

BOOK 8: AGNI/METABOLISM: ROLE IN HEALTH AND DISEASES

1. Introduction

This book will explain another uniqueness of Ayurveda in terms of [Agni](#). The importance, types, functions, abnormalities, symptoms and management of the same will be detailed.

We will learn about the most important preventive [health](#) principles of [Agni](#) / metabolism as per Ayurveda. The role of metabolism in preventive healthcare, and the role of free radicals in [disease](#) formation, and the role of intact [Agni](#) for [health](#), [Agni](#) status in diseases, and common herbs to restore [Agni](#) will be detailed.

1.1. Agni / Metabolism in Diseases

Watch this video: [Agni](#) metabolism against Diseases

https://youtu.be/XLJmO_AGQbo

2. Importance of Agni

As a Mahabhoota, [Agni](#) is an essential component of every living and non living matter. In the universe, the Sun is the main representative and source of [Agni](#). This is discussed under the principle of Loka –[Purusha](#) Samya (Similarities between Universe and Man) as discussed in Topic 4.

3. Definition of Agni in Ayurveda

Ayurveda's uniqueness also lies in the Concept of [Agni](#) / Bodily Fire.

The literal meaning of the term [Agni](#) is “To carry forward or to Transform” and the common meaning is “The Fire”. As per Wikipedia, the term [Agni](#) is similar to Latin ignis (the root of English ignite), Russian огонь (ogon), Polish "ogień," Lithuanian - ugnis - all with the meaning 'fire'. [Agni](#) has three forms: fire, lightning and the sun.

[Agni](#) has the most important assignment to transform the raw material available to the body, into a use-worthy form. This is the work of any given fire. In kitchen too, we transform the raw food to a palatable & consumable form by the virtue of [Agni](#)/ fire only. The same happens in the gastro

intestinal tract as well because the food we consume may not be in a form required by our cells. This transformation is all important & is solely attributed to **Agni**.

4. 13 Types of Agni

Ayurveda considers that **13 types of Agni** are there in the human body and this is responsible for life, the body, tissues, strength and complexion of a person. Therefore Ayurveda always investigates the digestive fire of each patient.

The 13 **Agnis** by Ayurveda have a detailed medical explanation.

The **Agnis** are as follows-

1. **Jatharagni** - One in number; It performs digestion of food and considered to govern other 'Agni'. **Jatharagni** is active in the stomach and gastrointestinal tract as Digestive Juices. It helps to assimilate the food, according to our body needs. It digests food and separates the nutrient factor from the residue factor. It nourishes the other 12 **agni** as well.

2. **Dhatawagni** – Seven in number; Number is symbolic as each cell has its own **Agni**. Every **Dhatu** has a particular type of **Agni** which is responsible for that particular tissue metabolism. It is named after the tissue it resides in. It is responsible for all the metabolic functions being carried out at the respective tissue level. The names are -
 - i. **Rasa Dhatu Agni**
 - ii. **Rakta Dhatu Agni**
 - iii. **Mamsa Dhatu Agni**
 - iv. **Meda Dhatu Agni**
 - v. **Asthi Dhatu Agni**
 - vi. **Majja Dhatu Agni**
 - vii. **Shukra Dhatu Agni**

3. **Bhootagni** -Five in number; Helps in digestion and assimilation of Pancha Mahabhoota. This **Agni** also transforms the external Mahabhoota to internal Mahabhoota. For instance when we drink **water**, Jala Mahabhoota (**water**) is predominant in it. This **water** is converted to the Sharir Jal (body fluids) by Jala Mahabhoota **Agni** The following are the **Panchamahabhoota Agni**-
 - i. **Akasha Mahabhoota Agni**
 - ii. **Vayu Mahabhoota Agni**
 - iii. **Agni Mahabhoota Agni**
 - iv. **Jala Mahabhoota Agni**
 - v. **Prithvi Mahabhoota Agni**

5. Importance of Agni

Agni is an important entity since Vedic times. It is considered as a Deity, Fire God, responsible for the Purity and acceptor of sacrifices/ offerings. As Per Upanishads, **Agni** transforms the maximum part of food to **Mala** / waste, some part of food to muscles, and minimum part of food to **Satva** / **Mind**. It also mentions that **Agni** converts, on the same lines, **water** into urine, blood and vitality. (Chandogya Upanishad 6/5/1)

Agni executes tissue transformation from **Rasa** to **Shukra** is contributed by Varahopanishad (5/48).

Agni is responsible for the following functions -

- Digestion - indigestion
- Vision- absence of vision
- Degree of heat
- Normal -abnormal complexion
- Prowess- fear
- Anger – exhilaration
- Confusion- clarity of **mind**

5.1. Role in metabolism

As we consume the food, it is made wet for taste appreciation by Bodhaka Kapha in the mouth cavity and further liquefied by Kledaka Kapha in the stomach. The **Jatharagni** is stimulated by the help of Samana vayu and the process of digestion starts. With the help of **Jatharagni**, five **Bhootagni** present in the Koshtha / G.I.T. get activated and start digesting their equivalent components in the food. Now, the food is separated into two components – Useful for the body, and the waste. The waste part is maintained inside the G.I.T. only and eventually passes out as stool. The useful part is absorbed from G.I.T. by the help of first **Dhatu Agni**, called **Rasagni** and **Rasa Dhatu** is produced outside the G.I.T. in the blood circulation. This triggers the production of subsequent Dhatus by respective Dhatawagni. After the tissue nourishment is complete, the best essence of all the tissues, **Oja** is produced and serves as Immunity.

The Stages of Digestion

The process of digestion is divided in three stages, which is collectively called Avastha Paka and can be divided in the following three -

1. **Amavastha** (The stage of Sweet taste) Paka - in Stomach: The first stage Amavastha is the one when a lot of digestive juices are being added to the food ingested. The liquefaction

increasing, this is called Kapha Production and Kapha being Sweet in taste, this is called the Sweet Taste Stage of Digestion. Also, as the food is least digested by now, this is called Ama Stage. Ama means unripe or undigested.

2. **Pachymanavastha** (The stage of Sour taste) Paka - in Duodenum: The second stage is the one when many digestive enzymes are working on the ingested food and all sorts of enzymatic metabolism which is fiery in nature, is going on, this is called Pitta Production. The taste of Pitta being Sour, this is called the Sour Taste (Amla [Rasa](#)) Stage of Digestion. Also, as the food is being digested, this is called Pachyamana Stage.
3. **Pakavastha** (The stage of Pungent taste) Paka - in Large intestine: The third stage is the one when all the useful components of food have been absorbed from small intestines & now the waste material is in the large intestines. The function of this stage of digestion is re-absorption of [water](#), thus producing dryness in the left over stool. Dryness is the most important property of Vata, thence this is called the Vata production and the taste of Vata being Pungent, this is called Katu (Pungent taste) Avastha Paka.

These stages are named after the taste predominance during various periods and places.

As the taste changes in different phases of digestion, these phases are called Avastha Paka. At the end of the digestion, the digested foods have their original taste which is in accordance with the taste of the ingested food. This is called as Nishtha (Final) Paka. It is also called popularly as Vipaka.

Taste and Vipaka

Tastes	Vipaka
Sweet	Sweet
Salty	Sweet
Sour	Sour
Astringent	Pungent
Bitter	Pungent
Pungent	Pungent

Thus we notice the roles of various types, stages, actions of [Agni](#) in food breakdown, assimilation, absorption, tissue production and nourishment and eventually, Oja production.

6. Prakriti and Agni

The **Agni** is specific for different **Prakriti** as follows –

Prakriti	Agni
Vata	Irregular
Pitta	Strong
Kapha	Dim

- Vata persons have irregular appetite because of irregular character of Vayu and **Agni** greatly depends on Vayu. This can be noticed by irregular appetite timings for such persons. They may often feel like taking lunch at different times.
- Pitta persons have strong **Agni** & can easily digest most of the food consumed. They usually feel hungry before due **time**.
- Kapha persons have low **Agni**. They usually do not feel hungry by the meal **time** and are comfortable to delay the meals. This forms an important patient examination where the assessment on **Agni** decides how to start the treatment and what is the condition of Ama.

7. Functional states of Jatharagni

Agnis are also classified into four categories according to how they manifest in the human being. This is explained by the following table -

Condition	Characteristics	Dosha Linkage
Tikshnagni	Sharp Agni	Pitta
Mandagni	Low Agni	Kapha
Vishamagni	Irregular Agni	Vata
Samagni	Balanced Agni	Balanced Tridosha

- Low **Agni** causes Anorexia, Indigestion, Edema, Asthma and many Kapha Diseases.
- Sharp **Agni** causes Bulimia, Fevers, Jaundice, Skin diseases and other Pitta diseases.
- Irregular **Agni** causes Spasms, Pain, flatulence, Constipation and other Vata disorders.

Imbalance of **Agni** leads to -

- Loss of appetite.
- Acidity or heart burn.
- Loose motions or constipation.
- Weight gain or loss.
- Gastrointestinal tract disorders.

8. Summary

Agni is an essential component of every living and non living matter

The literal meaning of the term **Agni** is “To transform” and the common interpretation is “The Fire”. **Agni** is an important entity since Vedic times. It is considered as a Deity, Fire God, responsible for the Purity and acceptor of sacrifices/ offerings. As Per Upanishads, **Agni** transforms the maximum part of food to **Mala** / wastage, some part of food to muscles, and minimum part of food to **Satva / Mind**. It has the most important assignment to transform the raw material available to the body, into a use-worthy form. Ayurveda considers that 13 types of **Agni** are there in the human body & this is responsible for life, the body, tissues, strength and complexion of a person.

Sharp **Agni** causes Bulimia, Fevers, Jaundice, Skin diseases and other Pitta diseases. Low **Agni** causes Anorexia, Indigestion, Edema, Asthma and many Kapha diseases. Irregular **Agni** causes Spasms, Pain, flatulence, constipation and other Vata disorders.

9. Reference books

Charaka **Samhita**, Chikitsa Sthana, chapter 15

Sushruta **Samhita**, Sutra Sthana, chapter 35

Ashtanga Hridaya, Sutra Sthana, chapter 19

Ashtanga Samgraha, Sutra Sthana, chapter 1, 5

8.1 Video: AGNI Metabolism for health

https://youtu.be/XLJmO_AGQbo

8.2 Video Agni / metabolism in diseases

https://youtu.be/XLJmO_AGQbo