

# Concept of Yogic Diet and Mental Health: A Literature Review on Scientific and Scriptural aspects

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## Abstract

Food is the essential thing indispensable for the subsistence of all living beings. Whether it's human beings, animals, or vegetation, all need food for their overall growth. The primary purpose of food is to increase the duration of life, purify the mind, and avail bodily vigor. Food that promotes peace alters one's mental state, allowing them to receive higher spiritual light and gives fullness of life, can be termed as 'Yogic Diet.' In Bhagwat Gita, Lord Krishna also explained to Arjuna that a vegan yogic diet is mandatory for nurturing the qualities of the mode of goodness conducive to spiritual life. Such people quickly attain spiritual upliftment and thereby get rid of their sin.

The modern lifestyle associated with a non-yogic diet brings suffering accompanied by physical and mental discomforts. A life controlled by the taste of the tongue is always full of pain and various fatal diseases. However, regular yoga practice and spirituality combined with the vegan yogic diet bring good health, mental peace, happiness, and bliss to life.

Various research shows that a healthy yogic diet is important not only for the physiology of the body but also for the significant positive effect on mental health.

There is a lot of debate about the benefits of various diets. This paper seeks to comprehend the concepts of yogic diet, mental health, and the relationship between the two. As a result, this paper provides a detailed logical discussion to justify the overall benefits of a yogic diet on mental health.

**Keywords:** Yogic Diet, Mental Health, Bhagwat Gita, Haṭha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita.

## Introduction

Food is a symbol of life and the existence of living beings. American psychologist Abraham Maslow divided the needs of humans into a five-tier model. He put physiological needs, i.e., food and water, as the primary need, essential for the survival of the human race. He explained that a person could survive easily even when his secondary needs (like security, Safety, Social needs, etc.) are not met, but his primary requirement for an adequate wholesome, nutritious diet is fulfilled.

Food substance (solid or liquid) that living beings take through the mouth and go into the

body to fulfill the lack of energy spent in physical and mental activities is called 'Diet.'

The word "Diet" is derived from the Greek word "diaita," which means "way of life." The Hindi meaning of diet is 'āhāra.' The word āhāra is formed when āñ' suffix and ghañ prefix is added to "hañ haraṇe" dhatu (Matthews, 2015).

A fresh and beneficial diet that coordinates with a person's yoga practice and spiritual upliftment; is consumed unadulterated, i.e., without artificial colors, chemicals, preservatives, or additives, is called Yogic Diet.' To maximize benefit, always consume

this diet in its natural form, i.e., raw, steamed, or lightly cooked.

With the frequently changing life style, People's dietary habits have shifted from healthy foods to fast foods that are high in sugars, oil, spices, saturated fats and other additives. This has resulted in a nutritional deficiency in the diet, which has a direct impact on a person's immune function as well as the physical and mental health.

Many studies have provided that diet is important to mental health in the same way as it is to physical health. The WHO has long said that there is no health without mental health.

WHO has explained health as “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

It further defined mental health as “A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

The critical new understanding that diet is important to both mental and physical health gives us the opportunity to think about public health, prevention and treatment strategies that focus on dietary importance (Madan and Snehi, 2020).

Hence, the objective of this paper is to discuss answers of below questions –

- a) Concept of Yogic Diet?
- b) Benefits of Yogic Diet on Health?
- c) How does diet control the mind?
- d) What quantity of Yogic Diet to consume to stay fit?
- e) The negative effect of a Non-Yogic Diet on Mental Health?

## Literature Review

Data is collected from secondary sources like Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta, Haṭha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, etc. Various scientific studies and surveys conducted by

multiple researchers and organizations are also incorporated to justify this study.

□ Shrimad Bhagwat Gita – It is one of the most important scriptures of Hindu philosophy. This book consists of 18 chapters and 700 verses. This text is in the form of an extensive conversation between Shri Krishna and Arjuna. All chapters of this book deal with various kinds of Yoga. Chapter 17 talks about the type of food and its effect on mental health.

□ Haṭha Yoga Pradipika – It is a Sanskrit text of Hath Yoga written by Swami Svamarama. This text has described the four limbs of Yoga which are also known as ‘Chaturanga Yoga.’ It has four chapters – 1) Asana; 2) Shatkarma and Pranayama; 3) Mudra and Bandha; 4) Dhyana & Samadhi. The fifth chapter, “Yoga Chikitsa,” is not part of four limbs.

In chapter one, Swami Swatmaram has discussed the yogic diet, restricted diet, Mitahara, Over-eating, and fasting.

□ Gherand Samhita - This yogic text describes seven limbs of Yoga known as ‘Saptanga Yoga.’ This text is in the form of an extensive conversation between Maharishi Gherand and ChandKapali. This book has 351 verses explained in seven chapters. In chapter five, Maharishi Gherand has discussed the yogic diet in detail. He mainly divided food into two categories Wholesome and Unwholesome.

### Concept of Yogic Diet?

The importance of food is available in various Upanishads, which say that this universe is originated from the food itself. A few essential quotes from Upanishads are given below -

Mundaka Upanishad (MU.) says that “by tapas, Brahman increases in size from which food is produced; from food, the prana, the mind, the Bhutas the worlds, karma and finally karma fruits were created.”

Taittiriya Upanishad (TU.) says that “from that Self Brahman, produced ether; from ether emerged air; from air fire; from fire water; from water earth. From earth herbs, from herbs food, from food seed, from seed man. Thus, man consists of the essence of food. From food, all creatures of the earth are produced. As food

is the oldest of all beings, therefore it is called panacea)

Food provides new strength and power to the body; a Nutritious diet leads to an increase in age, enthusiasm, memory, energy, etc., and acts as fuel to keep the body healthy, strong, and alive.

Ayurvedic texts say that proper diet is the best medicine “nacāhārasamaṃ kiñcibhaiṣajya” and it can cure diseases without the intake of any medicine “bināpi bhaiṣajairvyādhiḥ pathyādeva nivartate”; hence it is called as Great Medicine “mahābhaiṣajya mucyate” (Maharaj, n.d., p. 1).

The concept of the Yogic diet is available in almost all yogic texts. For example -

HathYog Pradipika (HP) has described Yogic Diet as ‘Mitahara’ (Abstemious Food). Sweet, unctuous food offered to the supreme lord, leaving one-quarter stomach empty, is known as “Mitahara.”

Another well-known Yoga text, “Gherand Samhita (GS),” has discussed the Yogic diet in detail. This text has divided food into two categories Pathya (wholesome) and Apathya (unwholesome).

Wholesome food is easily digestible and beneficial for health. Such food nourishes the body, protects it from diseases, and equalizes the ‘Tridosha.’ On the contrary Unwholesome food causes harm to the body and makes it sick.

Wholesome food is pure, sweet, lubricated, and fills only half the stomach, which is palatable and consumed to please the Supreme God.

HP considered the following food ingredients beneficial for yoga practitioners - Wheat, rice, barley, good corn, milk, Ghee, sugar, butter, sugar candy, honey, dried ginger, patola fruit, the five vegetables, moong, pure water; are beneficial for Yoga Practitioners. The yogi should take nourishing and sweet food mixed with Ghee and milk; it should nourish the “Dhathus” (primary body constituents) and be pleasing and suitable.

Maharishi Gherand says that “A Yogi should eat rice, barley, or wheat. Mudga (mungo dal), Masha (urad dal), Patola, jack fruit, manakachu, Kakkola, jujube, bonduc nut, cucumber, plantain fig, the unripe plantain, the small plantain, the plantain stem, roots,

eggplant, and other medicinal roots and fruits, green & fresh vegetables (balashaka), black vegetable (kal shak), leaves of Patola, the Vastuku shaka and Hima-lochika Shaka”.

Charak Samhita (CS.) described that the food which keeps “Tri-doshas” (Vat, Pitt, Kafa) of the body in a balanced state and equalizes the contrasting doshas are a wholesome food and the contrary substances are unwholesome food.

Similarly, another text, Ashtang Hridayam (AH), says that food polluted with grass, hairs or re-heated, or overloaded with vegetables or grains, very hot or very salty, should not be consumed.

It is essential to mention that the milk prescribed by almost all yogis in the above discussion refers to ‘Cow Milk,’ which is the most sacred and beneficial food for the human body. Ancient scriptures have compared this milk to Nectar.

Rigveda (RV.) has considered cow as the mother of Rudras (Shiva) “mātā ruḍrāṅām” (RV. 8.101.15).

King of demigods “Indra” described Cow milk as Nectar “amṛtaṃ gavāṃ kṣīramityāha” in Mahabharatha-Anushasan Parv.65.44, p. 441.

However, In Manu Smriti (MS) Sage Manu described few situations where a person should avoid cow milk - The milk of the cow that has not passed its ten days “anirdaśāyā goḥ kṣīram” the milk of the irregular cow, as also the milk of the cow whose calf has died “āvikaṃ sandhinīkṣīraṃ vivatsāyāśca goḥ payaḥ” (MS. 5.8, p. 411).

As per scientific studies, cow’s milk, is composed of about 87% water; it also contains, on average, 3%–4% fat, 3.5% protein, about 5% lactose, and 1.2% minerals, with some variation depending on the breed considered (Marangoni et al., 2019).

‘A mild poly-unsaturated fatty acid in cow’s milk, butter and ghee, myelinates nerve fibres with lipid deposition facilitating a better nerve conduction, at the same time keeps the nervous systems tranquil and healthy’ (Bhagal, 2015).

Shri Krishna explains a beautiful composition of a yogic diet and its benefit in Bhagwat Gita (BG). Here, Krishna has divided the food as per the three modes of nature – Sat (Goodness);

Raz (Passion); Tam (Ignorance) “aharas tv api sarvasya tri-vidho bhavati priyah” (BG. 17.7).

Satvik food is one which is juicy, naturally tasteful, mild, and beneficial. It increases life span, inner & outer strength, wisdom, health, happiness, and satisfaction.

Such food neither pull energy out of body nor makes the body feel heavy (Manay and Shadaksharaswamy, 2013, p. 458).

Rajsik foods are very bitter, sour, salty, hot, spicy, dry, and burning. Such foods cause pain, sadness, anxiety, and ill-health.

Such foods stimulate the taste buds, overheating the consumer’s body, leading to ill-health and chronic, degenerative imbalance (Manay and Shadaksharaswamy, 2013, p. 458).

Tamasic foods are those which are stale (cooked more than three hours before consumption), overcooked, putrid, impure, rotten, tasteless and left-over food, i.e., half-eaten by animals.

Such food diminishes our life-force causes feeling of heaviness, lethargy and irritability (Manay and Shadaksharaswamy, 2013, p. 459).

In one research, the ‘Thermogenic Effect of Food’ on psychological mood was studied using the EEG (Electroencephalography) readings. In this study, Satvic foods (obligatory Thermogenesis) produced Alfa readings, which signifies a vibratory state of mental peace and calm, whereas Rajasic food (Adoptative Thermogenesis) induced a negative impact on brain waves resulting in more Beta Waves, causing restlessness and anxiety in the mind (Manay and Shadaksharaswamy, 2013, p. 458).

Famous Sanskrit text Vidur Neeti (VN) has divided diet based on a person’s financial status. Mahatma Vidur says that High-class rich people immersed in the ego of wealth are hardcore non-vegetarians. Middle-class people’s diet is full of milk, curd, and butter. However, poor people use very oily food in their diet.

Rich people are sluggish; hence their digestion power is fragile. On the contrary, poor people are very hardworking; therefore, they can digest whatever they eat. Mahatma Vidur wants to explain that having simple vegetarian food is not enough. Rather post-meal, it is mandatory

for everyone (either rich or poor) to do hard work to get that food digested.

In Chanakya Neeti (CN), great scholar Chanakya described the Ghee (Clarified Butter) as the most potent food. He said, “Flour is ten times more powerful than all other food. Milk has ten times more strength than Flour. Meat has ten times more power than milk. Ghee has ten times more energy than meat. Ghee benefits the body the most. Ghee provides 38 times more power than any other food.

Ghee has great importance in the overall growth of the body and mind. As it is greasy & smooth. Hence, it improves the “Saptadhatus” of the body, i.e., Rasa (Plasma), Rakta (Blood), Mamsa (Muscle), Meda (Fat), Asthi (Bone), Majja (Nerve Tissue), and Sukhra (Semen) “bala-śukra-rasa-śleṣma-medo-majja vivardhanaḥ” (Maharaj, n.d., p. 11).

Chanakya said, “Getting good food along with good digestion power” Bhojyam Bhojanshaktishacham” no less penance and austerities “Naalpasya Tapasah Phalam”(CN. 94, p. 28).

Benefit of Yogic diet on Health? -

In BG. Krishna says A person who takes a balanced diet “yuktāhāra” is free from all pain “bhavati duḥkha-hā” (BG. 6.17).

Krishna says, “A yogi who first offers food in sacrifice and then eats it is free from sins. But a person who cooks food for his taste and enjoyment verily eats sin.”

Hath Yog Pradipika says a Brahmachari who practices Mitahara “Brahmachārī mitāhārī” achieves success within half a year “Abdādūrdhvam bhavedsiddho nātra kāryā vichāranā” (HP. 1.57).

Chandogyopnishad (CU.) says that our digestive system divides our food into three parts. The hardest part comes out of the body as excreta; the more refined part becomes flesh, and the finest part becomes the mind. Pure food makes the mind pure. A pure mind makes memory strong. Strong memory frees a person from all bondages, and he is free from this materialistic world.

Pashupat Bhraman Upanishad (PB.U.) also described the similar benefit of Pure food. It says that the heart becomes pure by the

renunciation of Unwholesome food. By following the strict discipline in food habits, mind (Chitta) automatically becomes disciplined. With this disciplined mind, ignorance vanishes, and knowledge emerges—however, the unwholesome food devoid the living beings from the knowledge of the supreme lord.

As per GS. ‘A yogi who practices Yoga without following a moderate diet suffers from various diseases and doesn’t get any successes.

Maharishi Gherand mentioned that moderation of food “mitāhāram” is necessary for practicing pranayama “prāṇāyāmaṃ ca sādhayet” (GS. 5.2).

Ashtang Hridayam advised about three food habits that a person should renounce as they cause fatal diseases and even causes death –

- a) Samashana – Eating wholesome and unwholesome food together;
- b) Adhyasana – Eating a new meal before the digestion of the previous one;
- c) Viṣamāsana – Overeating or fasting at irregular timings.

The food that we eat converts into five digestive juices/enzymes. However, without the proper digestion of the first meal, if we consume the second meal, the undigested juices of the first meal get mixed with the juices of the second meal, and they imbalance the “Tri-doshas” which ultimately causes dreadful diseases.

Similarly, overeating, especially at bedtime or fasting from morning breakfast, is considered unhealthy .

How does diet control the mind?

The type of diet directly controls the behavior of a person. (Bhagal, 2015, p. 28) cited that “nutrients, when taken as food or in their pure form, can alter the chemical composition of structures in the brain so as to modify brain functions.”

Various research has been conducted to determine the clinical effect of foods compositions on the brain. Few studies are quoted below –

Food rich in amino acids tryptophan, tyrosine, phenylalanine, and methionine is often helpful in treating many mood disorders, including depression (Sathyanarayana Rao et al., 2008).

Food high in sugar, salt, or fat can increase the chances of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, etc. (Hicklin, 2017).

Fresh fruit and vegetables are rich in nutrients and antioxidants. It is reported that fruits or vegetables may modify brain serotonergic status and positively affect mood (Huang et al., 2019).

Overconsumption of diet rich in saturated fats and simple sugars impairs memory” (López-Taboada et al., 2020).

Rock salt advocated in fastening is rich in potassium which helps in neuro tranquillization (Chaturvedi and Kandhan, 2022).

Hence, dietetic chemical composition and purity help in a person’s mental well-being. It is also claimed in various scriptures. For example –

Chandogyopanishad says, “From the purity of food follows the purity nature. When nature is pure, memory becomes firm, which ultimately leads to release from all heart knots”.

Another Upanishad says, ‘Yatha khadyatennam, tatha nigadyate manaha,’ which means thoughts depend upon the type of food consumed. Bhagwat Gita is also in a perfect agreement in this respect. For example, People who follow Satvik diet are very quiet, sacred, stable, rational, and balanced. They always think about their spiritual advancement and public welfare.

People who follow the Rajsik diet are generally very energetic. They are always busy achieving their goals for getting materialistic pleasures. They are mainly interested in power, prestige, position, and prosperity.

People who follow Tamsik diet are generally sluggish, insecure, irrational, unstable & self-centered. They are full of anger, wickedness & aggressive tendencies. They never do anything for the welfare of society. They can neither be happy themselves nor can they see others happy.

What quantity of Yogic Diet to consume to stay fit -?

It is consequential to mention that consuming Yogic Diet is not enough instead, the quantity of diet consumed is additionally significant. Over-eating and over-fasting can be the cause of various physical and mental disorders. As per reports published in NIH (National Institute of Health) Research Matters in 2017, researchers found that eating too much or too little can raise the risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes (Hicklin, 2017).

Over-eating and under-eating depend upon various factors, like the variety of food, nutritional value, etc. For example, if the same food is served daily, the person will certainly lose interest in eating it and under-eat it to satiate his hunger. On the other hand, if a different variety of foods are served daily, a person can eat over and above his daily diet quantity.

Similarly, fat content and the amount of fibre could affect the amount of food consumed. Foods high in fat can be readily overeaten because it contributes to the palatability of foods. Dietary fibre could reduce food intake for several reasons like, high-fibre foods take a longer time to eat and may reduce the digestibility of food, fibre may affect some gastrointestinal hormones that influence food intake, etc. The varied and palatable diets available in affluent societies probably contribute to the high incidence of obesity (Rolls, 1995).

As per WHO, "Energy intake (calories) should be in balance with energy expenditure. To avoid unhealthy weight gain due to overeating, total fat consumption should not exceed 30% of total energy intake" (WHO, 2020).

Fasting, Disordered eating, or Dieting is very common among urban people. Such eating habit is linked to a reduced ability to cope with stressful situations and an increased incidence of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (NEDC, 2018).

During fasting, the metabolic rate goes down. Research has found that starvation has widespread and profound effects on mood and cognitive functioning (Brockmeyer et al., 2012).

Restricted eating, malnourishment, and excessive weight loss can lead to changes in our brain chemistry, resulting in increased symptoms of depression and anxiety (Centre for Clinical Interventions, 2018b).

Research undertaken by the World Health Organisation found that the prevalence of mental health disorders has increased in developed countries alongside the deterioration of the western diet (Altomare et al., 2017).

All yogic texts verbalize the correct amount of diet a person should consume.

Sanskrit text Maha-subhashita-samgraha (Quote#562, p. 96) says, 'Ati sarvatra varjyet' which signifies that the excess of everything is terrible and hence should be avoided. In the context of diet, a person should take only a moderate diet and avoid overeating and fasting as it causes restlessness in the body and mind.

Krishna says A person who does overeating or eats nothing can never attain the status of a yogi "nātyaśnatastu yogo'sti na caikāntamanaśnataḥ ||" (BG. 6.16).

Swami Swatmaram has mentioned overeating "Atyāhārah" as a hindrance in the path of Yoga (HP. 1.15).

Gherand Samhita signifies that "It is precluded for a yogi to eat only once a day or not eating at all. But he can remain without food for three hours" ekāhārahṃ nirāhārahṃ yāmānte ca na kārayet" || (GS. 5.31).

This duration of three hours fluctuates as per the individual's physical & mental stress and the functioning of his digestive system. For example, an old-aged person's appetite is less in comparison to a young guy who is going to school/college. A small child or infant requires food after a gap of two hours. Generally, one should follow the rule of 'Eat when you are starving and drink when you are thirsty' whenever a person violates this, he is subjected to adverse effects (Sharma, 2015).

It further says that a yogi should fill half stomach with food, one quarter with water, and one quarter should be kept empty for practicing Pranayama.

The same quantification is explained in Ashtang Hridayam -

A person should always eat in moderate quantity as it activates the intestine fire required for the digestion of food. Food, either light or hard, should be consumed in the correct quantity for proper digestion. A person should consume heavy foods only until half hunger is satisfied and consume light food until the belly is full. An appropriate quantity is one that digests easily. Eating less food decreases the body's strength, immunity, and growth, which ultimately leads to Vata imbalance disorders. Overeating causes an imbalance of Tri-Doshas. It causes bowel obstruction, which further causes 'Ulcers.' At a later stage, a person is infected with diarrhoea and vomiting simultaneously, also known as 'Cholera Disease.'

Manu Smriti (MS.) says that overeating causes diseases that destroy a person's health and life, and such a person goes to hell.

Shandilya Upanishad (SU.) described that one-fourth of the stomach should be left empty and rest should be filled with oily and sweet food.

Yog kundalini Upanishad (YK. U.) also defined Abstemious Food "mitāhāraścāsanam" (YK.U. 1.2) as sweet and nutritious food, leaving ¼ stomach unfilled. It further says that a yogi should first offer this food to Lord Shiva "śivasamprītyai" then he should consume it by sitting in a correct posture, either Padma or Vajra "āsanam dvividham proktaṃ padmaṃ vajrāsanam tathā "ll (YK. U. 1.4).

The above texts have given utmost importance to "Offering food to God/Supreme Lord." Since the Vedic era, the Hindu's practices the tradition of offering food to God. So, the question arises that why there is a need to offer food to God?

Great sages say that when we first offer food to the Supreme soul with pure devotion, it makes food free from all impurities and transforms into sacrificial food or Prasadam.

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word "Prasadam" is "Mercy." So, when we say "Krishna Prasadam," we refer to Krishna's mercy (Dasa, 2021).

As per the principles of ISKCON temple, Prasadam is the remnants of something which is prepared for the pleasure of Krishna with love & devotion. Because the spiritual Nectar

of Krishna's lips has touched the food, it is no more materialistic now. Instead, it becomes transcendental. However, such offerings to the Supreme Lord should be full of love and devotion. It should not be performed merely as a daily physical routine without any love towards God. The supreme soul accepts even the smallest offering full of devotion. Krishna states, "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, I will accept it" (Dasa, 2021).

One best example in this context is 'MeeraBai,' who had pure devotion and love towards Shri Krishna. When Rana Vikram Singh sent her poison under the pretext of Nectar, Meerabai offered it first to Krishna with her pure devotion and drank it taking the name of Krishna. Miraculously Krishna transformed that poison into real Nectar. This whole episode is written by Sage Nabhaji in his book "Shri Bhaktmal" (Garg, 1960).

Manu Smriti says that worshipped food increases the semen in the body, which thereby increases strength and vigor. However, unworshipped food destroys all these.

It is consequential to mention here that besides having a yogic diet in adequate quantity, a few more significant points need equal attention as they play an essential role in maintaining mental health, i.e., -

- a) Sources of food;
- b) Nutritional Psychiatry;
- c) Why do we need food?

Sources of food - The food acquired through immoral means like stealing or snatching forcibly, and even the money used to buy food is earned through unethical ways like theft, embezzlement, robbery, blackmailing, etc. Such food has a direct negative effect on our minds and soul.

Food obtained from sinful wealth pollutes a person's mind, astuteness, and soul by contaminating the "Manomaya Kosha."

Gherand Samhita says that a yogi should avoid sinful food.

Nutritional Psychiatry (“You are what you eat”)

Chandogyopnishad says that the mind is nourished by food, i.e., The psychological state (Emotions like fear, stress, anger, sadness, happiness, etc.) of a person is directly related to the purity of food.

A Japanese researcher named Masaru Emoto investigated the impact of thoughts on water. He discovered that when precise, concentrated thoughts are directed onto crystals formed in frozen water, they reveal changes. He found that water that has been exposed to pleasant thoughts, loving words, and prayers produces crystal patterns that are beautiful, harmonious, and colorful. On the other hand, negative thoughts cause water to form incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colors.

The same thing happens with the food. In the food preparation cycle, mainly three people are involved – a farmer who grows raw food, a person who cooks that raw food, and a person who serves that food. The “Subtle law of nature” says that “If any of these people’s minds are full of negative thoughts, then the vibrations emanating from such feelings are transmitted into the subtle part of the food, thereby changing the subtle composition of food. Ultimately, eating such intrinsically impure food pollutes the mind and intellect ‘manomay kosh’ of that person, making him mentally sick.

Understand this concept of the “Subtle law of nature” with the example of a painter –

A painting is not just a collection of strokes on a canvas but an expression of the artist’s state of mind, which affects the viewer. Similarly, a cook with a pollutant mind (full of materialism and karma) impures the subtle part of food and ultimately affects the psychology of its consumers.

As a result, in ancient India, cooks were specifically hired from the brahmin community. This was because brahmins were constantly involved in chanting and performing various religious rituals. Positive vibrations from such pious practices were thought to be transferred into the meal, which eventually aids in the spiritual upliftment of the person who consumes that food.

Even if a person with an evil mind invites a good-hearted person for food, he should not accept such an invitation as the host’s evil eye and negative thoughts will make the subtle part of food unwholesome. Its best example is available in ‘Mahabhart,’ where Shri Krishna rejected the Dinner invitation of evil-minded Duryodhana and went to sage Vidur’s house for food and stay.

Various temples like ISKCON follow strict kitchen principles while cooking food for Krishna (Prasadam). Here, purity in the kitchen is not only about hygiene. The positive intentions of the cook, the creation of a ritualized space, the “purity” and guna of ingredients, and the understanding that food is divine grace are also necessary. The kitchen in any ISKCON temple remains an area of high purity and sanctity. It is set away from any polluting activity and cannot be entered by visitors. The kitchen should be absolutely clean, the ingredients pure. Ideally, the Brahman cook should have bathed or showered and wore clean clothes. S(he) should remain Krishna-conscious and absorbed in the loving pastimes of Radha-Shyamasundara. Food preparation, if possible, should be accompanied by the sounds of bhajans (hymns) and chanting. (King, 2012)

Prasadam is therefore sacramental: it has the power to cure the diseases not only of the body but of the soul. Just by eating prasadam, one can become healthy, happy and peaceful” (King, 2012)

Swami Ramsukhdas explains Nutritional Psychology’s concept with the following example - Whenever Kshatriyas / soldiers have to milk the cow, they first bring a calf and leave the dog behind it. Seeing the dog behind his calf, the cow gets angry, and the waves that emanate from this outrageous behavior affect the subtle part of the milk. When soldiers drink this milk, they become dreadful, and this furious behavior is much required to win any war.

Hence, we can say that a cook must keep his mind relaxed and pious while cooking as it directly affects the subtle part of the food.



Why do we need food?

In today's world, people eat just for the pleasure of tongue & to fill their belly. So, are we eating just to keep ourselves alive?

Ancient scriptures say that a person should eat, not just to satiate hunger and enjoyment of taste but for the Supreme's pleasure situated in the heart of all human beings. To get the maximum benefit from food, we should follow some spiritual principles.

Swami Ramsukhdas has described these principles in 4 steps -

Step 1) Wash Legs, Hands, and Mouth with clean/holy water. Sit on a clean sheet facing East or North and offer food to the Supreme lord chanting the following verse - *patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam yo me bhaktyā prayachchhati | tadahaṁ bhaktyupahṛitam aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ* || (BG. 9.26)

Step 2) - Take few drops of Gangajal (holy water of river Ganga) in right hand, do "Aachman" by reciting this verse *brahmārpanam brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam | brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahma-karma-samādhinā* || (BG. 4.24)

Step 3) Take the first bite of food by taking the name of the Supreme Lord. After finishing the meal, recite this verse – *annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaād anna-sambhavaḥ | yajñād bhavati parjanyo yajñaḥ karma-samudbhavaḥ* || (BG. 3.14)

*karma brahmodbhavaṁ vidhi brahmākṣhara-samudbhavam | tasmāt sarva-gataṁ brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam* || (BG. 3.15)

Step 4) Finally, for the proper digestion of food, recite the below verse along with the rotation of nuclei slowly with the middle finger. *ahaṁ vaiśhvānaro bhūtvā prāṇinām deham āśhritaḥ | prāṇāpāna-samāyuktaḥ pachāmy annam chatur-vidham* || (BG. 15.14)

Following these steps, food becomes digestible and healthy. Such food provides inner pleasure, and hunger is satisfied only with a small quantity of food.

The same steps are described by Sage Manu, "A person should always take his food after Achaman. After finishing the meal, he should rinse his mouth, eyes, cavities, etc."

*upaspr̥śya dvijo nityamannamadyāt samāhitaḥ | bhuktvā caupaspr̥śet samyagadbhiḥ khāni ca saṁspr̥śet* || (MS. 2.53, p. 138)

The negative effect of a Non-Yogic Diet on Mental Health?

In today's modern world, delicious and spicy food is the most pleasurable thing people are fond of. Today's food palate consists of vegetarian and non-vegetarian items, including fruits, vegetables, grain, meat, egg, fish, chicken, etc. Though a Non-Vegan diet gives pleasure to the tongue, this pleasure is always short-lived. Such a putrid diet distorts the *ānamaya kōsh*, which ultimately causes various fatal diseases. Shri Krishna also said that Sensual pleasures "sansparśha-jā bhogā" are short-lived "ādyantavantaḥ" (BG. 5.22)

The condition of most slaughterhouses in India is very pathetic. Generally, many animals are kept together in a very cramped state in a small room or area full of excess heat, humidity, dirt, and primitive conditions. Such strange surroundings harm animals' minds and bodies. Even in many cases, animals are kept hungry continuously for a few days before their slaughter. And when these animals are slaughtered, due to pain, fear, and anger, their minds start releasing highly toxic chemicals that work as a slow poison for humans. Modern medical science has also given factual data in cognition to meat consumption and diseases.

WHO (World Health Organization) has strongly recommended fruits and vegetables in daily diet. It says that "In 2017, an estimated 3.9 million deaths worldwide were due to inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption. As per WHO, a non-vegetarian diet causes 159 distinct sorts of infections. For example, Pork (Pig meat) contains a tapeworm named *Taenia Solium*. This tapeworm causes Cysticercosis, the leading cause of 30% of epilepsy cases in many endemic areas where people and roaming pigs live nearby. In high-risk communities, it can be associated with as many as 70% of epilepsy cases. Hence, a person should strictly abstain from eating meat. (WHO, 2022)

All ancient texts like Manusmriti, Vedas, and Puranas have condemned the non-vegetarian diet.

Manusmriti says that a person who doesn't eat meat "na bhakṣayati yo māṁsam" never suffers

from any disease “vyādhibhiṣca na pīḍyate” (MS. 5.50, p. 422). As meat can never be obtained without killing any animal “nākṛtvā prāṇinām himsām māṃsamutpadyate kva cit” hence, a person should avoid meat “māṃsam vivarjayet” (MS.5.48, p. 421).

It further says that all six people involved in the chain of animal slaughter, i.e., one who permits, kills, chops, sells, buys, cooks, serves, and finally eats that meat is, all equal culprits and is considered murderers. anumantā viśasitā nihantā krayavikrayī | saṃskartā copahartā ca khādakaśceti ghātakāḥ || (MS. 5.51, p. 422).

A person who eats flesh just to get himself fat “svamāṃsam paramāṃsena” is the biggest sinner “nyo nāstyapunyaḥkṛt” (MS. 5.52, p. 423) and the person who eats meat in this birth is swallowed by that meat in the next birth “māṃ sa bhakṣayitā'mutra yasya māṃsamihād myaham” (MS. 5.55, p. 423) and such person gets violent death and stuck in the cycle of life and death eternally “vṛthāpaśughnaḥ prāṇnoti pretya janmani janmani” (MS 5.38, p. 418).

but the virtuous fruit of not eating meat “māṃsāni ca na khāded yastayoḥ puṇyaphalaṃ samam” is equivalent to performing ‘Ashavmeda Yajna’ “śvamedhena yo yajeta” (MS.5.53, p. 423).

However, if a person has a strong craving for meat, then he should make an artificial animal statue with clarified butter (Ghee) or flour “kuryād ghr̥tapaśuṃ saṅge kuryāt piṣṭapaśuṃ tathā” but should never kill an animal “na tveva tu vṛthā hantum paśumiccheth kadā cana” (MS.5.37, p. 418).

The famous Tamil text “Tirukkural” (TK.) also has the same views regarding the sin of eating meat. A person who eats flesh to increase his own flesh can never be kind; such a person stuck in hell for eternal time. But not killing any animal for the pleasure of tongue is better than thousand sacrifices done with the offerings of Ghee. And such a person is adored by all creatures with clasped hands.

RigVeda says, “A person who partakes flesh of human or horse and those who kill cows should be beheaded.

Padam Puran (PP) says that eating meat is the biggest sin “māṃse ca bahupāpaṃ syādvārjayetpratipadādiṣu” (PP. 4.21.28)

And those who eat beef are demons “gavāśino durātmāno” and they are born as insects, trees, and ants “kīṭayoniṃ vrajamtyete taravaśca pipīlikāḥ” (PP. 1.76.17).

Atharvaveda (AV) says that a person who eats beef “āmā ca pacate vaśām” his descendants become beggar “apyasya putrānpautrāṃśca yācayate” (AV. 12.4.38, p. 91)

Similarly, Modern age Scholars, Scientists, doctors, etc., have also advocated the benefits of eating a Yogic diet that is purely vegetarian. A few meaningful quotes are-

“Vegetarianism is a greater progress. From the greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension motivated him to become a vegetarian. Flesh-eating is an unprovoked murder.” Benjamin Franklin

“I do not want to make my stomach a graveyard of dead animals.” George Bernard Shaw

“I do not see any reason why animals should be slaughtered to serve as human diet when there are so many substitutes. After all, man can live without meat.” The Dalai Lama

As per an ancient story, once great Ayurvedacharya Maharshi Charak asked a question from Maharshi Vagbhatt “ko ruk, ko ruk, ko ruk?” Means who is healthy? Who is healthy? Who is healthy? (Verma, 2022).

Maharshi Vagbhatt replied, “hitabhuk, mitabhuk, ṛtabhuk” means one who takes only a yogic diet in moderate quantity and that diet is acquired through honest means is considered as healthy.

## Conclusion

Basis the above discussion, we can say that the Yogic diet is not only for yoga practitioners. Instead, it benefits the whole human race to stay fit and active, physically, mentally, emotionally, or psychologically. If followed dedicatedly, such a vegetarian and Satvik diet can immensely help people with a sedentary lifestyle.

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