

Diet and Mental Health: Unraveling the Gut-Brain Connection through Ayurveda

Dr. Soumya Patil MD (Ayu)

Assistant Professor, Department of Kaumaryabritya,

SMVVS Rajeshwari Karpurmat Memorial Ayurveda Medical College Hospital, Vijayapura, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Food is known to affect our mood and how we feel; which is probably why “The way to man’s heart is through his stomach” thus interconnects food and mood by stomach. Food is the source of both life and disease, healthy diet decides the gut and mental health.

How we eat and what we eat can significantly influence our mental wellbeing, affecting mood, cognition and even the risk of developing mental health conditions. Our gut is home to trillion of bacteria that produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, which plays a crucial role in regulating mood and happiness, however, when the gut is out of balance, it can lead to issue like anxiety, depression and stress. Ayurveda emphasizes Healthy dietary habits such as *madhura snigdha ahara* causes *sukha*(happiness) and thus is essential for physical and mental health, while unhealthy diet such as *viruddhahara*, *dushtahara*, *ashuchi ahara* causes *dukkha*, *shokha*, *nischesta* and thus causes mental illness. Ayurveda classical text have clearly mentioned unhealthy diet is cause of both *shaareerika* and *mansika* vyadhi. Concept of *triguna* and *trividha ahara siddhanta* unravels the gut brain connection. The shift from traditional to western dietary pattern has become a leading cause of mental illness. Hence Maintaining gut health through Ayurvedic Diet is essential for maintaining proper mental health.

Method: Matter was collected from Brihatrayee Granthas, PubMed, Review articles, Evidence-based articles published online, Authentic websites. **Results:** The importance of Diet is studied in all contemporary medical system; food influences the mind is comparatively new in modern medicine and the same is elaborated in Ayurveda eons before in the concept of healthy and unhealthy dietary pattern. **Conclusion:** Thus, proper use of Dietary guidelines as said by ayurveda is the key to mental health and gut health and vice versa.

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KEYWORDS: Diet, Triguna, Trividha ahara, Gut Brain connection.

INTRODUCTION

Food is not just about filling our stomach and satisfying our appetites, there is a link between the food we eat and how it affects every level of our being. Ayurveda emphasizes ahara / diet as one among *Tryopasthambha*¹, and considers *Ahara* which is beneficial and nutritional to the body also give the happiness to the mind is known as *Pathya* (healthy diet) and opposite to that is known as *apathya* (unhealthy diet).

Ayurvedic mental constitution is categorized on the basis of *triguna*², they are *Satva*, *Raja* and *Tama*.

These three represents conscious, activity and inertia, when any of the three are dominant in nature that refers to their mental constitution(*prakriti*).

Diet has a crucial factor in maintaining mental health. In the Bhagavad- Gita it is told that food is of three categories which is based on mental status of individual. They are *satvika* *Rajasika* and *Tamasika* *ahara*. It is the first ancient manuscript that shows the importance of food and food mind relation which is nowadays understood by concept of gut brain axis.

There is specific relation between causation of mental disease (like *Unmada* and *Apasmara*) and food. the *naidanika ahara* of *unmada* is *viruddhahara* (incompatible food) which is not following the rules of food intake, *dushtahara*, *asuchi* / *malina ahara* these causes *dukha*, *shokha* and *nischesta* and thus causes mental illness.

Mental constitution and individual diet choices and their effect on mind⁴

Mental constitution	Diet choices	Effect on mind
Satvika	Snigdha, hrudya, satvabala, arogya vardhakaha	Sukhakara, balya
Rajasika	Katu, amla, lavana, atiushna teekshna rooksha, vidahi	Dukhakhara, shokakara
Tamasika	Gatarasam, Pootim, paryushitam,	Amedhyam

Bhagavad-Gita mention different type of diet preferred by individual of *satvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika*. *Satvika* person prefers food that increases lifespan nourishes *satva*, *bala* and improves health, causes happiness and pleasure and are of unctuous, stable, conducive for heart and soul and the same food with proper nutrition and rules of taking food indicates *satvika ahara*. These will raise our consciousness and positive action and thus unleash the happiness of mind.

Rajasika person prefers food that is very pungent, sour, salty, very hot sharp excessively dry which causes burning sensation and causes sadness, depression and various disease and such food is considered as *rajasika ahara*.

Tamasika person prefers food that is not freshly cooked (dead food), unhygienic food devoid of nutrients, foul smelling, stale, mixed with pollutants dust etc, and left over food comes under *tamasika ahara* these causes laziness and inertia and thus abstain in carrying works.

Healthy dietary habits and mental health

Pathya	Effect on mental health
Madhura rasa	Indriyaprasadana, balya, hrudya
Ksheera	Balya
Ghrita	Vatahara, Medhya
Mamsa	Pushtikara

Unhealthy dietary habit and mental illness⁵

Apathya	Mental illness
Katu rasa	Moorcha, bhrama
Lavana rasa	Trishna
Tikta rasa	Moha and bhrama

Mental illness and etiological diet:³

Disease	Naidanika ahara
Unmada	Viruddha dushta bhojanani, malina ahara
Apasmara	Ahita suchi bhojanani
Aatavabhinivesa	Malinahara shilasya

The diet such as sweet, unctuous, dairy products are considered as wholesome and healthy dietary habits because it nourishes both body and, mind and brings happiness, on the other hand diet such as sour salty and spicy causes impairment in GI tract functioning by causing burning sensation and thus destroys good bacteria and thus vitiates the proper signaling or neurons and in turn vitiates the mind.

Effect of unhealthy diet on gut brain axis

Diet	Neurotransmitter	Effect on mind
Fruits, veggies, legumes	Serotonin	Helps in good mood
Mamsa	GABA	Enables one to stay focused and calm
Dairy products(ghrita)	Dopamine	Helps in upliftment of mood

The gastrointestinal tract is lined by hundred million nerve cells, the bacteria present in gut lining helps absorb nutrients from food. and activate the neural pathways that travel directly between gut and brain the food gut biome and emotions are linked to one another.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate sleep mood and appetite this produced in maximum through gut by intake of dietary fibres such as fruit veggies legume. The gut bacteria ferments the fibres to create SCFA thus helpful in proper signaling of nerves.

Discussion: Faulty lifestyle and poor diet are identified as one of the important risk factor for mental illness. A balanced diet ways the path for balanced microbiome and thus is essential for physical and mental health, while dysbiosis can lead to various chronic condition. Our gut is home to trillion of bacteria that produce neurotransmitters like serotonin, which plays a crucial role in regulating mood and happiness, The gut is lined by hundred million nerve cells, it makes sense that inner workings of your digestive system to guide your emotions. however, when the gut is out of balance, it can lead to issue like anxiety, depression and stress. hence maintaining the gut health through ayurveda

diet helps in better outcome of mental and overall health.

Conclusion: Ayurveda emphasizes on personalised diet based on one's mental and physical constitution. As increased burden of mental health and overcoming it with limited number of medicines is again a challenge and thus we can concentrate of preventive aspect by ayurveda diet (*trigunatmak ahara*), thus relating food with mood .proper diet helps in mainataning proper gut health and thus helps in maintaining proper mental health nowadays, the influence of digestive system on the emotional aspect of human beings are well known and thus gut brain connection is unwavered through ayurveda eons before.

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