognized that such epidemics are due to the use of contaminated air, water, land and season which are common to all in a community. The cause for such natural abnormalities of air etc. is due to the (sinful) acts of the community⁸. [Cha Vi3/9-20]

As a consequence, the people perish as the result of infectious contact or ingestion of polluted food and water.

Sociological underpinning of *Janapadodhwamsa*

- Poverty refers to the state of being deprived of essentials of a minimum standard of living.
- Inequality refers to the concentration of wealth.
- Both exacerbate the impact of *Janapadodhwamsa* through the unequal distribution of medical care.

Community behavior i.e., culture, and environmental causes also determine the status of *Swasthya*.

In the first chapter of *Vimanasthana*, *Charaka* mentions that people from *Praachya Desha* and *Cheena Desha* consume excess of *Kshaara*, and people of *Baahlika Desha* and *Saurashtra* consume excess of *Lavana*⁹.

Such eating habits are linked to various *Ku-Poshana* and *Ati-Poshana Janya Vikaara*.

The take-home message is — Do not consume anything in excess just because it is *Saatmya* to your body. Also, the changing nature of *Kaala* impacts the *Shareera* by altering the *Kaala-Krita Bala*. By nature, *Greeshma* and *Varsha Ritu* reduce one's *Bala*. Consuming *guru Aahara* during these months would lead to *Vyaadhi*.

One can also infer from the chapter on *Janapadodhwamsa* that, environmental events like draughts, floods, epidemics also create conditions that adversely affect the *Swasthya* status of individuals

Also, the consumption of *Gara Visha* over time depletes one's status of *Poshana*, making her susceptible to *Vyadhi*.

E.g., Consuming fluoride polluted water makes us susceptible to fluorosis.

4. PATHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As *Baalya-Avastha* is characterized by growth, the absence of proper *Poshana* has enormous

consequences for a child's health. *Ayurveda* has described conditions such as — *Kaarshya*, *Phakka-Roga*, *Parigarbhika*, *Bala-Shosha* and *Sushka-Revati* all of which are linked with *Ku-poshana*. Also, the consumption of *Samala*, *Vikruta*, *Upahat*, *Dooshita* and *Anuchita Aahara* is linked to the emergence of *Maanasa Vikaara*.

Improper health conditions at respective stages of life hastens the process of aging.

One could examine this by considering the decadal changes in *Shareera* mentioned in *Sharangadhara Samhita* –

*Baalyam vridddhim chhavim medhaam tvak drishtih shukra vikramau |Buddhih karmendriyan cheto jeevitam dashato hrasat||*¹⁰

Improper *Poshana* hastens this process. So, the decadal depletion of tissues happens at a much faster rate than usual.

DISCUSSION:

Common determinants affecting health status are physical, environment, individual's constituent and behaviours, socio-economic environment, and many other factors like education, genetic factors, income, social status, health services, etc. These all can be understood in *Ayurveda* under four following aspects- physiological, behavioural norms, broader epidemiological causes and pathological implications.

The most common determinant affecting the *swasthya* is the individual's physical constituent. And for this purpose, the *Ayurvedic* texts mention the physiological aspects affecting status of *shareera* which include *sarvarasa ahara sevana*, consideration of *guna* and *matra of ahara, deha, desha* and *kala* while consuming *ahara*.

Besides these behavioural norms, determining the health status is mentioned by emphasising importance of eating method through the concept of *Aahara Vidhi Vidhaana*.

Broader epidemiological causes like community factors and environmental events like draughts, floods, epidemics etc and mental stability also determine the status of *poshana* affecting the *swasthya* of the individual.

Pathological conditions impact adversely on the *swasthya* condition effecting the growth and proper nutrition necessary for *shareera* at respective ages.

CONCLUSION:

According to *Ayurveda* the status of health is contingent on the interactions between one's physiology, behaviour, socio-economic status and environmental causes. That is, the status of health,

according to *Ayurveda*, is *Hetu* dependent. Both nature and nurture affect the *Shareera*. *Ayurveda* tries to control the impact of the determinants of health through regimens like *dinacharya* and *ritucharya*. Rules prescribed for *Ahara* and *Vihara* are also meant to protect one's health. Therefore, what matters is – do we exercise choice such that we eat things that make us lead a healthy life? That's the pertinent question that *Ayurveda* asks in the context of *swasthya*.

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