



Health determinants – An Ayurvedic Perspective

¹Dr.P.Sudhakar Reddy, ²Dr Beena MD

¹Professor and HOD, Dept .of PG Studies in Swasthavritta, JSS Ayurveda Medical College, Mysuru

²Assistant Professor, Dept .of Kayachikitsa , JSS Ayurveda Medical College, Mysuru

Abstract:-

Ayurveda, the science of life which deals with the good , bad , happy and unhappy life , its promoters, non-promoters and the measurements pertaining to the same. The aim of Ayurveda is to maintain health of a healthy individual and curing the disease on an ill person. To achieve the first aim, Ayurveda defined Healthy individual as the person whose *dosas*, *dhatu*s and *malas* are in state of equilibrium along with mental, sensory and spiritual pleasantness and happiness. The health of the person determined by so many factors which starts from conception, in this article systematic review has been done to collect the information regarding factors which determine the health of the individual as per Ayurvedic perspective.

Key words: *Health, Agni, Prakriti, Ahara , desa*

Introduction:-

Health is multifactorial , the factors which influence health lie both within the individual and externally in the society in which he or she lives . It is a truism to say that what man is and to what diseases he may fall victim depends on a combination of two sets of factors – his genetic factors and the environmental factors to which he is exposed¹

Factors contributing to health

The factors determining health are the following : *Agni*(digestive power) , *Bala-Vyadhikshatva* (strength and immunity) , *Ahara* (food), *Vihara* (behaviour), *Prakriti*(constitution), *Vega*(natural urges), *desa*(place), *Kala*(time) and *Satva*(mind).

Agni: The digestive power is concerned with all body processes. It is the factor responsible for the variations of anatomical and physiological factors in the body. The physiological processes of digestion and metabolism are related to number of factors, of which *Agni* is very important. The strength, health, immunity, vital health etc... Dependent upon the proper digestion. It is this power that brings about all transformation of food materials consumed. The properties of *Agni* are attributed to *Pitta dosha* . Health depends upon the proper quality and quantity of *Agni*.The ingested food is digested and assimilated in the intestine with the help of this. The digested and assimilated parts are again influenced by *Agni* for further transformation. The capacity of an individual to digest and utilize food can be determined by *Jaranasakti* – the capacity to digest².

Bala – Vyadhikshamatva : It is the power of the body that resists the diseases and reduces the virulence of abnormal physiological conditions occurring as a result of diurnal variations, seasonal variations or diseases , which have already set in . It varies from one individual to another and enables the body to perform its functions properly. The natural strength or the innate immunity, which exists in the body right from time of

birth, is the first one. The second one is influenced by seasonal traits and the age of the person. The third one is induced by administration or consumption of appropriate diet and regimen such as milk, ghee, exercise, etc³..

Ahara : Every region has its own food traditions, practiced for generations . Availability of the raw materials and the culture and civilization are the major factors influencing food traditions. The food habits of the community have been practiced for generations and have enduring influence on the constitution of the body. The only species, which willingly breaks the food hhabits with an urge to imitate the habits of those from the other region are human beings. Thus they invite ailments and health problems. This is one of the most important problems of the day. The properties of food are responsible for growth, nourishment and development of the body. The imbalance in the material composition occurring as a result of diurnal and seasonal changes is compensated by the habitual use of food. Proper food, in proper quantity, at proper time activates the digestive power and helps in the improvement of *Bala* –strength and immunity. The desire towards different types of food according to the body constitution, mental status, body demand, etc.. Provides for the desired equilibrium in different situations. The qualities of one’s body are dependent on the food, drinks and medicines. Adequate care should be taken to ensure that the food consumed facilitates maintenance of this equilibrium.⁴

Vihara : All physical, mental and verbal activities are taken together to mean vihara . The performance of such activities in the prescribed way enhances the qualities of an individual. Wrong doings always create an environment favorable for diseases. Activities performed physically, mentally and verbally give pleasure to the body and mind. Physical activities like exercise and yoga should be done to keeping in mind the variations in age, sex, seasons etc.. . Sufficient recreational activities always help to maintain the homeostasis of the body and mind. Viharas should not interfere with the physical and mental activities and must be conducive to health.

Prakriti : The biological constitution of an individual that remains constant throughout life is called *Prakriti* . It is determined by the features of three *dosas* or five mahabhutas of *Sukra*(semen) and *Sonitha* (ovum) . a perfect balance in the *Thridosas* is said to be *Sama Prakriti*. It is a state of good health with harmony of mental attributes in association with homeostasis of *Thridosas*. The *Prakriti* is divided into several types based on body and mind constitutions. There are seven types according to the body constitution anmd three types according to the mental qualites . Among them *Prakriti* constitute by the combination of *dosas* are most common⁵. The mental constitution are based on the three *gunas* – *satva guna*, , *rajo guna* and *tamoguna* ⁶. The characteristics of different *Prakriti* vary according to the structural and functional aspects of the *dosas*

Vega: In order to lead a healthy life, the 14 *Vegas* or urges should not be suppressed. These urges must be satisfied to prevent diseases. The 14 *Sareerika vegas* are flatus passing reflex, defecation reflex, micturation reflex, sneezing reflex, thirst reflex, hunger reflex, sleeping urge, , cough reflex, yawning reflex, breathing reflex, tear reflex, erection reflex, and seminal discharge reflexes .these are the effects of the body to expel the unwanted materials. Suppression of these urges provokes them and that results in the sudden onset of diseases or even death⁷. Urges related to mental and verbal deeds such as greed, grief, fear, using harsh words, irrelevant talk, anger, shamelessness, envy, vanity etc., should be suppressed and avoided⁸.

Desha: Persons living in different geographical areas have different constitutional advantages and disadvantages. For example, those living in *Jangala* desha are prone to developing diseases of *vata* origin. Similarly, those living in *anoopadesha* are prone to developing diseases of *kapha* origin. So *Sadharana Desha* is considered the best place for dwelling. The properties of food materials and drugs selected from

different places also vary. Therefore without proper analysis of the properties the materials, the collection and consumption of such food, drinks and medicines make adverse effects in the body⁹.

Kala: The living organisms are clearly influenced by the natural changes. The body strength also varies according to season. Even the zodiac signs influence the very existence of the living things. Since the universe and human body are made up of the same elements, whatever changes taking place externally in the universe will internally affect the living body¹⁰. Among the reasons for ailments, *kala* – the time factor plays an important role in the form of *heena yoga*, *midhya yoga* and *atiyoga*. For example, insufficient rain in rainy season is *heena yoga*, the non-occurrence of rain in rainy season is *midhya yoga* and excessive rain fall is *atiyoga*. Accordingly the selection, mode of preparation and administration of food, drinks and medicines are determined by these factors¹¹.

Vayas : The early years are the developing age and the body gradually acquires strength by assuming the ingredients necessary for the development and this period is called adolescent age. The adolescent attains strength only when the body becomes mature. The body strength is maximum in the middle age and is gradually decreases as the age advances. *Vata dosa* dominant during old age and that is responsible for the degenerative changes in the body¹². In order to prevent early ageing, measures must be employed in the form of rejuvenation therapy.

Satwa : Mind is precursor of all perceptions. It is permanently connected to the soul. It is considered a super-faculty because it controls all sensory and motor activities. The mental balance is determined by the properties inherent in it¹³. The three attributes that play an important role in the functioning of mind are *satva guna*, *rajo guna* and *tamo guna*. They make the mind turbid and impair the clarity.

The mental functions like thinking, remembering, etc. are performed only when the mind is clear. According to many scholars, the mind is located in the heart. The imbalance of the bodily functions impairs the mind and vice versa. Changes in the body humors affect mind. The *satvaguna* is pure and hence it does not cause diseases whereas *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* are capable of vitiating mind. The control of mind is essential to withdraw the organs from deleterious objects. Hence vitiation of the mind is responsible for the errors in consciousness, intellect, memory, etc.. Mental personality differs according to the properties of mind. Excessive utilization, non utilization and wrong – utilization of sense faculties vitiate sense organs. Proper and improper utilization result in normal and abnormal conditions respectively. So efforts must be made not to disturb the mind.

Discussion:

The fundamental principle for creating health and higher consciousness is the maintenance of the digestive fire, *agni*. It exists in the body and mind as the biological fire of metabolism. Ayurveda states that good digestion is the key to health, proper functioning of the brain and mind, and our intelligence and immunity. And now recent medical research indicates that poor digestion and extra weight in middle age increases our risk of getting dementia in old age. *Agni* is viewed as a sacred element that must be treasured and maintained in the same way that we carefully maintain a fire to cook, not burn, food, and to warm our home. *Agni* is the element that keeps our intelligence sharp, clear and bright. It maintains our intelligence by enabling us to digest information from life so that we can know what is good for us and what is not. Therefore *Agni* also means immunity; our ability to discriminate foods from toxins, to identify harmful bacteria, and so on. With a strong *Agni* we only take in what we need and eliminate excreta and toxins. A weak *agni* does not know what is good for us and does not have the power to remove toxins and bacteria. The best way to build a strong *agni* is to remain self-aware and balanced while eating, to learn what is good for us, and to place foods and substances into our body with care and respect. A good exercise is to imagine that we are feeding

a vitally important and sacred part of us, the importance of good digestion to our health and sense of wellbeing is well known. Scientific research is proving that there are many truths stored in ancient wisdom.

Ayurveda has a unique way of classifying humans, which is used in the clinical management of health and disease. Humans are classified into three fundamental types of constitution or *prakriti*, called *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* based on their anatomical, physiological, and psychological characteristics. According to Ayurveda, *prakriti* of a person is determined at the time of conception and does not change until death. Recommendations on diets, lifestyles, and drugs vary depending on the *prakriti* of the individual. Since it gets determined at the time of conception, in the past decade, the hypothesis that *prakriti* has a genetic basis been tested by different groups of Indian scientists. A correlation between specific *prakriti* and HLA-DRB1 polymorphism was demonstrated by Bhushan et al.¹⁴, Prasher et al.¹⁵ and Mukherjee and Prasher¹⁶ have used *prakriti*-based classification and have demonstrated the genomic and biochemical correlates with specific *prakriti* types. They have termed this approach of classification of humans as *Ayurgenomics* and propose its potential use in personalized and preventive medicine. Frequency of association of CYP2C19 genotype was demonstrated to vary depending on the *prakriti*¹⁷. Differential expression of a high-altitude adaptation gene, *EGLN1* as a response to hypoxia, was correlated to specific *prakriti* type¹⁸. Rotti et al.¹⁹ found a significant correlation between dominant *prakriti* to place of birth and body mass index (BMI).

In recent years, there have been concerted research efforts to understand Ayurvedic principles, such as *prakriti*, *dosa*, and *agni* using modern scientific tools. These trans-disciplinary bridging efforts have no doubt helped correlate certain reduced aspects of Ayurveda with existing biomedical entities. However, they have not been able to capture the holism of Ayurveda. It is not clear whether the holistic knowledge of Ayurveda was assembled by putting together pieces of data and information gained over a period of time (like is done in Systems Biology approach) or whether there was an altogether different method adopted to perceive holism. Therefore, interpreting or validating the complex holistic principles, such as the five fundamental elements and the three bio-effectors concepts (three humors or *tridosas*), of Ayurveda can be quite a challenge using the same methods and tools that look at cells and atoms. This may end up like the five blind men trying to interpret an elephant by feeling different parts of the elephant²⁰.

Birth in a country where people are naturally strong, inhabitants of certain places like *sindh* are strong by nature. This is because of the specific characteristics of those places. Birth in such countries makes the man strong. Moderate climate when there is no excess of heat and cold and which is pleasant also promotes the strength of the individual. Birth at a time when people are naturally gain strength – in certain seasons like *hemanta* (November to January) and *sisira* (January to march), people are generally gain strength and birth in such seasons makes the individual strong. The progeny of parents having no abnormality or having the excellence sperm, ovum, and uterus is endowed with strength. Mind also control over the body. If the individual is having sound mind, then his body will also be quite strong. Some people are endowed with a strong physique because of their virtuous actions in the past life. Habitual performances of exercise are also known to promote the strength of the individual.

Conclusion :

The health of the person depends upon the healthy *Sukra*(*semen*) and *Artava*(*ovum*), proper functioning of the *Agni* and intake of suitable and wholesome diet. Further health also determines by *Desa* (birth place), *Kala* (time factor or time of the birth), *Vaya* (age factor), *Satva* (mental factor) and *Vega* (natural urges) etc. the knowledge of determinants of health will be key to maintain good health life-long by adopting modifications as and when requires with proper observance of principles of *Swsathavritta*

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