

**Practical Tid Bits:
The Yogic Diet
By Reverend Jaganath Carrera**

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When possible, have your main meal at midday. It is when the digestive system is at its strongest.

Keep your meals tasty, but simple. Learn to take pleasure in the natural taste of whole foods without too always trying to improve it with too many spices and flavors. Enjoy the taste, texture, colors, aromas, and temperatures of your meal. Mother Nature will be pleased to see your delight in Her gifts.

Food that is not digested completely creates a kind of viscous sludge that hampers normal functioning of the body's systems, weakens immunity, and decreases energy.

Keep in mind what Master Sivanandaji often said, "Hunger is the best sauce."

Finish your last meal of the day at least 5 hours before going to bed. This way you ensure that the food is out of the stomach and small intestine. You will sleep better, and food will digest better as well.

Be careful with dairy. Many adults cannot digest it well. Dairy; or any other food that is not digested increases the toxic load in the system and creates excess mucous.

Drinking alcohol is not recommended for spiritual seekers (you'll find the same guidelines in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, for example). It makes it harder to have a clear, focused mind by making more sluggish and foggy.

A vegetarian diet is the least violent way to eat. It causes the least suffering and pain.

Dark leafy greens should be central to a yogi's diet. They help alkalize the body, remove toxins, bring the sun's energy to us in the form of chlorophyll, and are easy to digest.

Heating oil to over 120 degrees makes it hard to digest. Keep deep frying to a minimum, and when sautéing, use the least amount of oil you can or try sautéing using vegetable broth. You can drizzle some oil on the food after it's cooked.

Raw foods have the highest nutrient value and enzymatic content. Those with weaker digestion should be careful of eating too much raw food. Gradually increase the amount of raw food in your diet as your digestion gets stronger.

As a general guideline, keep meals simple. It is better for digestion and assimilation. In general, try not to have more than 3 items on your dinner plate: a vegetable, a whole carbohydrate, and a protein; such as lentils, tofu, or tempeh.

It's generally not what you occasionally eat that has the greatest impact on our health; it is what you regularly eat.

It is generally better to not make dairy products the center of your diet. It is also recommended that any dairy that you eat be imported. Most dairy products made in this country have a high level of mucous and pus in it due to milking cows that are sick.

Goat's milk products are easier to digest than cow's milk. Fermented dairy products like yogurt or buttermilk are also easier to digest.

Eat carbohydrates that are as whole and natural as possible. Whole grain flours are better than refined flours, but whole grains – brown rice, millet, and quinoa are even better.

To increase the nutrition and digestibility of any grain, soak it for 20 – 48 hours. This begins the germination process. Nutrients are increased by as much as 10 times. After germinating the grains, rinse them well and cook as usual.

Cooking grains with some vegetables increases its digestibility. You can add sliced celery, carrots, peas, cut green beans, or zucchini, for example. For an extra immune boost, you can also add dried shitake mushrooms to the pot.

Sea vegetables are superfoods. Find ways to add some to your diet several times a week. They are highly nutritious, easy to digest, protect the thyroid.

Soak cut veggies after washing them for 20 – 40 minutes. Just as watering cut flowers keeps them fresh, soaking veggies – especially leafy greens – revives them. If you add a little apple cider vinegar to the water, it also helps remove pesticide and insecticide residues.

Ginger, toasted mustard seeds, fennel seeds, cinnamon, cumin, coriander, and red pepper are good digestive aids.

Raw sauerkraut or kimchi (Korean sauerkraut with ginger and hot red pepper) are wonderful digestive aids and can be used as a supplement (a tablespoon or two a day), or eaten as an accompaniment to many meals. Try having it everyday or at least 4 or 5 times a week.

A tablespoon of apple cider vinegar or umeboshi vinegar dissolved in 6 ounces of water and taken 30 minutes before a meal will increase digestive power by boosting hydrochloric acid levels in the stomach. It is noteworthy that many people who suffer from acid reflux, have it due to low levels of hydrochloric acid. The food doesn't break down well in the stomach and the body reacts by secreting too much acid.

Cayenne pepper helps activate other herbs so that you get more benefit from them.

Use sea salt. It has more minerals and is more alkaline than regular table salt.

Chickpeas, aduki beans, red lentils, and split mung beans are the most digestible and nutritious of the legumes.

The vibration of the cook strongly affects the value of the food we eat. If you are cooking while upset, those negative vibrations not only affect the digestibility of the food, but are absorbed by everyone who eats it. It can really cause bouts of irritability, anxiety or depression in the diners. That is one reason why food eaten at restaurants, though tasty, can be hard to digest. If you are upset while cooking, take a break and calm down before resuming. On the other hand, food prepared with love and mindfulness creates health and wellbeing.

Gurudev Satchidanandaji often reminded us: “Better to fast than to eat fast.” Chew your foods well and don’t glug down liquids either. Let the digestive process begin where it is supposed to: in the mouth.

Having conversations or watching TV while eating is not the best idea. We don’t appreciate the taste of the food and we are not likely to notice when our body tells us we’ve eaten enough.

Cold foods depress digestive fire, lower immunity, and make it harder to focus the mind. Ice cold drinks should be sipped, with the mouth warming the liquid before it is swallowed. The same is true when eating cold foods, like ice cream.

You don’t have to have dessert with every meal. Once or twice a week and for special occasions is fine.

When you cook with honey, it becomes inorganic and not easily digested. You can stir honey into tea or use it on other warm dishes after they’re cooked. Instead, use agave nectar, maple syrup, or date sugar in your cooking.

It isn’t necessary to have a drink with a meal. It dilutes digestive juice, making digestion more difficult. Cold drinks are the worst. Stay away from them while eating. A cup of warm herbal tea after eating is fine.

Be gentle with caffeine. Too much can really weaken the adrenals. The equivalent of one cup of coffee per day is OK, but it’s even better to stay away from caffeine.

A balanced vegetarian diet, with plenty of dark leafy greens and germinated whole grains help alkalize the system. Alkalizing the system is important for a whole host of reasons – the body functions much better if it is not overly acidic. This is important for women concerned about osteoporosis. If the body is too acidic, it will leach calcium from the

bones to neutralize it. That is why in cultures that eat little or no meat (and some kind of fermented pickle as well), have low incidences of osteoporosis (until they become influenced by our heavily meat and protein centered Western diet).

Saying grace or a meal prayer before eating is not only a wonderful spiritual practice, in which we remind ourselves of where the food comes from and express our gratitude, but the short, meditative pause it gives us, makes for better digestion.

Shop with love, cook with love, serve with love, eat with love.