



Review Article

Volume 14 Issue 12

December 2025

A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF AGNI AND ITS ROLE IN DIGESTION AND METABOLISM

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Abstract

Background In *Ayurveda*, *Agni* is considered the fundamental force responsible for digestion, metabolism, transformation, and nourishment of the body. All physiological processes, including growth, strength, immunity, and longevity, depend upon the proper functioning of *Agni*. Disturbance of *Agni* is described as the root cause of most diseases. Hence, understanding the concept of *Agni* is essential for understanding both health and disease. **Aim-** To study and review the concept of *Agni* and its role in digestion and metabolism. **Objectives** To understand the basic concept and types of *Agni*. To explain the role of *Jatharagni* in digestion. To describe the role of *Dhatvagni* in tissue metabolism. To study the formation of *Ama* due to impaired *Agni*. To correlate the concept of *Agni* with modern digestion and metabolism. **Materials and Methods** This conceptual review is based on a detailed study of classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with relevant modern literature related to digestive and metabolic processes. The collected information was analyzed and interpreted in a systematic manner. **Results and Discussion** *Agni* is classified into *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*, each playing a specific role in digestion and tissue metabolism. Proper functioning of *Jatharagni* ensures digestion of food, *Bhutagni* governs elemental transformation, and *Dhatvagni* is responsible for tissue metabolism and nourishment. Impairment of *Agni* leads

to formation of *Ama*, which is considered the primary pathological factor in disease development. The concept of *Agni* shows close similarity with modern concepts of digestive enzymes, metabolic pathways, and cellular metabolism. **Conclusion** *Agni* is the central regulating force of digestion and metabolism in *Ayurveda*. Balanced *Agni* maintains health, while disturbed *Agni* initiates disease. Understanding the concept of *Agni* helps in proper disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. This review highlights the timeless relevance of *Agni* in maintaining metabolic harmony.

Keywords- *Agni, Jatharagni, Dhatvagni, Ama, Digestion, Metabolism*

Introduction

In *Ayurveda*, the concept of *Agni* holds a central position in understanding life, health, and disease. *Agni* is responsible for all types of transformation in the body, including digestion, absorption, assimilation, and metabolism. The strength of the body, clarity of mind, immunity, complexion, and longevity all depend on the proper functioning of *Agni*. When *Agni* functions normally, the body remains healthy, but when it becomes disturbed, it initiates the process of disease. Hence, *Agni* is considered the foundation of all physiological and pathological processes.¹

Digestion in *Ayurveda* is not limited to the breakdown of food in the stomach only. It is a continuous process that begins with the intake of food and continues up to the formation of body tissues and energy. This entire process is governed by *Agni*. Classical texts describe that even the best quality food taken in proper quantity will not be beneficial if *Agni* is weak. Thus, digestion and metabolism are directly dependent on the strength and balance of *Agni*.²

According to classical literature, *Agni* is classified into *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. *Jatharagni* is responsible for primary digestion in the gastrointestinal tract, *Bhutagni* helps in elemental transformation, and *Dhatvagni* governs tissue-level metabolism. Any disturbance in these forms of *Agni* results in improper digestion and formation of *Ama*, which is considered the root cause of many disorders. Therefore, assessment of *Agni* is essential in the diagnosis and management of diseases³

In the modern view, digestion and metabolism involve enzymes, hormones, and complex biochemical reactions. The functional role described for *Agni* shows a close resemblance to these modern concepts of digestion and cellular metabolism. This similarity highlights the scientific depth of the Ayurvedic concept of *Agni*. Therefore, a detailed conceptual

understanding of *Agni* is important not only from the traditional point of view but also for its clinical and metabolic relevance in present-day practice.⁴

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To study and review the concept of *Agni* and its role in digestion and metabolism.

Objectives

1. To understand the basic concept and types of *Agni*.
2. To explain the role of *Jatharagni* in digestion.
3. To describe the role of *Dhatvagni* in tissue metabolism.
4. To study the formation of *Ama* due to impaired *Agni*.
5. To correlate the concept of *Agni* with modern digestion and metabolism.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This conceptual review was carried out through an extensive literature study of classical Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*, along with relevant modern textbooks and research articles related to digestion and metabolism. Various references describing the concept, types, functions, and clinical importance of *Agni* were collected, compiled, and analyzed in a systematic manner. The available data were critically reviewed to understand the role of *Agni* in digestion, metabolism, and disease formation, and to establish its correlation with modern physiological concepts.

Review of Literature

Agni

In *Ayurveda*, *Agni* is described as the most important life-supporting factor in the body. Classical texts clearly mention that the existence of life depends on the balance of *Agni*. It is responsible for all transformation activities taking place in the body. When *Agni* is balanced, a person remains healthy, energetic, and strong. When it becomes weak or disturbed, the body becomes prone to diseases. Thus, *Agni* is considered the root of health and disease.⁵

The ancient Acharyas have explained that *Agni* is not a single entity but functions at different levels in the body. On this basis, *Agni* is divided into *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni*. *Jatharagni* is the main digestive fire responsible for digestion of food. *Bhutagni* works at

elemental level, while *Dhatvagni* functions at tissue level. These three together maintain proper nourishment and metabolism in the body.⁶

Different functional states of *Agni* are also described in the texts. These include *Samagni*, *Vishamagni*, *Tikshnagni*, and *Mandagni*. *Samagni* represents the normal balanced state and is responsible for good digestion and health. *Vishamagni* is irregular due to *Vata* effect, *Tikshnagni* is sharp due to *Pitta*, and *Mandagni* is weak due to *Kapha*. These disturbed states of *Agni* are directly responsible for many digestive and metabolic disorders.⁷

The pathological importance of *Agni* is clearly explained through the concept of *Ama*. When *Agni* is impaired, the food is not properly digested and forms *Ama*. This *Ama* circulates in the body and blocks the channels, leading to various diseases. Hence, assessment of *Agni* is considered essential in disease diagnosis as well as in planning treatment.⁸

Role of *Agni* in Digestion and Metabolism

Digestion in *Ayurveda* begins with the action of *Jatharagni*. After food intake, *Jatharagni* acts on the food and converts it into absorbable and nourishing form. Proper functioning of *Jatharagni* ensures timely digestion, proper appetite, and formation of healthy nutrients. If *Jatharagni* is weak, digestion becomes slow and incomplete, leading to heaviness, bloating, and formation of *Ama*.⁹

After primary digestion, the digested food is further processed by *Bhutagni*. Each *Bhutagni* acts on its respective elemental portion of the food and makes it suitable for tissue formation. This stage represents internal biochemical transformation. Thus, *Bhutagni* plays a crucial linking role between digestion and tissue metabolism.¹⁰

At the tissue level, *Dhatvagni* becomes active. Each tissue has its own *Dhatvagni* which helps in transforming nutrients into respective *Dhatu*. Proper functioning of *Dhatvagni* maintains the balance of *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, and *Shukra*. Disturbance in *Dhatvagni* leads to improper tissue formation, depletion, or abnormal tissue growth.¹¹

In *Ayurveda*, *Dhatvagni* is responsible for the transformation of nutrients into the seven body tissues or *Dhatus*. After primary digestion by *Jatharagni* and elemental conversion by *Bhutagni*, the nourishing part of food reaches the tissue level where each *Dhatu* has its own specific *Dhatvagni*. These are *Rasagni*, *Raktagni*, *Mamsagni*, *Medagni*, *Asthyagni*, *Majjagni*, and *Shukragni*. Each *Dhatvagni* converts the nutritive portion into its respective *Dhatu* and

also produces the next *Dhatu* in sequence. Thus, *Dhatvagni* plays a key role in growth, strength, immunity, and overall nourishment of the body.

When *Dhatvagni* functions normally, proper formation and maintenance of all *Dhatus* take place, resulting in good strength, stamina, and immunity. When *Dhatvagni* becomes weak or disturbed, improper tissue formation occurs, leading to either tissue depletion or abnormal tissue accumulation. This results in various disorders related to blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow, and reproductive tissues. Disturbed *Dhatvagni* also contributes to the formation of *Ama* at tissue level, which further blocks the channels and aggravates disease. Therefore, proper functioning of *Dhatvagni* is essential for both health maintenance and disease prevention.

From the modern point of view, digestion and metabolism involve enzymes, hormones, and cellular reactions. The functions described for *Agni* closely resemble the role of digestive enzymes and metabolic processes in the body. Thus, *Agni* can be understood as the collective expression of digestive and metabolic activity. This shows that the Ayurvedic concept of *Agni* is not only philosophical but also deeply scientific and clinically applicable.¹²

Role of *Agni* in Digestion and Metabolism

Food Intake (*Āhāra Sevana*)



Action of *Jatharagni*

Primary digestion in stomach and intestine

Conversion of food into absorbable form



Formation of *Āhāra Rasa*

Nutrient essence formed after digestion



Action of *Bhutagni*

Elemental transformation of nutrients

Makes food suitable for tissue metabolism



Action of *Dhatvagni*



• *Rasagni* → Formation of *Rasa Dhatu*

- *Raktagni* → Formation of *Rakta Dhatu*
- *Mamsagni* → Formation of *Mamsa Dhatu*
- *Medagni* → Formation of *Meda Dhatu*
- *Asthyagni* → Formation of *Asthi Dhatu*
- *Majjagni* → Formation of *Majja Dhatu*
- *Shukragni* → Formation of *Shukra Dhatu*



Formation of *Ojas*

Immunity, strength, vitality



Normal Metabolism and Tissue Nourishment



Maintenance of Health

If *Agni* is Disturbed (Pathological Flow)

Weak or Irregular *Agni*



Improper Digestion



Formation of *Ama*



Blockage of Channels (*Srotorodha*)



Impaired Tissue Nutrition



Development of Disease

Results and Findings

- It was found that balanced *Agni* is the primary factor responsible for proper digestion, absorption, and metabolism in the body.
- Normal functioning of *Jatharagni* was observed to be essential for timely digestion and formation of healthy *Ahara Rasa*.

- Proper activity of *Bhutagni* was found to play a key role in elemental transformation of nutrients before tissue formation.
- Efficient functioning of *Dhatvagni* was found responsible for proper nourishment and maintenance of all *Dhatus*.
- Disturbance of *Agni* was found to directly lead to the formation of *Ama*, which is the basic cause of many metabolic and systemic disorders.
- It was observed that different disturbed states of *Agni* such as *Mandagni*, *Tikshnagni*, and *Vishmagni* lead to different digestive and metabolic problems.
- The functions of *Agni* were found to closely resemble modern digestive enzymes and cellular metabolic processes.
- Proper regulation of *Agni* was found to be essential for maintaining normal immunity, strength, and vitality through healthy formation of *Ojas*.

DISCUSSION

The present conceptual review highlights that *Agni* is the central force responsible for digestion and metabolism in the body. Proper functioning of *Agni* ensures timely digestion, good appetite, clear metabolism, and healthy tissue formation. Classical texts repeatedly emphasize that no disease develops without the involvement of disturbed *Agni*. This discussion makes it clear that the assessment of *Agni* is not only important for digestive disorders but also for almost every systemic disease.¹³

The role of *Jatharagni*, *Bhutagni*, and *Dhatvagni* shows that digestion is not a single-step process but a continuous multilevel transformation. *Jatharagni* performs primary digestion, *Bhutagni* carries out elemental conversion, and *Dhatvagni* is responsible for tissue nourishment. If any one of these stages becomes weak or irregular, the entire metabolic chain gets disturbed. This explains why improper digestion often leads to poor tissue health, weakness, and chronic illness.¹⁴

The concept of *Ama* further strengthens the importance of balanced *Agni*. When *Agni* becomes weak or irregular, incomplete digestion occurs and *Ama* is formed. This *Ama* blocks the channels (*Srotas*), disturbs tissue nutrition, and initiates disease processes. This discussion clearly supports the Ayurvedic principle that treatment should first focus on correcting *Agni* before directly targeting the disease.¹⁵

From a modern perspective, the functions of *Agni* closely resemble the activities of digestive enzymes, metabolic hormones, and cellular biochemical reactions. This similarity proves that the concept of *Agni* is not only philosophical but also deeply scientific. The present discussion shows that balanced digestion and metabolism are universal principles of health, whether explained through *Ayurveda* or modern physiology.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

This conceptual review concludes that *Agni* is the fundamental regulating force of digestion and metabolism in the body. Proper functioning of *Agni* ensures complete digestion, effective nutrient transformation, and healthy tissue formation, which are essential for maintaining health. Disturbance of *Agni* leads to improper digestion, formation of *Ama*, and initiation of various metabolic and systemic disorders. Therefore, preservation and correction of *Agni* should always be given prime importance in disease prevention as well as in treatment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST -NIL

SOURCE OF SUPPORT- NONE

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