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Review Article

THE IMPORTANCE OF *AAHAR* (DIET & NUTRITION) IN AYURVEDA OPHTHALMIC PRACTICES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S WORLD

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ABSTRACT

In present era, everyone is rushing to achieve their goals in their life, leaving them with little time to consider of a healthy lifestyle or to follow healthy dietary practices. Ayurveda's goals are to treat illness and maintain the vitality, longevity, and well-being of the wholesome individual (*Swastha*). Worldwide, an estimated 250 million individuals experience vision impairment of varying severity. The major contributors to visual disability include ocular disorders such as cataract, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. Insufficient or nutritionally imbalanced dietary intake may contribute to deficiencies in essential nutrients, adversely affecting ocular health and increasing susceptibility to a range of visual disorders, including night blindness, cataract, and age-related macular degeneration. **Material & Methods:** In Ayurveda, *Aahara* is recognized as one of the three fundamental pillars (*Upastambhas*) that support and sustain life. Ayurveda gives *Aahara* a lot of weight and holds that the body, mind, and spirit are all nourished by a nutritious diet. The eyes were highly prized by the ancient Indians, who also believed that men should take every precaution to keep their eyes healthy throughout their lives. In Ayurveda, we find a comprehensive list of food items in different categories which are recommended by our *Acharyas* for protecting vision and maintaining the ocular health. **Results:** Diet is a key lifestyle factor that can have long-term effects on ocular health. For this reason, the diet has an importance and should be consumed in a light, readily digested manner while adhering to all dietary guidelines. **Conclusion:** Nowadays, it is believed that a person's food and lifestyle have a significant impact on their susceptibility to certain diseases. Because of this, *Aahara* have its great significance in this era. This review examines the complex interplay between dietary patterns, nutritional status, and ocular health. It aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the role of adequate nutrition in maintaining visual function, reducing the risk of ocular disorders, and supporting the preservation of healthy vision.

INTRODUCTION

The human eye is a highly specialized and structurally complex sensory organ whose normal function depends on the coordinated regulation of multiple cellular, biochemical, and physiological processes essential for maintaining ocular integrity and visual function. Among these critical factors, proper nutrition is pivotal in supporting ocular health and preventing eye-related issues.[1]

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While nutrition is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of overall health, the importance of specific nutrients in maintaining the integrity of ocular tissues, visual acuity and preventing eye disorders is sometimes overlooked.[2] Insufficient or nutritionally imbalanced dietary intake may contribute to deficiencies in essential nutrients, adversely affecting ocular health and increasing susceptibility to a range of visual disorders, including night blindness, cataract, and age-related macular degeneration.

Worldwide, an estimated 250 million individuals are affected by vision impairment of varying severity.[3] Leading causes include several eye conditions such as cataract, AMD, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. The ocular tissues are

particularly vulnerable to oxidative stress due to their substantial oxygen requirements, abundance of polyunsaturated fatty acids, and prolonged exposure to high-energy visible light. The interplay of these factors promotes the formation of reactive oxygen species (ROS), which may subsequently contribute to oxidative damage within ocular tissues. Consequently, increasing attention has been directed toward the role of dietary antioxidants and the potential therapeutic applications of vitamin and mineral supplementation. Such nutritional interventions may offer a relatively simple, accessible, and cost-effective approach to the prevention and management of disease.[4-7]

As per Ayurveda, *Aahar* (diet) is considered in *Trayopstambha*[8], which is necessary for restoration of life. All *Dhatus* are nourished by *Aahar Rasa*. Therefore, a good diet is essential for maintaining the body to be healthy in a proper way. Positive health may be readily attained if we focus a bit on proper food intake and the Ayurvedic regimens connected to *Aahara*, in addition to the quality, quantity, and flavor of food. The eyes were highly prized by the ancient Indians, who also believed that men should take every precaution to keep their eyes healthy throughout their lives.[9] This comprehensive review delves into the significance of nutrition in safeguarding ocular well-being and explores the intricate relationship between dietary choices and eye health.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Information about *Aahar* (diet and nutrition) in preventing eye disorders was taken from Ayurvedic literature, their commentaries, and textbooks of modern ophthalmology, in that order. The Google Scholar and PubMed databases were employed to assess previously published works in this field. Relevant information on specific topics has been collected from both indexed and non-indexed medical journals.

RESULTS

Diet and Nutrition in Preventive Ocular Care

Nutritional deficiency disorders can have significant impacts on eye health and can manifest in various ways in ophthalmology. Here are some common nutritional deficiency disorders related to eye health and the sources to overcome it are described in table 1.

Table 1: Nutritional Deficiency Eye Disorders and Their Sources to Overcome

Vitamins	Deficiency disorders	Sources
Vitamin A	Night blindness, dry eyes, and in severe cases, corneal damage and blindness.	Animal liver: Especially beef liver, fish liver oils: cod liver oil, egg yolks, dairy products: milk, cheese, and butter, fatty fish, orange and yellow fruits and vegetables: carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, butternut squash, and mangoes; leafy greens: spinach, kale, and collard greens, red bell peppers.
Vitamin B complex B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B6 (pyridoxine), B12 (cobalamin)	B12 deficiency can lead to optic neuropathy, causing vision loss.	1. B1 (Thiamine) Whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat, barley), legumes (beans, lentils, peas), nuts and seeds (sunflower seeds, peanuts), pork and pork products, fortified cereals 2. B2 (Riboflavin) Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese), lean meats (chicken, turkey, beef), eggs, leafy green vegetables (spinach, kale), fortified cereals 3. B3 (Niacin) & B5 (Pantothenic Acid) Meat (beef, pork, chicken), fish (tuna, salmon), whole grains (brown rice, barley), legumes (peanuts, lentils), mushrooms, avocado 4. B6 (Pyridoxine) Meat (chicken, turkey, pork), fish (tuna, salmon), potatoes, bananas, fortified cereals, nuts and seeds (sunflower seeds, pistachios) 5. B7 (Biotin) Egg yolks, liver, nuts and seeds (almonds, peanuts), sweet potatoes, salmon, avocado 6. B9 (Folate) Leafy green vegetables (spinach, kale), legumes (beans, lentils), fortified grains (bread, pasta, rice), citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits), avocado

		7. B12 (Cobalamin) Animal products (meat, fish, poultry, eggs, dairy), fortified foods (cereals, plant-based milk alternatives)
Vitamin C	Weakened blood vessels, potentially resulting in hemorrhages in the eye and increased risk of cataracts.	Citrus fruits: Oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruits, and tangerines; berries: strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, and cranberries; kiwi, tropical fruits: pineapple, mango, papaya, and guava; bell peppers: especially red and green bell peppers; broccoli; brussels sprouts: another cruciferous vegetable, brussels sprouts; tomatoes; leafy greens: spinach, kale, and other leafy greens; potatoes: particularly sweet potatoes and red potatoes.
Vitamin D	Vitamin D deficiency has also been associated with certain eye conditions such as uveitis and age- related macular degeneration (ARMD).	Sunlight; Fatty Fish: Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, mackerel, tuna, and sardines; cod liver oil; fortified foods: fortified dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese), plant-based milk alternatives (soy milk, almond milk), fortified orange juice, fortified cereals, and fortified tofu; egg yolks; beef liver; mushrooms.
Zinc	Poor night vision, cataracts, and retinal degeneration.	Meat: Beef, pork, lamb, and poultry are rich sources of zinc, particularly red meat; shellfish: oysters are one of the best sources of zinc, other shellfish like crab, shrimp, and mussels also provide zinc; legumes: legumes such as beans (chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans), lentils, and peas; nuts and seeds: nuts like cashews, almonds, and peanuts, as well as seeds like pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds, contain zinc; dairy products: milk, cheese, and yogurt; whole grains: wheat, rice, and oats; eggs; vegetables: spinach, kale, broccoli, and mushrooms contain zinc, although in smaller amounts compared to animal-derived sources.
Omega-3 Fatty Acid	Dry eye syndrome and age-related macular degeneration.	Fatty Fish: particularly EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid); seafood; fish oil supplements; algal oil supplements; flax seeds and flax seed oil; chia seeds; walnuts; hemp seeds.

***Pathya Aahar* (Recommended Food items for ocular health)**

In Ayurveda, the word "*Pathya*" literally means "belonging to the method which is suitable, fit or proper, healthy, beneficial, and especially diet." According to Ayurveda, *Pathya Aahara* (recommended food items) for ocular health are described in table 2 and 3 and *Apathya Aahara* (not recommended food items) are described in table 4.

Table 2: According to Ayurvedic Texts Currently Available *Pathya Aahara* (Recommended Food Items) for Ocular Health

Pathya Ahara	**Latin Name**	**English name**	**Nutrients**	**Current Availability**
Mudga	*Vigna radiate* L. Wilczek	Green gram	Vit-B6, C, iron, Mg	Available
Amalaki	*Emblica officinalis*	Indian gooseberry	Vit-C, A, zinc	Available
Lohitakshali		Red variety of rice	Anti-oxidant, zinc, iron	Available
Yava	*Hordeum vulgare*	Barley	Vit-B, iron, zinc, selenium	Available
Tanduliya	*Amaranthus spinosus*	Amaranth species	Vit-A, E, C, iron	Available
Vastuka	*Chenopodium album*	Wild spinach	Vit A, C and B-complex, calcium, iron and potassium	Available
Karavella	*Momordica*	Bitter gourd,	Vit-C, B6, Mg, iron	Available

	charantia Linn.			
Kumari	*Aloe barbadensis* miller	*Aloe vera*	Vit A, C, E	Available
Vartaku	*Solanum melongena*	Brinjal	Vit-C, B, A, E, beta carotene	Available
Mulaka	*Raphanus sativus* Llinn.	Radish	Vit-C, flavonoids anthocyanins, beta-carotene	Available
Karira	*Capparis decidua* (Forssk.) Edgew.	Kair	Vit-C	Available
Shigru	*Moringa oleifera* Lam.	Drumsticks	Vit C, iron, Vit-B6, Mg, calcium Vit-D, cobalamin	Available
Saindhav	*Halite*	Rock salt	Iron, zinc, mg	Available
Godhuma	*Triticum Aestivum* Linn.	Wheat	Vit –A, C, and E, zinc, niacin, and antioxidants,	Available
Dadima	*Punica granatum* Linn.	pomegranate	Vit-C, flavonoids, antioxidant, ascorbic acid	Available
Sita		sugar, Rock candy	Rich in vitamins, minerals especially Vit-B 12	Available
Draksha	*Vitis vinifera* Linn.	Wine grapes	Vit-E, zinc, iron, riboflavin	Available
Kadali	*Musa paradisiaca* Linn.	Banana	Vitamins (folates, niacin, pantothenic acid, pyridoxine, riboflavin, thiamin, vitamin A, Vitamin C	
Karkotaka	*Momordica dioica* roxb. Ex wild.	Spiny gourd Bristly balsam pear	Vit-C, flavonoids lutein, zeaxanthins	Available
Go-Ghrita,	*Butyrum departum*	Clarified butter, *Ghee*	Vitamin A, E and β-carotene antioxidant, mono saturated omega-3	Available
Go-dugdha	*Lactus*	cow-milk	all the essential vitamins and a very good source of Vitamin A.	Available
Madhu		Honey	Vit-B2, B3, B5, B6, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, iron, zinc, selenium	Available

Table 3: Category Wise *Pathya* (Recommended Items) for Ocular Health

	***Pathya* (Recommended)**
Haritakadi Varga [10]	*Haritaki* (*Terminalia Chebula* Retz.) *Vibhataki* (*Termenalia Bellirica*) *Aamalki* (*Emblica officinalis*), *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), *Lodhra* (*Symplocos racemose* Roxb.), *Saindhav lavan* (Rocksalt)
Karpuradi Varga [11]	*Karpura* (*Cinnamomum camphora* (Linn.), *Rakta Chandana* (*Pterocarpus santalinus*)
Guduchyadi Varga [12]	*Jivanti* (*Leptadenia reticulate*), *Shobhanjana* (*Moringa oleifera Lam.*), *Nirgundi* (*Vitex negundo*), *Shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*), *Kumari* (*Aloe barbadensis miller*), *Punarnava* (*Boerhavia diffusa*), *Bhrngaraja* (*Eclipta alba (L.) Hassk.*)
Phala Varga [13]	*Kadali* (*Musa paradisiaca* Linn.), *Dadima* (*Punica granatum* Linn.), *Draksha* (*Vitis vinifera* Linn.)
Dhatu Varga[14]	*Vanga* (tin), *Yashada* (zinc), *Loha* (iron), *Suvarna Makshikam* (copper pyrites), *Kapardaka*, *Shankha*

Dhanya Varga [15] (cereals & pulses)	*Shukadhanya*	*Rakta Shali* (red rice)
Shaka Varga [16 (potherbs)	*Shimbi Dhanyam*	*Mudga* (*Vigna radiata*)
Shaka Varga [16 (potherbs)	*Mulaka* (*Raphanus sativas*)	
Mamsa Varga [17] (animal meat)	*Jangala Mamsa- Guhasaya*	
Krittana Varga [18] (food preparation)	*Purika* (Kachouri) fried in ghee, *Mamsa Rasa* (mutton soup), *Mudga Modaka*	
Vari Varga [19] (water & its qualities)	*Antriksha Jala* (rain water)	
Dugdha Varga [20] (different types of milk)	Cow's milk, elephant's milk, human milk	
Navanita Varga[21] (butter and its properties)	Butter extracted from milk is beneficial for vision	
Ghrita Varga[22] (properties of ghee)	Cow's ghee, goat's ghee, sheep's ghee, woman's ghee, mare's ghee, *Haiyangavinam*, *Purana* ghee, *Naveen* ghee	
Mutra Varga [23] (urine & its properties)	*Go-Mutra* (cow's urine)	
Taila Varga [24] (different oils)	Sesame oil	
Madhu Varga[25] (different kinds of honey)	Honey – *Makshikam* type is considered as the best among all varieties of honey	

Table 4: *Apathya Aahara* (Not Recommended Food Items) for Ocular Health [26-28]

Category	***Apathya Aahara* (not recommended food items)**
Shukadhayna	Germinated cereals/sprout
Shimbidhanya	*Kulattha* (horse gram), *Masha* (black gram)
Mamsa (meat)	*Matsya* (fish), flesh of animals living in semi- arid tropics
Shaka (green vegetables)	*Kalingaka Patra-Shaka* (*Holarrhaena antidysentrica*)
Fruits	Watermelon *(Citrullus lanatus)*
Dugdha (milk)	Milk gotten in morning time
Ghrita (ghee), butter	Curd
Oils	*Atasi* (*Linum usitatisimum*), *Kushmbhataila*
Rasa	*Amla* (sour), *Lavana* (salt), *Katu*, *Kshara* (alkali), sour items like pickles in excess
Seeds	Sprouted paddy seed, *Tilkut* (*saesamum indicum*)
Salt	Other salts
Sugandhi dravya (aromatic drugs)	*Tambula*
Food habit	Excessive intake of food

DISCUSSION

Every nutrient and drug has a distinct purpose in the regular physiological operation of the eyes. Eating a balanced diet is crucial to preserving eye health. A diet high in antioxidants will keep your eyes healthy and help avoid serious eye problems. Inadequate or imbalanced nutrition can result in nutritional deficiencies, profoundly impacting ocular health and leading to various eye-related issues, from night blindness to age-related conditions such as cataracts and macular degeneration. *Netra* is regarded as the location of *Alochaka Pitta* in Ayurveda. *Pachaka Pitta* obliges the other kinds of *Pitta* by providing them with nourishment because of its strength and power. Maintaining the right balance of *Pachaka pitta* is essential for maintaining the health of *Alochaka Pitta*. The diet we take have an effect on body, according to *Agni* (the metabolic fire). The concept of *Agni* in Ayurveda can be considered as the metabolism which

takes place in the tissue, molecular and cellular levels. Unhealthy diets destruct metabolism, resulting in lower-quality byproducts that enter the blood-stream and reach the eye, and altered the normal physiological functioning of the eyes. So, it is very important to take healthy foods and avoiding unhealthy foods and regimens. For this reason, the diet should be consumed in a light, readily digested manner while adhering to all dietary guidelines.

Ghee is a potent medicine as well as food material, which is targeting on strengthens three main organs. Heart, brain and the eyes. The chemical analysis of ghee shows good quality unsaturated fat which helps in the *Poshana* of *Sapta Dhatu* and nourishment of neurons of brain preventing ocular neurodegenerative diseases. *Ghrita Manda* (upper portion of ghee) which always remains in a liquid state is rich in unsaturated fatty acids, esp. omega-3 and omega-4, which are essential for vision. For example, ghee with *Triphala* enhances vision and ghee with *Bhrami* enhances memory. *Triphala* is a drug consisting of *Terminalia chebula, Terminalia bellerica* and *Emblica* officinal is in equal quantity. Taking the individual qualities *Terminalia chebula* is having the property of cleansing the micro and macro channels, pacifies all *Doshas* and is having an anti-aging property so, it is advisable in age related macular degeneration, senile cataract, retinal degeneration etc. *Terminalia bellerica* is a best homeostatic. *Emblica officinalis* is a powerful antioxidant and prevents ageing and degeneration. Regular eye wash with *Triphala* and *Yashtimadhu* kwath with the use of eye wash cup is also beneficial for eye health. Considering honey as *Chakshushya* most of the compounds like flavonoids, phenolic acids, ascorbic acid, tocopherols, catalase, amino acids, vitamins B1 B2, and B6, minerals, and enzyme work together to give a synergistic, antioxidant, antibacterial, and anti-inflammatory effects.

CONCLUSION

As per Ayurvedic concept, healthy and rich diet is necessary for maintaining health and preventing disease. Ayurvedic concept of *Ana* and *Aahara* (food and nourishment) is most important for good health. It is said that nourishing the body, mind, and soul with natural, wholesome food will nourish them all. It's strongly manifest that thousands of years ago, Ayurvedic treatises had a plenty of knowledge of the eye, its diseases and remedies for them. Even Concept of *Pathya* and *Apathya Ahara* was clearly mentioned by our *Acharyas* for particularly eye diseases and so many more diseases but nowadays, lives are hectic and dominated by strict schedules, people have not so much time to follow the all the concept of Ayurvedic diet and nutrition and along this the generation of new era are not aware about the Ayurvedic concept of diet and nutrition therefore it is the need of the hour to take awareness in the people about Ayurveda and its concept of diet and nutrition. In present era, eye illnesses which are more likely to develop in some criteria, such as those that require working late at night or spending a lot of time in front of a computer screen. For these, Ayurveda takes great care to all the illnesses and steer clear of substances that might be harmful to health. No matter how healthy a person is, a blind person cannot benefit from this lovely world as day and night are the same to them. Thus, one should make a constant effort to maintain their vision throughout their lives.

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