

Ayurvedic Science of Food and Nutrition

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Editor

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 Springer

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Foreword

For centuries Ayurveda has emphasized the role of food in health and disease. Modern medicine started out by basing all its treatments on drug-based principles and focused on specific problems rather than on individuals and the food they ate. This book satisfies a long-felt need of many physicians and nutritionists who were aware of the immense knowledge that existed but never knew how to access that information. The book covers almost every aspect of Ayurveda, from basic principles to therapeutic diets, and compares the principles of modern medicine and Ayurveda, which will demonstrate for the reader the rationale behind the information found in traditional treatises.

Part I deals with the fundamental Ayurvedic principles of food and nutrition. That food, or Ahara, drugs, or Aushadi, and Lifestyle, or Vihara, are important for well being was understood several centuries ago, and all three were considered essential for treatment; these are now being rediscovered by modern medicine. The book does not theorize but explains how this knowledge can be translated into day-to-day practice. One chapter deals with bioactive molecules, which is a very recent research issue. Food as an adjuvant in several disease states, including diabetes, hypertension, and cancer, as well as in convalescence, is described in detail with examples.

The role of stress and its role in food behavior is an aspect of pathophysiology that is extremely relevant to modern diseases like obesity and lifestyle disorders. One chapter in the book describes the science behind fasting and its benefits to health. Modern food practices and western dietary habits are reviewed and linked to the knowledge available in Ayurveda so that the younger generation can understand the scientific reasoning behind the disapproval of some of these habits and methods. The authors have also analyzed the nature of food, its texture, taste, and satiety, and its role in digestion and good health. The chapter on Ayurvedic nutrition and dietetics will be useful to students, teachers, and practitioners of dietetics. All of the

book's contributors are eminent scientists and teachers. One of the authors, who reviews the Western diet in the context of Ayurveda, is from the West.

This book contains invaluable information that will be useful to almost anyone in the field or with an interest in nutrition. I would welcome the appearance of more books like it covering various aspects of human health with a blend of modern and traditional practices. Springer is to be commended for committing to this book's publication.

Oklahoma City, OK, USA

Dr. B. Sesikeran

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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Sanjeev Rastogi

Acknowledgments

The present book is an offshoot of our previous work in an attempt to find evidence-based applications of Ayurvedic principles to health care. It was a great revelation over the course of research to discover that, despite its profound importance in Ayurvedic health principles, food is often neglected in the contemporary practice of Ayurveda. Together with the universal desire to find better health care solutions through the application of food in daily life, there was a need to determine the logic of Ayurvedic food principles in light of science and then find a way to relate this knowledge to a modern understanding of nutrition so as to formulate a food-based solution to health that was based on both a holistic understanding of health and a scientific commitment to knowledge. This book is the outcome of this prolonged thought process that spanned several years. Professor Diana Lurie from the University of Montana and Professor Francesco Chiappelli from the University of California at Los Angeles were instrumental in my decision to pursue this work. That decision was reinforced by Professor R.H. Singh from Banaras Hindu University, who was my mentor and inspiration in my journey to understanding Ayurveda more rationally.

The team at Springer provided the much needed support that made this work possible. Assistant editor of food science Rita Beck, senior editor Susan Safren, editorial director Carolyn Honour, and Springer officer William F. Curtis all deserve special mention for their efforts in turning an idea into a finished book.

A book like this would not be possible without the wholehearted support of family and friends. It was the support I received from my wife Ranjana and son Shashwat that enabled me to fully engage with the task of giving the book its final form.

Words are inadequate to express my indebtedness to Piyari, who offered me solace when I was feeling completely forlorn, exhausted, and destitute. It was a medicine for my soul that healed me all through and gave me a new life. This is for the love that was showered upon me selflessly when I needed it most. Piyari, it is a blessing to have you in my life. You have transformed me completely.

Finally, I acknowledge all my colleagues, friends, and family who helped me in many ways during the process of writing this book. An effort like this is impossible without the support of many people. This book represents the efforts of an entire team working in harmony on different fronts. I salute all who had a hand in this project in one way or another.

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