



## Yogic Diet

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Received 16th February 2019, Accepted 5th March 2019

### Abstract

*Yoga is a healthy exercise for mind, body and soul. Yoga enhances the performances of internal organs and external appearance. This is always guided by appropriate intake of food. Eating right kind of food is an important factor in achieving a physical, mental and emotional balance. Among the three types of food namely sattvic, rajasic and tamasic, sattvic is the best food for yoga practitioners.*

**Keywords:** Yama, Ahimsa, Sattvic, Rajasic, Tamasic.

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### Introduction

The first step in Yoga practices is *Yama*, meaning restrains, which covers the concept of '*Ahimsa*' meaning non-violence, non-hurting, non-killing and non-injury. Mother nature has given supremacy to man by giving and providing more intellectual power compared to other creatures on earth. The virtue of Non-violence is to curb that power. Man has no right to kill or hurt any other creatures. Yoga practice thus restricts the act of man so he can't misuse his powers on other creatures. In other words there is a straight message to eat live and survive on the products naturally grown or cultivated by man in order to cover the needs of the human population on earth.

### Yoga

The word "yoga" originates from the sanskrit root yuj which means "Union". On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self; while, for the man of this world, it is the union of the physical, physiological, mental, emotional and intellectual bodies leading one to live a integrated, purposeful, useful and noble life.

Yoga is a healthy exercise for the mind, body and soul. Just as the exercises you practice during yoga are good for the internal organs and external appearance, eating the appropriate foods will enhance the benefits of yoga. It is meant to help yoga practitioners choose foods that will enhance the exercises. In yoga, it is vital to eat food that are nutrient-rich in their natural state as opposed to processed and high-fat foods.

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### Food

Eating the right kind of food is an important element in achieving a physical, mental and emotional balance. In yogic literature foods that are beneficial to us are said to be Sattvic, or pure. Impure foods that can upset our physical, emotional, or intellectual balance are referred to as being in the categories. Tamasic (stale or rotten) and Rajasic (stimulating).

In Yoga, it is said that 'What we eat is what we are.' Meaning the food has a direct impact on human mind, personality and behavior. After all Yoga is basically a healthy life style for spiritual upliftment!. The Science of Yoga has both, ideology and technology: suggestive theory and practical methods. Yoga suggests and supports vegetarian diet, naturally grown fruits and vegetables, all grains, pulses and dairy products as a healthy diet with few options. The options are available to those who have reached the higher level of understanding and perception. The yogic diet emphasis vegetarian and dairy products for mainly two reasons, firstly: The principles of Yoga are based on the laws of the Mother Nature and secondly it purely believes in the core nature. The more we are close to the nature we are more healthy, the more we are away from her we are more sick and ill and most unhealthy!. There is always a debate and discussion that plucking and cutting any fruits, vegetables, plants and trees, is also an act of violence. Yoga gives further explanation that we have only right to cut, which, is grown naturally or cultivated by man himself! The seed itself has no life. We put life into it by providing land, manure, water, were efforts and care. So we have a right to pluck and cut! We are the cause and reason of that life. So for survival, cutting any naturally grown and cultivated plants or plucking fruits from a tree is not considered as an act of violence or sin as per the law of nature and Yoga.

Yoga science further explains that why vegetarian diet is good? It also gives scientific

explanation at both levels: physical and mental.

### Physically

- Vegetarian diet is easy to digest because it is natural E.g. The protein from any beans or dairy product is easy to digest than an animal protein.
- Vegetarian diet takes 3-4 hours to digest while non-vegetarian diet takes 6 + hours to digest. The body and specially the organs of the digestive system have to work more and hard to digest heavy foods.

### Mentally

Our great Yogis were observers of the nature. They have studied the Nature very minutely and precisely. Milk is the first food taken by all babies: human or animal! A very natural form of food for any life! Produced by the body and for the nourishment of the body! So all the natural form of dairy product is covered in Yogic diet. Again animal milk is a question of debate and discussion but we all know that we use the milk from animals those are domestic and survive on grains, grass and plants - the natural foods. E.g. cows, goats, camels etc. Plus the priority is given to their babies and human - the caretaker or owner, uses remaining extra milk!

In the category of domestic animals we have to consider elephant, horse, donkey, bull etc though they are strong, their strength and power is useful, they offer their services to the owners! The violent and wild animals: tiger, panther, lion, they attack and kill others. Now just compare their nature, behavior and food they eat and we will get the answer!

In other words it proves that even in animal kingdom, those who are eating natural veggie food are more calm, useful and stronger animals! Their strength is useful. While wild animals are always angry, irritated, agitated and restless. They are strong but the strength is wasted in fulfilling their needs, instincts, power and desires!

The same principle applies to man! Here we get the straight message from the nature that which type of person we would like to be? Calm, cool controlled and at ease or angry, agitated and restless? As mentioned earlier that in Yoga it is said `what we eat is what we are!' hope that the explanation given by our great Yogis is enough to understand that why Yoga practically suggests, supports and encourage vegetarian diet! Choice is ours! To eat vegetarian diet or non-vegetarian! Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic Food

### Sattvic Foods

*Sattvic foods form the ideal diet, being nourishing and easy to digest. They create new energy and a clear, calm mind, enabling us to use all our mental, physical, and spiritual talents. Sattvic products include cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables, natural fruit juice, milk butter, beans, honey, and pure water.*

### Nature of Sattvic Food

- Sattvic foods are light and easy to digest
- They bring clarity and perception
- Sattvic food has the potential to unfolds love and compassion in the individual
- Sattvic food promotes the qualities of forgiveness and austerity
- It gives a feeling of contentment

### Examples of sattvic (high prana) foods

<b>Fruit</b>	mango, pomegranate, coconut, figs, peaches, pears
<b>Grains</b>	rice, tapioca, blue corn
<b>Vegetables</b>	sweet potato, lettuce, parsley, sprouts, yellow squash
<b>Beans</b>	mung, yellow lentils, kidney, lima
<b>Dairy</b>	organic milk, fresh homemade yoghurt
<b>Meat</b>	None

### Rajasic food

It feeds the body, but promotes activity and therefore induces restlessness of mind. It disturbs the equilibrium of the mind and is generally to be avoided by yoga practitioners. Rajasic foods include most spicy foods, stimulants like coffee and tea, eggs, garlic, onion, meat, fish and chocolate, as well as most processed food. Eating too fast or with a disturbed mind is also considered rajasic. Rajasic food should be avoided by those whose aim is peace of mind, but will benefit people with an active lifestyle.

#### Nature of Rajasic Food

- Rajasic foods are hot, spicy and salty
- They are irritants and stimulants
- All morish or tempting foods come under the category of rajasic
- Heavily spiced foods e.g. hot pickles and chutneys which can stimulate the senses
- Rajasic foods make the mind more agitated and susceptible to temptation

The mind can become more *rajasic*, which means it tends towards anger, hate.

### Examples of rajasic (stimulating) foods

<b>Fruit</b>	sour apples, apples, banana, guava
<b>Grains</b>	millet, corn, buckwheat
<b>Vegetables</b>	potato, nightshades, cauliflower, broccoli, spinach, tamarind, pickles, winter squash
<b>Beans</b>	red lentils, toor dal, adzuki
<b>Dairy</b>	old sour milk, sour cream
<b>Meat</b>	fish, shrimp, chicken

### Tamasic Food:

The following are the characteristics of Tamasic

food.

- This food is not good for the body or the mind.
- It brings in a sense of inertia, clouds the power of reasoning, and sucks out energy.
- It destroys the body's resistance to diseases.
- It also invokes feelings of anger, jealousy and greed in people.
- Overeating is a Tamasic behavior.

#### Nature of Tamasic Food

- *Tamasic* food is heavy, dull and depressing
- It induces sleep
- Under this category comes dark meat, lamb, pork, beef, as well as thick cheese
- Old and stale food is also *tamasic*

Only when too much of it is eaten, it causes the dulling effect.

#### Examples of tamasic (heavy) foods

<b>Fruit</b>	avocado, watermelon, plums, apricots
<b>Grains</b>	wheat, brown rice,
<b>Vegetables</b>	mushrooms, garlic, onion, pumpkin
<b>Beans</b>	urad dal, black, pinto, pink
<b>Dairy</b>	Cheese
<b>Meat</b>	beef, lamb, pork

#### Yogic-diet

The yogic-diet is said to be lacto-vegetarian, which means that it is made up entirely of non-animal foods with the exceptions of milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter eggs and honey. Evidence suggests that a predominantly vegetarian diet is good for our health. Meat proteins takes a long time to digest and tends to be difficult for the kidneys and liver to eliminate. Switching to a vegetarian diet isn't hard as long as we have tasty alternatives. And we don't have to do it overnight. First cut down on red meat, then gradually eliminate it from diet. As we find other vegetarian foods we enjoy, we can gradually give up poultry, fish, and eggs. We'll join the ranks of thousands of new vegetarians, many of whom have changed their diets for health reasons now that flesh foods have been linked to cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and so on.

Eat as many fresh fruits and vegetables as possible. Cooking vegetables destroys vitamins and enzymes content, so we should try to eat some raw vegetables everyday. Whole grain products, are a definite must. Drink approximately 2 litres of water daily. We can increase overall intake of fluids by drinking herb trees, fruit and vegetable juices, and milk and vegetable milks (coconut, soya, rice milk) and by eating water-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables. Avoid processed food, white flour, sugar and convenience or "fast" foods (pre-cooked meals or food in tins, jars and bottles.) Don't rush a meal, take time to

enjoy it and chew it. Body will thank.

#### Tips on avoiding tamasic foods

Foods that are stale, tasteless, unripe, over ripe, are tamasic. They poison the body, sap our energy, and dull the intellect. Tamasic foods include meat and fish, mushrooms, and foods that have been frozen, preserved, tinned, over-cooked, or re-heated. Foods that have been fermented, such as vinegar, are tamasic, as are all drugs and alcohol. Eating too much is also considered to be tamasic.

#### Tips on avoiding Rajasic Foods

Onions and garlic, tobacco, eggs, coffee, tea, chillies and other strong spices, and foods that are sour, acid, or bitter are all Rajasic. Chocolate, white sugar, white flour, and most prepared and convenience foods are also Rajasic to a lesser extent. All these substances excite the passions and over-stimulate the mind, making it difficult to control. Eating too fast and eating too many combinations of foods is also Rajasic in nature. A true Yogic diet is rather strict, and not everyone wants to or can follow its rules. But even applying a few of these suggestions to diet will enhance well being.

#### Some Recommendations for a Sattvic food

1. Try to eat fresh, leafy greens in great quantity. These should be included in every meal, and are best at the end of the meal. These vegetables contain many essential mineral for metabolism such as iron, potassium, magnesium, zinc, calcium and chromium. A yoga diets high in these foods forms a foundation for combating disease.
2. Vegetables that grow beneath the ground should be used sparingly, with the exception of carrots.
3. All fruits and vegetables should be taken fresh whenever possible. They are packed with nutrients, providing vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin and other vitamins, iron, calcium and fibre. Use tomatoes and over-ripe bananas sparingly.
4. Avoid canned or preserved foods.
5. The yoga diet includes a regular variety of nuts. These, however, should be boiled or steamed, and not fried or roasted.
6. Legumes, which is another name for beans and peas are all good sources of fibre, protein, iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins.
7. Soyamilk and soya products are an excellent source of B vitamins and calcium and should be included in the daily yoga diet.
8. Make plentiful use of pumpkins, cucumbers, gourds, squash and other vine-grown foods.
9. Avoid fried foods!
10. Whole grains are rich in fibre and other complex carbohydrates, as well as protein, B vitamins and zinc.

11. Drink a lot of (pure) water daily. Water (not cold!) may be taken with meals, but in small quantities and should not be used to “wash down” the food.

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### Conclusion

"Eat to live, not live to eat". It is best if we understand that the purpose of eating is to supply our body with the life force or Prana, the vital life energy. So the greatest nutritional plan for the Yoga practitioner is the simple diet of natural fresh foods. However, a true yogi has to go a step further than this. He has to be concerned with the subtle effect that food has on his mind and body. He has therefore to avoid foods which are over-stimulating and select those foods, which render the mind calm and the intellect sharp.

For seriously considering a change towards the yogic diet, the change has to be made gradually. Start by replacing with larger portions of vegetables, grains, seeds and nuts until finally all flesh products have been completely eliminated from the diet. The Yogic diet will help us attain a high standard of health, keen intellect and serenity of mind. Yogis say that a growing liking for pure, wholesome, nourishing food is part of a practitioner's spiritual unfoldment and that progress in yoga and purity of diet go together.

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