

VĀTA BALANCING DIET WITH EATING GUIDELINES

The food we eat is that unique aspect of our life which we have almost total control over. Because we are what we eat, according to Āyurveda, it can be a very powerful tool for balancing and for promoting and maintaining health. One ancient authority says that food is our medicine--a good regimen of diet is worth a hundred drugs but no amount of drugs can overcome a poor regimen of diet. Generally, one should eat warm, freshly cooked foods. We can use the tastes in food as a guide to what qualities those foods have. For example, foods which have sweet, sour, and salty tastes have those qualities (especially heavy and oily) necessary to balance vāta qualities of light, dry, cold, rough, etc. We will give below examples of foods with these tastes common in this culture. This information has been provided by Dr. Lad, in his book: *Ayurvedic Cooking for Self Healing*. This book is a good resource of knowledge and menus. Please note that agreement about the qualities of foods is not universal. Another important point is that a list of balancing foods is not a blanket proscription to totally avoid the foods with tastes of bitter, pungent, and astringent. Rather, do eat foods having these other qualities to help promote balance in the emotions and in the physiology but eat them less often and in smaller quantities. The foods to favor will provide a theme of influence but in a gentle and sustained way.

WHAT TO EAT

General Guidelines:

- Sip hot water (with lemon or lime) during the meal to aid digestion.
- Favor cooked warm, unctuous foods.
- Favor fresh, organic, locally grown
- Eat a variety of foods having all 6 tastes and change the variety of foods you eat

Specific Guidelines (eat less of those items in *italics*):

- Beverages: almond milk, aloe vera juice, apple cider, apricot, berry—not cranberry, carrot, cherry, grain beverages, grape, lemonade, mango, miso broth, orange, papaya, peach, pineapple, rice milk, sour juices, vegetable bouillon
- Herbal teas: ajvain, bancha, *catnip*, chamomile, *chicory*, *chrysanthemum*, clove, comfrey, elder flower, eucalyptus, fennel, fenugreek, ginger--fresh, Hawthorne, juniper berry, *kukicha*, lavender, lemon grass, licorice, marshmallow, oat straw, orange peel, pennyroyal, peppermint, *raspberry*, rosehips, saffron, sage, sarsaparilla, sassafras, spearmint, *strawberry*, *wintergreen*
- Condiments: *black pepper*, chutney—mango, *chili peppers*, *coriander leaves*, dulse, gomasio, kijiki, kelp, ketchup, lemon, lime, lime pickle, mango pickle, mayonnaise, mustard, pickles, scallions, seaweed, *sprouts*, vinegar
- Dairy: butter, ghee, whole milk—cow and goat (avoid homogenized if possible), lassi, cheese—cow and goat, panir, cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt
- Food Supplements: aloe vera juice, bee pollen, amino acids, calcium (citrate), copper, iron, magnesium, since, royal jelly, spirulina, blue-green algae, vitamins A, B, B12, C, D, E, EFA's (essential fatty acids) found in cold process oils from cod liver, evening primrose, black currant seed, flax seed, borage; note that omega 3 and 6 are probably best taken in the ratio of 1:1 to 1:2.5, which implies that while one supplements flax oil, for example, one continues to eat ghee also.
- Fruits: (ripe and sweet) apples—cooked, applesauce, avocado, banana, berries, cherries, coconut, dates, figs, grapefruit, grapes, kiwi, lemon, lime, mango, melons, oranges, papaya, peaches, pineapple, plums, prunes—soaked, pomegranate, raisins—soaked, rhubarb, strawberries, tamarind
- Grains: whole; amaranth, durham flour, oats—cooked, quinoa, seitan (wheat meat), sprouted wheat bread (Essene)wheat, white rice (basmati is best) (if digestion is weak carbohydrates and proteins e.g., rice and dal, may be eaten at separate meals in the same day

- Legumes: *lentils—red*, mung beans, mung dal, tur dal, urad dal
- Meats: (NOTE: As recent research points to animal meat, fat, and cholesterol as promoters of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity my recommendations not longer include these as safe suggestions; also Āyurveda makes no recommendations for these foods as habitual diet), beef, buffalo, chicken, duck, eggs, fish, turkey, sea food
- Nuts: almonds (without skins are best), black walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, charole, coconut, filberts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts
- Oils: ghee, olive oil, sesame (for external use), sunflower oil, and others generally ok; use coconut and avocado oils externally only
- Seeds: chia, flax, halva, pumpkin, sesame, sunflower, tahini
- Spices: ajvain, allspice, almond extract, anise, asafoetida—hing, basil, bay leaf, black pepper, cardamom, cayenne, cinnamon, clove, coriander, cumin, dill, fennel, fenugreek, garlic, ginger (especially fresh), marjoram, mint, mustard seeds, nutmeg, orange peel, oregano, paprika, parsley, peppermint, pippali, poppy seed, rosemary, saffron, , salt (saindhava), savory, spearmint, star anise, tarragon, thyme, turmeric, vanilla, wintergreen
- Sweeteners: barley malt, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, jaggary, molasses, rice syrup, raw sugar or sucanat, rock crystal sugar, turbinado
- Vegetables: asparagus, beets, *cabbage--cooked*, carrots, *cauliflower*, cilantro, cucumber, *daikon radish*, fennel (anise), garlic, green beans, green chilies, *Jerusalem artichoke*, *leafy greens*, leeks, *lettuce*, mustard greens, okra, olives—black, onions—cooked, *parsley*, parsnip, peas—cooked, sweet potato, pumpkin, radish—cooked, rutabaga, *spaghetti squash*, *spinach*, summer squash, taro root, *turnip greens*, water cress, zucchini

Foods to be taken regularly

Foods that nourish the body and promote sattvic mind are important. For this reason the following listing has been included. According to one writer one should take regularly a fast-growing rice (śastika), a type of red rice (śāli), dals – beans/lentils, rock salt, a type of fruit (amālaka), barley, rain water, milk, ghee, and honey. Another adds to this listing: wheat, meat of animals of hot arid lands, sugar, and about 6 other items of unknown identity. The Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. XVII.8-10, describes the qualities of foods to be favored for mental and physical evenness: Promoting life, virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction are foods of savory, smooth, firm, and pleasant nature to the stomach. Such are desired by the sattvic.

WHAT NOT TO EAT

Specific Guidelines:

Āyurveda says that food is your medicine but it also says that **some foods do not combine well with others**. This incompatibility stems from opposite qualities of food, which then produces contrary actions or otherwise toxic chemical reactions during or following the digestive process. Incompatibility may occur during the cooking process itself caused by chemical changes of the ingredients. Incompatibility occurs when grains or other foods, which have different cooking times, are prepared in the same pot. Thus improper cooking results and leads to toxic substances being formed. Also, foods having opposite energy (hot and cold) or opposite post-digestive effect (sweet/sour/pungent) give the body conflicting or stalemating information, which may produce āma (a toxic, sticky material detrimental to physiology). The following abbreviated listing from *Caraka Samhita*, *Ayurveda Today*, 1990, and [The Healing Cuisine](#) by Harish Johari includes the most common examples. The listing in the classical texts is quite extensive and many items are quite rare to our culture.

- melons with grains, starch, fried foods, cheese
- radish with milk, banana, raisins
- lemon with yogurt, milk, cucumber, tomato
- corn with dates, raisins, banana
- mango with cheese, cucumber
- eggs with milk, meat, yogurt, melons, cheese, fish, banana
- yogurt with milk, sour fruits, bananas, melons, hot drinks, meat, fish, starch (grains), cheese, hot foods
- starches with eggs, chai, milk, banana, dates, persimmon
- milk with banana, sour fruits—lemons, oranges, plums, meat, fish, melons, curds, khicadi, cherries, breads having yeast, oil, salt, vinegar, yogurt, green squash, radishes, candy, and sesame, milk & water mixed with ghee, coffee and tea (cream too)
- potato, tomato, eggplant, with yogurt, milk, melon, cucumber
- peaches with rice
- melons with grains
- fruits with potato, tapioca, other starches
- poultry, fish with yogurt or lassi
- chicken with cheese
- honey and ghee in equal amounts by weight or with radishes
- vinegar and sesame seeds
- honeydew melon with honey, yogurt, or water
- cucumber with water
- rice with vinegar
- meat with sesame, milk, cheese, vinegar, or honey, buttermilk mixed with bananas

General Guidelines:

Āyurveda includes the consciousness-promoting value of foods, independent of their nutrient and sustaining values. The Bhagavad Gītā, Ch. XVII.8-10, describes the qualities of foods to be avoided are those causing pain, misery, and sickness, pungent, sour, salty, excessively hot, harsh, astringent, scorching are the foods desired by the rajasic. Stale tasteless, putrid, left-over, the repulsive and foul are the foods desired by the tamasic.

- Frozen, canned, fried foods, leftovers
- Under-cooked or over-cooked foods
- Unnatural food additives and GMO food products or meat fed GMO feeds
- Honey cooked in anything (is toxic)
- Mushrooms, peanuts, tomatoes, garlic, eggplant (affect meditation and transcending)
- Sweet, flour desserts after a meal (before is best)
- Alcohol, caffeine--in coffee, tea, chocolate, other beverages (affect meditation and transcending)
- All refined grains and sugar and foods containing them
- All food cooked in used fats/oils
- Because of significant contraindicating research ALL soy products no longer carry a recommendation.
- Avoid all ice-cold food or drink--the digestive process slows in a cold environment and this strains the digestive process.
- Refined foods—especially grains and sugar—made into flour and pastes; e.g. pasta, bread, etc.
- Fluoridated water for any purpose and exclusive use of RO / distilled water in cooking / drinking

WHEN TO EAT

General Guidelines:

- Eat only if hungry. Skip a meal rather than eat with incompletely digested food still in the stomach. Eating would produce toxic materials, ama, which degrades physiology and health.
- No snacking—this introduces confusion in the nervous system about the timing of secretions and other digestive activities. The nervous system likes regularity.
- Eat at regular times in order to culture regular functioning of the nervous system.
- No food within 3 hours of bed time. Food in the stomach interferes with sleep, which affects digestion.

Specific Time Guidelines:

- Eat the biggest meal at noontime to take advantage of the body's greatest digestive capacity.

HOW TO EAT

The ancient authorities say that food is our medicine and no amount of medicine can overcome the effects of a poor regimen of diet. What is not appreciated, however, is that how one eats is just as important as what one eats. Specifically, the quality of digestion is related to what is going on in the mind, in the body, in our environment, and in our emotions. The autonomic nervous system takes charge of digestion automatically but since it has two aspects, sympathetic and parasympathetic, which operate in a contrary manner, the results of digestion can be good or even bad. When one is not focused in the mind while eating--thinking about work or other things--the energy of digestion is diverted away from the activity of digestion. If one is emotionally charged while eating then the sympathetic nervous system functioning dominates--blood supply is shunted to the peripheral muscles away from the stomach, etc., digestive juices stop flowing, and the peristalsis of elimination stops. When the body-mind is at rest then the parasympathetic nervous system dominates and digestion and elimination proceed normally. Āyurveda suggests the following to promote this vital element of health:

General Guidelines:

- Thoughts, emotions, frustrations, much like material things are energies, which influence the quality and action of food, therefore never criticize food while preparing or eating it.
- Remove shoes before eating--releasing pressure on the nerves here promotes better digestion.
- Bring all items to the table to avoid having to get up during the eating
- Pray before eating. This calms the mind and body and gives direction for use of the food.
- Always eat only while sitting--this means eating while sitting and driving is out.
- Sit in a cross-legged fashion on the floor.
- Eat in a settled atmosphere to promote parasympathetic nervous system functioning.
- Eat with awareness--recognize and enjoy the tastes, the appearance, the smell, the textures, and even the sounds, if any. This produces emotional satisfaction and balance.
- Don't read or watch television while eating--focus on the meal. This improves digestion via awareness.
- Don't talk unnecessarily while eating and not at all when food is in the mouth.
- During the meal soft, gentle, healing music is ok to listen to (Gandharva music is best).
- Eat with your cleaned fingers--prana circulates and goes into the food with touch.
- Eat without attachment or aversion.
- Brush teeth after eating--traditionally in Ayurveda a neem stick is used for this purpose.
- Lie on the left side after eating for about ten minutes. Digestion is improved with this action.
- Take a short walk of 100 steps after the meal.
- Avoid strenuous exercise within 2 hours of eating.
- Never waste food

- Don't eat alone—this means that sharing food with others is sacred and beneficial
- Have a clean, well-equipped kitchen--this means utensils and condiments are important.

Specific Guidelines:

- Eat about that amount of food which would fit into the hands when they are cupped together. Others say to eat approximately 1/3 stomach in solid foods, 1/3 liquids, and 1/3 for air (vāta, pitta, kapha).
- Eat slowly--this means chew the food well. Some Vaidyas say this means chewing 32 times for each bite. Research suggests that the incidence of stomach cancer is related to not chewing food properly. Salivary amylase, a digestive secretion in the saliva, begins digesting carbohydrates while in the mouth and the longer food stays there the more complete this activity can be.
- Fast on a liquid diet one day or more per week—the same day of the week is best. This gives the digestive and eliminative systems opportunity to rest and clean. Consider juice of romaine, celery, and carrot or pomegranate juice.

SOME COOKING GUIDELINES

- Use glass and ceramic for cooking or baking whenever possible
- Use of cast iron and stainless steel may be ok
- Avoid use of non-stick surfaced cooking utensils
- Do not taste food while cooking it
- Keep kitchen clean, organized, peaceful, and dedicated for cooking
- Remove rough skins and hard stems
- Cook vegetables until just tender