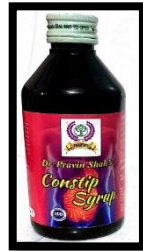


## 54 - HOW TO STRENGTHEN THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM THROUGH AYURVEDA?

- **Introduction of *Jatharagni* (digestive fire): a key element in maintaining the digestive system**

- According to the [Ayurveda concept of digestion](#), Jatharagni or the digestive fire (Agni) digests food to provide nutrition or nourishment for the **normal functioning of the body**. Correct functioning of the **digestive fire (Jatharagni)** helps to restore health, while improper digestion initiates disease processes in the body.



- **Weak digestive fire** produces metabolic waste, which, unless eliminated in a timely manner from the body system, can turn into toxins (Ama). If you want to be healthy, it is important to take care of your own digestive fire (Agni) so as to improve the **performance of the digestive system**.
- When our digestive ability, or Agni, is strong, we build healthy tissues, eliminate waste products efficiently, and produce a subtle essence called **Ojas (an element needed for longevity)**. *Ojas* is a Sanskrit word that means *strength* and can be defined as the *innermost vital essence*. According to Ayurveda, Ojas is the basis for clarity of perception, physical strength, and immunity.
- Ayurveda classifies diet according to the degree of solidity of the food. There are four types of food that we consume in our daily lives:
  - **Liquids or drinks:** milk, buttermilk, fruit and vegetable juice (food that is more suitable for infants, very old and physically weak or diseased people);
  - **Foods that are semi-liquid:** e.g. jam, gravy, jelly (food for children);
  - **Foods that require chewing:** e.g. rice (food for adults that need strength to cut it into pieces);
  - **Foods that require mastication:** e.g. Indian bread (food for the elderly who use their energy to chew the morsel inside the mouth).

- Diet can also be classified according to **food taste**. The food we eat has six tastes:

- Sweet / sour / salty / pungent / spicy / bitter.

- **8 RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTH**

**THEN THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM**

- **Prakruti**

- Each **nutritional substance** has its own nature or characteristics.

Ayurveda recommends checking the characteristics of the food you take to match your current digestion status and physical activity level. A person with indigestion (poor digestive fire) consuming large amounts of red



- meat causes pressure on the digestive system. Red meat is heavy (needs more energy and strength) to digest. A highly physically active person with better **digestive fire (Agni)** needs food rich in nutrients; fasting is not recommended.

- **Karana (Preparation/cooking methods)**

- The way we cook food can change its characteristics. **Roasting or steaming** makes food light to digest, while deep frying makes it difficult for digestion. For example, curd provokes an imbalance in the **Kapha energy** (and causes problems like sinusitis or edema), but the same curd, when **converted into buttermilk by churning**, becomes **easy for digestion**. The different methods of cooking are important to make food easy for digestion.

- **Sam yoga (Food combination)**

- Honey and ghee are very healthy if consumed independently, but if both are combined in equal quantities, they can be harmful to the body. So, it is very important to know the science of food combination to enhance those properties which aid digestion.

Ayurveda says that most skin conditions occur due to the consumption of **incompatible foods**, such as mixing sour **fruit & milk together**. Incompatible foods are referred to as **Viruddha Aahar in Ayurveda**, which is responsible for cumulative toxicity.

## • **Rashi (Quantity)-**

- For better digestion, solid foods should only fill half of the stomach capacity (maximum 500 g).  
A quarter of the remaining half should be reserved for liquids (maximum 250 ml) and the other should be kept empty for air. **Pitta biotype** people require a greater quantity of food (Pitta people have high **Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)** as compared to Kapha biotype individuals.

## • **Desh (Habitat) –**

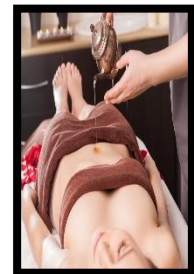
- The food science of Ayurveda recommends food as per the habitat and the biotype. Deserts (Jangal desh, such as Saudi Arabia or Africa) are dry and hot, so people from such habitats, especially if the **Vata biotype dominates**, should avoid dry and astringent foods. Such types of foods aggravate Vata..If a person lives in Anup desh, which means land rich in water, with cold & damp weather (like Bulgaria, Sweden, Germany or other European countries), it is better for them to avoid too much oily food, which can cause Kapha vitiation.

## • **Kala (Meal timing)**

- **Eat only when you feel hungry.** You should avoid eating without hunger. Pitta biotype people should avoid **hot and pungent foods**, especially in summer, and should also eat more regularly.  
The type of food should be adjusted according to the **age, timing of day, season**, etc. – for example, dry food such as **sandwiches, dry cured meat, raw nuts**, and extremely light food like popcorn and cold beverages will increase Vata so these should be avoided by the elderly as Vata is dominant in that age. Hence, eating such foods will affect digestion and weaken it.

## • **Upayog Samstha (Dietary rules)**

- **Ayurveda dietary rules** help conscious and cautious nutrition, leading to improved digestion and assimilation of food. Freshly prepared food is easily digested. The food should be freshly **cooked and warm** as it **stimulates the digestive fire (Agni)**. Re-warming food prepared the previous day distorts its taste and slows digestion.



- The proper use of **natural fats** such as oil and ghee is very important as they **lubricate the digestive canal and the visceral organs** increasing their strength. Deep fried food should be avoided unless specified. The amount of food depends on its properties. **Heavy foods** (food that takes time to digest such as red meat, cottage cheese, pastries) should be **consumed in moderation**. Food should only be taken when the previous **meal has been well absorbed**, which means when you feel hungry. This allows the body to eliminate waste in time to be ready for the next meal.
- Feel free to consult your [Ayurveda expert](#) and learn the **Science of Food Combination** because it is very important (fruit and milk together taste good but the combination is bad for digestion and is among the causes of various skin diseases, e.g. leukoderma).
- **Maintaining proper hygiene** and a pleasant atmosphere around the dining table and before starting the meal is recommended. Despite being appropriate, if the food is eaten too fast, it will not provide the necessary nutrition to the body and might increase the possibility of toxin generation.
- Hence, it is recommended to chew a bite 32 times for better digestion. Eating too slow is not advisable, either – one tends to eat more, which may lead to sluggish digestion. Meetings over lunch could save time but this will not help digestion. All our attention should be directed to eating while eating; mindful eating helps digestion.
- **Upayokta (Specificity of the person)**
  - Food items selected in accordance with the personal constitution get digested correctly, which helps maintain balance in life (Santulan). A **Vata person** eating too much **dry, bitter, light and cold food** will ultimately cause vitiation in Vata and will **imbalance the dosha**. One can eat all tastes but the exact quantity should be determined as per the constitution.
- **Aahar Parinamkar Bhava (Transformation of food)**
  - It is important to apply **Ayurveda dietary rules in cooking methods**, because they influence the functioning of the digestive tract.
  - **1 - Heat:** Properly cooked food becomes easy to digest. **Overheated or cold foods** are difficult to digest. The proper secretion of digestive juices provides heat for digestion.
  - **2 - Stimulation through spices:** Adding Indian spices such as cumin, hing, and mustard insures the proper stimulation of the digestive tract in order to push the intestines to work better. Gases produced while digesting Indian spices provide stimulation for the food's mixing and propulsion.
  - **3 - Kleda (Moisture):** The moisture inside the digestive organs softens the food and helps in separating food particles. This means that proper drinks such as **buttermilk, milk, fruit juices, or different kinds of alcohol** should be taken along with food.



- **4 - Sneha:** Food passes through the intestine during digestion. To guarantee passing action, lubrication is needed to avoid friction and deterioration of the digestive system. Hence, to retain the softness inside the body, essential fats are added while taking food. For **Vata and Kapha constitutions**, oil is better whereas ghee is the preferred option for Pitta.
- **5 - Kala:** Completing the process of digestion requires a specific amount of time. The habits of overeating, not eating well enough, eating incorrect foods, or eating more frequently cause **disturbances in digestion**. In turn, it affects the timing of digestion by either slowing it down or speeding it up. In both cases food is not digested well, which leads to various digestive problems – irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, hyperacidity and so on. Maintaining the exact and **regular timing of breakfast**, lunch and dinner (when a person is hungry) is highly important just as the time taken for each step of the food digestion process.
- **6- Sam yoga/santulan (balance):** Balancing the above five factors is required for **proper digestion**. Following only a few and ignoring the rest will certainly not make the **digestive system strong as balance is essential**.
- We can understand the whole concept through a simple example from daily life, e.g. the preparation of rice. When rice is being cooked, if it gets heated for a long time, it gets **overcooked** (digestion disturbed); if there is less water (**Sneha**), the rice will burn but will not get cooked. In a similar way, a balance of all these elements is required in terms of quantity and quality.
- Health is directly proportional to the **digestive fire (Agni)**. Following the above rules consciously is not a burden but an easy pathway to staying fit or fighting any chronic illnesses.

