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## Influence and intimation of yogic diet over the mind

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### Abstract

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 kind viz., Sattvic diet, Rajasic diet and Tamasic diet. All these have different effect on one's health and mind. They act differently when consumed in different form. In this paper the effect of Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic diet is elaborated and also their connection with mind and body is also taken care of.

**Keywords:** yogic diet, sattvic, rajasic, tamasic spiritual progress

### Introduction

#### Influence and Intimation of Yogic Diet over the Mind

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." (Bhagavad-Gita. Ch. XVII-8, 9, 10).

#### Introduction to Yogic Diet

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."

#### Kinds of Food

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,

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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 everybody, 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.

### Scientific Effect of Yogic Diet

According to Ayurveda there are three forms or types of mind – the three gunas of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. These three gunas co-exist simultaneously in each individual in different proportions and they constitute your specific individuality and character, which cover cultural, intellectual, mental and physical life. A person can have either

- A higher percentage of sattvic guna, being more calm and harmonious, with more tendency to meditate and live a spiritual life
- A higher percentage of rajas guna, being more passionate and restless, with a tendency to search for power, possessions and dominations
- Or a higher percentage of tamas guna, being more passionate and restless, with a tendency toward inertia and darkness.

The important aspect to notice is that all these tendencies are present in each individual, simply in different proportions. The guna that is most dominant defines ones character and way of living. Another important aspect to notice is that these proportions can be changed, causing the mind to fluctuate between these three stages. This can happen if a mind is not strong to external influences that create different energetic tendencies. For example spring influences the sattvic guna to increase, while in winter there is more tendency to the increase of tamas and in summer to rajas. In the morning the sattvic guna is stimulated, at midday rajasic is stimulated and as is the tamasic guna at night. In this text we are going to approach how food can contribute to change the energetic proportions of each of the gunas. For good yogic practice one should have a diet that stimulates the sattvic mind, if we are interested in maintaining a serious yoga practice, we should take special care of our diets, not just because it affects the health in your body, but also because it directly affects the health of the mind. Yoga influences the sattvic guna to increase, so a yoga practice combined with sattvic diet can help us to establish a more sattvic type of mind which in turn can improve your yoga practice, helping one to achieve higher states of awareness,

So let's analyse deeply some ayurvedic rules that are

important in a sattvic diet. These rules are combined with some scientific considerations which take into account ethical, spiritual viewpoints and energy levels. The first eating rule of ayurveda is that one should take food only when hungry. This general eating rule is also to be applied for a sattvic diet. Not following it can create more tamas because it creates toxins in the body. The sensation of hunger happens when the food that exists in the stomach is no longer there and the stomach produces enough acidity to digest new food. Before the process of food passing to the intestines can take place, the stomach receives more food. Therefore there is not going to be effective digestion and increased toxicity or body wastes can accumulate in the form of toxins which can create diseases. The new food received in the stomach mixes with the partially digested food. This slows down the partially digested food from moving to the intestines and whilst it stays and mixes with the new food toxins and gases are created.

These toxins create tamas in the body, therefore creating tamas in the mind. Giving some -time between meals will help the stomach rest and the body can more easily determining the amount and type of food that it needs next, improving the connection between your natural instincts and the intake of food. Ayurveda recommends a break of up to 4-5 hours between meals. This amount of time is related to the digestion of Indian meals such as dal and rice which are takes longer to digest. In considering the duration of the break one should pay attention to the type of food eaten: fruit for instance only takes 20-30minutes to make its way from the stomach to the intestine.

Another rule tells us that meals should fit into a time schedule, that is they should take place at more or less the same time everyday. This is so the body gets used to receiving food at regular times which stimulate the production of digestive juices before the intake of food. This creates a pattern of behaviour which helps to stabilise appetite which reduces food cravings and anxiety related to food intake. This will also help to regulate the levels of acidity in the stomach which controls the rajasic energies related to body heat or digestive agni. Tamas will also be reduced because digestion becomes more effective, reducing toxins.

According to ayurveda the food should also be warm as it creates a sense of tranquillity, safeness and comfort which increase sattva. These days the concept of raw food diets is getting more popular. It is said that raw food has more prana or energy because it is more close to its natural state therefore maintaining the nutrients that are lost in the cooking process. But according to ayurveda only the pitta body type can have raw food because it is considered to be the only one that has enough agni to properly digest food and it is said that vatta body types should not have raw food in their diet at all because it can cause a serious imbalance due to poor agni.

Another rule tells us to eat only seasonal and regional food. The philosophy of permaculture gives the same thing for ecological reasons and medical studies indicate that this attitude is also better for your health. By itself, nature puts the right foods in the right place at the right time: local and seasonal foods naturally provide us with the nutrients that your body needs to face atmospheric conditions of the time and the place where it grows. For example there are more fruits with vitamin C in season when we are prone to certain health disease, as vitamin C strengthens the immune system and detoxifies the body. Taking this into consideration, we get more close to natural cycles connecting the body to the outside world, preparing it to answer its demands instead of supplying it with nutrients that it doesn't necessarily need.

This connection with nature stimulates sattvic energy. The ecological viewpoint can also be considered to reflect the sattvic value of altruism, love and respect for nature. Out of season food is generally produced in monoculture big productions that drain nutrients from the soil. Non-regional food demands transportation and therefore causes more pollution.

We should also take into account our food intake and not overeat. Overeating makes digestion harder and increases the accumulation of toxins in the body due to indigested food. Overeating creates tamas in the body because of toxins and because it creates inertia as more energy is required to complete the process of digestion. To stimulate sattva, we should bring awareness to the intake of food, not overindulging in the pleasure of the senses therefore keeping the body and mind balanced and pure. This doesn't necessarily mean that one should abstain from the pleasure that eating causes in the body, as this sensation of pleasure and tasty food will help the natural increase of digestive juices. The problems is overindulging in this pleasure and losing control of the senses.

Taking food with awareness, enjoying its flavour with controlled and balanced senses is in accordance with tantric philosophy and can actually help to develop detachment. This is because we gain access to the origin of sensation of pleasure in the mind, and can help to balance Swadhistana Chakra, which is associated with food, pleasure and attachment. Extending this awareness to the digestive process will also help to awaken manipura chakra. This awareness and control can be obtained through yoga practice and improve yoga practice. This is due to energy exciting awareness and balancing the chakras which maintains a pure mind and body. These general eating rules should be taken in to account in maintaining a sattvic diet. There are several ailment lists that classify each ailment as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. Sometimes it is difficult to clearly categorise some of the ailments into one of the three gunas. The impact an ailment has on each person can be different due to life habits, genetic etc. It is said that sattvic food should be simple, light and supply all the nutrients to the body increasing physical vitality which balances body and mind and generates equanimity and spiritual tendencies. For some ailments light and simple food may not be appropriate. Therefore rather than strictly following the rules and one should listen to their body as it is the best advisor. One should use the ailment lists as a guideline and not get paranoid about strictly following them. The mood in which we eat food will also effect the impact it has on the mind. Food neuroses are worse than having a bodily ailment. So we should also take care of our feelings toward food and the feelings present in the mind when we are eating as well as the environment and company associated with mealtimes. A home cooked meal for instance has higher sattvic value than bought food because it is cooked with loving energy and not with the energy of profit expectations. A meal taken when one is angry or agitated increases the raja energy etc.

The yogic cleansing techniques increase bodily awareness and can help us to listen better to our bodies and its demands, which can guide us to choose the right foods. The tendency toward certain foods reflects our state of mind. A healthy mind and body will naturally select healthy food. Furthermore healthy food will naturally increase the state of mind to lead to that food choice in the first place. On the other hand if we are sad or depressed we will choose unhealthy food and this food will further aggravate our state of mind. So awareness is

the master key to lead us in these choices.

We should take into account that although our body may desire a certain type of food, it is not reason enough to have it indiscriminately as that desire can once again lead to aggravation of an imbalanced state. An example of this is the intake of sugar. In some food lists it is considered as sattvic if it as close to its natural forma as possible, like raw sugar or jaguary. Other lists consider it as rajasic regardless of sugar type as it increases the blood sugar levels. Other lists consider it as tamasic as it lowers the metabolism and creates a general state of inertia in the mind. When we are sad and depressed, we easily indulge in the intake of sugar because the sweet flavour is associated with the emotion of love and pleasure. However, the intake of refined sugar will increase will increase sadness. Due to the fast uptake of sugar by the blood, the body produces insulin to stabilise blood sugar levels which ends up decreasing the levels of sugar because the refined sugar is ingested in a way that the body is not prepared for. So it's also important to have some knowledge about the effects of food and clean the body in order to purify your food tendencies helping to make balanced choices.

To help us in with food decisions, there are some consideration of what sattvic type food is:

- It has to be fresh, meaning that it's been recently prepare (maximum 3 hours between preparing and eating). It is said that recently prepared food has more prana and recent Kirliam (aura) photographies seem to compare this as it is seems that they have healthier auras than leftovers. Frozen food (even if home made) is classified as tamasic as it has very little amounts of energy. The preparation of food should also be taken into account. The food should not be overcooked and should be prepared with care and in a good mood. According to Indian tradition, the cook (normally women) should wash and change before cooking, although few people follow this procedure now.
- It has to be vegetarian. Meat is contaminated with adrenaline which increases in the animal at the moment of death. Consuming this hormone will create states of stress, aggressiveness and fear because adrenaline is the hormone produced when we are in such states. It creates tamas, increasing levels of toxins in the body because we eat the toxins produced by the animal such as antibiotics and vaccines that they are given. It is also takes more energy to digest and rots in the stomach before it is fully digested. Finally meat is less ecologically sustainable.
- It should even out the metabolism: the absorption of nutrients should even the elimination of wastes. This will help maintain a healthy body and reduce tamasic inertia.
- It should include a good proportion of vegetables. Vegetables help to even metabolism, help to connect the functioning of organs and help to drain toxins. They are easily digested using less energy and creating a sensation of lightness in the body. In every food list that I have seen, vegetables are considered mainly as sattvic and very few, like turnips and tomatoes are considered as rajasic. None are considered to be tamasic.
- Cereals should be wholegrain. Refining cereals removes the essential mineral elements of the food and increases constipation (wholegrain cereals have a membrane that helps to clean the intestines).

Understanding these rules of ayurvedic science can be the first step to more sattva and therefore healthy eating habits. This allows us to understand better how our body and mind work in relation to each other and provides us with some altering tips to aspects that we should pay attention to in our

bodies. Slowly, listening to our bodies needs we can incorporate them in our kitchens. We must take care not to rush into sudden changes and allowing the process of change of habits happen at a speed that is acceptable to our bodies.

In the case of strong desires towards some types of foods that are not sattvic, like deep-fried food, suppressing that desire can be unbalancing as it produces cravings (and we probably end up eating it later on, not just one but a full plate of fried pakoras). However, indulging in that desire will only create more desire because it creates a habit. So the virtuous path always seems to be finding a middle-ground. As we progress in life slowly to an ideal– the ideal form of an asana or an ideal diet to the practice of yoga. We must remain focused on the goal of increasing bodily awareness and improving our quality of life, acting with full acceptance and effort to improve. Slowly we learn to understand the unique language of our bodies and how can relate to them. For instance deep-fried food desires can have their origin in the need for oil in the body and we can deal with that need by having some dried fruits daily, as they provide us with healthy oils. Some body types can need more oil than others for example considering the three ayurveyda body types of vattam pitta and kapha. Kapha bodies will have similar functioning but they will not be completely equal or have exactly the same needs. Kapha should eat spices, but a kapha with a strong pitta influence can be sensitive to them. So no rule can be absolutely true to every single person, but they are guidelines to help us in our path to yoga, understanding and awareness. For instance, if we feel our mind is agitated after spicy food we can understand this process and deal with it.

Self-observation will help us in this path as each day we make new discoveries in our bodies functions and about nutritional information. So bring energy and gratitude to every food eaten, to help purify it and observe the different effects different types of foods can have on us. It is a beautiful way of self-study.

### Conclusion

Live 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. Simple, natural, non-stimulating, tissue-building, energy-producing, non-alcoholic food and drink will keep the mind calm and pure and will help the student of Yoga in his practices and in the attainment of the goal of life. Holistic health is the basic need of life. If health is good, anybody can get the success in his life. But health depends on our thinking, life style, diet and many aspects. In which food plays a very important role in care of health. Food is a natural need of life, in our diet we should concentrate for that food which is good for health. The 'Yogic Diet' affected not only the body but also the mind. The 'Yogic Diet' maintained the health and developed a positive attitude in a person.

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