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In this issue:

HypnoBirthing	Cervical Abnormalities	Reflexology Bridging Course
28 	44 	36 

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Are you a health-conscious consumer, looking to come into the industry or looking for a suitable treatment? Find out what the experts say and read.

Health and Happiness through Ayurvedic Cooking



***'Let food be thy medicine
and thy medicine shall be
thy food' Hippocrates***

As a basic necessity of life, food brings people together through its diverse flavours, textures and cultural depths; and what a huge subject we all just love to talk about! In this article, we merely scratch the surface of understanding the principles and applications of Ayurvedic cooking.

Food is traditionally classified in terms of taste (rasa), quality (guna), post-digestive action (vipaka) and potency (virya) rather than in terms of carbohydrates, fats and proteins. This classification is connected to the principle that we are all a unique combination of the tridoshas – vata, pitta and kapha – which are the three bio-physical forces within the human body reflecting the five basic elements of our universe. Each element – ether, air, fire, water and earth – has varied qualities and actions that govern the biological, physiological and psychological functions of our minds and bodies. According to Ayurveda, a balanced diet nurtures the body, mind, senses and spirit, providing strength, vigour and radiance.

This profound knowledge of Ayurvedic nutrition allows us to make informed and personalised dietary choices to maintain a natural balance and good health in line with our 'dosha type'. When a dosha gets out of balance we can use foods, spices and herbs opposite in nature, taste, quality, post-digestive effect and potency to bring back balance. A balanced meal, according to Ayurveda, will be simple, tasty and nutritious and would include all six tastes.

Food and the mind

Our relationship with and reference to food is often descriptive in a qualitative way; for example, 'left a bitter taste', 'sour grapes', 'couch potato', 'cool as a cucumber' and therefore taste

plays a crucial role on our mind as well as emotions: 🍬 Sweet tastes promote love, warmth and affection, pacify the over-active vata mind and cool the pitta mind 🍬 Salty tastes are soothing for the vata mind but intensify the pitta irritations 🍬 Sour tastes sharpen the mind and senses, but can aggravate anger in pitta types 🍬 Bitter tastes can clear the hazy minds of the kapha types and cool the emotional pitta mind 🍬 Pungent tastes awaken the kapha mind but can quickly heat and cause the pitta mind to become aggressive 🍬 Astringent tastes can stimulate fear and insecurity in the vata.

Food is also categorised as sattvic, rajasic and tamasic, the qualities of the mind (gunas). Sattvic foods are fresh, organic and vibrant and free from chemicals, pesticides and preservatives. They help one to be clear, calm, stay focussed and promote physical, mental and spiritual health. Sattvic foods include organic fruits, vegetables, lentils, milk, ghee, honey, sesame and sunflower seeds, cashews, almonds and walnuts. Rajasic foods are stimulating in nature and promote passion, creativity, motion and increase agni.

Foods include peppers, tomatoes, onions, eggs, salt, hot spices, red lentils, kidney beans, peanuts and pickles. Tamasic foods are dull, heavy and lifeless and create lethargy and inertia. These foods include leftovers, stale foods, meats and fish, frozen, fried and fast foods, mushrooms, cheese and chemicals such as pesticides. Tamasic foods cause 'ama' (toxins) in the body and mind.

Dosha	Balancing tastes	Imbalancing tastes
Vata	Sweet, sour, salty	Bitter, pungent, astringent
Pitta	Sweet, bitter, astringent	Sour, salty, pungent
Kapha	Pungent, bitter, astringent	Sweet, sour, salty

Taste	Action in body	Food sources
Sweet	Builds tissues, calms nerves, increase weight, brings comfort	Rice, wheat, milk and dairy products, beans and lentils, sweet fruits, root vegetables
Sour	Cleanses tissues and increases absorption of minerals	Citrus fruits, yoghurt, cheese, fermented foods (wine, vinegar, sauerkraut, soy sauce)
Salty	Improves taste of food, lubricates tissues and stimulates digestion	Salts and sea vegetables (sea kelp, seaweed)
Bitter	Detoxifies, de-blocks and lightens the tissues	Green vegetables (green cabbage, spinach, kale), olives, bitter melon, turmeric, fenugreek
Pungent	Stimulates digestion and metabolism	Chilli peppers, onions, garlic, ginger, black pepper, clove
Astringent	Absorbs water, strengthens tissues, dries fats	Cranberries, pomegranate, pears, broccoli, asparagus, artichoke, quinoa, rye, marjoram, turmeric, green tea, coffee

It's not only what you eat

Ayurveda goes beyond the wisdom of what to eat but also advocates how, when and where to eat to ensure good digestion and assimilation that will prevent toxins from accumulating.

- ☺ In order to maintain good metabolism, do not skip meals
- ☺ To maintain a 'sattvic' state of mind, eat in a quiet, settled environment with no TV, phone or heated discussions
- ☺ Give blessings and thanks to our food before eating
- ☺ Avoid drinking liquids with the meal (except to moisten food) to prevent the 'agni' from being put out
- ☺ Follow the principles of seasonal and daily rhythms
- ☺ Choose fresh organic foods to prevent 'ama' from accumulating
- ☺ Choose foods in line with your natural dosha type
- ☺ Lunch should be the main meal of the day, when the digestive fire is optimum.

Agni & Ama

Digestive power is paramount to what and how we can eat and its effect on our overall health. 'Agni', the simplest form, is the fire within our body, primarily our digestive fire (jathar-agni). In a healthy state, agni allows for good digestion, assimilation, elimination, circulation, nourishment to all body tissues, healthy tissue formation, good complexion, strong immunity and intelligence.

This occurs when there is a balanced, nutritious diet. Ama is undigested or toxic material (food or emotional) that is created when there is a low or disturbed agni and is often caused by incompatible foods, irregular eating habits or non-conducive food choices. Ayurveda, first and foremost, looks to restoring the agni. This often means first eating more heating and pungent foods to digest the toxins before moving to purely sattvic food choices. There are various digestive herbs that enable us to keep a check on our digestive fire and overall health.

So what types of foods would keep the 'fire' burning and your 'ama' at bay? Some basic food choices could include, ghee, dahls, kitchari, various vegetarian dishes cooked lightly with digestives spices, fresh fruits, nuts and seeds.

Some classics recipes include:

Ghee is considered the best of the cooking fats and penetrates to the deeper body tissues. This is very simple to prepare: heat organic unsalted butter until the milk solids separate and sink to the bottom of the pan. Allow to cool and pour into a jar through a cloth to prevent sediments from entering.

A classic, delicious and complete meal is, of course, Kitchari. The choice of grains can vary

from rice to quinoa, buckwheat or millet.

For a balanced breakfast, heat ghee and add almonds or pecans, bananas and raisins, stir in oat bran, add then enough water or soya milk to cook grains.

Kitchari (rice with green mung beans)

This basic, nutritiously wholesome Ayurvedic recipe is suitable for all doshic constitutions.

Ingredients ☺ Ghee—3 to 6 tsp ☺ Whole Spices—2 to 3 tsp. e.g. cumin, coriander, fennel, fenugreek ☺ ½ tsp. powdered spices, e.g. cumin, coriander, turmeric, fresh ginger ☺ White basmati rice—½ cup ☺ Split green or yellow mung dhal—½ cup ☺ Water—2 cups, may need to add more ☺ Vegetables of your choice—1-2 cups, diced (1cm size) e.g. carrots, peas, potato, cabbage, kale, onion (optional)

Method

☺ Heat ghee in medium-sized saucepan until melted then add whole spices. Stir. Allow the aromas to release (30 seconds) ☺ Add the vegetables and ground spices, ginger and salt and sauté for 2 minutes ☺ Add mixed and rinsed rice and mung dahl and stir in for 1 minute. Add water and bring to the boil, then reduce to low heat and cook covered for 30—60 minutes or until vegetables and mung beans are cooked. Avoid stirring while cooking. The final consistency should be like a risotto ☺ Allow to stand for 2-3 minutes. Serve while hot. **CHW**

"When diet is wrong medicine is of no use. When diet is correct medicine is of no need."

Ancient Ayurvedic Proverb

© A member of the APA, **Geeta Vara is a fully qualified Ayurvedic Practitioner working in London & South East and providing consultations, treatments and corporate workshops.** For more information about ayurvedic nutrition, dosha types, treatment or other health concerns, please email: geetavara@gmail.com or call: 07956 521601.

Essential ingredients for good health	
Ingredient	Uses
Turmeric	Reduces inflammation, gently cleanses blood, antiseptic, bitter in taste
Ginger	Improves appetite and digestion, reduces inflammation and toxins
Coriander	Improves digestion, balances spicy foods, relieves gas, promotes urination
Cumin	Stimulates digestive enzymes, relieves toxins and congestion
Black pepper	Improves digestion, liquefies blocked mucous, eliminates toxins
Nutmeg	Promotes sleep, relieves cough and colds, decreases morning sickness
Ghee	Enhances brain function, acts as a carrier for essential nutrients to cells, relieves burns
Lemon	Cleanses toxins from colon. Reduces imbalances vata and kapha
Asafoetida	Increases appetite, aids digestion, reduces abdominal pain
Honey	Dissolves excess fat, relieves vomiting, anti-oxidant, quenches thirst