

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Ayurveda has described an important factor of digestion and metabolism in our body as Agni. Ingested food is to be digested, absorbed and assimilated, which is unavoidable for the maintenance of life, and is performed by Agni. In Ayurveda, the term "Agni" is used in the sense of digestion of food and metabolic products. Agni converts food in the form of energy, which is responsible for all the vital functions of our body. Therefore, Ayurveda considers that Agni is the cause of life, complexion, strength, health, nourishment, luster, oja (vigor), and prana (life force). Agni is contributed by the three doshas.

As long as Agni is functioning correctly, the processes of breaking down food and absorbing and assimilating it into the body will work effortlessly. An individual with a healthy and active Agni will result in a healthy and vibrant body. Longevity depends upon Agni. The intake of food should be regulated by the condition of the Agni, the digestive fire in the body. In this article we will see in detail about Agni, the digestive fire.

We welcome your suggestions and submissions.

Enjoy reading and get benefited with Ayurveda.

Vaidya Lakshmi Anoop

HEALTH AND AGNI



Like Tridosha control all parts of the body, they also control the Agni – digestive power.

Agni and Pitta – Wherever there is processing with fuel, like running of a motor engine, there is an element of fire involved. Hence, even in the process of food digestion, where food is used as fuel by the body to burn and generate energy, there is predominant involvement of fire. So, Pitta is the main component of Agni. (In fact, Agni itself means fire.). Pitta acts as the main burning power, which burns the food and divides it into useful part (Rasa) and waste part (Mala – faeces)

Agni and Vata - But as we know, fire alone cannot burn a mass. It needs some amount of air as well. Proper quantity of oxygen rich air will keep the fire alive.

Wind is correlated with Vata in Ayurveda. Hence, the process of digestion also involves Vata. For your digestion process to run smoothly, your Vata should also be in a healthy state. Vata helps in maintaining proper Pitta. It also helps in the division of useful part and waste part. Vata is responsible for movement of the food taken in, in normal downward direction, from oral cavity to anal canal. It is also responsible for division and further assorting of useful part of food and waste part.

Agni and Kapha - When there is a big mass, to burn it, only fire and wind might not be sufficient. You need some lubricating liquid that would soften and break down the mass into small particles. Liquid / water are correlated with Kapha. Hence, you need a little amount of Kapha also, in the digestion process. Kapha helps in lubricating the food. It helps to break down the food particles into small pieces.

Common causes of digestive disorders :

- Ayurvedic classics emphasize to follow satvik food. But, it will not be possible, all the time. Our tongue demands tasty food, every time. Many of the spicy and additives like chilly, garlic when used excessively will cause digestive troubles.
- Mostly we are dependent on packed food; these possess significant percentage of preservatives, coloring agents, stabilizers, emulsifiers, taste enhancers etc. which on the long run will cause disorders of the digestive system.
- Hurry, worry and curry are the reasons for any kind of irritation.
- Untimely food, excess of food, repeated food intake (before the digestion of the previously taken food), excess intake of coffee and tea, habits like smoking, tobacco chewing etc too contribute in the causation as well as aggravation of the disease.
- Ayurveda emphasizes that stress, job dissatisfaction, jealousy, anger etc also as reasons for disease of GIT.
- In our busy schedule, we often take food in hotels, restaurants or in the roadside fast food- shops. In many part of the country, in these shops good hygienic measures are not undertaken or else there will be every chance of contamination. Due to this, there will be infection by bacteria, fungus or such other micro organism and indirectly they become the reason for irritation of the stomach and gut.
- Now-a-days most of the people do not follow classical food habits. Taking pizza, burger, noodles etc followed with any juice or milk-shake is a typical example of incompatible food. Other than this, we are not sure about the type of oil used, spices mixed, the way of processing of food etc. Incidentally, these also act as incompatible foods. Due to this, the food is not digested properly and it provokes excess of Pitta and thus results in gastric irritation.

As per Ayurveda, indigestion and low digestion strength leads to Ama (metabolic toxin) formation which is the cause for many diseases. Hence, improving digestion strength is the first thing to be done before starting Panchakarma treatment. Improving digestion is also helpful in treating conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, obesity, etc.

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