

## Yogic Diet for Immunity and Health

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### ABSTRACT

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, lifestyle, diet and many aspects. In which food plays a very important role in the care of health. Food is a natural need of life, in our diet we should concentrate for that food which is good for health. If we search deeply, there are many types of food, in which 'Yogic Diet' has immense importance. In Ayurveda, food is classified into 12 groups and The Bhagavadgita also classifies food as Sattvik, Rajasik and Tamasik. It has elucidated the three categories of food and its effect on human body and mind. All the foods are directly affected on Tridoshas of our body if we are not following the path of yogic ahara. Mithahar and sattvic is essential, according to the Ayurveda and the findings of modern research supports the yogic way of intermittent fasting for boosting the immunity and maintenance of good health.

**KEYWORD:** Yoga, Diet, Tridosha, Mitahar and Immunity

### INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is the sum total of the process by which the living organism receives and utilizes the materials necessary for survival, growth and repair of worn-out tissues. Food is the source of the fuel, which is converted by the metabolic process of the body into the energy for vital activities. Yoga literally means "union". It is a union of breath and the body, the mind and muscles and most importantly, union of the self to the divine. Yoga is a scientific system of physical and mental practices that originated in India more than three thousand years ago. Its purpose is to help each one of us achieve our highest potential and to experience enduring health and happiness. With Yoga, we can extend our healthy, productive years far beyond the accepted norm and, at the same time; improve the quality of our lives.

Yoga is a 5000-year-old Indian philosophy that combines exercise, breathing, diet, relaxation and meditation. It is a combination of physical and mental disciplines which make the body stronger and healthier and the mind calmer and more controlled, helping towards self-realisation. It emphasizes the relationship of body, mind and breath, the synchronization of the breath and movement, the use of preparation, counter pose, sequences of linked postures and modification of postures to suit individual needs.

### ANCIENT LITERATURE:

Eating agreeable (sattvic) food and eating in moderation have been emphasized throughout ancient literature. For example, the Tamil poet-philosopher Valluvar insists this in the 95th chapter of his work, the Tirukkural. He hints, "Assured of digestion and truly hungry, eat with care agreeable food" (verse 944) and "Agreeable food in moderation ensures absence of pain" (verse 945).[2] Yoga

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includes recommendations on eating habits. Both the Śāṅḍilya Upanishad [3] and Svātmārāma, an Indian yogi who lived during the 15th century CE.[4]:Introduction[5, 6] both state that Mitahara (eating in moderation) is an important part of yoga practice. It is one of the Yamas (virtuous self restraints).[4]:verse 1.58–63, pages 19–21 These texts while discussing yoga diet, however, make no mention of sattvic diet.

In Yoga diet context, the virtue of Mitahara is one where the yogi is aware of the quantity and quality of food and drinks he or she consumes, takes neither too much nor too little, and suits it to one's health condition and needs.[7, 8]

The application of sattva and tamas concepts to food is a later and relatively new extension to the Mitahara virtue in Yoga literature. Verses 1.57 through 1.63 of Hatha Yoga Pradipika[4]:verse 1.58–63, pages 19–21 suggest that taste cravings should not drive one's eating habits; rather, the best diet is one that is tasty, nutritious and likable, as well as sufficient to meet the needs of one's body.[9] It recommends that one must "eat only when one feels hungry" and "neither overeat nor eat to completely fill the capacity of one's stomach; rather leave a quarter portion empty and fill three quarters with quality food and fresh water".[7] The Hathayoga Pradipika suggests "mitahara" regimen of a yogi avoids foods with excessive amounts of sour, salt, bitterness, oil, spice burn, unripe vegetables, fermented foods or alcohol.[4]:Verses 1.59 to 1.61 The practice of Mitahara, in Hathayoga Pradipika, includes avoiding stale, impure and tamasic foods, and consuming moderate amounts of fresh, vital and sattvic foods.[10].

**CONCEPT OF DIET IN MODERN MEDICINE :**

In modern medicine, food items are classified in terms of carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, minerals and water. Carbohydrates are the main source of energy. Fats or lipids are the concentrated form of energy in the food and some vitamins are only soluble in it. Proteins are structural constituents of cell membranes and body building nutrients. Vitamins and minerals are accessory nutrients, and water is an ideal vehicle for transporting dissolved nutrients and waste from the body. To remain healthy, this is important to have a balance of all these essential components in the diet.

**CONCEPT OF DIET IN AYURVEDA:**

In *Ayurveda* diet is given extreme importance. According to *Ayurveda*, the diet should be simple, easily digestible, and small in quantity. A person with weak digestive capacity should take diet containing less protein, that too for one to two times. Water should be taken half an hour after food. But those with good digestive capacity can take water along with food. Alcohol, coffee, tea should be avoided (11-12).

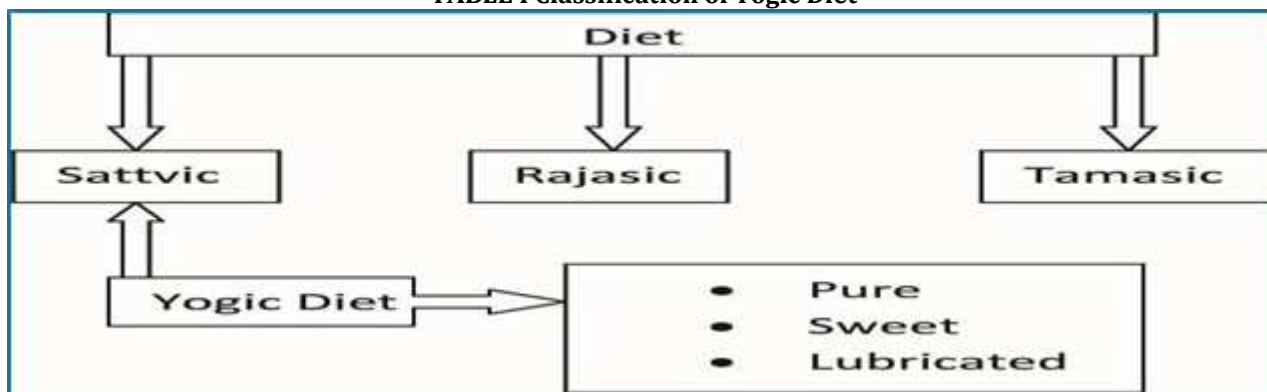
*Ayurveda*, further emphasizes that dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in *Ayurvedic* therapy. Sometimes, dietary management itself is a complete treatment. According to *Acharya Lolimbaraja*, if wholesome diet is given in a planned way, then a separate medicinal treatment may not be required as the diet itself can take care of the disease. Similarly, if unwholesome diet is being permitted, then also treatment is not required as the disease is not going to be cured in that case (11).

**YOGIC DIET:**

**He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga. 6.17**

The *Bhagavadgita* also classifies food as *Sattvik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik*. It has elucidated the three categories of food and its effect on human body and mind. These are defined as follows:

**TABLE I Classification of Yogic Diet**



(Taken from Rastogi and Rastogi, 2017, [13])

**Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic Foods**

You are what you eat. If you are free to live a quiet, contemplative life, a sattvic diet is perfect. For those who wish to maintain a meditative mind, but also must live and work in the world, a diet consisting of sattvic and some rajasic foods is best. For those who practice demanding disciplines, like Kundalini Yoga or marital arts, rajasic foods are necessary, along with sattvic foods. For all these lifestyles, tamasic food is best avoided.

**Sattvic:**

**Foods dears to those in the mode of goodness increase the duration of life, purify one’s existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, fatty, wholesome, and pleasing to the heart. 17.8**

Those foods which are fresh, whole, natural, of good quality yet mild, neither over nor undercooked are experienced as lending a calm alertness and at the same time a state of quiet energy. Such foods are called *sattvic*. They are said to nourish the consciousness. They not only provide nourishment for the body, but they do not adversely affect the overall energy state. They add vitality to the total system by bringing a perfect, harmonious balance of energy states in the food itself. They don’t pull energy from the body, they don’t weigh it down, they don’t make it heavier; neither do they irritate it nor push it beyond its capacity. Rather, they provide a precise balance of nourishment and create no undue experience as *sattvic*. They are the ones which are likely to give the body

lightness, alertness and energy and create a keener consciousness (13, 14).

- Clarity and lightness
- Graceful, peaceful, disciplined, intuitive, sensitive.
- More fruit and vegetables, sun foods, and ground foods.

**Rajasic:**

**Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning are dear to those in the passion. Such foods cause distress, misery and disease. 17.9**

Food which is cooked a great deal to increase its taste appeal, that which stimulates the nervous system, speeds up metabolism and activates is called *rajasic*. Such foods as coffee, tea and tobacco are usually considered *rajasic*. These foods will energize, but not in the sense of lending a clear, balanced energy. Rather, they tend to stimulate and push the organism to increase its speed and to indulge more in physical activity, sensual pleasure and “creature comforts.” *Rajasic* food is the fare of the bon vivant and of the epicure. Spiced and cooked to perfection with gobs of rich sauces, it tempts one to eat more and leads the attention into the savor of the food and away from internal signals (13, 14).

- Forcefulness and willpower
- Active, positive, demanding.
- Stimulating herbs and spices, many earth foods.

**Tamasic:**

**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. 17.10**

Those foods which are “dead,” partly spoiled, have been processed a great deal, have been preserved in some way, have no spark of life about them, lack the vitality of food that is alive or has been recently cooked are called *tamasic*. Such foods create a feeling of heaviness, lethargy; they nourish only the grossest aspects of the body. If the diet is consistently comprised of *tamasic* food, then the person can continue to live but the body will become heavier, or else functioning will be sluggish, and diseases of degeneration and accumulation of excessive matter are likely to occur (obesity, arthritis, hardening of the arteries, and so forth.) The matter of the body may be added to, but its energy, vitality, and its consciousness are not increased through the use of such food (13, 14).

*Tamasic* food causes irritability. They motivate or activate but not in a constructive or enjoyable manner. Because of the feeling of restlessness and lack of ease, one may be likely to act in a cruel or thoughtless way. *Tamasic* food can lead to a tyrannical, oppressive kind of disposition (13, 14).

- Functioning from need and instinct
- Impulsive, dull, angry, confused.
- Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, alcohol, intoxicating drugs.

**AYURVEIDIC TRI-DOSHA THEORY**

According to Ayurveda, the universe is made of five primordial elements, namely earth, air, fire, water and ether. These elements themselves are inanimate, but in combination, give rise to three main biological forces or principles in the human body, called doshas, and, as every human being has a different balance of elements, one dosha is typically predominant in our constitution and ascertains our personality.

When the five eternal substances – space, air, fire, water and earth combine to form the human body, they do so by

creating three vital energies, or doshas. These are the forces that govern all psycho-physiological functions in the body and mind respectively. They construct the body and serve to maintain it in a dynamic state of health. However, when these vital forces are aggravated, due to improper gross or subtle factors, the body- mind connection begins to suffer and the disease process begins (15).

**Vata**

It is the most powerful among the doshas. Formed by the interaction of space and air, Vata is movement, the body in motion. Warm food, moderately heavy textures, added butter and fat; salt, sour, and sweet tastes; soothing and satisfying foods, All are good for settling the disturbed Vata. Use food such as: warm milk, cream, butter, warm soups, stews, and hot cereals, fresh baked.

**Pitta**

Formed by the interaction of fire and water...the polarity of these two elements plays an important role for Pitta, which regulates the body metabolism and transformations in the body’s form. Cool or warm but not steaming hot foods; bitter, sweet, and astringent tastes, are what are perfect for this body type. Take cool, refreshing food in summer. Reduce the consumption of salt, oil and spices, all of which are “heating” to the body. Salads are good, so is milk and ice cream.

**Kapha**

It is formed by the structural properties of earth, with water in its role as a lubricant to different tissues of the body, which also aids strength and adds stamina to the body. Warm light food, dry food, cooked without much water, minimum of butter, oil and sugar are recommended for this body type. Stimulating foods with pungent, bitter and astringent tastes and deep fried foods are best avoided. Eat lightly cooked foods or raw fruits and vegetables. ‘Eat’ spicy, bitter and astringent foods. Watch out for eating that little bit extra, a typical Kapha tendency.

**Table II Tridoshas And Tastes (16)**

Taste	Translation	Mahabhuta	Effect on dosha	Example
Madhur	Sweet	Earth + water	Increase: Kapha, Decrease: Vata, Pitta	Sugar
Amla	Sour	Earth + fire	Increase: Kapha, Pitta Decrease: Vata	Lemon
Lavana	Salty	Water + fire	Increase: Kapha, Pitta Decrease: Vata	Sea salt
Katu	Pungent	Air + fire	Increase: Pitta, Vata Decrease: Kapha	Pepper
Tikta	Bitter	Air + ether	Increase: Vata Decrease: Kapha, Pitta	Bitter herbs
Kashaya	Astringent	Air + earth	Increase: Vata Decrease: Kapha, Pitta	Green tea

**THE DOSHA BALANCING DIET :**

Vata types need foods that calm their tendency toward anxiety and overactivity. Heavy, cooked foods served warm are the most soothing. Dairy products, sweeteners, and foods cooked or served with fats and oils pacify vata. Steam veggies and drizzle with a little ghee (clarified butter) or olive oil, or stir-fry them in oil or ghee. Rice and wheat are excellent grains for vata types. Juicy fruits and vegetables, heavy fruits (such as avocados and bananas), risotto, sweet and sour veggies, and warm berry cobbler with whipped cream all help pacify vata. Avoid hot, spicy foods. Vatas can healthfully cook with more salt than pittas and kaphas. Fiery pitta needs to be cooled down. Serve foods at cool temperatures, but not ice cold which inhibits digestion. Pittas thrive on reduced amounts of fats, oils, and salt. Sweet, completely ripe fruits and all vegetables except garlic, tomatoes, radishes, and chilies are pitta-pacifying. Moderate

portions of dairy products are fine, but minimize sour-cultured ones. Coriander and mint have cooling effects. Coconuts, pomegranates, grilled vegetable salad, and rice pudding all reduce pitta (16).

**EFFECT OF MITAHARA (Yogic diet)**

Yogic diet does not limit its positive impact to physical health but also brings harmony to a person’s state of mind (17).

*“Ahaarshudhau satvashudhih satvashudau  
dhruvasmritih  
smritilambhesarvagrathinaam vipramoksha”  
(Chandogya Upanishad-7/26/2)*

If the food is pure then pure will be the essence of the body, purity of physical body leads to stability of memory and if

the memory becomes stable a person will not suffer mental conflicts.

Shiva Samhita rightly explains the Vipaka (after taste) of the types of food has on different levels of the body after their digestion. Of the four kinds of food (i.e., that which is chewed, that which is sucked, that which is licked and that which is drunk), which a man takes, the chyle fluid is converted into three parts. The best part (or the finest extract of food) goes to nourish the linga sharira or subtle body (the seat of force). The second or middle part goes to nourish this gross body composed of seven dhatus (humours).

The third or the most inferior part goes out of the body in the shape of excrement and urine. The first two essences of food are found in the nadis, and being carried by them, they nourish the body from head to foot.

Father of modern medicine science -Hippocrates statement "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food" also supports this idea of Taittiriya Upanishad. In taittiriya Upanishad food is considered as a medicine- "Aushadhibhyah annam" The Taittiriya tells us that there was thus the creation down to the earth, and from the earth arose vegetation of various kinds, herbs or aushadhis which became the diet of the individual, the Purusha. Generally, Yogic diet is of vegetarian (Sattwik) type which is easily digestible and keeps one full of energy and healthy. "The health advantages of a vegetarian diet include a lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and colon cancer. Vegetarians generally have lower blood pressure and cholesterol readings as well" (17).

#### Health benefits of fasting:

Intermittent fasting and alternate-day fasting could help decrease blood sugar levels and reduce insulin resistance but may affect men and women differently. Some studies have found that fasting could decrease several markers of inflammation and may be useful in treating inflammatory conditions, such as multiple sclerosis. Fasting has been associated with a lower risk of coronary heart disease and may help lower blood pressure, triglycerides and cholesterol levels.

Theoretically, abstaining from all or certain foods and beverages should decrease your overall calorie intake, which could lead to increased weight loss over time.

Fasting may increase metabolism and help preserve muscle tissue to reduce body weight and body fat. Animal studies have found that fasting could delay aging and increase longevity, but human research is still lacking. Some animal and test-tube studies suggest that fasting could block tumor development and increase the effectiveness of chemotherapy.

It's best to talk to your doctor first if you have any underlying health conditions or are planning to fast for more than 24 hours. Additionally, fasting is not generally recommended without medical supervision for older adults, adolescents or people who are underweight (18).

#### CONCLUSION :

In *Ayurveda* diet is given extreme importance. According to *Ayurveda*, the diet should be simple, easily digestible, and

small in quantity. A person with weak digestive capacity should take diet containing less protein, that too for one to two times. Water should be taken half an hour after food. But those with good digestive capacity can take water along with food. Alcohol, coffee, tea should be avoided. Five elements and Tridoshas are highly related with diet. Mithahar and intermittent fasting are sufficient enough to improve our immunity and holistic health. In order to manage ageing problems and live longer, healthy and peaceful life yogic diet is very much beneficial.

Naturopathy believes in purity of diet and also in the concept of 'we are what we eat'. As clearly stated in one of the ancient text:

*'Purity of diet and nutrition can only help us to maintain physical, vital, mental purity and spiritual harmony in life thereby we can manage the dualities of life and pave the path of liberation'.*

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