

Food & Lifestyle Tips from Ayurveda
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Shad Rasa - Ayurveda Dietary Science of Six Tastes

When all six tastes of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent are present in your meal or day, you'll feel satisfaction ('trupti') and more easily avoid cravings, which may be rooted in emotional dissatisfactions, upon deeper consideration.

Nutritional needs can be satisfied with food, but emotional hungers must be satisfied with understanding and compassion. For more details on meal plans based in Six Tastes Science, see 'Ayurveda Cooking for Self-Healing', by Usha & Vasant D. Lad, Lotus Press.

All six tastes provide complete nutrition according to ancient Ayurveda, whose principles have not changes in 10,000 years according to the World Health Organization.

Quantity, Frequency of Food & Water

The number of meals for Kapha types is one, while older Pitta people past meno/manopause, can digest one or two meals daily. Only Vata types and younger Pitta types need three meals daily, spaced about 4 hrs apart, according to the need of hunger.

Digestion will be most active during the hottest part of the day, perhaps 11am-3pm, depending on latitude. Snacking between meals is discouraged to help maintain strong gastric fire or 'agni', the agent of transformation of the food into you.

One 'anjali' or double handful is the optimum size of the meal, while a snack can one-half anjali. Portion size has grown to support overweight and its many health complications nowadays. Warm or hot water can be sipped in sufficient quantity to moisten the food, and assist digestion, but not to gulp.

Follow the principle of eating when hungry and drinking when thirsty,

Fresh, Local Food Choices

Fresh, local food items are always preferred. Stale foods are classified as 'slow poisons' in Ayurveda, so it's not on the first day that they prove baneful, rather their cumulative use over time is not advised. To re-heat leftovers can be done in a pinch, however avoid leftovers and frozen items whose prana (life force) is diminished or nil. If a substance must be preserved with chemical compounds or processes, best to leave it aside. Drying, cold storage and canning are useful methods in Canada for dealing with our limited growing season.

Lifestyle Considerations

Along with what to eat for one's individual health needs, also consider how and when to eat. Review your lifestyle, such as implementing working to half your capacity and saving half your energy for your health, the family needs and sufficient rest.

Rest is more important on your flow days to help support a balance of energy out and energy in. Sufficient night time rest is considered a requirement for health in ancient Ayurveda, along with natural appetite and elimination systems. Avoidance of daytime sleeping is important, especially for weight loss.

Not resting enough at night now may lead to forced rest later. Daytime naps can induce more fatigue, though 'yoga nidra' provides good quality rest and rejuvenation by lying quietly for 20-30 mins., without falling asleep.

Going to bed earlier will help rising earlier with more enthusiasm. Meditation before sleep helps to transition from outer to inner attention.

Fruits

The most basic principle of food combining according to Ayurveda is to take fruits and fruit juices entirely separately from other foods. If you've had fruits, wait about an hour (two for Kapha people with slower metabolism) before eating other foods. If you've had other foods, wait at least two hours (3 or more for Kapha people) before taking fruits.

Fruits are best taken during the late afternoon or mid-evening as needed and suitable for the digestive needs, when the sun is setting or has set. Fruits taken in the morning may spike up the blood sugar. Avoid imported fruits whenever the carbon footprint does not justify its consumption. Local is preferable.

Different enzymes digest fruits as compared to all other food groups. They have a quicker transit time, due to their quality of lightness, growing high from the ground, than heavier foods.

Melons are in a class by themselves and are to be taken alone, in season and when locally grown. Melons do not mix with any other fruits or foods, even one another, and can cause fermentation and later putrefaction, toxicity and disease, if habitual. Take a serving melon completely by itself in season, except in elevated Kapha even local and in season.

Fruits are generally cooling in thermal effect, and especially melons, which can increase kapha. Some fruits are warming such as papaya, which are enzyme-rich, bananas which are sour in post-digestive effect and lemons which are catabolic

Milks

To choose cow's milk, it should be fresh, meaning drawn that morning. If it is not fresh, it must be boiled with suitable spices to help increase digestibility. Milk drawn 3 or more days ago is not advised, as is milk in plastic or cardboard. Glass or stainless steel containers are OK.

Milk does not combine well with fruits, yeasted bread, fish, radishes, nightshades (vegetables that grow at night from moonlight such as potato, tomato, eggplant, bell peppers), yogurt, eggs or kitchari, even if fresh. Milks have tryptophan precursors, therefore help as sedatives for sound sleep. The heavier the milk, the better the sedative action

Goat's milk is OK for kapha types; the same guidelines for freshness apply. It is lighter than cow's milk and often more easily digested.

Rice milk is satvic, nourishing, light and easy to digest for most people, therefore useful in debility. Rice is simmered with 5 times the water, along with a pinch of tumeric and ginger powder per cup, then blended to render a milky consistency.

Almond milk can be made fresh by blending 10-15 pre-soaked, peeled almonds with a cup of boiled water, perhaps with a little ginger root and vanilla extract. Avoid processed almond or other nut milks and blend your own freshly just before enjoying. Almonds combine well with most grains, seeds and lentils to form complete amino acid chains. Almonds are rich in laetrile, an anti-cancer compound, and are best consumed fresh within a year.

Other nut milks can be made from walnuts, hazelnuts (both native to northern climates), pecans or cashews (native to southern climates) and are rich in oils, making them increasing to pitta and kapha, except in small quantities, due to their nutrient density. If they are local to your area, they are carbon neutral, though if imported, induce a higher carbon footprint. Nuts have affinity with shukra and artava dhatus, as they are the ova of the tree.

Soy is pacifying to pitta and kapha but tends to increase vata. Processed or packaged soymilk may be made from genetically modified soybeans, and therefore could have a deleterious effect on the thyroid gland, which is associated with metabolic rate. Soybeans have an estrogen-precursor action. Soy combines well with most grains, lentils, beans and vegetables, though for Vata types or in Vata vikruti situations, best to avoid soy.

Meals & Snacks

Snacks for P and K types can include be tea, especially for evening after 6 or 7pm. Vata types need to avoid snacking, but can take fruit as a snack if needed for laxative action and taken during Vata time of day from 3-6pm, or for emotional eating patterns at about 8pm, keeping in mind the above spacing of food intake intervals.

Serving size of meals is one anjali (your double handful) and of fruit snacks is one-half anjali (your single handful) at a time.

Conclusion

Diet is not just foods and nutrition. Consider that psycho-emotional factors lead us to make food choices, often in error for our personal best interest. Food taken too late in the day or with incompatible foods can ruin the best organic, fresh, local choices.

Assimilation is responsible for our immune quality. Absorption is dependent upon consistent timing, simplicity of ingredients, exercise and mental state, among other factors. Eating hastily, with distractions, wrong combinations or too many ingredients can deplete the power of assimilation.

Food choices also impact our carbon footprint. Food choices are often culturally informed. Be aware of the subtle influences of involved in your food and nutrition.

Consciousness is the main informant of wellness, not just food itself. Food may contribute 20% to our health outcomes, and food choices are informed by our consciousness. Nowadays many fad dietary programs abound, but the ancient teachings of Ayurveda still remain as the comprehensive guidelines for internal medicine and wellness.