

## The Digital Digestive Dilemma-

### Impact of excess digital screen time on Agni

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**Abstract-** According to National Library of Medicine, Average screen time in India is high, with adults spending around 6.5 to 7.4 hours daily, often exceeding figures from the US and China, driven by affordable data for social media, video streaming (YouTube, OTT), and gaming, though data varies slightly by report and source. Children also show significant usage, with many exceeding recommended limits, impacting health and development. This makes the screen time a major culprit for various diseases. Along with ophthalmic and ear disorders, excess screen time causes depression, anxiety, functional gastrointestinal disease, irritable bowel disease etc.

When we analyze impact of excess digital screen time on human health with Ayurveda point of view, it emerges as a very strong etiological factor. Excess screen time fits into all three category of *hetu* i.e. *Asatmyaindriyarth* *Samyog*, *Pragyaparadha* And *Parinaam*. Excess screen time is a causative factor for

*mandagni* and *ajirn*. Vitiated status of *Bodhak Kaph*, *Pachak pitta* and *Saman vayu* again disturb the *Agni*. The sedentary lifestyle and stress inducing behaviour of excess screen time alters *Agni*. significantly. The *doshik* vitiation and *manas dushti* caused by excess screen time make path for *Agni dushti*.

**Keywords-** Excess Screen Time, *Dosha* Vitiation, *Mandagni*, *Agni*, Digital screen

### **Introduction-**

*Agni* is the fuel of life. Proper state of *Agni* functioning is required for good health status. It is very vital to protect *Agni* from various those factors which can vitiate it. Fast lifestyle, fast-food, stressful schedule, all time staying tele- connected and living in virtual life are the new etiological factors responsible for various diseases.

India has massive mobile user base, exceeding 1.2 billion users, with nearly universal usage among young adults (15-29) in both rural and urban areas, where

smartphones dominate and internet penetration is very high, with over 85% of households owning one and 4G/5G driving connectivity. Data from 2024-2025 indicates high digital engagement, with over 1.08 billion active subscribers and significant daily usage, especially on social media, gaming, and video<sup>1</sup>. Digital Engagement: Indians spent over 1.1 trillion hours on smart phones in 2024, with 70% on social media, gaming, and video<sup>2</sup>.

Globally, the primary social networks are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. In 2021, 57.6% of the total global population used social media<sup>3</sup>. Extreme screen time is the new cause for various diseases which has emerged in recent times. Sometimes prolonged screen time is needed for learning purpose and sometimes just for leisure. but it always going to hamper various functions of human body.

This excess digital screen exposure is becoming a new etiological factor for various diseases like Obesity, Diabetes, anxiety, depression, Functional Gastro-Intestinal disorders (FGIDs). With *Ayurveda* prospect we need to discuss its impact on our physiological parameters like *Dosha*, *Agni* etc. The long sitting hours, gazing towards digital screen, having daily routine around screen surely impacts our *doshas* and *Agni*. In this study we would connect the missing links between *Agni* and excess digital screen time. Here we are considering the *Jatharagni* as *Agni* in this paper's context.

### **Material and Method-**

All references related to *Agni* and its vitiation provided in classical texts of *Ayurveda* were studied along with latest

research articles. On the basis of provided data and information this analysis is done.

### **Results-**

#### **Digital Screen Time-**

Digital screen time, defined as the time spent in front of electronic device screens, has become a significant aspect of daily life. It is prevalent across all age groups in modern society, with smartphones, tablets, and computers occupying a significant portion compared to traditional devices such as television and video games<sup>4</sup>.

Research articles consistently show excessive screen time harms child/adolescent physical health (obesity, poor sleep, eye strain, heart risks), cognitive development (attention, language, memory issues, lower academic performance), mental/ social well-being (anxiety, depression, poor social skills, loneliness), often linked to less physical activity and disrupted sleep, though quality (educational vs. passive) and context (co-viewing) matter.<sup>5</sup>

According To National Library of Medicine, Research consistently links excessive screen time to negative health outcomes, including increased risks obesity, poor sleep, and significant mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and attention problems, especially in children and adolescents.

***Agni-*** It primarily indicates *Jatharagni*. Other types of *agni* like *bhutagni* and *Dhatvagni* are dependent on *Jatharagni*. In this article *agni* is mentioned for *Jatharagni*. *Jatharagni* is considered to be the most important because each and every nutrient that one ingests first comes to the *Jathara* and is subjected to the action

of *Jatharagni*. *Jatharagni* digests the food materials that consist of the five basic elements and transforms it for utilization by the respective *Dhatus* (tissues). *Jatharagni* is also responsible for separation of the food material into the essence portion (*PRasad*) and the waste products (*kitta*) in our body (As.Hr.Su-12/8).<sup>6</sup> *Jatharagni* is directly related to *Dhatvagni* or bioenergy in the cells and their metabolic processes, with ultimate tissue metabolism or *Dhatu-Paka* process. All the *Dhatvagni* depend on the normal, healthy state of *Jatharagni*. If the *Jatharagni* is hyperactive (*Tikshna*) or hypoactive (*Manda*), it will cause an excessive or retarded action of the *Dhatvagni*. This disturbed action ultimately leads to various disorders. *Jatharagni* is the main important *Agni* that controls the function of all other 12 *Agnis*. All the *Agnis* are totally dependent on the status of *Jatharagni* (Cha. Chi. 15/39-40).<sup>7</sup>

***Agni Dushti Hetu-*** According to Acharya Charak *Agni dushti* occurs because of excessive fasting, indigestion, excessive eating, eating at irregular timings, having allergic foods, excess heavy, cold, dry and stale food, violation the protocols of *Vaman*, *Virechan*, *Snehan*, weakness because of diseases, unfavourable time and surroundings and avoiding the unavoidable urges. here he enlisted all the factors which can cause *Agnidushti*.<sup>9</sup>

Factors which triggered *Agni Dushti* are 1. Disturbed pattern of daily regimen and stressed life style. 2. Consumption of unwholesome diet & *Virudha Ahara*. 3. Eating foods too fast or involvement in activities while taking foods. Fasting, irregular dietary timing or consumption of

*Snigdha* food. 5. Diet which is not according to *Prakriti* of an individual also triggers *Agni Dushti*. 6. Psychological factors such as; anger, greed, anxiety, grief and depression can also lead digestive ailments. 7. Consumption of food in unhygienic conditions which can leads infections. 8. Presence of other diseases which directly affect digestive functioning.<sup>8</sup>

Excessive eating , long sitting hours and heavy- cold food consumption vitiates the all components - *Pachak pitta*, *Bodhak kapha* and *Saman vayu*, reponsible for proper digestion of food. so, this again contributes in *Agnidushti*.

#### ***Hetutva of Screen time-***

- As discussed above multiple factors are present in excess screentime as a new etiology for *Agnidushti*. having excessive fasting, excessive eating, eating at irregular timings, having allergic foods, excess heavy, cold, dry and stale food and avoiding the unavoidable urges are closely associated with excess screen time.
- Mindless eating usually led to overeating, improper chewing of food, hampered digestion, prolong absorption time, irritable visceral behavior. Then again excess screen time leads to sedentary lifestyle and increased secretion of cortisol which in turn initiate disorders like Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Functional Gastro Intestinal Disease. Hence excess screen time leads to increased stress level as well mindless eating, both affecting digestive system simultaneously. Again, not only during the meal

time but overall a screen time user stay inactive in comparison to non screen user. It leads to vitiation of *Kapha* which will hamper the *agni*.

### Discussion-

- While excess digital screen time causes impaired digestion because of mindless eating and stress factor , this etiological factor fall in all three category of *Hetu*.
  - Excess digital screen time causes *Asatmayaindriyarth-samyog* causing various diseases of eyes and ears as well as involvement of *Manas* (being the *Ubhayindriya*) causes various disorders related to *Manas*.
  - Taking *Asatmendriyarth* *Samyoga* into consideration, the *Atiyoga* of *Manas* is also available in case of excessive use of cell phones. *Manas Karma* (action) in the gross body transpires via the body's functional faculty by *Tridosha* and additionally, our *Acharyas* have reaffirmed the connection between *Manas* and *vata dosha*. Therefore, in addition to *Atiyoga* of *Manas*, there is *Vata Dosha* vitiation, which can lead to *Shoka*, *Chinta*, and other issues.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, mental illnesses like anxiety may also result from this. sadness, insomnia, stress, etc., and explains the increase in the quantity of similar occurrences that have occurred recently.
  - On digestive system- *Asatmendriyarth* *Samyoga* causes
- mindless eating which violates the *Ashtavidha Vishesh Aayatan* leading to vitiate *Agni* causing *Mandagni*.
  - Again being engaged with screen time causes *asatmaindriyarth samyog* of *Jihva* also . Sometime *abhojan*, *atibhojan*, *vishamashan* occurs which are prominent *hetus* of *Agni dushti*
  - *Vega vidharan* is also an empirical *hetu* which often happens with digital screen watching. It is also a *hetu* mentioned by *Acharya Charak*.
  - The second category of *hetu* is *Pragyaparadh* which is done in deliberation while gazing digital screens. Acc. To National Library of Medicine on an average Indians watch 6.5-7.5 hours. While recommended hours are around 2 hours depending upon type of profession. Now this much excess screentime happens sometimes because of *dhi-vibhram*, *Dhruvi-vibhram* and *smruti Vibram* which leads to *Adhyashan*- overeating. Mindless eating often leads to *Adhyashan* which is a causative factor of *Ajirn* and *Agnimandya*. Improper chewing of food again hampers the work of *Bodhak Kaph* which in turn prolongs the duration of digestion hence creating *Ajirn*. *Adhyashan* leads to *Pitta* vitiation and *Mandgni*. One more factor is long sitting hours which vitiate *saman Vayu* and hence *Agni*.
  - The third category of *hetu* is *Parinaam* or *Kaal*. Post covid we all

made to use screen time because of various reasons. It was nothing but *Kaal* which became a causative *hetu* for increased screen time. Sometimes for studies or professional work, sometimes for connecting with our family members and sometimes just for leisure each of us had started to use screen a bit much. Corona pandemic made all of us more user-friendly towards various type of screens. That's why excess screen time can be classified as third type of *hetu* also.

### **Conclusion-**

- Vitiated *Bodhak Kapha*, *Pachak pitta* and *Saman vayu* hampers the *Agni* and this leads to the initiation of diseases with *Mandagni*. Here we can see that how much potent *hetu* excess screen time is for *Agni dushti*. While understanding its *Nidanaktva* we can find the *Nidan Parivarjan* and *chikitsa* for its impacts. Epidemic of Corona has made each of us more user-friendly towards all sort of screens. We were using TV only as a leisure tool but post covid we all made us to use our screens much more. Be it laptops, mobile, tablet etc. Its impact has been studied with various aspects. Research articles and systematic reviews indicate that screen use significantly impacts the human digestive system indirectly by promoting mindless eating, increasing caloric intake, fostering unhealthy food choices, promoting sedentary behavior, disrupting the gut micro biome, and potentially

exacerbating conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), functional Gastro-Intestinal Disorders (FGIDs). Impact occurs on physiology of digestion and gastric visceral irritability. All these conditions are arising because of *Agnidushti* which has close association with excess digital screen time.

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