

Concept of Agni in Ayurveda

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Ayurveda is the science of life and longevity. Its main intention is to maintain the health (*Swasthasya swaasthya rakshanam....*). Maintaining a healthy condition is directly related to the food we intake and the lifestyle we follow. A healthy Ayurvedic diet consists of medicinal properties that induce the natural healing process and develop and boost the immunity. So Ayurveda is all about food, herbs, lifestyle, yoga, and meditation, which promotes physical as well as psychological health. Ayurveda teaches us how to live in harmony with Mother Nature to make the universe disease free for peaceful living to save our planet for our future generation.

Agni (digestive fire) is a main concept in Ayurveda. It is considered as sacred fire in Ayurveda and is an important key to all the psychological and physiological processes in the body. It includes the digestion of food, absorption, assimilation, cellular metabolism and the regulation of hormones at the level of neurons and beyond that. There are thirteen types of Agni mentioned in Ayurveda at physical level. They are:

- *Jatharagni*
- *7 Dhatvagni*
- *5 Bhutagni*

Jatharagni - Food ingested into the GI tract undergoes the digestive process and is converted into a nutritive fluid called "*Ahara rasa*". A strong *Jatharagni* results in a good digestion, absorption, assimilation. It burns out toxins and pathogens and helps in forming and eliminating waste products. *Samana* and *apana vayu*, *pachaka pitta* and *kledaka kapha* are all involved in this process.

Dhatvagni -Once the food has been digested through *Jatharagni*, the *Ahara rasa* enters the *dhatu* (tissue) level. Digestion in the *dhatu* level progresses similarly. If the *Ahara rasa* is of poor quality, or if the *dhatvagnis* are poor, it generates a toxin called '*Ama*' which clogs the *srotas*, the channels of the body, resulting in imbalance in the physiology, which is the root cause for the diseases.

Bhutagni- *Bhutagni* gets activated when the digested food finally reaches the sensory level. It is responsible for the formation of the *indriyas* (sense organs) of the body. Each sense organ is formed from combinations of the *panchamahabhutas* (five basic elements).

Agni is also classified according to *Doshas* (three basic biological humors – *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*). Therefore, the normal function of *Agni* is different in each person, according to his or her own *Prakrithi* (doshic constitution).

Vishamagni - Vishamagni is irregular digestion and metabolism. It is predominant in Vata dosha. Vata dosha is composed of *Vayu* (air) and *Akasha mahabhuta* (ether). Appetite is irregular in individuals with a vata predominance; this leads to abdominal distension and constipation, sometimes at the level of Jatharagni. Vishamagni weakens the immune system, allowing pathogens to cause infection in the body. Infection weakens Agni further and the digestion is impaired, reducing the vitality and movements of the body, affecting the circulation, and causing pain.

Tikshagni - Tikshagni refers to hypermetabolism. It is found where there is *Pitta* predominance. Pitta dosha is composed of the elements *Agni* (fire) and *Jala* (water). At the digestive level, there is increased secretion of acids, leading to an increase in appetite. The intake of spicy, sour, and hot foods further vitiates the Pitta dosha, leading to diseases. Heartburn, dryness of throat, and thirst are a few of the symptoms here that may result in inflammation and bleeding.

Mandagni- Mandagni is slow digestion and metabolism, influenced by *Kapha* dosha which is made of *prithvi* (earth) and *jala* (water). Even a small amount of food takes a long time to digest. Since kapha is a biological humor that makes up the bulk of our body tissues, the imbalance can lead to the disease like diabetes, hypertension, edema, and depression. Excess kapha also increases attachment to something or possessiveness.

Any of these conditions results in the formation of *Ama* (toxins in the body), which indicates the improper functioning of Agni. One can assess the condition of one's own Agni by his or her appetite.

Samagni- It is the perfect state of Agni, where the digestion and metabolism are normal. All three doshas are at their normal level, which is a state of complete balance and health.

*Samadosha samaagnischa samadhatu malakriyaaha
Prasannatmendriya manaaha swastha ityabhideeyathe -Sushruta Sutra*

Translation:

One who achieves equilibrium in doshas, ideal Agni, perfect dhatus with pleasant soul and sense organs with clear mind is known as a healthy person.

Being healthy gives longevity, calmness, strong constitution and immunity. Intake of healthy, fresh, easily digested, lightly cooked, nutritious food at appropriate time is the main key to maintaining a good state of Agni. This is the reason Agni is considered as sacred fire in the Vedas. We use Agni in different forms like heat, light, color and energy, externally as well as internally. It is the internal fire that has the potential for natural healing within ourselves.

Reference: *Yoga and the Sacred Fire* by Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

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