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Understanding the role of ahara, matra, desha and kala in health promotion an ayurvedic perspective

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Abstract

Background: *Ayurveda*, the ancient Indian system of medicine, emphasizes the role of diet (*Ahara*) in maintaining health and preventing disease. Among various dietary principles, the consideration of *Matra* (quantity), *Desha* (geographical habitat), and *Kala* (time or season) forms the core of personalized nutrition in *Ayurveda*. This paper explores their significance in health promotion and preventive care.

Objective: To critically analyze and interpret the classical Ayurvedic concepts of *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* and their relevance in modern-day dietary planning for promoting holistic health.

Methods: This conceptual study is based on a literary review of classical *Ayurvedic* texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with modern scientific interpretations. Textual references were systematically compiled, interpreted, and correlated with contemporary understanding of personalized nutrition and chrononutrition.

Results: The review reveals that *Ahara Matra* ensures proper digestion and assimilation, *Desha* provides insight into food compatibility with regional physiology and climate, and *Kala* guides seasonal and circadian dietary adaptations. Collectively, these three parameters regulate *Agni* (digestive fire), prevent *Ama* formation (toxic byproducts), and maintain *Dosha* balance.

Conclusion: The integrated understanding of *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* offers a profound approach to personalized dietetics in preventive medicine. Its incorporation into daily dietary practice can significantly improve individual health outcomes and reduce lifestyle-related disorders.

Keywords: Ahara, matra, desha, kala, agni, health promotion, etc

Introduction

In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* (diet) is considered one of the *Trayopastambha* (three supporting pillars of life), alongside *Nidra* (sleep) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated lifestyle). The classics like *Charaka Samhita* state that proper food is the foundation of health, strength, complexion, nourishment, immunity (*Bala*), and longevity ^[1]. The emphasis on diet is not merely quantitative but also qualitative, with deep concern for the appropriateness of food in context to various factors. Thus, *Ahara* is not just sustenance but a therapeutic tool in the hands of a knowledgeable individual ^[2].

The concept of *Matra* (appropriate quantity) is pivotal to ensure efficient digestion (*Agnibala*) and prevention of *Ama* (undigested toxic matter). Overeating (*Ati matra*) leads to indigestion, metabolic disorders, and accumulation of toxins, while insufficient quantity (*Hina matra*) results in inadequate nourishment and depletion of bodily tissues (*Dhatu kshaya*). *Charaka* emphasizes the consumption of food in a quantity that satisfies hunger without overburdening the digestive fire. This rational approach aligns with modern concepts of caloric moderation and portion control ^[3].

Desha refers to the geographical location and its specific influence on the individual and the properties of food substances. It encompasses *Jangala* (dry), *Anupa* (marshy), and *Sadharana* (mixed) regions. The suitability of food depends on the individual's habitat, local climate, and availability of region-specific foods. This principle reflects *Ayurveda's* ecological wisdom and aligns with modern ideas of sustainable and local nutrition. Consumption of locally grown seasonal foods enhances digestibility and physiological harmony ^[4].

Kala in *Ayurveda* represents both *Nityaga Kala* (daily biological rhythm) and *Avashyaka Kala* (seasonal variations). Different foods and dietary habits are prescribed for different

times of the day and seasons of the year. For instance, *Guru Ahara* (heavy food) is better tolerated during winter (*Hemanta ritu*) due to heightened *Agni*. *Kala* also influences the body's *Dosha* balance; hence, seasonal regimens like *Ritucharya* are crucial for health maintenance. The modern sciences of chronobiology and chrononutrition strongly support these time-based dietary regulations [5].

In today's era of globalization, processed foods, sedentary lifestyles, and erratic eating patterns have led to a surge in lifestyle disorders. Reinstating the wisdom of *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* can guide the design of personalized and preventive health strategies. The adaptability of these principles into modern nutritional science could bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary healthcare. This paper attempts to critically examine and reinterpret these foundational dietary principles of *Ayurveda* for promoting holistic and sustainable health [6].

Aim and objectives

Aim

To critically explore the significance of *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* in health promotion from an *Ayurvedic* perspective.

Objectives

1. To study classical references related to *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* from authentic *Ayurvedic* texts.
2. To analyze the physiological and preventive roles of these concepts in maintaining health.
3. To correlate *Ayurvedic* dietary principles with modern nutrition science.
4. To highlight the relevance of personalized and seasonal diet planning for health promotion.
5. To promote awareness about classical *Ayurvedic* dietary wisdom in contemporary lifestyle.

Material and Method

Type of Study

This is a conceptual literary research study based on classical *Ayurvedic* texts and modern nutritional literature.

Basis	Types
Taste (Rasa)	<i>Madhura</i> , <i>Amla</i> , <i>Lavana</i> , <i>Katu</i> , <i>Tikta</i> , <i>Kashaya</i>
Virya	<i>Sheeta</i> (cooling) and <i>Ushna</i> (heating)
Vipaka	<i>Madhura</i> , <i>Amla</i> , <i>Katu</i>
Prabhava	Specific unique effects (e.g., milk is <i>sheetala</i> despite being <i>madhura</i> and <i>snigdha</i>)
Category (Dravya)	<i>Anna</i> (solid) and <i>Pana</i> (liquid)
Digestibility	<i>Laghu</i> (light) and <i>Guru</i> (heavy)

Ideal Ahara - Concept of Pathya Ahara

Pathya Ahara is that which is suitable and wholesome for the body and mind. According to *Charaka*, *Pathya* ensures nourishment without causing any disturbance in *dosha*, *dhatu*, or *mala*. (*Charaka Samhita*, *Sutrasthana* 28/15). All bodily functions and tissues are derived from food - hence the emphasis on its quality and suitability [10].

Concept of Ahara Matra, Desha, and Kala

- **Matra (Quantity):** Eating appropriate quantity according to *agni* and strength. Prevents *ama* and maintains balance.
- **Desha (Habitat):** Choice of food according to land type (*jangala*, *anupa*, *sadharana*) and regional climate.

Source of Data

- **Primary Sources:** *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Kashyapa Samhita*, and other *Ayurvedic* compendia.
- **Secondary Sources:** Commentaries like *Ayurveda Deepika*, *Nibandha Sangraha*, *Ghanekar Teeka*, and modern books on *Ayurveda* and nutrition.
- **Contemporary Sources:** Peer-reviewed journals, research articles, WHO and AYUSH guidelines, and relevant publications on diet and preventive medicine.

Method of Data Collection

- Classical *Ayurvedic* references were collected from *samhitas* and their commentaries.
- Concepts were systematically categorized under *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala*.
- Comparative understanding with modern concepts like portion size, geographical dietetics, and chrononutrition was explored.

Conceptual study: Ahara: The word *Ahara* is derived from the root 'hr' meaning to carry or sustain. Hence, *Ahara* signifies that which sustains life. This implies that the body is the product of food, and proper *Ahara* is essential for growth, development, and health maintenance. *Ahara* is not merely food intake, but a holistic term encompassing its type, quality, quantity, timing, method of preparation, and digestive capacity of the consumer [7].

Importance of Ahara in Ayurveda

- Considered one of the *Trayopastambha* (three pillars of life) along with *Nidra* and *Brahmacharya*.
- It is the primary source of energy, nourishment (*Poshana*), and immunity (*Bala*).
- *Ahara* is also instrumental in *dosha* balance, *dhatu* formation, and *agni* maintenance.
- Disease prevention and health promotion in *Ayurveda* largely begin with dietary regulation [8].

Classification of Ahara:[9]

Ahara is classified on various parameters in classical texts:

- **Kala (Time)**
Seasonal (*ritucharya*) and diurnal variation; promotes natural *dosha* balance and optimal digestion [11].

Ahara Vidhi Vidhana (Dietary Rules)

Charaka Samhita (*Sutrasthana* 5) prescribes eight rules (*Ashta Ahara Vidhi Vidhana*) for proper eating:

1. **Prakriti** - Nature of food
2. **Karana** - Processing
3. **Samyoga** - Combination
4. **Rashi** - Quantity
5. **Desha** - Region
6. **Kala** - Time/Season

7. Upayoga Samstha - Dietary rules**8. Upayokta** - Person who eats

These principles ensure digestion, absorption, and assimilation in accordance with *Ayurvedic* physiology.¹²

Conceptual study on matra (quantity of food in ayurveda)

The term *Matra* is derived from the root “*Ma*” meaning to measure. In *Ayurveda*, *Matra* refers to the appropriate quantity of food or medicine that should be administered based on individual capacity, digestive strength (*Agni*), and

other factors. Thus, *Matra* is not a fixed measurement but a dynamic and individualized concept^[13].

Importance of Matra in Ahara

- *Matra* ensures proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation of food.
- Both excessive (*Ati Matra*) and insufficient (*Hina Matra*) food intake are considered causes of disease.
- Balanced *Matra* helps maintain the equilibrium of *Doshas*, supports *Dhatu Poshana*, and prevents *Ama* (toxins)^[14].

Types of Matra

Type	Explanation
Sarvagraha Matra	Total volume of food taken (whole meal portion)
Parigraha Matra	Individual item-wise portion within a meal
Anashana Matra	Quantity below the requirement - leads to <i>Dhatu Kshaya</i> and weakness
Atimatra	Overeating - leads to indigestion, <i>Ama</i> , and <i>Kapha</i> aggravation
Yukta Matra	Ideal quantity, suitable to <i>Agni</i> , <i>Vaya</i> , <i>Desha</i> , <i>Kala</i> , and <i>Prakriti</i>

Classical Guidelines for Food Quantity

- Half stomach with solid food, one quarter with liquids, and one quarter left empty for movement of *Vata* and proper digestion - this is an often quoted principle.
- *Charaka Samhita* recommends observing “*Laghuta*” (lightness) and “*Tripti*” (satisfaction) as signs of correct quantity^[15].

Factors Determining Matra

Determinant	Description
Agni Bala	Digestive strength - <i>Teekshna Agni</i> tolerates more, <i>Manda Agni</i> tolerates less
Vaya (Age)	Children and elderly require lesser quantity; youth require moderate to high
Sharira Bala	Physical strength and constitution (<i>Prakriti</i>) influence dietary quantity
Desha (Habitat)	<i>Jangala Desha</i> requires more nourishing food than <i>Anupa Desha</i>
Kala (Season and Time)	In <i>Hemanta Ritu</i> and during day time more quantity is tolerated
Vyakti Bheda	Personalized approach based on constitution, disease status, and routine

Matra in Clinical and Preventive Practice

- Prevents indigestion, *Ama*, obesity, and malnutrition.
- Promotes *Agni Dipti* (stimulated digestion), *Dhatu Poshana* (tissue nourishment), and *Vikara Nasha* (disease prevention).
- In clinical practice, *Matra* is crucial in Ahara (diet) and Aushadha (medicine) administration.¹⁶

Conceptual study on desha (Geographical and Individual Consideration in Diet and Health)

The word *Desha* literally means place, habitat, or region. In *Ayurveda*, *Desha* is a multidimensional concept used in both diagnostic and therapeutic contexts. It refers to:

- **Bhumi Desha** - the geographical and environmental land characteristics
- **Deha Desha** - the bodily habitat or constitution of the individual
- **Roga Desha** - the site or location of disease

In the context of *Ahara*, *Desha* mainly refers to *Bhumi Desha*, or the physical environment where an individual resides, which affects both the *Agni* (digestive capacity) and the properties of consumed food^[17].

Classification of Desha^[18]

According to *Charaka Samhita* (Vi. 8/94), land or habitat is classified into three main types:

Type of Desha	Characteristics	Effects on Body/Diet
Jangala Desha	Dry region; sandy soil, less vegetation, hot and arid climate	Vata-Pitta predominance; needs nourishing, unctuous, and heavy diet
Anupa Desha	Marshy, water-abundant region; dense vegetation, humid climate	Kapha predominance; needs light, dry, and warm food
Sadharana Desha	Mixed region with balanced climatic and soil features	Balanced <i>Doshas</i> ; general recommendations apply

Desha Ahara (Diet)

The regional attributes of *Desha* influence the:

- Qualities of locally grown foods - e.g., grains, vegetables, and herbs absorb *Desha-specific gunas*.
- Digestive fire (*Agni*) of the inhabitants
- Need for *Dosha* balance based on habitat

Example

People in *Jangala Desha* tend to have stronger *Agni*, so heavier food is suitable. In contrast, people in *Anupa Desha* are more prone to *Kapha* disorders, and thus require lighter diets.¹⁹

Desha and Individual Constitution (Deha Desha)

- *Deha Desha* refers to the individual's body and constitution, primarily determined by *Prakriti* (Vata, Pitta, Kapha types).
- An individual's native *Desha* impacts their physiology, disease susceptibility, and food compatibility.

Thus, *Ahara* should be adjusted not only according to land (*Bhumi Desha*), but also to body constitution (*Deha Desha*)^[20].

Clinical and Preventive Importance of Desha^[21]

Context	Relevance of Desha
Ahara Planning	Region-specific food selection enhances digestion and Dosha balance
Disease Diagnosis	Helps in identifying the nature of vitiated Doshas and their aggravating causes
Drug Selection	Herbs/plants grown in native <i>Desha</i> have better efficacy and bioavailability
Roga Desha	Identifying the affected body part/location and modifying diet accordingly

Conceptual study on kala (*Time Factor in Dietetics and Health in Ayurveda*)

The term *Kala* in *Ayurveda* refers to time, but its implications go far beyond the chronological concept. It is a dynamic principle that governs:

- Biological rhythms
- Seasonal variations

- Disease progression
- Digestion and metabolism
- Appropriateness of Ahara (diet), Vihara (lifestyle), and Aushadha (medicine)^[23]

Types of Kala in Ayurveda

Type of Kala	Explanation
Nityaga Kala	Daily time cycle (based on circadian rhythm) - <i>Dina Anshas</i> like morning, noon
Avasthika Kala	Time based on physiological or pathological state - e.g., hunger, sleep
Ritucharya Kala	Seasonal time - Six seasons influencing <i>Doshas</i> and dietary needs
Yogya Kala	Appropriate timing for interventions - e.g., correct time for food, medicine
Adhyatmika Kala	Life stages - childhood, youth, old age affecting <i>Ahara</i> needs

Kala and Ahara (Dietary Timings and Seasons)**A. Daily Dietary Timing (Nityaga Kala)**

- Eating should be in synchrony with digestive capacity, which is strongest at midday.
- *Ahara* should not be taken immediately after last meal, nor after prolonged fasting.
- Best times:
- Morning (light breakfast)

- Midday (heaviest meal)
- Evening (light dinner before sunset)^[24]

Seasonal Dietary Variation (Ritucharya Kala)

According to *Ayurveda*, every season causes changes in *Dosha* predominance and *Agni* (digestive fire). Diet must adapt accordingly:

Ritu (Season)	Dosha Predominance	Agni Status	Recommended Ahara
Hemanta/Shishira	Vata accumulation	Strong	Heavy, nourishing, oily, warm food
Vasanta	Kapha aggravation	Mild	Light, dry, easily digestible food
Grishma	Pitta accumulation	Weak	Cooling, hydrating, less oily food
Varsha	Vata aggravation	Weak	Warm, sour, salty, oily food
Sharada	Pitta aggravation	Moderate	Light, cooling, bitter foods
Hemanta	Kapha accumulation	Strong	Heavy and unctuous food

Kala in Digestion (Ahara Pachana Kala)

Digestion also proceeds in a time-bound manner after food intake:

- **Madhura Avasthapaka** (initial sweet phase)
- **Amla Avasthapaka** (acidic phase)

- **Katu Avasthapaka** (pungent phase)

These stages should be respected when prescribing second meals or medications^[25].

Clinical and Preventive Importance of Kala

Context	Application of Kala
Ahara Timing	Eating according to digestive peak prevents <i>Ama</i> , improves metabolism
Ritucharya	Seasonal adaptation of diet prevents <i>Ritujanya Vikara</i> (seasonal diseases)
Disease Management	Certain disorders worsen or improve in specific seasons (<i>Dosha Prakopa Kala</i>)
Life Stages	Child, adult, elderly - diet quantity and quality vary with age (<i>Vaya Kala</i>)
Medicine Timing	Drugs like <i>Basti</i> , <i>Vamana</i> , <i>Nasya</i> have specific optimal timings (<i>Yogya Kala</i>)

Result and findings

1. Ahara is central to health maintenance, acting as the primary source of *Bala*, *Dhatu Poshana*, and *Agni Dipti*.
2. Matra (Quantity) of food, if taken appropriately as per *Agni* and *Prakriti*, prevents *Ama* formation and ensures metabolic harmony.
3. Desha (Region) influences both the properties of food and the individual's physiological responses; diet should be adapted to the local habitat and bodily constitution.
4. Kala (Time)-including daily rhythms and seasonal cycles-plays a crucial role in determining the type, quality, and quantity of food suitable for consumption.

5. Personalized diet planning based on *Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* supports doshic balance and strengthens disease resistance.
6. Classical *Ayurvedic* principles align closely with modern concepts of portion control, geo-nutrition, and chrononutrition.

Discussion

In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* is not just nourishment but a fundamental therapeutic and preventive tool. It influences not only physical strength and immunity but also mental well-being and spiritual clarity. The classics regard *Ahara* as the foremost among the *Trayopastambha* (three supporting pillars of life), highlighting its centrality in achieving and maintaining health. In the present study, the multidimensional role of *Ahara* in promoting *Agni* (digestive fire), supporting *Dhatu Poshana* (tissue nourishment), and maintaining *Dosha* balance has been emphasized [26].

The concept of *Matra* (quantity) plays a pivotal role in maintaining homeostasis. Classical texts mention that proper *Matra* ensures digestion without overburdening the *Agni*. Overeating (*Ati Matra*) and undereating (*Hina Matra*) are recognized as direct causes of many metabolic and gastrointestinal disorders. Modern dietary science supports this through its focus on portion control and caloric balance, confirming the practical value of *Matra*-based eating. The present review demonstrates how personalized quantity, guided by *Agni*, *Vaya*, and *Sharira Bala*, is key to preventive healthcare [27].

Desha (habitat) provides a geographic, climatic, and ecological basis for dietary planning. The ancient classification into *Jangala*, *Anupa*, and *Sadharana Desha* has parallels in modern concepts of geo-nutrition and environmental dietetics. Locally available foods are better assimilated due to climatic compatibility, and regional dietary habits have evolved to support endemic health conditions. Thus, adapting diet according to *Desha* ensures optimal compatibility and reduces the risk of *Dosha* aggravation, which was clearly highlighted through classical references and modern analogues in this study [28].

Kāla (time) governs the cyclic variations in digestion, metabolism, and *Dosha* dominance throughout the day and seasons. Daily *Ahara* routines should align with circadian rhythms, and seasonal changes demand *Ritucharya*-based diet adjustments. In modern science, this aligns with the principles of chronobiology and chrononutrition. The analysis shows that improper timing of meals leads to *Agni Mandya* (digestive weakness), *Ama* formation, and subsequent systemic disorders. The *Ayurvedic* wisdom of time-based diet reinforces the necessity of synchronizing food intake with natural biological clocks [29].

This conceptual study establishes that *Ayurvedic* guidelines regarding *Ahara Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* are in alignment with key modern nutritional concepts. Portion control (*Matra*), regional diets (*Desha*), and meal timing (*Kala*) are widely accepted in preventive nutrition and public health frameworks today. The personalized nature of *Ayurveda*, where food is recommended based on individual constitution and environmental factors, is similar to the evolving science of precision nutrition. This validates the continued relevance and scientific applicability of classical *Ayurvedic* dietary principles [30].

The study reveals that the thoughtful application of *Matra*, *Desha*, and *Kala* principles leads to enhanced digestion, balanced *Doshas*, and strengthened immunity. It not only supports disease prevention but also promotes sustainable health practices. In a time of rising lifestyle disorders due to poor dietary habits, the revival and integration of these timeless *Ayurvedic* concepts into contemporary dietary practice can serve as a powerful tool in both individual and community health management [31].

Conclusion

The present conceptual study highlights that *Ahara*, when consumed in appropriate *Matra* (quantity), suited to one's *Desha* (habitat), and aligned with *Kala* (time/season), serves as a powerful means of health promotion and disease prevention in *Ayurveda*. These timeless principles support *Agni* (digestive fire), balance the *Doshas*, and ensure optimal *Dhatu Poshana* (tissue nourishment). The integration of these dietary guidelines into daily life fosters holistic well-being and aligns closely with modern concepts like personalized nutrition, geo-nutrition, and chrononutrition. Therefore, the application of *Ayurvedic* dietary wisdom is not only relevant but also essential for achieving sustainable and preventive healthcare in the modern era.

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