

Mark L. Vinick, D.C., C.A.S.

Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist (C.A.S.)

President, California Association of Ayurvedic Medicine

Board Certified, American Academy of Pain Management

Board Certified, American Board of Anti-Aging Health Practitioners

326 S. Pacific Coast Hwy., Suite 103 ~ Redondo Beach, CA 90277
(310) 543-1070 ~ Fax (310) 543-0402 ~ www.drmarkvinick.com

AYURVEDIC FUNDAMENTALS FOR HEALTHY EATING

“ Without proper diet, medicine is of no use.

With proper diet, medicine is of no need.”

-ancient Ayurvedic proverb

The complete digestion and assimilation of food is essential to optimal health. It is just as important as what we eat. If digestion is disturbed, even the best diet will not provide proper nutrition. The following points are encapsulations of wisdom from the ancient Science of Life- Ayurveda.

QUALITIES OF FOODS:

- Choose organic foods as much as possible.
- Avoid: frozen, canned, processed, and genetically engineered foods.
- Avoid fake foods with little nutritional value, refined white flour, white sugar, margarine, preservatives, artificial flavors, and colors.
- Avoid leftovers, either cold out of the refrigerator, or reheated.
- Cook foods slowly, on a lower heat, ie. gently, not violently, no microwave.
- Use fresh, ripe fruits and veggies.
- Eat fresh food that is freshly prepared.
- Eat a wide variety of seasonal, wholesome foods.
- Choose foods that create balance for you according to the season, taking into account your specific imbalance and Ayurvedic body type.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Eat according to your hunger level. Avoid eating when not hungry, and do not delay or skip meals.
- Eat at approximately the same time every day.
- Breakfast should be light, just enough to get you to lunch. Stewed apples or pears with a few whole cloves and cinnamon is an excellent early breakfast. Can be followed with some hot whole grain cereal, or oatmeal.
- Lunch should be the largest, most substantial meal of the day. It should include ample protein, and fuel your activities throughout the day. Ideally it should be taken between 12 Noon and 1:30 p.m.
- Dinner should be light also, three hours before bed. It should be just enough to get you through your evening activities, preferably relaxing ones, so that you are not hungry when you retire for the day.
- Chew your food thoroughly, and eat at a moderate pace. Remember that digestion begins in the mouth, and that the stomach has no teeth.
- Do not over or under eat. Eat to about $\frac{3}{4}$ capacity, i.e. two cupped handfuls, or 6.5 out of a scale of 0-10.
- Wait until the previous meal is digested before eating again. This usually occurs within 3-6 hours.
- Include all 6 tastes in each meal: sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, and astringent. Each taste feeds the body, mind, senses, and spirit in its own unique way.

- Eat in a settled, quiet atmosphere. Avoid distractions such as reading, T.V., or driving. Allow your mind and body to focus on the process of enjoying the flavors, textures, and aromas of your food.
- Sip warm or room temperature liquids during meals. More or less depending upon the dryness of the food. Do not suppress your digestive fire with ice cold food or liquids.
- Sit comfortably for several minutes (five to ten) after finishing a meal. This allows the digestive process to get underway without disruption. Take the time to enjoy the pleasant feeling of satiation.
- Take a short walk ten minutes after a meal. This will help your body to digest the meal more efficiently. The traditional recommendation is at least 100 steps.
- Milk should be enjoyed either alone or with other sweet tastes. It is best raw, at least organic. It should be briefly boiled with a pinch of spice, such as cinnamon, ginger, or turmeric, and consumed warm. Milk should never be taken with meat, fish, sour foods, vegetables, salt, or eggs.
- Honey should never be heated in any way, either by cooking, baking or adding it to hot beverages. Ayurveda maintains that when heated honey is metabolized by the body it creates a toxic effect in the tissues. Once a hot beverage has cooled to below 104 degrees, raw honey may be added to it.
- Enjoy freshly prepared fruit and vegetable juices on a daily basis. While raw vegetables can be aggravating to Vata, juices are an excellent source of nutrition, and Prana (vital life energy).
- Ayurveda generally recommends a lacto-vegetarian diet for most people, although there are exceptions to this rule. If one is desiring to transition to a vegetarian diet, it's best to do so gradually. Eliminate red meat first. Poultry should be organic, and fish should be wild, not farmed. The occasional use of chicken, turkey, and fish may be desirable for some individuals, depending upon their particular condition.
- Use sweet juicy fruits such as pears, plums, or grapes for snacks. Also raw sunflower seeds, almonds, walnuts, and raisins (equal proportions) make an excellent, nourishing, light snack. Soak overnight in spring water, drain, and carry in a zip lock bag for a convenient light, nutritious snack.
- Avoid the use of refined white sugar. Instead favor (in moderation) other natural sweeteners such as: Agave (from cactus), Rapadura, Sucanet, Date sugar, Pure Maple sugar, etc.
- Avoid cold foods and drinks, they greatly interfere with digestion and increase toxins in the physiology.
- Carbonated beverages should be avoided as they aggravate Vata and diminish "Ojas" (the basis of immunity).
- Caffeine is also very aggravating to both Vata and Pitta. With overuse it significantly imbalances the physiology. Coffee is highest in caffeine, followed next by black tea. Green tea is lower, and white tea is the lowest in caffeine while still maintaining the other health benefits of tea in general.

THE PROPER USE OF SPICES:

Two factors are very important in food preparation. The first is to begin with the best quality food, ie. organic, whole foods that are freshly prepared. The second factor relates to our process of digestion and assimilation, or how effectively our body transforms what we have eaten into healthy tissues. Ayurveda refers to this quality as "Agni", the digestive "fire" that transforms the food into our body tissues. This is where spices play an important role in our health. They help us maintain a healthy, balanced Agni. The heavier the food (ie. high in protein, fat, or sweet) the more important it is to spice it properly. Without spices, these foods will quickly produce Ama (toxicity), that will result in heaviness and blockages of the micro-circulatory channels (shrotas) and physiology.

Ayurveda has particularly emphasized the subtle, and yet, incredible healing properties of herbs and spices that are readily available and can be used on a daily basis. The following easily obtainable spices are possibly some of the best sources of botanical healing available today.

PROPERTIES OF SPECIFIC SPICES:

- A. Salt-** Salt is one of the six basic tastes and everyone requires some salt on a daily basis. Natural rock salt is the best. The black (red or pinkish color) varieties have a high sulfur content but are too heating for most people. To test, place a pinch on your tongue, the sharper and more irritating it is, the less desirable it is. The best way to use salt is to cook it, near the end, into the watery portion of the food rather than sprinkling it on the food afterwards.
- B. Pepper-** Pepper is pungent in taste, stimulates the digestive process, and is cleansing. Since it is so heating, only a very small amount is required. Pepper is best cooked into either organic extra virgin olive oil, or organic ghee. This allows it to be carried most efficiently into the tissues. Pepper increases the absorption of other nutrients, spices, and herbs. It also passes thru the blood-brain barrier. Since the brain itself is over 50% fat, this is an excellent way of providing nourishment to the brain.
- C. Fresh Green Herbs-** These are best used in their fresh form (found in the produce section of the grocery store), rather than the dried form in the spice bottles. Since they are heat sensitive, it's best to add them at the end of the cooking process and cook for only a minute or so.
- 1) Basil-** Basil is purifying and cleansing. It clears the lungs, and uplifts the mind. A tea made from the fresh leaves steeped in hot water is useful for a chronic cough, cold, allergies, or asthma.
 - 2) Cilantro-** Cilantro is cooling, and so is excellent for Pitta types, and also in the hot summer months. It is useful for all kinds of skin rashes, used both internally and externally. It is also specific for helping to detoxify heavy metals in the physiology.
- D. Sweet Spices-** Some spices are particularly well suited for use in sweet foods and desserts. These foods are typically heavy, and high in carbohydrates and fats. These spices help digestion, assimilation and the metabolism in general.
- 1) Cardamon-** Cardamon is used primarily in milk and milk desserts. It helps to reduce mucous production, and stimulates digestion. It also enhances fat metabolism.
 - 2) Cinnamon-** Cinnamon helps in the assimilation of nutrients into the tissues of the body. It also is known to enhance sugar metabolism.
 - 3) Clove-** Clove is ideal for helping to increase the digestive fire (Agni) without overheating the system. It is best used for this purpose cooked into stewed apples, and taken first thing in the morning.
 - 4) Saffron-** Saffron is a wonderful nourishing spice that builds and strengthens all the tissues of the body. It is especially good for the blood, heart, and reproductive tissues, enhancing fertility. Use only a few strands in each dish. Use in milk, milk sweets, rice, etc.
- E. Traditional Indian Spices-** These spices are known especially to help digestion, assimilation, metabolism, and decrease the heaviness (kapha) of foods. They are widely used as they provide numerous health benefits.
- 1) Coriander-** Coriander is the seed of the Cilantro plant. It is one of the few spices that stimulate digestion while not aggravating Pitta, due to its cool nature. It specifically effects the digestive, respiratory, and urinary systems. The toasted seeds are useful in nausea, and is safe in pregnancy.
 - 2) Cumin-** Cumin stimulates digestion, helps reduce gas, and is diuretic. It also has antimicrobial qualities, and mixed with yoghurt and water is useful for diarrhea, abdominal pain, and distention.
 - 3) Fennel-** Fennel is similar to Coriander in that it stimulates digestion, and is cool in nature. It helps reduce gas, is diuretic, and calms the nervous system. Fennel increases fertility in women.

REFERENCES:

Frawley, David, and Vasant Lad, *THE YOGA OF HERBS*, Santa Fe, New Mexico: Lotus Press, 1988.

Lonsdorf, Nancy, Ayurveda ebook.

Physicians Desk Reference, *PDR FOR HERBAL MEDICINE*, Montvale, N.J: Thomson Medical Economics, 2000.

Mishra, Vaidya R.K., Personal conversations, workshops, and collected writings.

Mishra, Vaidya R.K., and Hari Sharma, *THE ANSWER TO CANCER*, New York, N.Y.: SelectBooks, Inc., 2002.

Sharma, R.K., Bhagwan Dash, *CARAKA SAMHITA*, trans., Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, 1997.

Disclaimer: This information is provided for educational purposes only. It should not be taken or construed as a treatment for any medical condition. Always consult with a qualified health care professional.