

ROLE OF AGNI (DIGESTIVE FIRE) IN LIFE STYLE DISORDERS: A LITERARY REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In Ayurveda, the term Agni is used for the digestion of food and metabolic products. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of human body. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that Dehagni is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, lusture, Oja, Teja (energy) and Prana (life energy). About the importance of Agni, Acharya Charak has mentioned that after stoppage of the function of Agni, the individual dies, and when the Agni of an individual is Sama, then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long and healthy life. But, if the Agni of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in ill health and disease. Hence, Agni is said to be the base (Mool) of life. The qualities of healthy individuals are narrated in : Normal state of Jataragni, normal state and function of Dhathus (Tissues): Normal state and function of Malas : Pleasant soul, mind and sense objects. There are four different states of Jataragni. Vishama, Teekshana, Manda and Samastates. Among the four different states of Agni Samagni is considered as normal one, all others are considered as abnormal. Samagni is the only state which is responsible for maintenance of health and thus prevent life style disorders. Agni is having dominant role in the manifestation of lifestyle disorders. So, the maintenance of Samagni is essential for the prevention of diseases mainly for the diseases concerned with lifestyle.

Keywords - : Agni , Health, Maintenance, Jataragni, lifestyle diseases.

INTRODUCTION

LIFE STYLE DISORDERS

Lifestyle disorders are defined as those health problems that react to changes in lifestyle. This is commonly caused by alcohol, drug and smoking abuse as well as lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating. Lifestyle Diseases are Heart disease, Diabetes, Cancer, Stroke, Arthritis, Migraine, Headaches, Sleep Disorders, Musculoskeletal Disorders, Nerve Compression Disorders, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Tendonitis, Degenerative Neck and Back Disorders, Pulmonary Disease, Osteoporosis, Arteriosclerosis, Gallbladder Disease, Kidney and Liver Disease, Alzheimer's disease and Dementia etc. The management is incomplete without lifestyle modifications. Healthy lifestyle includes various activities performed by an individual with an objective of physical and mental health along with longevity by means of proper hygiene, diet regulation and exercise for fitness.

ROLE OF AGNI IN LIFE STYLE DISORDERS

Agni is given major significance in the maintenance of health as well as occurrence of lifestyle disorders. Food which is taken by the person is the major responsible factor for the state of health and manifestation of diseases. Food is categorized first for the maintenance of health or

manifestation of lifestyle disorders. Consumed foods and drinks undergo metabolic transformation in the digestive system. After the process of digestion, it will produce effects on the body which may be beneficial or harmful. The process of digestion is mainly carried out by *Agni* (digestive fire). The food provides nourishment to bodily tissues which is reached to end organ by the action of *Agni*. It is the *Agni* that plays an important role in this connection because tissue elements like, *Rasa* etc. cannot originate from undigested food particles. Lifestyle disorders like diabetes mellitus, obesity, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular diseases etc. are produced mainly due to *Medhodhatvagni*. *Agni* is the essential cause for existence of life, its destruction leads to death and its proper maintenance helps to live a long life, and its impairment gives rise to various ailments. It is also cause for colour, vigour, health, enthusiasm, plumpness, appearance, *Ojas*, *Tejas*, and other varieties of *Agnis* and *Prana*.

TYPES OF AGNI

Agni is countless because of its presence in each and every *DhatuParamanu* of the body. But sum up of the number of *Agni* varies in various classical *Ayurvedic* texts, as shown below *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned thirteen types of *Agni*. *Jatharagni* 1, *Bhutagni* 5, *Dhatvagni* 7. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, five types of *Agni* are illustrated, viz. *Pachakagni*, *Ranjakagni*, *Alochakagni*, *Sadhakagni* and *Bhrajakagni*. However, there is an indirect reference of five *Bhutagnis* underlying in the brief description made to the transformation of food stuff. *Acharya Vagbhata* has described different types of *Agni*, viz. *Bhutagnis* 5, *Dhatvagnis* 7, *Dhoshagni* 3. *Sharangdhara* has recognized five Pittas only (*Pachak*, *Bhrajak*, *Ranjak*, *Alochak* and *Sadhak*). *Bhavamishra* has followed *Acharya Charaka* and *Acharya Vagbhata*. Accordingly, they are classified into three groups, namely *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. *Jatharagni* is the *Agni* or bioenergy present in the *Jathara* (the site where the digestive process takes place). According to *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Jatharagni*, the seat of *Grahani*, is so called because it holds the food for a certain time inside the *Amashaya* (stomach) to facilitate the digestion. In the opinion of *Dhanvantari*, it is the *Kala* known as “*Pittadhara*,” situated at the entrance of the *Pakvashaya* (large intestine) and acting as a bolt to the door of the pathway/channel of food. It is responsible for the duration of life, health, valour, *Ojas* (essence of the *Dhatus*) and strength of all the *Bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni*. The strength of *Grahani* is from *Agni*, and the strength of *Agni* is from *Grahani*. When the *Agni* undergoes vitiation, *Grahani* also gets vitiated and produces diseases. *Jatharagni* is considered to be the most important because each and every nutrient that one ingests first comes to the *Jathara* and is subjected to the action of *Jatharagni*. *Jatharagni* digests the food materials that composed of the five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective *Dhatu paramanus* (tissues). *Jatharagni* is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (*Prasad*) and the waste products (*kitta*) in our body. *Jatharagni* is directly related to *Dhatvagni* or bioenergy in the cells and their metabolic processes, with ultimate tissue metabolism or *Dhatu-Paka* process. All the *Dhatvagni* depend on the normal, healthy state of *Jatharagni*. If the *Jatharagni* is hyperactive (*Tikshna*) or hypoactive (*Manda*), it will cause an excessive or retarded action of the *Dhatvagni*. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. *Jatharagni* is the main important *Agni* that controls the function of all other twelve *Agnis*. All the *Agnis* are totally depends on the status of *Jatharagni*.

Agni Pariksha- *Jatharagni* is also classified into four types according to its performance of digestion in the human body namely *Vishamagni*, *Tikshanagni*, *Mandagni* and *Samagni*. Four different states of *Agni* exist in the body. Of these various states, this is due to the aggravation of each *Dosha* respectively (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and the fourth state is considered as balanced state. In fact only *Samagni* is the physiological state while remaining three are abnormal due to vitiated *Doshas*.

VISHAMAGNI- Due to aggravation of *Vatic Dosha*, *Vishamagni* originates and makes bodies digestive system unstable, which leads to constipation, distension or swelling of the abdomen, dysentery, colic type pain and wind, gurgling sounds in the intestines.

TIKSHNAGNI- Person with predominantly *Pitta* constitution or with disturbed *Pitta Dosha* has raised *Tikshnagni*. *Jatharagni* apart of *Tikshnagni* becomes hyperactive which leads to rapid digestion of food. These people never get satiated and keep on eating food. This state of *Agni* causes dry mouth and palate, a burning sensation in the stomach and excessive thirst.

MANDAGNI- A state of *Agni* found in people with *Kapha* aggravation such persons cannot digest even a small quantity of food leading to nausea, vomiting, heaviness in the stomach, laziness, coughing and coating of the tongue.

SAMAGNI- A state of *Agni* indicates balanced state of three *Doshas* in the body. Persons can easily digest normal diet and obtain proper nourishment. Cells, organs and all *Dhatus* (tissues) received proper nutrition leading to healthy body.

MANAGEMENT

The state of *Agni* is not only based on food quality and quantity it also has number of confounding factors like *Prakruti*, *Kala*, *Desa*, *Manasika Avastha*, etc. Depending on which the variation of the state of *Agni* is often expectable and unavoidable. All the human beings can have all the different states of *Agni*. So, to avoid the disease manifestation and to retain the healthy state one should always remember the state of *Agni* and its management.

MANAGEMENT OF VISHAMAGNI- *Vishamagni* is treated with foods with the quality of *Snigdha* (unctuous) and *Lavana Rasa* (salty taste). As *Vishamagni* digests the food sometimes properly and sometimes improperly. It seems combined effect of *Teekshana* and *Mandastates* of *Agni*. So, the management is carried out as per the condition. As *Vishamagni* is caused by *Vata Dosha*, the simple *Sneha Dravya* (unctuous substances) like oil is sufficient along with *Saindhva Lavana* (rock salt).

MANAGEMENT OF TEEKSHNAGNI- *Teekshnagni* is treated with foods with the quality of *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Sheeta* (cold) and *Madhurarasa* (sweet taste). *Virechana* (Purgation) is the optimum procedure to manage *Teekshnagni*. As *Teekshnagni* is caused by *Pittadosha*, *Ghrita* (ghee) is the best substance to manage *Teekshnagni*.

MANAGEMENT OF MANDAGNI- *Mandagni* is treated with foods with the taste of *Katu* (Pungent), *Tiktha* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent). As *Mandagni* is caused by *Kapha*, *Vamana*

(Emesis) is the optimum procedure to treat *Mandagni.Pippali* (piper longum), *Maricha* (piper nigrum) is the good substances to manage *Mandagni*.

MAINTENANCE OF SAMAGNI-*Samagni* is the only state which is beneficial to maintain healthy state in the human beings and prevent lifestyle disorders. So the maintenance of *Samagni* can be carried out by following *AshtaAharaVidhiViseshaAyatanas* (Eight rules for eating). In general *SamanaVata* is the main factor for vitiation of *Agni*. As long as *Samanavata* is carrying out its normal functions, the state of *Agni* is also *Sama*. *Vishama* is caused by *Vimargagamana* of *Samanavata*. *Teekshnagni* is caused by combination of *Samanavata* with *Pitta*. *Mandagni* is caused by combination of *Samanavata* with *Kapha*. In *SamanavataVikrutithe* medications should be taken in *Madhyabhaktam*(middle of meals). Obviously daily use of ghee in proper quantity in the middle of meals is essential for the maintenance of *Samagni*.

CONCLUSION

Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body. Therefore, in *Ayurveda*, it is considered that *Dehagni* is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, lusture, *Oja*, *Teja*(energy) and *Prana*(life energy). *AcharyaCharaka* has described the importance of *Agni* and stated that after stoppage of the functions of *Agni*, the individual dies, and when the *Agni* of an individual is in the state of *Samavastha* (equilibrium), then that person would be absolutely healthy and would lead a long, and healthy life. But, if the *Agni* of a person is vitiated, the whole metabolism in his body would be disturbed, resulting in various types of life style disorders. Hence *Agni*, should be maintained balanced to prevent these disorders.

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