

Ayurveda for Everyone

HOW TO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR DOSHA & JUST LIVE BETTER



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AYURVEDA DOESN'T NEED TO BE CONFUSING

BY EDEN TOSCH

If you have been bitten by the Ayurveda bug & started to educate yourself about this amazing science you are probably confused. Don't blame yourself. Ayurveda is a vast & ancient science. It is odd to us; set in a very different paradigm than western mechanistic materialism. It has been practiced & pontificated on by brilliant minds across S.E. Asia for ages. To add to the confusion: Westerners are trying to memefy Ayurveda now.

What was originally practiced culturally, 1-on-1, with a skilled *Vaidya* (doctor) is now being gleaned from blog posts by yoga teachers. This means that there is a lot of conflicting & unclear info out there. I am truly sorry for the confusion. There is so much value in Ayurveda that can be used & appreciated by westerners!

I would like to do my part to clarify a few things.

This article will show how anyone can use wisdom from Ayurveda to improve their everyday eating patterns to avoid short-term disorders & long-term disease, ease digestive & mental health problems & make your life more sustainable personally & environmentally.

SIMPLIFYING AYURVEDA

Ayurveda is an internally logical system that addresses how the body works. The knowledge of Ayurveda can be investigated for over lifetimes & with an awe inspiring level of detail. I encourage you to go deep if you are called. But for everyday living there are basic ideas that will benefit anyone through their whole life. You don't need to read *Sanskrit* for this & you don't need to know your 'dosha' or constitution; these guidelines will benefit any body.



WHAT TO EAT ... INGREDIENTS

nobody's perfect:

EDEN'S CURRENT STAPLE INGREDIENTS

Staples: Rice, wheat, ghee, milk, mung & other home cooked beans, wild meats (venison, wild boar, elk etc), sunflower seeds, peanuts, collards, summer squash, eggplant, celery, onions, carrots

Condiments: Honey, store bought mixed pickle (spicy chutney), store bought Salsa Huichol hot sauce, butter, peanut butter

Cheats: Coffee, home made strawberry pound cake, store bought corn tortillas, canned sardines

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: STAPLES

Simplicity is the rule for any sustainable diet. You don't need fancy products or procedures & you don't need to spend a lot of money on food. You do not need more complex meals or ingredients. Westerners are not under-nourished. Our diseases are diseases of excess. Nearly all of us need less; not more.

But we also do not need to fast or cleanse obsessively either! What we need is balance, simplicity & regularity.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: STAPLES

Make a list of 10-15 good quality, unprocessed ingredients that you enjoy eating. These **Staples** will make up 75-95% of what you eat.

The other 5-25%: spices, seasonings, condiments, nuts & seeds, seasonal fruit & veggies, the occasional meal out & a few guilty pleasures that deeply enrich your life.

How strict you are with this depends on how healthy you are overall & your personal capacity. Give yourself a break when you are on vacation & enjoying food with friends. Get serious when you are feeling unwell or want to move your health to another level. At home develop a clear set of staples that you know nourish you & rely on those with rigor.

SIMPLIFYING AYURVEDA

Why is it important to focus your diet on Staple ingredients? Ayurveda says: eat what is healthy for you & what is *satmya*. *Satmya* means: what you are accustomed to, what you grew up with & what feels comforting to you.

Modern science supports this idea as it learns about the living gut microbiome. Our gut develops & perfects the ability to glean nourishment from foods over time as we cultivate a gut biome that excels at digesting specific ingredients. Eating new foods every day means our bodies are forever scrambling to figure out how to breakdown & metabolize what we eat. This inefficiency creates *ama*, or internal waste that clogs us up.



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR STAPLES ...

DON'T INCLUDE THESE:

There are a few foods that despite being in every cuisine should not be on your Staple list. Occasional use is ok - daily use will compromise your health over time:

- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Cheese
- Some people think Fish should be limited too.

When considering what ingredients are healthy for you individually there are a number of things to keep in mind:

- What are you accustomed to eating?
- What did your ancestors eat regularly?
- What grows happily in the region you live?
- What could you love to eat every day?

Pick a nice selection of these, stick to these items for a month & see how that effects your health & happiness. If anything is out of place you can make adjustments.

FEELING LIMITED?

Consider traditional staple foods of the world:

Middle East: wheat, rice, chickpeas, lentils, meat, olive oil, honey cucumber, lemon, onion, sesame seed (11)

Coastal South East Asia: rice, fish sauce, bitter melon & other seasonal veggies & fruits, fish, coconut (7)

Eastern Europe: Rye, kasha (buckwheat), pork, lard, cabbage, beets, cultured milk, mushrooms, eggs, seasonal veggies pickled & fresh (10)

Latin America: Corn, beans, chilies, cultured milk products, squash & seasonal veggies, chicken & goat (7)

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: STAPLES

See how much diversity & flavor can be gained from simple ingredients?

The hardest Ayurvedic food rule for westerners to follow is to eat freshly sourced & freshly prepared foods. TV dinners are an American tradition. Frozen leftovers & 'food prep' facilitates many 'healthy' diets. But Ayurveda knows that frozen, stale, processed, canned, encapsulated or stored foods lack *Prana*, or life force. Consumed regularly these contribute to many 'lifestyle' diseases including obesity & fatigue. We can't wait until Science gets a grip on the idea of *Prana*; ☐.

Get an Instant Pot or air fryer & learn to make fresh foods for yourself.



QUALITIES OF FOOD & FOOD PREPARATION

Ideal ayurvedic meals will be healthy & satisfying for the whole family.

THESE ARE THE QUALITIES OF A WELL-BALANCED AYURVEDIC MEAL:

- **Freshness:** freshly prepared from fresh ingredients
- **Includes all 6 flavors:** sweet/bland, salty, sour/acid, spicy/pungency, bitter & astringency. A balance of these will feel satisfying & prevent over-eating.
- **Moistness:** soups, stews & curries fit the bill easily. But if you are having sandwiches make sure to add moisture in the form of veggies, ghee & sauces.
- **The perfect 'plate':** 1/4 protein, 1/4 starch/ grain, 1/4 veggies & 1/4 left empty for Spirit to move!
- **You don't need to eat meat.** But if you grew up with it & love it try to stick to rancher or wild meats. Wild boar has become invasive & problematic in many area of the US & is a delicious, nutritious & sustainable choice.
- **Organic or not organic?** Corporate factory farmed organic is fine if that is all you have. But small farm raised food is generally better - even without the organic certification. Many small farms can't afford the certification & a sensible use of pesticides in the hands of a skilled farmer is better than corporate exploitation of your insistence on 'organic'. Know your farmer!

GHEE: THE GOOD FAT

Of all the cooking oils available *ghee* is the only one that improves your digestion. [See my journal entry on all other good things ghee does for your health.](#) If you can afford to cook primarily with *ghee* you should. Even if you avoid dairy, use *ghee* in cooking. *Ghee* has no lactose so digests well for nearly everyone.

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: FRESH

When & how you eat is as important as what you eat.

The energy at different times of the day is different & will assist different activities. Observe the fluctuation of qualities throughout the day. The still of early morning is best for study & spiritual practice. Likewise, the heat of midday is dominated by the Sun & the element of fire. This heat helps digestion & transformation. This is the time for a bigger more nourishing meal. If you eat a heavy meal in the slower hours before bed you can expect to sleep poorly & wake up feeling heavy & slow.



WHEN TO EAT ...

Most importantly: Eat when you are Hungry & Drink when you are thirsty. Pay attention & learn your body's needs.

Never eat if your belly does not feel physically light & empty. This is why snacking is not good as it layers undigested food on top of partially digested food. Sit & eat a full & satisfying meal 2 or 3x a day. Don't eat anything else until you are hungry again.

WHEN TO DRINK:

Drink when you are actually thirsty - trust your body to tell you what you need. In cool weather if you are not too active - a cup of hot water when you wake up, a cup of hot ginger or cumin/ coriander/ fennel tea at each meal & maybe a mid morning and mid afternoon beverage is sufficient for most people, most of the time.

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: WHEN TO EAT

MEAL ROUTINE:

- If you are hungry in the morning have a light, simple breakfast. For most people a cup of tea & toast with ghee or a boiled egg is plenty.
- **Lunch is your main meal.** Between 10am - 2pm sit down to a full meal. At lunchtime your body is most able to digest heavier & more complex foods like meat, salad or cake.
- Include all 6 tastes & a diversity of textures & ingredients in each meal. A full palate of flavors & textures helps you to feel satisfied.
- Dinner should be light & simple & 3+ hours before bed. Dinner can be composed of foods left over from lunch so that you only need to cook once a day. Sometimes it makes sense to do the reverse: cook dinner & eat left-overs the next day at lunch.
- Ayurveda considers 2 meals a day ideal. If you are physically active add another light meal or a snack break.
- Snacks are not recommended. But if you are truly hungry between meals have some fruit or a handful of toasted pumpkin seeds or a cup of warm spiced milk.

SIMPLIFYING AYURVEDA

The concept of *Dosha* or constitution, has come to dominate Ayurveda in the west. *Vata*, *Pitta* & *Kapha* are part of ayurvedic diagnosis & treatment. But they are high-level concepts, regularly misinterpreted & often confusing if you have not studied extensively. Understanding your *dosha* is not necessary to having a healthful ayurvedic diet. If you are experiencing symptoms of a serious nature work with a *vaidya* (ayurvedic doctor) to individualize your diet. But until then the basic principles will serve you well.

Agni is the most foundational principle to understanding ayurvedic diet & how it affects you.



INNER FIRE: ALL ABOUT *AGNI*

Ayurveda never said 'you are what you eat'. What it says is 'you are what you digest'. *Agni* is the quality of fire & transformation that is responsible for making things that are not you (plants animals, minerals) - into you (your physical body & energy). Protecting your inner fire is essential to health and will keep you strong well into old age.

AGNI DOES WHAT?

Agni is not only responsible for the digestion of food but also the digestion of ideas, physical regeneration, healing & the ability to take in & process experiences & information. When your digestive *agni* is low your ability to learn & grow from experiences is also limited! You can relate *agni* to the western idea of the microbiome.

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: *AGNI*

CULTIVATING & PRESERVING *AGNI*

- Never eat when you are not hungry, when you have indigestion or are upset.
- Cook with spices & herbs to kindle *agni*. Don't worry about what spices & herbs you use beyond what tastes good to you. Explore & experiment; but I recommend starting with 3 spices/herbs per dish so you don't over do it.
 - thyme, parsley, rosemary
 - oregano, chilies, lime juice & zest
 - turmeric, brown mustard seeds, cilantro or coriander
 - cinnamon, allspice, orange zest
- Drink a cup of warm water or herb tea with meals. A big glass of icy tea, water or soda will extinguish your *agni* & hamper digestion.
- CCF Tea always helps. If you want to improve your *agni* make a pot of tea from cumin, coriander & fennel seeds daily. Drink a cup or 2 with each meal.
- Approach food with enjoyment & appreciation; even if you are eating a handful of gummies! Positive emotional attitude will help you digest & metabolize. Negativity, resistance & rejection will immobilize & clog digestion.

SIMPLIFYING AYURVEDA

My favorite on the go meal is a simple pot of rice, protein & veggies with a big scoop of spicy Mixed Pickle & ghee. Sometimes I make it with meat & sometimes with legumes. Either way this one-pot meal can simplify your day & soothe your soul with plenty of flavor & very little fuss.

If you don't have time to prepare your own lunch (& dinner) here is an easy recipe that is endlessly adaptable & can be put together in a matter of minutes. Either prepare it before bed & let it slow cook overnight or pressure cook (InstantPot!) in the morning while you shower.



MODERN AMERICAN KITCHAREE

This recipe can be composed of your individual 'staple' ingredients. I add a scoop of Indian 'mixed pickle' or chutney & ghee to the mason jar I pack my lunch in. You could add kimchi or sauerkraut depending on the other ingredients.

GRUEL

I wonder what my ancestors would have eaten during a good year. I imagine a fragrant pot always simmering over the cottage fire. A bowlful scooped out and served with a chunk of grainy bread or mug of beer when the work day was over. What goes in it? Anything harvested, hunted, gifted or preserved. A handful of grain, seeds, some root veggies or pot-herbs, a few mushrooms & a chuck of preserved meat or a freshly trapped rabbit.

AYURVEDIC DIET 101: *AGNI*

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 C whole grain (rice, rye berries, bulgar, fonio etc), rinse if appropriate & drain
- 4 Tbsp lentils, rinsed & drained or 1/2 C ground or stew meat
- 3-4 C water
- ½ C cubed winter squash (or another dense veggie)
- 1 C leafy greens (optional)
- ghee (bacon fat is great too)
- optional spices/herbs:
 - pinch hing / asafoetida
 - fresh ginger (I throw a chunk in & pull it out later)
 - seeds: cumin, fenugreek, clove, black pepper corn
 - Fresh herbs: parsley, basil, rosemary, sage, garlic
- salt & lemon or lime juice to taste

Add ghee to instant-pot or slow cooker. Saute lentils or meat till golden. Add hing & spices; saute till fragrant. Add grain, water, veggies, salt & fresh herbs. Slow cook overnight. Or use bean setting on instant pot (30 minutes with pressure). I will often dice a cup of leafy greens & add them at the last minute to cook lightly.

Package to-go & add dollop of condiment of your choice.