

## Protect Your "Agni"

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**Abstract:** The key to good health is by maintaining the appropriate condition of the fire within the body. Ayurveda emphasises that if the fire within is hampered, the person is subject to diseases. This study is a humble effort to deliver to the public the concept of "Agni". Its types, significance and care have been briefly discussed.

**Keywords:** Agni, digestive fire, doshas, Ayurveda

### I. Introduction

The quality of one's life is determined by the "fire" they possess. They say there is a fire within everyone. Indeed, everything is possible only by this fire. It is a fire that energises, initiates, and keeps life going. It is a fire that is responsible for the metabolism of the body. It is this fire that is referred to as "Agni".

### II. Understanding agni

The digestive Agni is of four varieties, based on the three humors called Vata, Pitta and Kapha. These four varieties of digestive fire are a gift offered by the parents to the offspring. It is determined right at the period of conception and it is said to exist till the death of the individual. This concept is given by Vagbhata's verse<sup>[1]</sup>, which goes like this:

तैर्भवेद्विषमस्तीक्ष्णो मन्दश्चाग्निः समैः समः॥

(अ.ह.सू.1/8)

The living body is understood with the help of three humors (doshas) called Vata, Pitta and Kapha, wherein Vata is made up of the elements air and ether, pitta is made up of the fire element and kapha is made up of the elements water and earth. The Agni of each person is determined by the quality and quantity of these three doshas. This is variable in each person. It may be noticed that some people are voracious eaters, while some are poor eaters. These variations are caused by Agni.

Inconsistency of Agni, leading to erratic digestion is due to the predominance of Vata dosha in the human gut. Such Agni is called as "Vishamagni". In this state, the Agni functions in an irregular manner. It sometimes digests even a heavy meal, and sometimes cannot digest even a very light meal. Such a person is prone to problems such as abdominal distension, colicky pain, constipation, dysentery, heaviness of abdomen, noisy movement of gas within the bowels, etc.,. Some individuals who can digest even heavy products within a short span of time come under the group of 'sharp digestion', which is otherwise called as "Tikshnagni". This is due to the predominance of the pitta dosha in the lumen of the gut. Such a person is prone to suffer from excessive hunger and other discomforts such as dryness of throat and lips, burning sensation and heat, characteristic of increased metabolism. There are humans who cannot even digest the lightest substances taken as food at ease and they take a long time to digest these simple food products as they possess an Agni called "Mandagni", due to Kapha dosha. This may lead to indigestion. When all these three humors are in equipoise, then the agni, that is, the digestion, will become "Samagni", called "Optimum digestion". It is characterised by complete digestion of food taken in proper time and proper quantity without causing discomfort.

तत्र तीक्ष्णोऽग्निः सर्वापचारसहः, तद्विपरीतलक्षणस्तु मन्दः, समस्तु खल्वपचारतो विकृतिमापद्यतेऽनपचारतस्तु प्रकृताववतिष्ठते,  
समलक्षणविपरीतलक्षणस्तु विषम इति।

(च.वि.6/12)<sup>[2]</sup>

The above quote suggests that the tikshna agni is capable of handling well all types of food. This means to say that even improper food does not produce much harm, provided the person is otherwise healthy. Contrary to this is mandagni. A person with mandagni is easily affected by overeating or eating improper food. Samagni is maintained in its normal condition when it is given the appropriate food and is vitiated when it is given improper food. The contrary to this is Vishamagni.

### III. Importance Of Understanding Agni

“Agni” is a concept that has to be understood by each individual. It must be assessed by each person for himself as to what his agni is, and eat accordingly. One may consider that the body is an entity which is fuelled by this component called ‘agni’. This is not just a fuel. Its quantity, quality and activities determine the very health of the body. It is said that diseases manifest only when this Agni is not proper. In fact, it is said that a person who has good agni is unaffected even by improper food at times. This is given by Vagbhata, when he says –

व्यायामस्निग्धदीसाग्निवयःस्थबलशालिनाम्।  
विरोध्यपि न पीडायै सात्म्यमल्पं च भोजनम्॥

(अ.ह.सू.7/47)<sup>[3]</sup>

A person who does regular exercise, has good agni, eats unctuous food, is young and is strong remains unaffected even by improper food.

Thus, it would indeed be apt to say that the digestive fire (Agni) is an accurate marker of many diseases. Putting this in different words, it can be said that most diseases are centred on the GI tract.

As one may commonly observe, nothing can transform to a cooked state without the presence of heat. The food, as put by Vagbhata, which is the source of energy and nourishment for all the body tissues is assimilated only by Agni, after all, uncooked food cannot be assimilated by the body.

यदन्नं देहधातवोजोबलवर्णादिपोषणम्।  
तत्राग्निहेतुराहारान्न ह्यपक्वाद्रसादयः॥

(अ.ह.शा.3/54)<sup>[4]</sup>

Not only is the agni the cause of assimilation of food, but also has various other roles to play, as quoted by Charaka as follows:

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

(च.चि.15/3-4)<sup>[5]</sup>

The fire for digestion and metabolism is the reason for lifespan, color, complexion, strength, immunity, good health, energy, enthusiasm, bulk, shape and plumpness of body, aura, complexion, radiance, vital breath and more. Extinction of Agni leads to death. Its proper maintenance helps a person live longer and its impairment gives rise to diseases. Therefore this fire is considered to be the root or the most important sustaining factor of living beings.

Having said that destruction of Agni destroys life, it becomes essential to ensure that we protect it by all means. Vagbhata says that the following vitiates the Agni, thereby hampering digestion.

द्विष्टविष्टम्भिदग्धामगुरु रूक्षहिमाशुचि। विदाहिशुष्कमत्यम्बुप्लुतं चान्नं न जीर्यति॥  
उपतप्तेन भुक्तं च शोकक्रोधक्षुदादिभिः।

(अ.ह.सू.8)<sup>[6]</sup>

The above quote means that consuming foods which are disliked, which cause flatulence, which are over-cooked or uncooked, which are not easily digestible, which are dry, very cold, dirty (contaminated), which cause burning sensation during digestion, which are dried up or soaked in more water, do not undergo proper digestion, so also the food consumed by persons afflicted with grief, anger, excess hunger etc., Because heavy food is capable of vitiating the agni, Vagbhata gives a simple rule –

गुरुणामर्धसौहित्यं लघूनां नातितृप्तता।  
मात्राप्रमाणं निर्दिष्टं सुखं यावद्विजीर्यति॥

(अ.ह.सू.8)<sup>[7]</sup>

Which means – food that is heavy must be consumed upto half satiation and light food must be consumed not until complete satiation. By following such rules, one may protect his digestive fire, thereby ensuring good health.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

One may understand the significance of Agni from the following verse of Bhagavadgita:

अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः।  
प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम्॥

(गीता – 15/14)<sup>[8]</sup>

Lord Krishna says, “It is I who take the form of the fire of digestion in the stomachs of all living beings and combine with the incoming and outgoing breaths to digest and assimilate the four kinds of food (that which is consumed by swallowing, eating, drinking and licking).

Putting it the other way, we may say that the fire in our body responsible for digestion is like the power without which the body cannot sustain life within it. Therefore, it wouldn't be wrong to consider this fire as Lord Krishna Himself, and then take measures to always protect and please this fire, just like how one would regard, worship and protect the supreme power within. Agni is the driving force of life. Let us understand it and protect it always, for its destruction is death.

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