

## FOOD FOR CONSCIOUSNESS

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A healthy mind lives in a healthy body, and a healthy body depends on what we eat: "You are what you eat." Or more precisely, what you eat goes to make up the cells of your body, and the cells of your body affect your mind.

That's the main reason why a vegetarian diet is good for the body and good for the mind. Here's a more comprehensive rundown of the reasons for being vegetarian:

\* It costs about ten times more to produce the same amount of meat protein as vegetable protein. That's a cost to society, considering there are enough resources in the world for every human being to live at current middle-class American standards. If everyone ate only half as much meat, it would release enough food reserves to feed the entire developing world.

\* Meat production uses 17 times more land and 8 times more water. That's a cost to the environment.

\* Animals do actually suffer when they're killed, not to mention their daily suffering in the cramped and artificial conditions of 'factory-farms'. And yes, contrary to Western religious teaching, as with all things (animate or inanimate) they do actually have fundamental consciousness (as with all things whether that consciousness be latent or dormant). The fundamental consciousness of any entity may be called the soul. George Bernard Shaw once remarked, "Animals are my friends, and I don't eat my friends!" Unit consciousness can be defined as that witnessing entity which is not the former of any actions and so remains unchanged as a witnessing entity only. Its qualified form is the subtle I-feeling (the feeling of existence), followed by the sense of the doer-I or doership, and then the results of doing take the form of the expressed mind or objectivated mind.

\* Vegetarian food is better for the body. Many big-time Western diseases are caused by meat and the constipation it causes. Also the toxins, hormones and chemicals used to produce it. People often ask: where do you get your protein from? Well vegetable protein such as in beans, dairy products, nuts and seeds is proportionately higher than in meat, and much easier for the body to digest and absorb. And the myth about meat giving more physical strength can easily be ruled out when you consider that the elephant is the strongest creature in the world - and vegetarian. Many athletes are now switching to vegetarianism. The tortoise is one of the longest-living creatures, and it's also vegetarian. The Hunza people - vegetarians - have the longest lifespan of all.

\* Vegetarian food is better for the mind. It makes the mind calm and alert, increases concentration, memory and intelligence (by the way, it is generally considered that Einstein was vegetarian), and generally makes you feel more relaxed, contented and happy.

Note that vegetarian food means no meat of any kind (red meat, poultry, fish, seafood, etc), as well as animal derivatives such as animal fat, gelatin and eggs. Onions, garlic and mushrooms also have a negative effect on the mind, as well as intoxicating drugs. All the better if you can cut down on these too! Milk and dairy products are okay though, because of their positive effect on the mind.

I'll leave you with that as food for thought!

## YOGA HEALTH SECRETS

by Ac. Vedprajinananda Avadhuta

While most complex machines which we use today have a complete operating manual which explains how to get the best use out of that machine, our human body, which is in some ways like a machine, does not have such a definitive operating manual. As a consequence we often treat our body in ways which are harmful to the proper functioning of this structure. Although medical and scientific knowledge has become an important feature of modern life, many of the physical and mental diseases which plague humanity today can be prevented or cured simply by adopting a way of life which is in harmony with the true needs of our physical body.

Yoga is an ancient science of physical, mental and spiritual development which originated in India more than 7000 years ago. Many people have misconceptions about yoga and think that it is mainly a set of strenuous postures which only circus acrobats can perform, or associate it with mystic or esoteric ideas which are far removed from the daily life of the masses of humanity. Rather, yoga has much to offer to contemporary humans and it contains clear ideas and practices which can be implemented by many people who wish to live a healthy, happy and meaningful life. In short, the ideas and practice of yoga are the 'missing' operating manuals for the successful functioning of the human structure.

While most humans live longer today than they did in the past, during the last years of their life (and even in middle age) they are often troubled with many different physical problems and become incapacitated to a certain degree. Yoga says that if humans observe certain rules, they can easily live an active life to the age of 80. What are these yogic secrets for a long and healthy life? Here is an overview of these practices. A complete discussion of many of these points would take more time, but interested people can do this by attending proper courses or by reading useful books.

According to yoga there are six "secrets" of longevity. They are as follows:

#### 1. Proper Physical Labour

In the past people had to use their physical bodies in the course of their normal work. But today someone may get up, go to work in a car, then sit down, get up to go home in the car and when arriving at home, sit down

again for the rest of the day. In such a life there is no physical labour.

This physical inactivity is one of the main reasons for a host of diseases.

Sport, running, walking and other things must be added to our life if our normal work does not require us to exert ourselves physically. In yoga there are some special exercises which are also prescribed and we will discuss them more fully below.

#### 2. Going to sleep when one feels sleepy

This may sound simple, but many people stay up late even when their body is telling them that it is time to sleep. Yoga and Ayurvedic doctors also say that it is better to sleep in the night and be active during the day.

However, people such as students will take coffee and stimulants to study late into the night. Others

develop the habit of remaining active at night and sleeping during the day. While we can do this, it eventually takes a toll on health. This kind of unnatural living is one of the contributing factors in the causation of cancer. It is far better to get up early in the morning for study and after one does it for a while it becomes quite normal and natural.

### 3. Eating when one feels hungry

This is also a simple idea, but once again we often go against the messages of the body. If one eats out of habit or due to social pressure at certain times of the day, even when one has no real appetite, then there will not be proper digestion of food. Acidity and indigestion begin and this contributes to the likelihood of other more complex diseases taking root. Having an appetite is actually a sign of good health, but if there is no appetite one should wait a bit and then eat. (If one has no appetite even after awaiting a reasonable amount of time, then a doctor should be consulted because something may be wrong.)

### 4. Regular fasting

If you would ask any person to work 365 days per year without any rest, they would complain and say that they must have some rest or else they will break down. But we have never bothered to ask or to think about our digestive organs which we compel to work day after day without a rest. They cannot protest the way a person would to their work supervisor, but they do give us signals that they cannot work non-stop. When we ignore those signals and still compel them to work, those organs break down. That is why yogis say that on a periodic basis it is good to refrain from eating for one complete day. This gives a rest to the digestive organs and also helps in the elimination of wastes from the body. Regular fasting allows a person to use the fasting days for intellectual or spiritual pursuits. Fasting is not for hermits in a cave, but is a sensible practice that anyone can practice.

Proper procedures should be followed for fasting. Once in the habit, it is possible to not even notice that you are fasting and the day is just like an ordinary day, even without food.

### 5. Ablution before sleep

As mentioned above, proper sleep is essential for the

maintenance of health.

If one washes important motor and sensory organs (hands, arms, eyes, legs, mouth, genitals) before sleep using cool water this relaxes the body and prepares it for deep sleep. The same should be done before meditation to relax and calm the body and nervous system. A simple half-bath is all that is needed. It can be done as follows:

- o Pour cool water first over the genital area, then over the knees, calves and feet, and then over the elbows and lower arms.
- o Next, hold some water in your mouth and splash water in your eyes twelve times. Then spit out the water. This reduces eyestrain and relieves headaches.
- o Then take water in gently through your nose and expel it through your mouth. This is called 'nasapana'; it cleans and clears the nasal passages (improves eyes and prevents colds) and also makes respiration comfortable.

Actually it is not as hard as you might think. After a few practices it becomes second nature.

- o Next clean the back of the your mouth and throat using the middle finger of your right hand by expelling the mucus at the back of the throat, and scrape the tongue if possible. A metal tongue cleaner is better and can also be used.
- o Finally, cool the ears and the back of your neck with water.

## 6. Regular performance of meditation

The body is linked to the mind. Many of the diseases of this era are psychosomatic. Stress and anxiety take their toll on our physical health.

Meditation is spiritual practice but as a mental exercise it also, among other things, allows a person to detach himself or herself from the worries of life. Just as we take vacations and go to the mountains or the sea to 'get away from it all' and to get mental peace, meditation enables a person to do this on a daily basis without expensive travel costs. The role of meditation in the achievement of mental well-being is vital. In the physical aspect of yoga it is also important to remember that meditation has a direct influence on our physical body and helps for example to lower blood pressure. Thus, meditation is one of the keys to a long and productive life.

Additional tips for good health

There are three more prescriptions for maintaining a healthy body.

1. Eat raw foods as much as possible. Slightly cooked food is also OK.

But the important thing is to have good healthy food in the diet. Raw foods (salads, fruits and vegetables) almost always have an alkaline effect on the body. That is, the digestion of these foods contributes to a flow of blood in the body which is alkaline. Most starches and carbohydrates (bread, grains, etc) as well as meat products are acid-forming. If one consumes more alkaline foods than acidic foods, many diseases such as rheumatism, skin diseases, cancer and others can be prevented or even cured. Conversely, if one consumes a very high proportion of acidic foods, it is an invitation for diseases.

2. Eat yoghurt. Yoghurt is nutritious and easy to digest. It contains micro-organisms which are helpful for our digestive systems.

3. Follow an overall system of physical, mental and spiritual practice.

That is, if one follows a complete system, combining proper exercise, food, fasting and meditation, that person's life will indeed be blissful.

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## YOGA POSTURES

No discussion on the physical aspect of yoga would be complete without some words on yoga postures. These postures are called "asanas," which means a position which is easily held and brings a feeling of composure in the person. Although some of the postures are complex and require exceptional agility, many of them are simple and can be practiced by anyone.

As stated, physical exercise is a key to achieving a long life. Most physical exercises develop the muscles or aid in the circulation of blood.

Yoga asanas are 'innersizes' in that, in addition to working on the muscles and circulation, they also have a profound affect on the endocrine glands and nerves. Yoga asanas were developed over a period of thousands of years.

At first yogis watched the postures of different animals and then imitated them. For example, the peacock is a bird with a powerful digestive system; it can digest a poisonous snake. Similarly there is a posture in which the yogi imitates the position of the peacock. The posture helps develop the glands and organs responsible for digestion and can prevent or cure many diseases that originate in this area of the body.

The endocrine glands are ductless glands which distribute hormones directly into the blood. They have a profound effect on many physical and mental activities of a human being. The thyroid gland (located in the throat) regulates metabolism; that is, the conversion of foods into energy. If this gland under-secretes (gives less hormones into the bloodstream) , then a person may become very fat even without consuming much food. An over-secretion of the same gland can make a person too thin even though he or she is consuming large amounts of food. The shoulder stand posture of yoga, regulates this gland. It puts pressure on the thyroid gland. When the posture is released the flow of blood rushing into the throat 'massages' the gland and helps it to achieve the right amount of secretion. The other yoga postures work in a similar fashion, maintaining the optimum glandular secretion.

Yoga postures also help maintain the flexibility of the spine. As we age the spine has a tendency to grow rigid. Regular performance of yoga postures stops this process. The posture known as the spinal twist is an example of such a posture.

Finally there is another aspect of yoga asanas which makes them different from other kinds of exercise. One of the important discoveries of the ancient sages is that there is a system of energy centres or cakras (pronounced chakras) in the body. These centres located along the spine are primarily psycho-spiritual realities (rather than anatomical features) but they are associated with physical glands as well as nerves. All of the mental propensities of the mind (positive and negative) are associated with these psychic/psychological centres of the body-mind structure. Each of these centres regulates different mental propensities. The yogis in their meditation, visualized these cakras and described them as flowers having different petals. Each petal represents a particular mental propensity.

For example, the cakra located at the height of the navel area is pictured as having 10 petals representing different mental propensities. One of these propensities is 'anger' . Thus it is often true that those people who have ulcers, constipation or other aggravations in this region also suffer from an irritable or angry personality. Accordingly, yogis prescribe asanas for weakened regions of the body which will directly affect the cakras, helping to cure or ward off physical disease as well as psychic imbalances.

One further word about yoga postures. Every person is unique. Our physical bodies are not the same. The yoga postures of a 60 year old woman suffering from rheumatism are quite different from those of young man in good health.

Thus yoga postures cannot just be taken out of a book. Rather the best way is to learn the exact postures which are best for your condition. A qualified teacher can help you to learn which postures are the right ones

for you. Qualified teacher here means one who knows not just the physical aspects but also how the postures affect the mental and spiritual aspirations of a person. The teacher must have a deep understanding of the psychic and spiritual aspects of life - and that comes from spiritual practices which must also be known.

In summary, these asanas can be helpful to many people. They are easily learned and can be practiced conveniently at home. When the yoga asanas are combined with the other points outlined above they become an important part of a way of life which will bring physical, mental and spiritual fulfilment.

So, go for it. Meditation and the yogic lifestyle is the best thing you can do. Don't worry about what others may think once you start yoga and meditation. In a short time, they will see your shining personality and your well being will clearly be an inspiration to all. But remember, the real well being comes from spiritual practices (meditation) and that must come first, else the rest does not really work.

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