



AYURVEDA'S TOOLS FOR CULTIVATING SATISFACTION

The power of a satisfying meal

For too many of us, the day begins at the computer – reading emails and breaking news as we drink our tea or coffee and eat something we scarcely notice for breakfast. Lunch can be much the same: meeting colleagues for a power lunch or dashing off to meet a friend for a heart to heart talk. Alternatively, you may be sitting at your desk eating lunch while searching the internet, making phone calls or reading over a proposal. We hardly give any attention to experiencing the food as we eat it. It is the food that gives us energy for all our activities, yet our attention is somewhere else. When you miss that simple satisfaction that your food was ready to share with you, all too often you find yourself looking for that juicy satisfaction a little while later: a cookie, a snack, another cup of coffee, a cigarette, a lively magazine, a piece of juicy gossip.

Ayurveda places so much importance on eating our meals in a satisfying way because it is a key not only to our deeper nourishment, but also de-fueling the cycle of addictions before it overpowers us. Ayurveda gives us both clear guidelines on how to eat in order to derive satisfaction, and tells us about foods and spices that can really help strengthen your mind and build your resolve. We all meet with challenges and disappointments, frustrations and losses in life. But the more resilient we have become through cultivating the power of satisfaction and inner resolve, the better equipped we are to handle these situations without falling prey to the snowballing power of little addictions that get out of hand and overpower us.

The principles of Ayurveda help us understand that even if we are eating what we believe to be the right number of calories and carbohydrates, vitamins and antioxidants, the missing ingredient is typically satisfaction. We are missing the profound nourishment that our body, mind, and spirit get from the satisfaction of truly relishing a balanced meal. We are missing those lingering moments of enjoying the beauty and fragrance, the colors and subtle flavors that give us energy and happiness and make even a simple meal so satisfying. We are missing that simple fulfillment that helps us keep unwanted desires from imposing their presence on us. Dissatisfaction is their ally.

We associate satisfaction with overeating. However, when we relish our food with focus, understanding, and delight, it actually helps us put wholesome parameters around our eating. Alternatively, we think of finding satisfaction in our meals as an indulgence, something that implies eating heavy, rich food instead. Yet a simple, health-promoting meal can be immensely satisfying if it balanced from the Ayurvedic perspective and eaten in the right way.

Breaking the Pattern of Forming Unhealthy Habits

Ayurveda tells us that the human body will always try to maintain the equilibrium of health. Our role is to support it. Our bodies do not create unhealthy habits; WE cultivate them; we subconsciously nurture them and encourage them to grow. Nevertheless, before we realize it, they can take charge of our mind and then our body. In addition, it is we who have to struggle so hard to get rid of them. One day it is a seemingly innocent bag of potato chips and chocolate bar because lunch wasn't very exciting and work was frustrating.

Months later, you notice you are in the habit of eating lots of snack food and people think of you as a chocoholic, not realizing you are hooked on all that extra salt and sugar.

One of our great allies is our mind and intellect. The greater our understanding and inner resilience, the better equipped we are to understand our own bodies and to digest the ups and downs of life. Nurturing the strength of the mind is vital.

People say they smoke cigarettes for various reasons. Some say that smoking a cigarette in the morning gives them better bowel movement. Others say they use cigarettes as stress busters, and to feel great. However, smoking does not address the root cause of constipation, stress or low self-worth, and instead sets new problems in motion in the body. There is no need to spoil your precious lungs in the name of relieving constipation, which can be resolved in many more benign ways, or to relieve stress, which can be treated so much better with yoga and meditation. We need to understand such messages that our bodies send us because they are measures to keep the body working immaculately, not cries for abuse.

When we feel thirsty, it is the body that needs water. It needs sufficient moisture to perform all the bodily functions smoothly. Instead of replenishing the body with water, if we treat this as an excuse to drink a few glasses of chilled beer, the body is going to react in ultimately instead of feeling refreshed and rejuvenated, you feel groggy, heavy, potentially nauseous – and very thirsty. We need to understand exactly what the body needs and act accordingly.

Many smokers get a desire for a cigarette after eating beyond their capacity. The heaviness one feels after large, rich meal pushes a bodily desire to feel lighter. Smokers associate this with a need for nicotine, when actually a short walk could have helped more, or chewing on some digestive spices. However, we do not think about the real message the body is giving us, because we are enslaved to that pattern of smoking. Similarly, getting up late in the morning is another thing that causes a feeling of heaviness. For smokers, that again translates into looking for lightness through nicotine – rather than doing a few

gentle rounds of Suryanamaskar, Sun Salutations, to energize the body, mind and spirit at the start of the day.

Other people worry that they are addicted to coffee and tea. However, often it is more of an addiction to one's own high-paced lifestyle that goes on late into the night.

Here we are looking at some of the things that set patterns of addictive habits in motion. Many people cite tragedy, injustice, abuse, failure, bad company, or frustration with life as the trigger for an addiction. Yet we find that many other people face these same circumstances with greater inner resilience. Ayurveda gives us the knowledge for building this inner resilience in simple, everyday ways that become powerful inner allies.

Why does Ayurveda make such a science of how to eat our meals?

According to Ayurveda, a meal should nourish not only the body but also the mind and spirit. Not only the food but also the way we eat has the power to promote healing and wellbeing at every level.

The sages of Ayurveda have described in detail the most ideal way to eat our meals. From the prayers to the atmosphere, from the sequence and combinations of foods to the role of water, from the state of body and mind to the state of the food: everything has been elaborated for the purpose of deriving the ultimate benefit for the body, mind and spirit.

For example, the meal should begin with a relaxed state of mind that helps create a satisfying atmosphere. At the very least, we can put our work aside, turn off the TV and give the food our full attention. If you have to eat in an office cubicle, try closing your eyes as you chew your food, so you can really taste it. Try listening to some calm, uplifting music as you eat, if there is noise or distracting conversation in the background.

Before you begin eating, pause for a moment to notice the colors and aromas of the food. The aromas will not only help set the digestive fire in motion, they are also pleasing. As you enjoy the food for a moment with your eyes and nose, it's natural to feel a sense of gratitude towards the food that it about to infuse you with fresh energy, perhaps even towards the generosity of Mother Nature and the farmers who cultivated the ingredients of this meal. It is a moment of connection with nature

and humankind, so even if we are sitting alone, we experience a sense of community. We cannot underestimate these connections. They have a lot of potential to keep us away from the dissatisfaction that can grow in a pattern of addictions.

Ayurveda recommends that our meals should contain a little of all six tastes: sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent in some or the other form. This is necessary to maintain the equilibrium of body and digest the meal efficiently, as well as provide natural satisfaction. Often people try to cut out certain tastes, thinking mistakenly that pungent spices, for example, are not good for you when in fact in moderation they can aid digestion significantly. Or they cut out sweets altogether, only to find a craving for them building up.

Foods to Nourish the Mind and Nurture Satisfaction

- According to Ayurveda, almonds and walnut have the capacity to nourish and impart strength to our mind. Eating a handful of these nuts every day helps nourish the intellect, courage and memory.
- Chewing fennel seeds is a marvelous way to end meals, because they help to calm sweet tooth cravings at the end of a meal, along with the urge to have coffee or to going on nibbling. Fennel seeds are digestive in nature and help in digestive functions, along with creating a sense of satisfaction after meals.
- Freshly prepared buttermilk is such another healthy food that gives satiety at the end of a meal.
- Spices like cumin seeds, turmeric, and saffron help to keep the body physiology and the mind healthy. Using a little of them in your cooking is a beneficial habit.

Cultivating Satisfaction at its Source

According to Ayurveda, the best practice for cultivating satisfaction at its source is meditation. This connects the body, mind and soul. It allows you to develop the subtlety and clarity to understand the true desires of soul and the body, to perceive the emptiness you are trying to fill through your habits and indulgences. Feeling guilty and fearful makes the mind weak and subconsciously takes us close to the habits we know we should lose. Meditation fills the mind with courage and focus, which are keys to staying on the path that leads to health. In addition, meditation cultivates deep, inner satisfaction.

Strengthen the body and mind with yoga, going for regular walks, and by practicing Surya-namaskar, Sun Salutations is an important form of exercise that helps to make mind and body stronger.

Getting up early and enjoy the early morning sunrays and sounds of the birds. This will help you to eliminate the previous day's food early in the day, cleansing of body and mind, as well as giving you easy access to a few moments of joy and satisfaction. It can give you a daily dose of sattva – fresh, inspired yet calm state of mind -- from nature that helps you enjoy every small thing you are doing.

By cultivating even one simple practice like eating a satisfying meal every day, we can set up a pattern of deriving satisfaction and joy in many areas in life. Even amidst our fast-paced lives, we can learn to savor the moment when we are with friends and family, amidst nature, breathing in fresh air, playing with a child, or enjoying a work of art. This becomes a foundation of satisfaction in your life, boosting the immunity of your mind and emotions. It enables you to weather life's challenges and truly enjoy life's gifts.



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