

Camp Utopia Yoga Food for Yogis and Healthy People



“From the earth sprang herbs, from herbs food, from food seed, from seed, man. Man thus consists of the essence of food. From food are all creatures produced, by food do they grow. The self consists of food, of breath, of mind, of understanding, of bliss.”
- The Upanishads

“We are what we eat, for the mind is constructed out of the subtlest parts of our diet and the body from the rest.”
- Swami Vishnu – devananda

“Nobody seems more obsessed by diet than our anti-materialistic, otherworldly, New Age spiritual types. But if the material world is merely illusion, an honest guru should be as content with Budweiser and bratwurst as with raw carrot juice, tofu and seaweed slime.”
- Edward Abbey

In today’s world of constant, streaming information, and literally thousands of books and websites and advice about nutrition and diet, we get a lot of mixed, confusing, or premature messages about what a healthy diet looks like.

Sometimes the news is thrilling: “Dark Chocolate is a SuperFood!” Sometimes the news is unbelievable: “Study Finds Low Fat Diet Does Not Prevent Disease.” Sometimes, the news is even realistic, and gradually, over time, it repeats itself so often that it becomes accepted truth.

So that now, in the beginning of the 21st century, we are finally beginning to hear – from every reputable source on the topic of nutrition, the same basic message, over and over and over: A diet of primarily real food, fresh and as close to its original condition as possible, with lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and plenty of moderate, regular exercise, is the best way to get and stay healthy for the long term. Finally, modern science is catching up to something most civilizations have known for thousands of years.

Every culture on earth is inextricably linked with its food. In *A Mediterranean Feast*, Clifford Wright reflects, “Cuisine is the tactile connection we have to breathing history. History and culture offer us a vibrant living society that we taste through cuisine. All cuisine is a reflection of the society from which it emanates... in the end, cuisine is a result of culture.”

Yogic culture is no exception. The 5 core principles of yoga are: proper exercise, proper breathing, proper rest, proper food, positive thinking and meditation. Each is an essential element of the whole.

The 3 Gunas

Yoga philosophers in the 2nd century described two distinct forces at work in the universe – purusha, the pure spirit, and prakriti, the natural world, which includes everything that we see and experience – including our bodies, our food, even our life experience.

Prakriti is made up of three elements: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Each exists in everything, but in most things one or two elements are stronger, and the main philosophers of that time believed that the struggle for each element to dominate is the cause of all human misery. Rajas and Tamas are opposing; in extremes they are destructive. Sattvic is the balanced, clear place in between them.

The 3 Gunas play a role in yogic nutrition. Yoga developed as a discipline to help the yogi attain ultimate liberation through meditation. A yoga diet is one that brings inner peace to the body and encourages spiritual progress. That means primarily Sattvic food, which is conducive to a calm mind and healthy body.

This doesn't mean one should eat nothing but sattvic food. A highly tamasic person – very sluggish and lethargic, may need spicy, energizing rajasic foods to waken them up, and vice versa. If the body is in balance, Sattvic foods then becomes most conducive to the higher meditative states.

Which state are you?

Tamasic people are prone to lethargy. A couch potato is tamasic. Also, the tendency to get addicted to pleasurable things like coffee, cigarettes, or sugar is tamasic. It is hard to get things done. A yoga practice for the tamasic person increases energy.

Rajas is opposing. A rajasic person is all wound up. They are always in motion, getting things done, and have a hard time settling the mind. Meditation and regular practice of yoga is good for calming the mind and creating stability in life.

The Sattvic person is a moderate; calm and balanced. Meditation and regular yoga practice neither winds them up nor calms them down – they maintain a steady balance of effortless effort throughout the practice.

Eating Like a Yogi

The yoga diet strives to achieve “Mitihara” – which includes:

- Food should be “agreeable and sweet,” which means fresh – not sugared.
- It should “leave one fourth of the stomach free” – this means half food, one quarter water, and one quarter air.
- It should be “eaten as an offering to please Shiva” – which means the yogi should eat for nourishment, not personal pleasure.

In modern language, we can translate that to mean “real food”, smaller portions, and being mindful. Choosing foods that feed the whole self, and slowing down to prepare and eat consciously.

Sattvic Principles

“The foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are savory and oleaginous, substantial and agreeable, are dear to the sattvic people.”

- Bhagavad-Gita, XVII,8

The sattvic diet is simple and bland. Early texts prohibit foods that are bitter, sour, pungent, salty, or heating. That includes some green vegetables, oil, sesame, mustard, alcohol, fish, animal protein, curds, buttermilk, and garlic. No leftovers, no dried foods, and no dishes with too many vegetables are allowed. Sattvic food includes grains, milk, brown sugar, honey, dry ginger, most vegetables, fruits, pulses and pure water.

- Pure foods increase vitality, energy, health and joy; they are delicious, wholesome, substantial and agreeable, and sattvic. These foods render the mind pure and calm, and generate equanimity, poise and peaceful tendencies. Sattvic foods increase energy, strength and endurance, and eliminate fatigue even for those who do strenuous work. They promote a peaceful attitude and are conducive to meditation.
- Foods should be fresh and natural, preferably organically grown, not genetically modified, and kept without preservatives or artificial flavorings. They should also be eaten in as natural a state as possible, raw, steamed or lightly cooked.
- Grains include corn, barley, wheat, unpolished rice, oats, millet and quinoa. Also coarse foods such as porridge and wholegrain breads. Considered to be good for the teeth and jaws, they also stimulate digestion and elimination. Grains supply the necessary carbohydrates, the main source of energy for the body, and they also contain about half the amino acids that are needed to form protein.
- Protein foods include pulses, nuts and seeds. Proteins are the building blocks of the body. The key to a healthy vegetarian diet is to eat a good mixture of foods to ensure that it includes all the amino acids essential for making proteins.
- Fruits, both fresh and dried, as well as pure fruit juices, are included. Among the many different foods, fruits have foremost importance in the yoga diet. The curative effects of fresh, juicy fruits are astonishing. They fill the body with vitalizing, life giving minerals, vitamins and fiber. Their high alkaline matter keeps the blood pure.
- Vegetables also contain a host of minerals, vitamins and fiber. The diet should include seeded vegetables (such as cucumbers and squashes), all leafy vegetables, and roots and tubers. These are best eaten raw or cooked as lightly as possible.
- Use herbs for seasoning and herbal teas.
- Natural sweeteners, such as honey and molasses, maple syrup and apple juice concentrate are allowed. These are much better for you than processed white sugar. Raw cane sugar is a traditional part of the yoga diet in India. It is called jaggery, and it comes directly from the cane and is not processed.
- Include dairy products such as milk, butter, cheese and yogurt. Traditionally these are an essential part of the yoga diet. However, modern dairy practices can be abusive to animals, filling their milk with hormones and antibiotics. If you use dairy products, use moderation. They tend to intensify the production of mucus, which interferes with the natural flow of breath.

Rajasic Principles

“Foods that are bitter, sour, saline, excessively hot, pungent, dry and burning, are liked by rajasic people and are productive of pain, grief and disease.”

- Bhagavad-Gita, XVII, 9.

Rajasic foods are hot, bitter, sour, dry or salty. They destroy the mind-body equilibrium, feeding the body at the expense of the mind. Eating in a hurry is also considered rajasic. Too much Rajastic food will over-stimulate the body and excite the passions, making the mind restless and uncontrollable.

- Rajasic foods are those that over-stimulate the body and the mind. Onions, garlic, radishes, coffee, tea, tobacco, and stimulants of all kinds fall into this category, as do heavily spiced and salted, chemical-riddled, convenience foods and snacks. Sattvic food taken in the wrong place, like on the run, becomes rajasic. Refined (white) sugar, soft drinks, prepared mustards, pungent spices, highly seasoned foods and anything that is excessively hot, bitter, sour, saline are all rajasic.
- Strong spices and condiments over-stimulate the mind as well as irritate the mucus membrane of the intestines. Rajasic foods are thought to increase lust, anger, greed, selfishness, violence and egoism, which are barriers that separate people from each other and their realization of the Divine. Rajas is the energy that creates dissension in life and wars in the world.

Tamasic Principles

“That food which is stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten and impure is the food liked by the Tamasic.”

- Bhagavad-Gita, XVII, 10

A Tamastic Diet benefits neither the mind nor the body. Prana, or energy, is withdrawn, powers of reasoning become clouded and a sense of inertia sets in. The body's resistance to disease is destroyed and the mind filled with dark emotions, such as anger and greed. Overeating is also considered tamasic.

- Tamasic food makes a person dull and lazy; it robs individuals of high ideals, purpose and motivation. It also accentuates the tendency to suffer from chronic ailments and depression, and fills the mind with darkness, anger and impure thoughts. Deleting most tamasic foods is one positive lifestyle change the healthy yogi makes.
- Meat, fish, all intoxicants (alcoholic beverages, marijuana, opium, etc) are tamasic in nature. It is thought that the craving for alcohol dies a natural death when meat is withdrawn from the diet.
- Tamasic foods include all foods that are stale, decomposed, unclean, as well as overripe and unripe fruits. Also foods that have been fermented, burned, fried, barbecued or reheated many times; as well as stale products and those containing preservatives, such as canned, processed and many pre-prepared foods.
- Mushrooms are included in this category as they are grown in darkness; and vinegar, as it is a product of fermentation and retards digestion.

- Deep-fried foods are indigestible and are considered tamasic. The fat penetrates into them and the digestive juice of the stomach cannot act on them. In addition the fine, nutritive essence of the food, which is beneficial to health, is destroyed by frying.
- Sattvic food taken in excessive quantity (overeating) becomes Tamasic.

The division of foods into sattvic-rajasic-tamasic is a comparative one and not absolute. It is meant to guide you to change your diet in a positive direction. Consider also that the traditional yogic diet is suitable for the climate and environmental conditions of India, and represents the hatha yogi, who is devoted to many hours of constant practice, and not of those who do a yoga class once a week and have other household commitments in a stressed out, frenzied world.

Rajasic	Sattvic	Tamasic
Sharp spices	Cereal	Meat
Strong Herbs	Whole Grain Bread	Alcohol
Coffee and Tea	Fresh Fruit	Tobacco
Fish	Vegetables	Onions
Eggs	Pure juices	Garlic
Salt	Milk	Mushrooms
Chocolate	Butter and cheese	Fermented foods (vinegar)
	Legumes	Stale or overripe foods
	Nuts	
	Seeds	
	Sprouted Seeds	
	Honey	
	Herb teas	

“Never eat more than you can lift.”

- Miss Piggy

Camp Utopia Healthy Eating Principles for the Modern Yogi

Eat real food. As close to its original condition as possible. If it comes in a box, can, frozen food container, fast food restaurant, or is advertised on TV, it is probably not “real” food. You can find real food at farmer’s markets and the outside edge of the grocery store.

Eat smaller portions. This is the number one way to lose excess body weight. Most of what we believe to be hunger is actually the sensation of thirst. Eating less, eating slower, paying attention as you eat, and drinking lots of water throughout the day makes portion control easiest.

Live it, don’t Diet. Cleanses, fasting, and most popular diets may help you lose a few pounds, but a healthy body comes from permanent changes in food choices that are healthier and more natural. The ideal “diet” is one that you can be happy “on” every day for the rest of your life. However, short term cleanses and detoxes can be beneficial to kick start metabolism and rid the body of pollutants that create inflammation, discomfort, and disease.

Eat like you love your body. If it comes in through the window of your car, it isn’t food. Taking the time to prepare your own food, sit, relax, eat slowly and mindfully makes any food more healthful. Imagine “raising” your body like raising a child – you always want the best for your child, and you do the best you can for the child every day.

Choose moderation in everything vs everything in moderation. Choice = stress. Narrow it down, pick what you like best, discard the rest. Find ways to make your favorite things a little bit healthier if they aren’t naturally healthy, and don’t bother worrying about the foods that aren’t important to you. Choose recipes with fewer ingredients, choose the healthiest foods (superfoods) as much as possible, shop for locally grown foods in season, avoid buffet style eating, and splurge on occasion.