

Yogic Diet

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Abstract:

Diet plays a vital role in our life. It is said that “As you eat so you behave.” According to yogic thinking, mind is formed by the core of food. Healthy eating is essential for healthy mind and body. Diet plays an important role in achieving perfection and success in yoga. A yogic diet leads to peace and progress in spiritually. So in this article we will go through diet mentioned for yoga sadhak in yogic literature like Hathayoga Padipika, Gheranda Samhita and Shrimad Bhagwadgita.

Keywords:

Yogic diet, ahara, Mithra, pathya-ahara, apathya-ahara, sattvik diet

Introduction:

Yoga is spiritual discipline which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. The word ‘Yoga’ is derived from Sanskrit root ‘Yuj’, meaning to join or ‘to yoke’ or ‘to unite’. Yoga is not merely a form of exercise for the body. It is an ancient wisdom – for a healthier, happier and more peaceful way of living – which ultimately leads to union with the self. Yogic Philosophy believes that diet is an integral part of yoga. This not only helps in developing a mindful eating practice but also supports and nurtures your yoga regime

The Bhagwadgita also classifies food as sattvik, Rajasik and Tamasik Diet. Sattvik ahara It highly preferred yogic diet. Food dears to those are the mode of goodness increase the duration of life, purify ones. Existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such food is juicy, fatty, wholesome and pleasing to the heart. Sattvik food nourishes the Body, balances the energy intellect and purifies the mind. It e.g.: fresh fruits, dry fruits, berries, raw or lightly cooked vegetable, salads, grains, honey, dairy products etc. Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning are dear to those in passion. Such foods cause distress misery and disease. The food makes the mind rest less and case disease e.g.: onion, garlic, coffee, tea, tobacco, alcohol, fast food, chocolate, etc. Yoga sadhak should avoid Rajasik food. Tamasik Foods prepared more than three hours before being eaten, food that is tasteless, decomposed and putrid, and food consisting of remnants and untouchable things is dear to those in the mode of darkness. The food which is stale, tasteless, impure is Tamasik in nature. Such food creates a feeling of heaviness, lethargy. e.g.: meat, fish, egg, drugs, alcohol.

Food which is burned, fried, reheated many times. A yogi should consume sattvik diet and should avoid tamasik and Rajasik diet. Concept of yogic diet in hatha yoga Hatha yoga text is Hathayoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita define yogic diet in three categories 1. Mitahara – moderate and balance diet. 2. Pathaya-ahara – beneficial and preferred diet. 3. Apathaya-ahara – Harmful and prohibited diet. Mitahara Mitahara in Hathayoga text is defined as--agreeable and sweet food leaving the one fourth of stomach free and eaten as offering to please God (Prasad). It means that food should be fresh pleasant taste, lubricated. The rule of food intake is that half of stomach should be filled with food, one fourth should be filled with water and remaining one fourth should be kept empty for circulation of air. Eating until the stomach is full is prohibited. A practitioner who undertakes yoga without moderating the diet suffers from many diseases and doesn't make progress in yoga. Pathya-ahara: (Food should be taken) The most conducive food for the yogic according to Hathayoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita are: good grains, wheat, rice, barley, milk, ghee, jaggery, Mishri, Honey, dry ginger, parval, mung, urad and such pulses, pure water, seasonal green vegetables, brinjal, unripe banana, figs, cucumber, bitter gourd etc. Five leafy vegetable similar to spinach (balashaka, kalashaka, patolapatraka, vashtaka and himalochika) are highly recommended. Cardamom, cloves, nutmeg, haritaki and dates can be taken. Only food which is easily digestible, agreeable, lubricating, strengthening nourishing the Dhatus and acceptable to the mind should be eaten. (G.S. 5/29) Apathya-ahara: (Food should be avoided) The food which is harmful is described in Hatha yoga Text are as: one should avoid food that taste bitter, sour, pungent, salty, heating, heavy vegetable

A diet that is wholly conducive to the practice of Yoga and spiritual progress is called Yogic diet. Diet has intimate connection with the mind. Mind is formed out of the subtlest portion of food. Sage Uddalaka instructs his son Svetaketu "Food, when consumed becomes threefold: the gross particles become excrement, the middling ones flesh and the fine ones the mind. My child, when curd is churned, its fine particles which rise upwards, form butter. Thus, my child, when food is consumed, the fine particles which rise upwards form the mind. Hence verily the mind is food." Again you will find in the Chhandogya Upanishad: "By the purity of food one becomes purified in his inner nature; by the purification of his inner nature he verily gets memory of the Self; and by the attainment of the memory of the Self, all ties and attachments are severed." Diet is of three kinds viz., Sattvic diet, Rajasic diet and Tamasic diet. Milk, barely, wheat, cereals, butter, cheese, tomatoes, honey, dates, fruits, almonds and sugar-candy are all Sattvic foodstuffs. They render the mind pure and calm. Fish, eggs, meat, salt, chillies and asafoetida are Rajasic foodstuffs. They excite passion. Beef, wine, garlic, onions and tobacco are Tamasic foodstuffs.

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna: "The food which is dear to each is threefold. Hear the distinctions of these. The foods which increase vitality, energy, vigour, health and joy and which are delicious, bland, substantial and agreeable are dear to the pure. The passionate desire foods that are bitter, sour, saline, excessively hot, pungent, dry and burning and which produce pain, grief and disease. The food which is stale, tasteless, putrid and rotten, leavings and impure is dear to the Tamasic."

Food plays an important part in meditation. Different foods produce different effects on different compartments of the brain. For purposes of meditation, the food should be light, nutritious and Sattvic. Milk, fruits, almonds, butter, sugar-candy, green gram, Bengal gram soaked in water overnight, bread, etc., are all very helpful in meditation. Thed (a kind of root

available in abundance in the Himalayan regions) is very Sattvic. Tea and sugar should be used in moderation. It is better if you can give them up entirely. Dried ginger-powder can be mixed with milk and taken frequently. Indian Yogins like this very much. Another health-giving stuff is myrobalan of the yellow variety which can be chewed now and then. In the Vagbhata it is represented as even superior to a nourishing mother. It takes care of the body better than a mother does. A mother gets annoyed with her child sometimes, but myrobalan always keeps an even temperament and is cheerful and enthusiastic in attending to the well-being of human beings. It preserves semen and stops all nocturnal emissions. Potato, boiled without salt or baked on fire, is also an excellent food for practitioners.

A beginner should be careful in choosing food-stuffs of Sattvic nature. Food exercises tremendously vast influence over the mind. You can see it obviously in everyday-life. It is very difficult to control mind after a heavy, sumptuous, indigestible, rich meal. The mind runs, wanders and jumps like an ape all the time. Alcohol causes great excitement the mind.

Food is only a mass of energy. Water and air also supply energy to the body. You can live without food for several days; but you cannot live without air even for a few minutes. Oxygen is even more important. What is wanted to feed the body is energy. If you can supply this energy by any other means, you can entirely dispense with food. Yogins live without food by drinking nectar. This nectar flows through a hole in the palate. It dribbles and nourishes the body. A Jnani can draw energy directly from his pure, irresistible will and support the body without any food whatsoever. If you know the process of drawing the energy from the Cosmic Energy, then you can maintain the body for any length of time and can dispense with food completely.

Food is of four kinds. There are liquids which are drunk; solids which are pulverised by the teeth and eaten; there are semi-solids which are taken in by licking; and there are soft articles that are swallowed without mastication. All articles of food should be thoroughly masticated in the mouth until they are reduced to quite a liquid before being swallowed. Then only they can be readily digested, absorbed and assimilated in the system. The diet should be such as can maintain physical efficiency and good health. The well-being of an individual depends more on perfect nutrition than on anything else. Various sorts of intestinal diseases, increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, lack of high vitality and power of resistance, rickets, scurvy, anaemia or poverty of blood, beriberi, etc., are due to faulty nutrition. It should be remembered that it is not so much the climate as food which plays the vital role in producing a strong healthy body or a weakling suffering from a host of diseases. An appreciable knowledge of the science of dietetics is essential for evserybody, especially for spiritual aspirants, to keep up physical efficiency and good health. Aspirants should be able to make out a cheap and well-balanced diet from only a certain articles of diet. What is needed is a well-balanced diet, not a rich diet. A rich diet produces diseases of the liver, kidneys and pancreas. A well-balanced diet helps a man to grow, to turn out more work, increases his body-weight, and keeps up the efficiency, stamina and a high standard of vim and vigour. You are what you eat.

Where can Sannyasins in India, who live on public alms get a well-balanced diet? On some days they get pungent stuffs only, on some other days sweetmeats only and yet on some other days sour things only. But they are able to draw the requisite energy through power of

meditation. This unique Yogic method is unknown to the medical profession and to the scientists. Whenever the mind is concentrated, a divine wave bathes all the tissues with a divine elixir. All the cells are renovated and vivified.

All articles that are putrid, stale, decomposed, unclean, twice cooked, kept overnight, should be abandoned. The diet should be fresh, simple, light, bland, wholesome, easily digestible and nutritious. He who lives to eat is a sinner, but he who eats to live is verily a saint. In the Siva Samhita it is said: "Yoga should not be practiced immediately after a meal, nor when one is very hungry; before beginning the practice, some milk and butter should be taken."

You will find in the Yoga-Tattva Upanishad: "The proficient in Yoga should abandon the food detrimental to the practice of Yoga. He should give up salt, mustard, sour things, hot, pungent or bitter articles, asafoetida, women, emaciation of the body by fasts etc. During the early stages of practice, food of milk and ghee is ordained; also food consisting of wheat, green pulse and red rice is said to favour the progress. Then he will be able to retain his breath as long as he likes. By thus retaining the breath as long as he likes, Kevala-Kumbhaka (cessation of breath without inhalation and exhalation) is attained. When Kevala-Kumbhaka is attained by one and thus inhalation and exhalation are dispensed with, there is nothing unattainable in the three worlds to the Bhikshuka-Upanishad you will find: "Paramahansas like Samavartaka, Aruni, Svetaketu, Jada Bharata, Dattatreya, Suka, Vamadeva, Haritaki and others take eight mouthfuls and strive after Moksha alone through the path of Yoga." Manu, Jesus and Buddha exhorted the people to refrain from using liquors, intoxicants and drugs as these are deleterious in their effects.

The vast majority of persons dig their graves through their teeth. No rest is given to the stomach. After all, man wants very little on this bountiful earth a few loaves of bread, a little butter and some cold water. This will amply suffice to keep the life going. People, on the contrary, stuff their stomachs with all sorts of things, eatable and uneatable, on account of the force of habit even when there is no appetite. This is very bad. All diseases take their origin in overloading the stomach. Hunger is the best sauce. If there is hunger, food can be digested well. If you have no appetite, do not take anything. Let the stomach enjoy a full holiday.

A variety of dishes overworks the stomach, induces capricious appetite and renders the tongue fastidious. Then it becomes difficult to please the tongue. Therefore control the tongue first; then all the other senses can be easily controlled.

Man has invented so many kinds of dishes just to satisfy his palate and has made life complex and miserable. He calls himself a civilized man, when he is really ignorant and deluded by the senses. His mind gets upset when he cannot get his usual dishes in a new place. Is this real strength? He has become an absolute slave of his tongue. This is very deplorable. Be natural and simple in eating and drinking. Moderation is Yoga. Eat to live and not live to eat. Follow this golden rule and be happy. You can then devote more time to Yoga practices.

A Yogic student who spends his time wholly in pure meditation wants very little food. One or one and a half seers of milk and some fruits per day will quite suffice. But a Yogi who ascends the platform for vigorous active work wants abundant nutritious food.

Vegetarian diet has been acclaimed to be most conducive to spiritual and psychic advancement. It has been found that meat augments animal passion and decreases intellectual capacity. While it is true that meat-eating countries are physically active and strong, the same cannot be said of their spiritual attainments. Meat is not at all necessary for the keeping up of perfect health, rigors and vitality. On the contrary, it is highly deleterious to health. It brings in its train a host of ailments such as tape-worm, albuminuria and other diseases of the kidneys. Killing of animals for food is a great sin. Instead of killing the egoism and the idea of "mine-

ness," ignorant people kill innocent animals under pretext of sacrifice to goddess, but in reality it is meant to please their own tongue or palate. What inhuman horrible crimes are being committed in the name of God and Religion! Ahimsa (non-injuring) is the first virtue that a spiritual aspirant should try to possess. You should have reverence for life. Lord Jesus says: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Mahavira shouted in a trumpet-like voice: "Regard every living being as thyself and harm no one." The Law of Karma is inexorable, unrelenting, immutable. The pain you inflict upon another will surely rebound upon you and the happiness you radiate will come back to you adding to your happiness. He who knows this Law will not hurt anybody.

Meat-eating and alcoholism are closely allied. The craving for liquor dies a natural death, when the meat is withdrawn. The question of birth-control becomes very difficult in the case of those who take meat. To them mind-control is next to impossible. Mark how the meat-eating tiger and the cow or elephant living on green grass are poles asunder! The one is wild and ferocious, the other is mild and peaceful. Meat has direct influence on the different compartments of the brain.

"Fasting is interdicted for practitioners of Yoga as it produces weakness. But occasional mild fasts are highly beneficial. They will overhaul the system thoroughly, give rest to the stomach and the intestines and eliminate uric acid. Yogic students may take one full meal at 11 o'clock, a cup of warm milk in the morning and half a seer of milk and some plantains (or oranges or apples) at night with much advantage. The night meal should be very light. If the stomach is overloaded, sleep will supervene and as too much sleep is injurious to Yogic practices, one cannot make any real headway in the path of Yoga. Therefore a diet consisting of milk and fruits alone is a splendid menu for all practitioners. Aspirants should avoid all narcotics, coffee, tea, alcohol and smoke that stimulate the senses. Our senses are compared to restive horses, and they become uncontrollable by taking narcotics. You should control them by refraining from taking narcotics. We are all slaves of our senses more or less and the senses in turn are the slaves of narcotics. If you really crave for perfection, control of mind and success in Yoga, avoid these narcotics by all possible means.

Boil half a seer of milk along with some boiled rice, ghee and sugar. This is called Charu. This is an excellent food for Yogic practitioners. This is for dinner. Half a seer of milk and some fruits will do for the night. Try this prescription and tell me the benefits you have derived in your sadhana. Milk should not be boiled too much. It should be removed from fire the moment the boiling point is reached. Excessive boiling destroys all nutritious principles and vitamins and renders milk unfit for consumption. Milk is an ideal food for aspirants. It is a perfect food by itself.

Fruit-diet exercises a marvellous influence upon the constitution. This is a natural diet. Fruits are tremendous energy-producers. Fruits and milk help concentration and meditation. Barley, wheat, milk, ghee and honey promote longevity of life and increase power and stamina. Fruit-juice and the water wherein sugar-candy is dissolved are very good drinks. Butter mixed with sugar-candy and almonds soaked in water overnight will cool the system. all do not make much fuss about your diet. You need not advertise to everyone that you are able to live on a particular form of diet. The observance of such Niyama (rules) is for your own advancement in the spiritual path and you will not be spiritually benefited by giving publicity to your practices. There are many nowadays who make it their profession to make money and their livelihood by performing some Yoga-Asanas, Pranayama or by having some diet regulation as eating only raw articles or leaves or roots. These people cannot have any real spirituale a natural simple life. Take simple food that is wholly agreeable to your system. You should have your

own menu to suit your constitution. You are yourself the best judge to select a Sattvic diet. In the matter of food and drink you will do well to eat and drink as a master. You should not have the least craving for any particular diet. You should not become a slave to this food or that food.

TABLE SHOWING SATTVIC, RAJASIC AND TAMASIC ARTICLES OF DIET

SATTVIC		RAJASIC	TAMASIC
Cow's milk, Cream, Cheese, Butter, Curd, Ghee, Sweet fruits, Apples, Bananas, Grapes, Papaya, Pomegranates, Mangoes, Oranges, Pears, Pineapples, Guavas, Figs, Vegetables, Coconut, Brinjals, Potatoes, Cabbages, Spinach, Tomatoes.	Cucumber, Pumpkin, Cauliflower, Lady's finger, Peaches, Almonds, Pistachios, Raisins, Wheat, Red rice, Unpolished rice, Barley, Oat-meal, Dried peas, Dates, Sugar- candy, Green gram, Bengal gram, Green pulse, Groundnut, Cereals, Dried ginger, Myrobalan, Lemon, Honey, Charu.	Fish, Eggs, Meat, Salt, Chilies, Chutney, Asafetida, Pickles, Tamarind, Mustard, Sour things, Hot things, Tea, Coffee, Cocoa, Ovaltine, White sugar, Carrots, Turnips, Spices.	Beef, Pork, Wine, Onions, Garlic, Tobacco, Rotten things, Stale things, Unclean things, Twice cooked things, All intoxicants, All liquors, All drugs.

Conclusion:

Yogic diet is specifically designed for yogic practices such that a Yogic practitioner does not get ill and throughout his practice he/she remains healthy. Yogic diet is mainly of vegetarian type. People having sedentary lifestyle can be immensely helped if they along with their regular Yogic practices also follow Yogic diet. As yogic scriptures say that certain dietary precautions are kept under consideration before practicing various Yogic practices. Yogic diet

believes in the concept of mitahara and sattavik ahara. Thus intake of food for yoga sadhak depends on three things 1. Quality of food – It should be sattvik. 2. Quantity of food – Half of stomach should be filled with food. One fourth with water and one fourth should be empty for air. As yogic scriptures say that certain dietary precautions are kept under consideration before practicing various Yogic practices.

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