

agni & Ama - some points

agni

The representation of the solar energy in the living body is called agni - this is essential for any metabolic process to take place in the living body. The normal activity of the agni helps in the maintenance of physiological activities and is the key to health while its abnormal state induces pathology. Total absence of agni causes death. Hence the maintenance of life is dependent on agni.

Importance of agni

Some quotations from the texts which clearly explain the importance of agni -

The texts define kAyacikitsa as - the treatment of the agni inside the kAya is known as kAyacikitsa.

देहो हि आहारसम्भवः ॥

The body is the product of food.

Hence the body is dependent on agni for its survival.

भवन्तु सुखिनः

Loss of agni causes death; if it is proper, man lives for a long time without disease; and if it is abnormal, it makes him a patient. So it should be preserved taking proper efforts.

A.S.Sa. 6/41

आयुर्वर्णो बलं स्वास्थ्यमुत्साहोपचयौ प्रभा ।
ओजस्तेजोऽग्नयः प्राणाश्चोक्ता देहाग्निहेतुकाः ॥
शान्तोऽग्नौ म्रियते युक्ते चिरं जीवत्यनामयः ।
रोगी स्याद्विकृते मूलमग्निस्तस्मान्निरुच्यते ॥

Ch.Chi. 15/3-4

Life span, complexion, strength, health, enthusiasm, corpulence, lustre, immunity, energy, heat processes, and vital breath - all these depend on the agni. One dies if this agni is extinguished, lives long, free from disorders if it is functioning properly, gets ill if it is deranged - **hence agni is the root cause of all.**

For food to nourish the dhatus, ojas, strength, complexion etc., it is dependent on agni, because rasa etc. cannot be produced from undigested food.

The agni which digests food is regarded as the master of all agnis because increase and decrease of other agnis depend on the jataragni. Hence one should maintain it carefully by taking properly the wholesome fuel of food and drinks because on its maintenance depends the maintenance of life span and strength. One who eats greedily leaving aside all the rules acquires the disorders due to morbidity soon.

The kAyAgni is not stimulated by

- fasting or
- overeating

like without fuel or little fire covered with excessive fuel.

The power of the agni increases with the intake of unctuous food, various powders, fermented preparations, alcoholic preparations prescribed properly by the physician.

One enjoys health for long by taking wholesome food in proper quantity and after the previous food has been digested. One should be careful not to promote the agni by disturbing the equilibrium of the dhatus. When doshas are in equilibrium, the heat of the agni located in the mid portion of the body is also normal and the food digested by it leads to promotion of health, corpulence or pushti, life span and

strength. If Agni becomes deficient or excessive due to imbalanced doshas, it causes disorders.

The above clearly illustrate the importance that Ayurveda gives to agni or the digestive fire as also the mode of functioning of agni, and the problems (including death) that can occur due to improper functioning.

Hence

Man should always consume proper quantity of food, proper quantity is the activator of agni, foods whether guru or laghu both require a specified quantity for digestion. Heavy food should be eaten to half of one's satisfaction while light food should be eaten till just before one is fully satisfied i.e. it should not cause over satisfaction.

A.H.Su. 8

उद्गारशुद्धिरुत्साहो वेगोत्सर्गो यथोचितः ।

लघुता क्षुत्पिपासा च जीर्णाहारस्य लक्षणम् ॥

A.S.Su. 11/45

The symptoms of good digestion of food are - pure belching, enthusiasm, elimination of waste at the proper time, lightness of the body, appearance of hunger and thirst.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

If there is no agni, taking any nutritious food is of absolutely no value to the body - the body cannot absorb it as it is. The body is nourished by the food with its properties. The body cannot absorb only the properties of the food. Hence vitamin tablets are not really useful and can never substitute actual food. If the body is just producing Ama, what is the use of taking the nutritious food? If somebody has good agnibala, even the intake of viruddha AhAra will not cause any harm. But for somebody who has poor agnibala, even the intake of nutritious food will cause harm and form Ama.

मिताहार - moderate food. Two parts to be filled with food, one part with water and one part left free for digestion.

Types of agni

samAgni	that which cooks (digests) the properly ingested food at the proper time
viSamAgni	that which cooks the food sometimes too quickly though it is improperly consumed, and some times too slowly though the food is properly consumed
tIkshNAgni	that which digests the food too quickly even though the food is improper
mandAgni	that which digests the food even though proper, after a long time producing dryness of the mouth, noise in the abdomen, gurgling of the intestines, flatulence, and heaviness.

Mode of digestion of the ingested food specifying the role of agni

The prANa vAyU with receiving function carries the food to the belly where the food, disintegrated by fluids and softened by fatty substances gets acted upon by the agni fanned by the samAna vAyU. Thus the agni cooks the timely taken and balanced food properly leading to promotion of life span. Agni cooks from below the food situated in the stomach for division into rasa and mala as the same cooks the rice grains with water kept in a vessel into boiled rice. Ch.Chi. 15

This is further explained as - in the process of digestion, kapha is more prominent in the first stage. kledaka kapha, located in the AmAzaya liquefies the hard masses of the food in preparation for digestion. In the next stage, pAcaka pitta associated with samAna vAyU digests the food - here the pitta is more prominent. In the third stage, when the sAra and kitta are separated, the vata (samAna vAyU) is more prominent, and then, vyAna vAyU takes the sAra to the body and apAna vAyU

releases the mUtra and purISa and expels them out. Thus as always, in the process of digestion also, kapha is more prominent in the first part, pitta in the second part and vata in the third part.

Thus is antarAgni or jaTharAgni, the most important among the different agnis.

Later, when food becomes fully moistened, the five mahAbhUtAgnis enable cooking of corresponding bhUtAs, helped by vAyu; qualities of bhUtAs thus undergoing cooking will nourish the identical qualities of bhUtAs present in the body. A.S.Sa. 6

The essence of food transported by vyAna vAyu undergoes further transformation by the seven dhAtvagnis, in proper order; casts off its previous qualities and assumes new ones, identical with themselves; both taking place simultaneously, and becomes known as dhatus such as rakta and others, maintaining uninterrupted strength and quantity, like kAla. This supports/sustains the body, and nourishes the dhAtus and the dhAtumalAs. A.S.Sa. 6

Thus the three agnis are described.

vaidyagrāma
सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

Causes for derangement of agni

agni is deranged by

- fasting
- eating during indigestion
- over eating
- irregular eating
- intake of unsuitable, heavy, cold, too rough and contaminated food
- faulty administration of emesis, purgation and unction
- emaciation due to some disease
- faulty adaptation to place, time and seasons
- suppression of natural urges

agni thus deranged becomes unable to digest even the light food and the food being undigested gets acidified and toxic.

Ch.Chi. 15/42-44

vaidyagrāma
सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः

Ama

The root cause of every disease is Ama which is produced by agniMAndya. What is Ama?

ऊष्मणोऽल्पबलत्वेन धातुमाद्यमपाचितम् ।

दुष्टमामाशयगतं रसमामं प्रचक्षते ॥

A.H.Su. 13/25

The first dhAtu, which by the weakness of the agni, remaining uncooked and becoming vitiated, accumulates in the AmAzaya, is known as Ama.

The doSAs and dUSyAs which get mixed with this Ama are designated as sAma so also the diseases arising from them.

Thus Ama is first produced in the AmAzaya; and then spreads from there to the dhAtus. When the digestive fire is weak, then that will affect the other agnis resulting in improper pAKa in the other agnis thus causing Ama. It occurs due to -

- over intake of food or
- eating again before the previous food is digested

like the fire where more firewood is fed in before the existing wood is completely burnt leading to more smoke than fire.

Causes for the formation of AmadoSa

- excessive intake of food
- foods which are disliked or not to one's taste
- foods which cause flatulence
- foods which are over cooked or uncooked
- foods which are not easily digestible
- foods which are dry, very cold or unhygienic

- foods which cause burning sensation during digestion
- foods which are soaked in more water
- foods which do not undergo proper digestion
- foods which are taken by people going through sorrow, anger etc.

LakSaNAs of sAma doSA

- Obstruction of the srotas
- loss of strength
- feeling of heaviness of the body
- inactivity of vAta
- lassitude
- loss of digestive power
- expectoration
- accumulation of wastes
- loss of appetite
- exhaustion

The opposite are the symptoms of nirAma doSa.

A.H.Su. 13

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How to identify Ama?

When a physician examines a patient, two specific questions to be asked to the patient are - How is digestion? How is the bowel movement? These two questions are very crucial while diagnosing a disease for as has been repeatedly said, poor digestion is the primary cause for all diseases. That is why one of the synonyms of disease is Amaya - that which is produced by Ama.

Treatment of Ama

The sAma doSAs which are spread all over the body, which are based in the dhAtus, and which are not moving out of their places of accumulation - should not be forced out of the body by purificatory therapies. Just as attempts at taking the juice from an unripe fruit leads to the destruction of the dwelling place itself, so also it will be very difficult to expel them out. A.H.Su. 13

In those who have Ama doSA - after the food gets digested, the AmAzaya will be found coated with a layer of Ama causing loss of movement, heaviness of abdomen and lack of desire for food. In such a condition, the patient should be given medicines to digest the Ama, and also to kindle the digestive fire. If the food has not been digested, such medicines should not be given because the fire will have been weakened by both the Ama doSA and the food, and it will not be able to digest the medicine. A.S.Su. 11

They should be treated with medicines which are digestive and which increase hunger; next with oleation and sudation therapies; and finally they should be expelled out with purificatory therapies at the proper time, through the nearest orifices, and in accordance with strength of the patient. A.H.Su. 13

sAma doSAs which are greatly increased and going out of the body on their own, either in the upward or downward directions, should not be stopped by medicines for they produce diseases if stopped. A.H.Su. 13

aSTAGga samgraha sUtrasthAna Chapter 11 explains how the different treatments work in different conditions of Ama -

- In little Ama, langhana works similar to how little water in a tank evaporates completely by the action of wind and sun.
- In moderate Ama, langhana and pAcana work similar to how water in a larger tank disappear by the action of wind and sun leaving behind the silt.
- In more Ama, zodhana works similar to how the crops in a field do not grow well unless the excess water and silt are drained out.

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