



Ayurvedic Bodywork Specialist Manual

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Ayurvedic Principles of Eating for Radiant Health

Food is the source of life. And digestion is the root of all health. It nourishes, maintains, and cures. Ayurveda holds that we are what we eat—literally. 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 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.

- 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.
- Eat the biggest meal at noontime to take advantage of the body's greatest digestive capacity.
- No food within 3 hours of bedtime. Food in the stomach interferes with sleep, which affects digestion.
- Avoid eating foods having opposite energy (virya) for example, milk and fish.

- Thoughts, emotions, and frustrations—much like material things—are energies, which influence the quality and action of food. Therefore, never criticize food while preparing or eating it.
- Eliminate bowels and bladder before eating.
- Remove shoes before eating—releasing pressure on the nerves here promotes better digestion.
- Pray before eating. This calms the mind and body and gives direction for use of the food.
- Eat only while sitting. Do not drive a vehicle while eating.
- When practical, 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 through awareness.
- Don't talk unnecessarily while eating. Do not talk 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.
- Bring all items to the table necessary for the meal—to avoid getting up.
- Eat warm, cooked food rather than cold food or drink whenever possible.
- Avoid all ice-cold food or drink—the digestive process slows in a cold environment and this strains the digestive process.
- Sip hot water (with lemon or lime) during the meal to aid digestion. Avoid drinking lots of fluids with meals as the digestive juices are diluted and the stomach has to work harder.
- 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).
- There is no concept of dessert in Ayurveda. Sweets should be taken first (if taken at all), because they are hard to digest and they have the effect of reducing appetite and the possibility of overeating.
- 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. (Consult a doctor before trying this.) This gives the digestive and eliminative systems opportunity to rest and clean.
- Always eat only fresh food—no leftovers, no canned food, no frozen food, as these are hard to digest and lack the vitality of fresh foods.
- 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.
- Use glass pots for cooking whenever possible; stainless steel, copper, and cast iron may be OK, too; avoid
- use of non-stick surfaced utensils.
- Avoid too much raw foods, undercooked foods and overcooked foods.
- Prefer organic foods, fresh, locally grown foods.
- Before undertaking this or any other health regimen, be sure to check with your primary health care provider.

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