

“Importance of Diet in Yogic Practices” - A Review Study

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Abstract: - Diet has been given a very significant role in Yoga sadhana. Healthy living has a direct correlation with the diet consumed. Dietary habits also influence the risk of diseases in an individual. Suboptimal eating habits and micro-nutrient deficiency has been a fundamental reason behind the deaths due to cardio metabolic diseases. A balanced diet could be a very useful tool in order to manage the deaths caused by these disorders.

Keywords: Diet, Yoga, Lifestyle.

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga as a science and system of health and wellness management has gained immense popularity and promotion in recent past. Components of yoga, like Yogasana, Pranayama, Kriya and meditation have been and are being practiced and studied upon, in order to derive and describe the best of its benefits. Parallel to this, food and diet has also been described in various traditional, contemporary and classic yoga texts. The following article aims at extrapolating the philosophical and practical aspects of diet as per various yoga texts and its relevance and role in maintaining a healthy life.

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.

II. 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 includes recommendations on eating habits. Both the Śāṇḍilya 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].

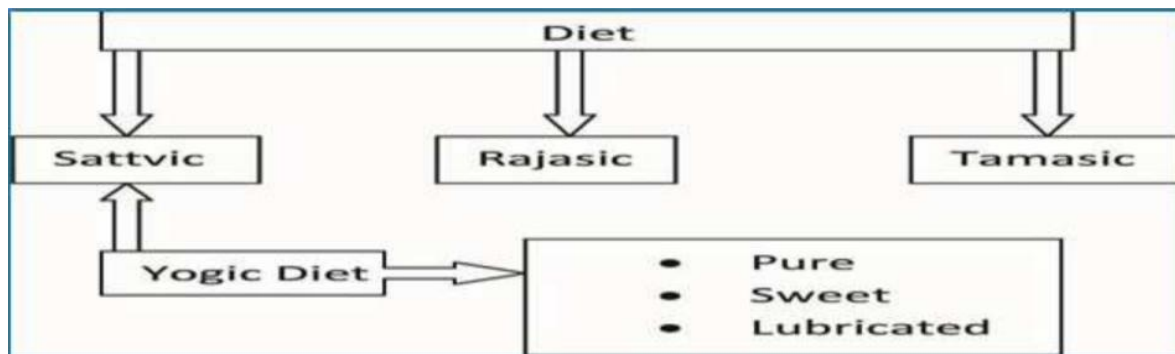
CONCEPT OF DIET IN MODERN MEDICINE

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 BALANCE DIET

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).

Classification of Yogic Diet (TABLE: I)



DIET AND YOGA

Diet has been given a very significant role in Yoga sadhana. As per Chhandogya Upanishad verse 6.5.1, the grossest of what is consumed, is excreted out of the body, in the form of waste. The medium part becomes flesh and the subtlest becomes the mind. Thus, the quality of the food consumed becomes the building brick of mind and various mental functions like intention, intuition and imagination. In *Srimad Bhagwad Geeta* chapter 9, sloka 8,9 and 10, food has been divided into three types, i.e. Sattvik, Rajasic and Tamasic Diet.

*“āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ
rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthirā hṛidyā āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ”*

Bhagavad Gita

Out of these three, the diet which enhances age, mental function, strength, longevity, happiness and love, is juicy, smooth and stable, is called sattvic diet, and this is the diet which is recommended in order to excel in yoga sadhana.

Yogic diet is unique in itself, both in terms of quantity, quality and components. Hatha Yoga advocates the consumption of Mitahara, which is described very prominently in Hatha Pradeepika and Gheranda Samhita.

Sūsniḡdha madhurāhāra chatusthānśa vivarjitāḥ |

Bhujyate śivasampritye mitāhāraḥ sa uchyate ||

Hathapradipika

YOGIC DIET

*Puṣṭam sumadhuram snigdham gavyam dhātu prapoṣaṇam |
manobhilāṣitam yogyam yogī bhojanamācaret ||
Hathapradipika*

That which nourishes, is juicy, soft and balanced in nutrients, makes one feel happy is the diet that should be consumed by a yogi. A diet, which is conducive and co-operative in yoga sadhana and personal upliftment, is yogic diet. A yogic diet helps in keeping the body light, mind fresh and soul activated and prepared for spiritual upliftment. Yoga texts have a wide array of ingredients including crops, vegetables and milk products. It also lists food items which should be prevented from consumption, in order to keep sadhana intact.

YOGIC DIET FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Healthy living has a direct correlation with the diet consumed. Dietary habits also influence the risk of diseases in an individual. As per reports published in NIH Research Matters in 2017, excessive consumption of sugar, salt and fat, raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other health conditions. Suboptimal eating habits and micro-nutrient deficiency has been a fundamental reason behind the deaths due to cardiometabolic diseases. A balanced diet could be a very useful tool in order to manage the deaths caused by these disorders. Rock salt advocated in fastening is rich in potassium which is a known neuro tranquillizing element. As per Chochalingham and Kaleeswaran, 2020, a sports activity, combined with yogic diet, helps in decreased Lipid HDL in the experimental group. Dairy products like milk and ghee, have been given emphasis as a conducive product in order to excel in one's yoga sadhana. Today, ghee has been considered instrumental in influencing the serum total cholesterol levels, LDL and VLDL. Contrary to the belief, that high-calorie diets taste better and makes one happy, it has been found in a study conducted in 2017 by Wahl, that healthy food choices, like eating fruits and vegetables have not only physical, but also mental health benefits and may prove to be a long-term investment in health. Grains like wheat, barley and rice, which are predominantly rich in Carbohydrates, have been enumerated in Hatha Pradipika. In wake of COVID Pandemic, diet has been given a spotlight and various diet advisories had been issued by the government in order to expect a speedy recovery.

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."

Bhagavad Gita

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.”

Bhagavad Gita

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.

II. YOGA APPROCH

Yogic Texts like Gherandra samhitha and hatha pradipika have been guidelines regarding various food articles and diets for a Yoga practitioner (Sadhaka) interested in fruitful practice of Pranayama and other higher practices of Yoga.

A. The important references on recommended diet and food articles in Above Yoga Texts as are as follows:

He who begins the practice of yoga without controlling the diet suffers from many diseases and does not make progress in yoga. A Yoga practitioner should eat food prepared from rice, flour of barley and wheat, green gram, black gram, horse gram etc. which should be clean and free from husk. He should eat patola, surana, mana, kakkola, sukasaka, dradhika, karkati, rambha, dumbhari, kantakantaka, amarambha, balarambha, rambhadanda, mulaka, vartaki and rddhi as well as the five recommended leafy vegetables- balasaka, kalasaka, patola-patraka, vastuka and himalocika.

Controlled adequate diet (mitahara) which is pure, sweet, containing lubricants –quantity enough to fill only half the stomach and which is palatable and is eaten to please the self (i.e. Oneself). One should fill half the stomach with food; one quarter should be reserved for the movement of the air.

A yoga practitioner should eat fresh butter, ghee, milk, sugar, sugar-cane, Jaggery, ripe plantain, coconut fruit, pomegranate, aniseed, grapes, laveli, dhatri (myrabolane), juice which is not sour, cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, paurusa, rose apple, jambala, haritaki and dates. Similarly he should eat food which is easily digestible agreeable, well lubricated with ghee and which nourishes the elementary substances of the body and which will be pleasing for mind. In the begging for the practice of pranayama one should take milk and ghee daily and food twice a day, once at noon once in the evening.

Eating sweet and soft food first offered to the Almighty leaving one quarter of stomach empty is known as Mitahara. Wheat rice, barley and saskita (a special variety of rice), milk, ghee, sugar, butter, sugar candy, honey, dry ginger, paravara kind of cucumber, the five leafy vegetables and green-gram are considered to be wholesome food for advanced Yogis. Sadhaka should eat food this is nutritious sweet and unctuous (soft), products of cow's milk and nourishing food of their own choice suitable for the practice of Yoga.

B. The important references in Gheranda Samhita and hathapradipika for the diet and food articles to be avoided by Sadhaka.

In the beginning of yogic practices one should avoid bitter, sour, salt, pungent, scorched food-such as curds, buttermilk, heavy vegetables, liquor, plamnuts, jack fruits, kulattha, masura, kusmanda, vegetable stems, gourds, berries, kapittha, kanta-bilva, palaska, kadamba, jambira, bimba, lakucha, lasuna, lotus –stalk fibres, kamaranga piyala, hingu, solmali and kemuka. He should avoid a food that is hard, polluted, putrid, producing heat inside the body, stale extremely cold and extremely hot. Eating in excess the food which bitter, sour, pungent, salty or hot, oil (mustard and seasma) and consuming alcohol, fish, meat, curds, buttermilk, kulattha, (wood apple), berries, oil-cakes, asafetida, garlic (even in small quantities) are said to be unwholesome. Similarly food that is heated over again dry and excessively salty or sour is unwholesome and should be avoided.

Thus ‘A bland diet comprising of simple vegetable proteins, low in salt content and moderately rich in cereals; lacto-vegetables and fruits that are adequate in minerals and vitamins seems to have been prescribed in Yoga.

III. CONCLUSION

This article aims at enumerating the connections and correlations between Yogic Components and principles of diet and its relevance in healthy living. It also describes the modern aspects of a balanced and healthy diet and how it is in coherence with the yogic principles of food consumption. An attempt has also been made to enumerate the traditional references and principles of yogic diet.

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