

Ayurveda - Health notes

Diet & Digestion

DIET & DIGESTION TOPIC: Nine Dietary Must-Do's for 2003

The single most important thing you can do for your health every day of the year is to eat wisely. "Food is just as, or even more, powerful than medicine", according to Maharishi Ayurveda. "If you do not eat the right foods, and do not follow good eating habits, medicine won't be of much use in recouping health. On the other hand, if you eat the right foods for your physiology, and follow a good routine that enhances digestion, your body will not need medicine for the most part. There is a traditional saying in ayurveda--Annaha Brahmaha--"Food is God." That is how important ayurveda considers diet."

Here are nine dietary suggestions from Maharishi Ayurveda for 2005:

- * Eat naturally intelligent foods.**

Did you know that many of the chemicals and pesticides used in growing foods have been linked to numerous diseases? Processed foods, genetically modified foods, and foods to which additives or artificial preservatives have been added are no longer alive with the intelligence of nature. According to ayurveda, the human physiology is a reflection of the laws of the universe, and the more in tune our lives are with nature, the healthier we are likely to be. Our body possesses the natural intelligence to process those foods best that are closest to nature - whole grains, organically grown vegetables and fruits, wildcrafted herbs. Help your digestion function optimally by choosing organic foods when possible - your health is worth the added effort and cost.
- * Shun food fads.**

Every day the media report a new research study on a specific food or drink or a new diet that is guaranteed to work. Keeping up with the latest on what to eat or how or when can be a challenge. "After all that, what works for a million other people may still not be right for you, Listen to your own physiology, and include a sensible mix of various types of foods in your diet so that you are getting the nutrition your body needs." The recommended midday ayurvedic meal includes whole grains, lentils, vegetables cooked with spices and lassi, a drink made by combining fresh yogurt with water, for balanced nourishment. "Rotate your menus," advises Dr Donn Brennan . "Vary cooking methods - sauté, steam, boil, roast, bake - eating should be an adventure, not a chore." Food fads and roller-coaster diets end up doing more harm than good, starving the body of balanced nutrition and nourishment needed to build healthy cells and tissues.
- * Opt for lots of fruits and vegetables.**

Fruits and vegetables contain lots of phytonutrients, and a variety of senses-pleasing colors, tastes and textures. Ayurveda has always recommended eating lots of fruits and vegetables, not only for their nutritional value, but also because they are fine natural internal cleansers. Modern research concurs that fruits and vegetables are powerful disease-prevention foods--in fact, it is now recommended that you eat nine servings of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables a day to prevent cancer and other free radical induced diseases. The specific food guidelines for Vata, Pitta and Kapha at <http://www.mapi.com> can help you pick a variety of fruits and vegetables suited to your physiology and the season. Vegetables do not have necessarily have to be cooked as separate dishes - add them to grains, stuff them in breads, toss them in stews and soups-there's always room for your favorite veggies in every dish. Start your day with stewed apples or pears. Eat a handful of berries for your mid-afternoon snack.
- * Be spice-wise.**

Why choose mustard and ketchup to tickle your palate at every meal when there is a world of aromatic spices to choose from? Spices not only add flavor and aroma; they

world of aromatic spices to choose from? Spices not only add flavor and aroma; they also bring therapeutic value to your meal. "There are over a thousand research studies that have been done just on turmeric," says Dr Brennan. "Spices help boost natural immunity, and most of them rev up your digestion so that your body is better able to absorb and assimilate the nutrients from the foods you eat." If you are new to the world of spices and aren't quite sure what to choose, try one of the ready-to-use Churnas from Maharishi Ayurveda.

* Give your digestive system a break. According to ayurveda, the build-up of ama-digestive toxins-in the physiology is the root cause of most disorders. That's why ayurveda recommends internal cleansing at every change of seasons for optimal health. Detoxing is particularly recommended in the early spring, because that is the time nature starts the annual cycle of regeneration as well. During internal cleansing, eat light yet nourishing foods such as mung bean soup or kitcheree and drink lots of warm water through the day. Sip detoxifying tea or ama pachana water - for recipes, visit the foods section at <http://www.mapi.com>. Fresh, sweet juicy fruits are excellent cleansers. Take Elim-Tox or Detox-Pitta from Maharishi Ayurveda for gentle full-body cleansing and Herbal Cleanse or Triphala with Rose to aid elimination. Periodic internal cleansing gets rid of accumulated junk from inside the body and revs up the digestion for another season.

Drink to your health.

* Avoid caffeine, alcohol and carbonated soft drinks and switch to life-giving, vitality-boosting beverages this year. Start with water, that most basic yet most overlooked drink-drinking lots of water through the day helps to rehydrate your system and flush toxins out of the body. Water that has been boiled and cooled has the added healing element of fire in it. Don't drink water ice-cold--if you have a lot of Pitta to balance, drink it cool, otherwise room temperature or warm water is best. Spiking your drinking water with herbs and spices suited to your physiology or a mix of herbs and whole spices designed to correct a specific imbalance can enhance the healing quality of the water you drink. Raja's Cup from Maharishi Ayurveda comes with antioxidant power as well as rich coffee flavor, Almond Energy offers a quick pick-me-up when you are feeling fatigued, and a wide range of therapeutic Herbal Teas offers comfort any time of day or night. At bedtime, drink a cup of warm milk (boil and cool it for added digestibility) blended with a spoonful of Rose Petal Preserve or with a pinch of cardamom or nutmeg to aid sleep.

Cultivate good eating habits.

* Our lifestyle these days is generally not conducive to good digestion. Eating on the go, eating while working, skipping meals and eating "junk" foods are all too common improper eating habits. You can add life to your years as well as years to your life by following a good eating routine. Eat three regular meals at about the same times each day. Make lunch your main meal of the day--eating a heavy meal at night taxes your digestion and disrupts sleep. Cook and eat fresh food--leftovers are "dead" foods from the perspective of ayurveda, offering only substance, not sustenance. Practice deep breathing for a couple of minutes before you start a meal. Say thanks for the food you eat. Sit quietly for a few minutes after a meal. Small things, but they add up to good health and longevity.

Eat for your soul.

* Total health goes beyond physical wellness to well-being in mind, spirit, emotions and senses as well. According to ayurveda, the food you eat can nourish or vitiate all of these aspects of health, not just your physical health. Cooking or eating when you are angry or stressed can turn the food into poison. Cooking and eating in a saatvic atmosphere, on the other hand, turns the food into nectar. Pleasant aromatherapy, soothing or uplifting music playing softly in the background, a tidy, cheerful dining table, and the nurturing company of friends or family can make mealtimes nourishing for your mind, emotions, senses and spirit. Try eating in silence sometimes--the total focus on your food can turn the meal into a feast, no matter how simple the fare. You'll find yourself relishing colors, textures, aromas and flavors in an eating experience that is optimal for health.

**Experiment.**

If you find yourself eating the same dishes several times a week, or your food shopping-list has the same items in it every time you shop, you need to break out of the rut you are in, and experiment with new foods and flavors. Resolve to try at least one new recipe a week - involving your spouse, significant other or family in meal-planning and preparing foods or cooking can often make cooking and eating more fun. If you have a favorite vegetable or grain you like to eat often, try preparing it differently each time or combining it with other grains, vegetables or herbs for variety. Once or twice a week, create a healthy dish from another part of the world--Miriam Hospodar's Heaven's Banquet contains over 700 recipes from all over the world.