

TOTAL HEALTH BY DIET CONTROL

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The Yogic concept of food takes into consideration the total dimension of human existence. Apart from the atoms and molecules with which our gross physical body is made of, we all possess Prana, Mind, Intellect, Emotions and the spiritual dimension featured by freedom. Yoga is that process by which we bring an integration of the entire personality of all levels. The Stamina of the body is developed, the Prana should be brought to a balance, the mind calmed down. The emotion stabilized and the intellect under total control. A 'Balanced diet' therefore according to Yoga is that diet which restores balance at all levels. Such diets could add in a holistic way of living.

Classification of Foods

Yoga classifies food into three categories similar to the classification of human beings into predominantly:-

1. Tamasic food

2. Rajasic food

3. Satvic food

1. Tamasic food

It is stale more or less spoiled food, containing foul odor, artificial additives and which is not at all useful to nourish either body or mind. They make the body dull, lazy and drowsy and reduce our immune power, filling the mind with dark emotion such as anger and greed. Tamasic food items include alcohol, tobacco, onions, garlic and fermented food such as vinegar.

One yama is equal to 3 hours. Food that gets cold is stale. In these days of canned food, preserved fruits, stored vegetables and refrigeration facilities almost a substantial majority of us have come to love stale food. Food cooked overnight or that has been kept for days together comes under this category. We can include all the

drinks which people love to drink in tamasic People category. Impure and filthy food, is not fit for human consumption.

Those foods which are 'dead', partially spoiled, which have lost their essence which have been processed a great deal, which have been preserved in some way or which lack the vitality of food that is alive, are the ones liked by the Tamasics.

The innate personality structure of the Tamasics is reflected in their liking for such foods. Hence, all such foods are classified as Tamasic food. The busy schedule and attractive advertisements makes even a satvic man resort to tamasic food like preserved canned food and his taste also slowly changes and he becomes Tamasic.

Energy and vitality are almost absent in such foods and hence he becomes sluggish and diseases of degeneration and accumulation of excessive matter are likely to occur (obesity, arthritis hardening of the arteries etc.) When food is spoiled, its chemical structure breaks down and because of the acidity some nutrients are destroyed. Rather than being useful, they may break down into products which cannot be used by the body, but must be excreted. In the mean time, they are under circulation and act as irritants to the nervous system as well as to the other cells, tissues and organs. Eating tamasic food makes one less alert.

Fermentation is a process of decomposition especially when it is poorly controlled and over done. Alcoholic drinks of poorer quality and meat which is not fresh are tamasic. Most meat marketed is not freshly slaughtered and in some causes must be cured to destroy the toxic components or to improve the taste. Unless this process is carried out carefully with a total knowledge of what is happening, the result is likely to be tamasic. Wild animal and fish freshly killed and properly done were not considered as detrimental. The effect of such fresh, wholesome meat were said to be Rajasic.

2. Rajasic Food

It is very hot natured, spicy sour pungent, dry and excessively salty. Such food items are real enemy of mind body equilibrium. They function as body stimulants and exit the passions, making the mind restless and uncontrollable. Food which is cooked a great deal to increase its taste appeal, that which stimulates and activates the nervous system, speeds up metabolism e.g. Coffee, tea, tobacco, green chilies and pepper are considered Rajasic but dried red chilies tend to be more tamasic. High quality wines are Rajasic.

Rajasic food stimulates speed, sensual pleasure and physical activity. Rajasic food is of good vitality and fresh. It is meant for Rajas, the kings. Such a diet no doubt creates in an individual, brilliant energies and keeps all vigorous men restlessly striving to fulfill their uncontrolled passions and desires. Hence, in their final reactions they lead the eater towards a life productive of pain, grief and disease.

3. Satvic food

It is the purest diet and is most suitable for Yoga practitioner. It purifies the mind enabling it to function at its maximum potential. The satvic food consists of fresh fragrant and tasty items. It includes cereals, fresh fruits, vegetables, milk and milk products, nuts and honey. Those foods which increase the life, strength and happiness are termed satvic.

In contrast to tamasic and rajasic foods, satvic foods, which are fresh, whole natural of good quality yet mild, neither over nor under cooked, gives calm alertness and at the same time a state of quiet energy. They not only provide nourishment for the body but they do not adversely affect the overall energy state. They do not pull energy from the body, they do not weigh it down. They do not make it heavier, neither do they irritate nor push it beyond its capacity. They provide a precise balance of nourishment and create no undue waste such foods are called as Satvic.

Fresh fruits, wholesome grains and the fresh milk of the cow are satvic food. Raw milk just drawn from the cow is considered ideal. If however, it has been set for some time, then it is brought to a boil before it is taken. Milk of buffalo is considered more Rajasic since it is heavier and more fattening. Any milk which becomes sour or spoiled, of course tends to acquire a Tamasic property. Such people will have natural inclination to take food which will augment joy and inner cheerfulness. In short, such creative men, by their own choice enjoy only food that is clean and wholesome with no charge for them, when consumed to putrefy within.

All the different types of food eaten by man in the world have been classified and brought under four types on the basis of their physical properties. They are savory, greasy, firm and cordial types of food.

Diet can influence the mind and change the personality. But a strong mind can digest the most Tamasic food and still live very healthily. We must change our food habits towards a sattvik diet. With a proper attitude of the mind attached to it, a Yoga sadhana can gain immensely in his journey towards mental control. The right attitude

is to have a proper diet as a means to the end – the mind control and not diet schedule as an end by itself often, one can get stuck with too much of emphasis on diet almost to the detriment of the goal itself.

The six tastes of food are derived from the five elements influences: ether, air, fire, water and earth (refer to the chart in chapter 1 which shows the relationships of element influences to taste characteristics). The tastes derived from the specific element influences will increase those influences in the mind and body; the other tastes will decrease them. To strengthen the doshas, choose foods with the tastes which influence them. To reduce dosha effects, choose the other tastes:-

1. Sweet

Derived from water and earth element influences. It increases kapha dosha and reduces vata and pitta. Examples of foods with sweet taste are grains and other complex carbohydrates, milk, butter and concentrated sugars. Sweet taste is best obtained from complex carbohydrates and complex sweeteners (in moderation) so that their post-digestive effects are the result of digestion. Concentrated sugars shock the body.

When sweet taste is in the mouth the brain immediately signals for a release of insulin into the blood stream to regulate sugar before food is digested. Concentrated sweet taste is not recommended (especially not refined sugar or sugar substitutes found in many soft drinks and other commercially prepared foods). The sweet taste of ordinary foods nourishes and builds the body. Many of the foods recommended for rejuvenation purposes are sweet when well-masticated and have a sweet post-digestive effect.

2. Sour

It is derived from fire and earth elements. It increases pitta and kapha and decreases vata. Some foods with sour taste are citrus and some other fruits, hard cheeses, and yogurt needed in small quantities.

3. Salty

It is derived from fire and water element influences. It increases pitta and kapha and decreases vata. It helps in maintaining mineral balance and retaining water. It can usually be derived from foods.

4. Pungent

It is derived from air and fire element influences. It increases vata and pitta and reduces kapha. It is in hot peppers, ginger, cumin and some other spices. It is needed for metabolism, stimulates appetite and diaphragm.

5. Bitter

It is derived from ether and air element influences. It increases vata and decreases pitta and kapha. It is found in spinach and some other green leafy vegetables, egg-plant and turmeric. It is helpful in detoxification of the body. Hence it is used in some medical preparations when body cleansing is needed.

6. Astringent

It is derived from ether and earth element influences. It increases vata and decreases pitta and kapha. Found in beans, lentils and in some fruits. It is helpful in maintaining tissue firmness.

Foods also provide the following subtle qualities:-

1. Heavy

Increases kapha, decreases vata and pitta. Some sources are cheese, yogurt and wheat products.

2. Light

Increases vata and pitta, decreases kapha. Some sources are barley, apples, spinach and corn.

3. Oily

Increases kapha, decreases vata and pitta. Some sources are fatty foods, oils and most dairy products.

4. Dry

Increases vata and pitta, decreases kapha. Some sources are barely, corn, beans and potatoes.

5. Hot

Increases pitta, decreases vata and kapha. Obtained from hot foods and drinks.

6. Cold

Increases vata and kapha, decreases pitta. Obtained from cold foods and drinks.

Fasting Therapy

Defination

Therapeutic fasting or fasting for health means a purifying and rejuvenating process by which the toxic waste matters of the body are eliminated and regeneration of diseased tissues take place.

History

The history of fasting is as old as the origin of human beings. Evidence shows that the Egyptians were the pioneers of scientific fasting. The Egyptians considered fasting essential for the preservation of health and prolonged life. The mystical and occult school regards fasting as essential for the preservation of health and an important step towards spiritual infoldment. Hippocrates recognized fasting as a very effective therapeutic measure for almost all sorts of morbid states. Even the Jews, Greeks, Romans practiced the art of fasting.

In this regard Homor referred to Ascutaptes, the son of the sun god who was intimately related with fasting. Many ancient evidences showed the value of therapeutic fasting on the health and well being of mankind for curing diseases. The methods of fasting were practiced through the middle ages and in 18th and 19th century by eminent Europeans like Kneippe, Schroth, Kunhe, Bitz, Rickli, Lahman, Permitz, Dust and others.

The Americans also made good contributions for the development of fasting in natural form with the help of lust like – Tilden Grahman, Lindlahar, Macfadden, Kellogg and others. Indian history reveals that before Plato, Aristotle and Hippocrates were born, the Indian Yogis and Sages were the earlier exponents of fasting therapy. They practiced therapeutic fasting for purification of the body, mind and soul. Lastly Mahatma Gandhi practiced natural fasting methodically about which he wrote in his autobiography called “My experiments with truth”.

Principles and Philosophy

Fasting for therapeutic purpose means complete abstinence from all kind of food except water and air, which are regarded as indispensable foods. So fasting is regarded as beneficial and constructive. The Philosophy says the return of natural hunger after fasting is the ideal goal after elimination of all toxic and unwanted products from body, with regeneration of the diseased tissues. So fasting is a

purifying and rejuvenating process, where the digestive and physiological functions of the body is devoted to eliminate all the poisons and waste matter accumulated in the system. Fasting regards itself as a natural way of cleansing and regeneration of the body and mind. It gives individual better control of his appetite, more knowledge of and confidence in ones physical and mental energies and powers.

Occasional fasting therapeutically does not create foolish fears artificial and hunger reactions. Fasting for illness or any emergency conditions, temporary unavailability of food indicates that nutrition is not essential to life and abstaining from food at times as fasting in illness is not a weakening process because occasional periods of fasting are normal and necessary to physical efficiency. Many diseases are caused from an accumulation of an excess of morbid materials in the body due to general habits of overeating, consumption of badly balanced diet, failure in elimination. So as a result the vital energies and the functioning of life becomes impaired.

To conserve the vital energy of the body so that natural hunger can return, fasting therapeutically is only getting rid of bacterial decomposition from the digestive tract too. Fasting should be done not only when one is ill, but should be practiced scientifically for the prevention of diseases. It is beneficial to complete fasting by preliminary cleaning of the bowels by enema or colonic leuge. This combined effect helps in the elimination of the wastes and to clean the cells and tissues of the body down to their actual vital essentials and to prepare them to rebuild with new materials when the eating of food is resumed.

There is no hard and fast rule to determine the length of a fast and each case depends upon the individual needs and general condition of the patient. The primary features of fasting being foul breath, coated tongue bad taste in the mouth, hunger ceases on the third or fourth day, abnormal appetite for food and drinks ceases, rapid loss of weight in obese persons etc. Ultimately these things increase the physical strength and mental alertness of an individual which leads o revitalization and an unobstructed flow of vital energy in the body for return to normal health. There are various types of fasts lasting from a short fast to long ones (varying from one to ten days) which enables the body to eliminate it to get rid of the evils automatically and to repair themselves.

The features on which the fast should be broken are:

1. Return of hunger.

2. Foul breath disappear.
3. The tongue usually becomes clean.
4. The bad taste in the mouth passes away.
5. There is a general feeling of well being with improvement of skin texture, brightness of eyes and improvement in the vision.

Scope and precautions of fasting

Fasting therapeutically is very beneficial from the point of Naturopathy and Yoga therapy. Because it guides the health of an individual in accordance with nature. Fasting therapeutically eliminates the unwanted toxin materials accumulated due to cover of metabolism, digestion, overeating etc. This helps to get rid of the unwanted materials accumulated in the cell tissues along with the elimination of micro pathogens like bacteria, virus etc.

Thus the curative effect of the disease is achieved, by eliminating the unwanted materials from the system. Therapeutic fasting always plays a vital role in prevention of diseases. If an individual thinks that there are any abnormalities in the normal physiological function and metabolism in the body, then he can immediately restore therapeutic fast. So as a prophylaxis measure the disease can be prevented. Fasting, if done rationally and judiciously in accordance with nature helps to revitalize and rejuvenate the body, that obviously increases the immunity or the disease resisting property of body. In this way it helps to promote the health for various purposes as it is a natural way of purification of the body, digestive tract and the other cells and tissues of the body. Lastly, scientific fasting indirectly helps to diagnose a case so that immediate therapeutic measures can be advocated without delay.

The art of therapeutic fasting has a few precautions too. If fasting is not done according to certain norms then it will lead to the destructive process of starvation which is very harmful. In course of time if this starvation is prolonged, it deprives the body from all nutrition leading to the death of an individual. Fasting will ultimately lead to a destruction process of starvation which is actually a process of slow suicide. Hence fasting should be done according to its laws and rules to get the best therapeutic effects. Similarly long fasts if not withdrawn correctly causes real damage to the tissues and organs, leads to starvation which is very dangerous and can result in death.

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