

Concept of Yogic Diet: A Realistic Approach

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Abstract

This academic article aims to study a realistic approach of diet by means of yoga practice and accordance with yoga system. The result of study found that the yoga practitioners gained the benefits of yogic diet. The right ways of practices yoga also lead to spiritual status. In the Yogasutra of Patanjali, the ancient yogis divided foods into the following three main categories Rājasic foods/diet (related rajasic quality) Sāttvic foods/ diet (related sattvic quality) Tāmasic foods/diet (related tamasic quality) Of all three, Sattvic food is considered as the healthiest. Let us talk more in details about these three categories to understand them.

Keywords: Yoga, Yogic Diet, Approach

Introduction

Yoga helps a man to live a very comfortable and a true healthy life in the society. It extends a good and positive approach with right thought through various yogic performances. The ancient seers had prescribed a healthy and proper foods to maintain a healthy life. Therefore, it is essential for an individual to follow the instructions of the ancient physicians to eat health as well as good yogic diet for the body. The importance of Yogic diet will be discussed in this paper.

Generally, the yogic diet is like any other diet that a person should follow for a workout. Just as it's not enough just to lift weights without a proper intake of protein-rich

food, it's also not enough to just practice yoga every day without a diet to support it. An intake of the right food items in right proportions will only enhance your yoga practice and give it more meaning.

Yoga practitioners of ancient times laid great importance on the yogic diet, and though many have gone astray in between, recently the practice has been revived again. Yogic philosophy emphasizes that proper adjustment in the consumption of food can prevent and even cure diseases, make you more mindful, and emotionally stable. Other than that, doing so can also change a person's perspective of life and character too.

Significance of Yogic diet

Ancient yogis, through diligent observations, understood how human bodies worked internally. They postulated that human body consisted of a fire referred to as "Agni" via which, everything that a person eats was consumed and transformed into a finer substance called "Ojas" that could later be used to build a human body.

However, this could only happen if the food that was consumed was pure. If the food is impure or harmful, Agni needs to work harder to break it. This results in the creation of lesser amounts of Ojas, which is required to build a healthy and strong body, and an additional substance called "Ama", which can cause the body harm.

A good diet is essential to reverse this cycle as Agni is greatly affected by the quality of food you eat. Yogis believed in a healthy yogic diet that was essential to bring Agni to full health. Hence it is essential to consume a diet that compliments your practice.

Proper Yogic diet—Food that can enhance your health

A Yogic diet is a balanced diet that ancient Yogis believed had a huge influence not only over our physical well-being, but also over our thoughts, and ultimately our emotional and spiritual well-being. This diet can also be called lacto-vegetarian, which means that it is made up of non-animal foods with the exceptions of dairy items and honey. With continued awareness about the body through yoga you may find that vegetarian foods become a natural choice. It can also help you maintain the same energized, light feeling that is achieved through yoga. Also, if you are going a more

spiritual way you may decide that your love for every living being outweighs your need for animal foods. Non-animal foods can help you attain a higher level of spirituality by generating positive energy. You don't need to be a 'Yogi' to establish this diet in your life, just a desire to live healthier and happier.

Mostly people are unable to keep up with their diets because of the cravings and emotional instability created by the Amma deposit, present in the body. It is your responsibility towards your body to understand what it likes. If you feel dull, heavy, and uncomfortable after a meal, it's your body signalling that the food was not right. Always remember that good foods always make you feel energized and light.

We cannot say that there is any prescribed diet that ancient yogis advised and even if they did, it would be highly unlikely that we would find those food items in that form now. Milk in ancient times was healthy, but with commercial dairies around the world, a good number of people are lactose intolerant.

So, to make the entire process of choosing the right kinds of food for your body, as you practice yoga, ancient yogis divided foods into the following three main categories:

- Rājasic foods/diet (related rajasic quality)
- Sāttvic foods/ diet (related sattvic quality)
- Tāmasic foods/diet (related tamasic quality)

Of all three, Sattvic food is considered as the healthiest. Let us talk more in details about these three categories to understand them.

Sāttvic Foods

In yogic literature, foods that are beneficial to us are said to be Sattvic, or pure. Sattvic foods form an ideal diet, keeping the body nourished while being easy to digest. They create new energy, clarity and a clear, calm mind, enabling us to use all our mental, physical, and spiritual abilities. Sattvic foods include cereal, fresh fruit and vegetables, milk, butter, nuts, seeds, lentils, rice, grains and honey. Ayurveda considers Sattvic foods as the purest and most harmonious foods for a yogi's body. This category of food derives its name from the Sanskrit word Sattva, which means Purity. Fruits, dairy products, nuts, seeds, whole grains, natural sweeteners like honey, and anything edible that is in its purest form. So, Sattvic foods are the foundation of the yogic diet and preferred by yogis, and include foods that are nourishing and easy to digest, such

as fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, herbal teas, etc.

These foods promote a peaceful state of mind, healthy body, emotional stability and mindfulness, and a longer life. Traditional Yoga Diets were mostly Sattvic in nature. If not taken in measured quantity or if cooked with spice, Sattvic Foods can become Tamasic.

Rājasic Foods

These foods derive their name from the way that kings dined in ancient times; their menu consisting of no less than 56 food items at one given time. Foods that taste bitter, spicy, or salty and are dry or hot come under this category. This category of foods includes fried foods, sweets, and beverages, which are undesirable for yoga practitioners as they are heavy and full of fats.

Tāmasic Foods

Mostly, non-vegetarian foods are considered as Tamasic. However, if any food item is created using too many spices and an excess of salt and chilli it can be called Tamasic. This food category is responsible for the heat created in the human body, thus resulting in outbursts of anger and a coarse temperament. Yogis believe that this food category makes people quarrelsome, impatient, and intolerant, thus completely ruling it out for yoga practitioners.

Benefits of Yoga diet

Since the Sattvic Diet is pure, it gives the body innumerable benefits. Here are some of the benefits of the Sattvic diet:

- A good and healthy yoga diet plan promotes digestion and cures practitioners of stomach problems like constipation, aches, and gas.
- It helps in keeping your colon clean.
- As sattvic foods help in detoxifying your circulatory and digestive system, they clean skin and reduce breakouts and acne.
- Meditation can calm the mind, but the results can be attained faster with the help of sattvic food items as they are lighter food items which ease your mind and body.

- Undoubtedly, eating sattvic foods can help you lose weight and get a healthier body.

- Tamasic and Rajasic food cause blockage in the body and it also results in joint pain. Sattvic foods combined with yoga helps to open these blockages and relieve you of these issues.

Before and after Yogic diet

What you eat before and after your yoga practice also governs the overall improvement of your body and helps in accomplishing your fitness goals. If you are wondering “How do I follow a yoga diet?” here are some pre and post meal do’s and don’ts to assist you.

Pre-Yogic meal tips

- Before starting your practice, ensure that you are well-hydrated. Do this 30 minutes before you start your practice. You can also have green tea or a homemade fruit juice throughout the day if you are looking for some flavour.

- Avoid taking caffeine right before a yoga class or practice.

- The body requires some time to digest food. So, the rule is to not eat right before practice. If your practice timings fall during the evening, then take a small snack half an hour prior to practice and nothing after that. In the morning, too you can start by eating fruit like a banana, 30 minutes before practice.

- Avoid any type of spicy foods.

Post-Yogic meal tips

Once your yoga class is over, it is natural to feel the hunger. However, that does not give you the liberty to eat at will. After a healthy routine of yoga, the body needs the right kind of nourishment. Splurging on the wrong foods will only make your efforts go waste. So, here is what you can do.

- After a healthy workout, your body needs maximum hydration. So, keep drinking as much fluids as possible. Since you will be hungry after the workout you can snack on an apple first and when you reach home, treat yourself to a warm bowl of homemade vegetable soup. Again, avoid using spices to your soup.

The gist of all these tips is that you should avoid any Tamasic or Rajasic foods before and after yoga practice. It is best to stop eating meat altogether, however, if you cannot then try taking it in minimal amount without any spice. You can always add fish to your diet as it is high in omega-3 fats which is a good supplement for the body. But remember your meat or fish should never be deep fried, in case if you prefer non-vegetarian foods.

Conclusion

A good yoga diet is not something difficult to follow. There is a common yoga diet misconception that a person must give up on all types of foods to achieve good health. But that is not true. It's all about understanding your body's needs. You need to understand whether the hunger you are feeling is really a want for food or your body asking for water. Your body can only digest as much as its capacity and overburdening it can cause an emotional breakdown. So, follow the diet chart and take proper food in time for a healthy life.

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