

## DIETARY GUIDANCE FOR ASPIRING YOGA STUDENTS.

The importance of balanced and nutritional food for a healthy life, needs no emphasis. The value of diet in the growth of the body, maintenance of good health, prolongation of life, and its application as a therapeutic measure for treatment of diseases were known even in olden times.

The food we eat every day -

- (i) provides the body with fuel, such as fats and carbohydrates, which are oxidized and supply the energy required for various activities;
- (ii) provides protein for the building and upkeep of the body tissues;
- (iii) furnishes vitamins and minerals by means of which life process in the body is regulated, thereby protecting against ill-health.

Functionality, food can be classified as

(i) Energy yielding foods-food rich in carbohydrates and cereals, roots & tubers, dried fruits, sugars, fats.

Cereals, in addition, contain a fair amount of protein, minerals and certain vital vitamins.

ii) Body building foods-Foods rich in protein:

Milk, pulses oil-seeds, nuts, low fat oil-seed flours, meat, fish and eggs.

(iii) Protective foods. Foods rich in protein, vitamins and minerals are:

Milk, green leafy vegetables, fruits, eggs, liver, etc.

Milk, eggs, fish & liver are rich vitamins and minerals and proteins of high biological value. Green leafy vegetables are rich in vitamins and minerals only.

**Proteins** are required for promoting growth and for building and up-keep of body tissues and are essential for muscular development. They are necessary for the production of metabolic and digestive enzymes, blood protein and hormones.

Deficiency in proteins reduces the body's resistance to results in general weakness, emaciation, edema, dry skin pigmentation.

**Fats** along with carbohydrates in the food serve as a source energy. Fat in the diet serves as a carrier for fat-soluble vitamins and is also essential for the absorption of carotene

prolonged deficiency in fat in diet causes dryness of the skin.

**Carbohydrates** are the main source of energy to Excess of carbohydrates in the diet is converted into fat in the body.

**Minerals** play an important role in nutrition

- (i) as constituent of the mineral matter in the bones;

(ii) as structural constituents of the soft tissues:

(iii) as constituents of physiologically active substances e. g, iron in hemoglobin.

The more important minerals are calcium, phosphorus and iron.

Calcium and phosphorus are major constituents of bones and teeth. They are present in all the fluids of the body and supply the electrolytes for the action of muscles and nerves. Calcium also participates in the coagulation of blood.

Iron is mainly required for the formation of hemoglobin which is an important constituent of red blood cells.

**Vitamins** are essential for growth and health. The most important vitamins are

(i) **Vitamin A and Carotene-a)** essential for integration of epithelial tissues.

b) stimulates new cell growth.

It is essential for the health of respiratory, digestive and urinary tracts. It keeps the membranes of the bones, throat and the wind pipe strong and healthy, helping to prevent colds and other infections of this region.

It is essential for maintaining the eyes in healthy condition and for proper vision. Continued deficiency of this vitamin causes night blindness, reduced resistance to infection, dryness of the conjunctiva of the eyes, grayish patches on the white of the eyes and opacity of the cornea.

Carotene is a precursor of vitamin A and is present in large quantities in green leafy vegetables, tomatoes, carrots and some fruits.

(ii) **Vitamin B1 (Thiamine)**-plays an important role in carbohydrate metabolism.

It is essential for maintenance of good appetite and normal digestion. It is also necessary for the normal functioning of the nerve tissues and muscles.

Mild deficiency of this vitamin in diet results in loss of appetite and digestive disorders

Without sufficient quantity Thiamine, the body would be in a perpetual state of ache and pains.

(iii) **Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin)** is concerned with the metabolism of carbohydrates, proteins and fats.

It is necessary for the maintenance of healthy skin and eyes Its' most important function is the production of enzymes that help to digest food.

Deficiency of Vitamin B2 causes burning sensation in the eyes, inflammation of the tongue, dimness of vision, fissuring at the angles of the month, etc.

Nicotinic Acid (Niacin), another member of the Vitamin B Group, also takes part in the metabolism of carbohydrates.

Severe deficiency of this vitamin causes the disease known as 'pellagra', characterized by soreness of the mouth and tongue, diarrhea and dark pigmentation of the exposed parts of the body.

Vitamin B12 stimulates the formation of red blood cells. Deficiency of this vitamin causes macrocytic anemia.

Vitamin B12 occurs only in foods of animal origin e.g. eggs, liver, mutton, fish, milk and curds.

Vitamin C (Ascorbic acid) is necessary for the maintenance of good health. It is the great healing vitamin of the body. It is essential for building bones, maintenance of the walls of the smaller blood vessels, strengthening of teeth and gums, and aids in the absorption of iron. It also hastens the healing of wounds and bone fractures.

Deficiency of Vitamin C in the diet causes 'Scurvy' which is characterized by tender, swollen and bleeding gums, bleeding in the skin and joints, anemia and delayed healing of wounds and fractures.

Vitamin C is found abundantly in fresh fruits, leafy vegetables, potatoes and tomatoes.

Folic Acid stimulates the formation of red and white blood corpuscles. Deficiency in Folic Acid in diet results in the development of macrocytic anemia.

Important sources of Folic Acid are whole cereals, pulses, nuts, ~~grain~~, leafy vegetables and liver.

Vitamin D increases the absorption of calcium and phosphorus and regulates their concentration in the blood. It directly helps in the formation of strong, hard and healthy bones and teeth.

Deficiency of vitamin D causes rickets, the bones becoming soft and pliable.

Vitamin D is available in milk and eggs. But the body builds its own supply of Vitamin D by the interaction of the sun and the natural skin oil.

There are over 20 known vitamins which play different roles in the proper functioning of the various parts of the body.

These vitamins are present in a great variety of foods. A mixed balanced diet generally produces these essential vitamins. A healthy body has the ability to transform one type of food into another as required.

A person who is able to gain control of his system can live on a simple food and transform it internally to other substances as his body requires.

Many Yogic practices, especially 'Surya namaskara' and 'pranayama' increase the efficiency of this transformation process.

## YOGA AND DIET

Throughout history many sages and yogis have advocated vegetarianism as the preferred way of life, because there is a definite relationship between what we eat and our state of mind. The food we eat has profound repercussions on our mental and emotional attitudes. It has been said that meat eating is conducive to internal tensions and disharmony, where as vegetarian food tends to promote inner calmness.

It is generally assumed that vegetarianism is an integral part Yoga practice. This assumption is only partly true. Yoga considers . vegetarianism as the most beneficial system in nutrition. It does not insist that all practicener of Yoga should become vegetarians.

Vegetarianism does find a place in Yoga only in so far as it is the preferred nutritional system whereby total body health can be obtained in preparation for higher forms of Yoga.

By being a vegetarian. we feel that one is laying down a foundation for a harmonious and happy life. But this does not mean that we cannot attain higher state of awareness if one is not a vegetarian.

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