



Yogic Diet In Promotion Of Wellbeing –An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

Food, according to Indian culture is the source of sustenance for the entire creation. Food is considered to be very sacred and is treated as God. Strict restrictions were placed in Indian culture regarding dietary patterns as it is believed that the food affects one's physical as well as mental and emotional health of individuals. In the current time, the effect of food and its influence on mind is neglected. Due to availability of packed, processed and ready to eat foods in plenty, children's eating patterns are adversely affected. Current day children prefer to eat processed, junk foods than freshly available foods and home - made foods. These eating patterns have led to ill health, obesity, depression, psychosomatic problems etc. The problems faced due to faulty eating behaviours can be corrected with the ancient Indian wisdom on yogic diet. The current study made an attempt to review the effect of yogic diet prescribed by Indian culture to mitigate food related problems among children.

Keywords: Yogic diet, types of food in Indian culture

Food according to Indian scriptures

In Hinduism, food is treated to be very sacred. It is considered to be *Brahman*. (*annam parabrahma swaroopam*). Food was part of every ritualistic offering. No celebration was complete without distribution of food. In ancient India, food was consumed to purify mind and consciousness and not merely for bodily strength or to increase longevity. Food was supposed to be eaten with a religious attitude, and to attain self control, but not merely for pleasure. A lot of stress was laid on ensuring purity of food. *Paka shuddhi* (purity at preparation of food), *Patra shuddhi* (purity of vessels used for cooking) and *Padhartha shuddhi* (purity of substances used in cooking) was considered to be very essential. Food and its importance are revealed through various Indian scriptures.

Taittiriya Upanishad

Food is considered as *Branha* or God in Taittiriya Upanishad. According to yogic tradition, there are five sheaths of existence of man called *pancha koshas*. The first sheath is named after food and is called '*annamaya kosha*'. This is because the entire body of man is formed by the food that he consumes.

Bhagawad Gita

In Chapter 3, verse 14 of Bhagawad Gita, it is mentioned “ *annād bhavanti bhūtāni* which means that all beings come into existence from food.

Mundakopanishad

Verse 1.1.8 of Mundakopanishad states:

*tapasācīyate brahma tato'nnam abhijāyate |
annāt prāṇomanaḥ satyaṃ lokāḥ karmasucāmṛtam*

Through meditation, *Brahma* grows in size and food is produced as a result from food originated subsequently, the Bhutas, the worlds.

The Prasna Upanishad

In Prasna Upanishad, there is a clear mention that the two aspects of God are the creation of food and life. Whole Universe is resulted from the interaction of both these aspects.

Chhandogya Upanishad

In this Upanishad It is mentioned that the food consumed has three aspects. The coarse part becomes faeces, the medium becomes the flesh and that finest becomes the mind.

Ayurveda on foods:

In ayurvedic system, foods are categorised into three types based on the benefits they confer upon the individuals.

- *Sattvic* foods are the foods full of vital energy (Prana). These foods are light, nourishing, fresh and sweet. These foods provide energy, stamina and good health. Examples of *sattvic* food are wholegrain, milk, fruits, vegetables, natural sugars, spices and herbs.

- *Rajasic* foods are the foods that are either too spicy or too sour, hot, pungent foods. These foods are not digestible. It includes onion and garlic, and non-vegetarian foods like meat, fish, eggs, chicken, tea, coffee, tobacco, soda, alcohol, chocolate, sour apples, pickles and refined sugars etc.
- *Tamasic* foods are processed or frozen foods that have lost all of their Prana. All stale, dry, juicy, unripe, undercooked and overcooked food items are all tamasic in nature. Eating such foods dulls one's mind and creates lethargy.

Objectives of the current study:

The current study is carried out keeping the following objectives in mind.

- To review the effect of *sattvic* food in promoting wellbeing
- To study the adverse effects of junk food on the health of children
- To highlight the importance of a vegetarian diet

Yogic diet:

Yogic diet is a lacto-vegetarian diet which is based on the principles of *ahimsa*, *sattva* and *saucha*. This diet is very light, wholesome and is important for spiritual practices. Yogic diet promotes physical, mental and spiritual health and aligns with yogic philosophy. It is a type of diet that enables one to reach peace and bliss.

Yogic diet involves the following aspects.

➤ **Adhering to *sattvic* foods**

Sattvic foods are wholesome foods that benefit physical, mental health of individuals. These foods are ideal for all types of individuals. In *Hath Yoga Pradipika*, there is a clear mention that *sattvic* foods are light foods. These include wheat, rice, barley, milk, ghee, butter, honey, dried ginger, cucumber fruit, mung beans and other legumes. All foods that ripen within 60 days are considered to be *sattvic* in nature.

➤ **Reduced usage of *rajasic* and *tamasic* foods**

Rajasic foods are foods that over stimulate the nervous system. In Verses 59 and 60 of *Hath yoga Pradipika* book, it is mentioned that all bitter, spicy, salty, sour foods are not suitable foods and are called as *apathya foods*. Examples for these foods include alcohol, fish, goat or other meat, green leaves, sesame seeds, curds, buttermilk, kulattha pulses, garlic etc. Chillies, salt, condiments, cloves, mustard are *rajasic* foods.

A yogi should have a diet consisting of simple and bland food, avoiding anything that is highly acidic, greasy or spicy. All these foods slow the digestion process. Hence they need to be consumed in moderation.

➤ Adhering to vegetarian diet

In Bhagwat Gita, Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna that it is plant based vegetarian diet that nurtures good qualities among people. This diet alone is important for spiritual progress to occur in human beings.

In *Manusmriti*,(5:48) it is stated that meat eating leads to karmic bondage. Eating meat involves causing harm to other living creatures on this planet. Man should not consume any kind of meat because the fear and pain of animals before they are slaughtered leaves their effects on the meat which in turn affects man's health.

In the *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that "He who desires to increase his own flesh by eating the flesh of other animals lives in misery in whatever species he may take birth."

➤ Occasional fasting

In Hinduism, emphasis is given to fasting. Yogis adopted this practice prior to their penance. Fasting is an important ritual that cleanses human body and detoxifies the body. Fasting is considered to purify one's body and mind and develops higher values among individuals. On special occasions fasting is observed to express one's devotion to God. Scientifically also fasting is considered to be beneficial as it cleanses the body.

➤ Mindful eating and eating at regular intervals of time

Food needs to be consumed with divine feelings and thoughts. Mindful eating of the food bestows a number of benefits than mere eating it in haste and hurry. Mindful eating involves eating the food slowly, enjoying and relishing every bit of the food consumed.

In Bhagawad gita, chapter 4, verse 24, there is a mention that food needs to be consumed after offering it to God. A prayer that one needs to chant prior to partaking of food is mentioned. Brahmaarpanam, Brahma havih, Brahmaagnou, Brahmanaahutam. This prayer sanctifies the food that we consume and converts food into prasadam. This prayer also removes three kinds of impurities caused due to lack of cleanliness with regard to vessels, food and cooking process.

Maitrayani Upanishad (VI. 9) also mentions that before and after partaking of food one needs to meditate on God. This will ensure liberation from all bondage.

Importance of Yogic diet for children in the present day:

With the advent of industrialisation and entry of different kinds of processed and ready to eat foods into the market, also due to their advertisements, children are the targeted group whose dietary patterns have completely changed. The foods currently consumed are either over-processed or loaded with sugars or have replaced locally grown, fresh produce in today's time. Present day children are found to be selecting faulty foods, eating at irregular time of day, skipping home-made food and eating street food, craving for instant and fast-foods, junk foods, over processed foods, chocolates and cold drinks. These foods spoil the health of children and affect their immunity in long run. According to studies done in India in 2017, the country has the second-highest percentage of obese youngsters worldwide. Due to a lack of consumption of chewable foods like fruits and cereals, 60 to 80 percent of school-aged children experience dental problems. A study on children's eating habits by Dobariya Miral (2020) revealed that children's daily routines include eating packets (70%), biscuits (54%), faulty home diets (54%), and faulty outer diets (60%) of food. These dietary habits have to problems such as worm infections, abdominal pain, skin diseases, sour throat, cough etc

The findings from these studies highlight that it is necessary to promote healthy eating habits among children. Children need to be made aware about the importance of consuming plant based fresh foods in order to lead a healthy and happy life. Proper dietary habits developed at young age's lays foundation for the growth and development of the future stages of life. The healthy dietary patterns among children according to WHO include

- Five portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- Total fat intake to be less than 30% of total energy intake
- Salt intake to be less than 5 g per day
- Free sugars should be reduced to less than 10% of total energy intake

Hence it is seen that with the exception of non vegetarian food consumption, there is a congruence of yogic diet specified by Indian scriptures and recommendations made by WHO with regard to healthy eating patterns.

Diagrammatical representation of the above discussion:

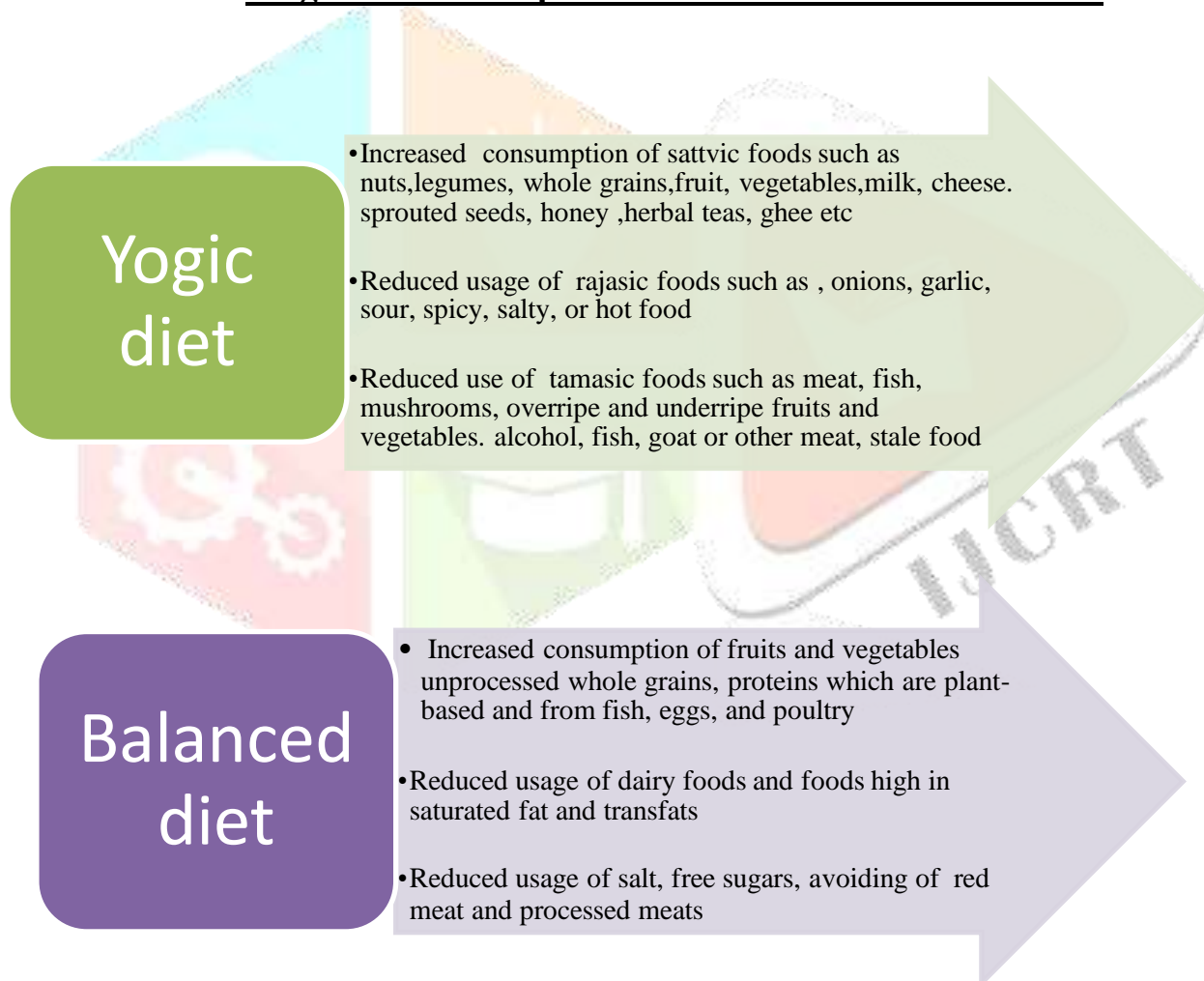


Fig 1: Figure depicting the relationship between Yogic diet and Balanced Diet

Literature reviews on Yogic diet

Research studies show that a healthy yogic diet is important for physical as well as mental health of individuals. According to a study by Opie, et al, (2017) traditional eating habits, increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and less consumption of processed foods help people overcome depression. According to a study by Kris-Etherton, et al. (2021), proper eating habits can help manage depression. Improvements in dietary habits have also been demonstrated to benefit people's mental health. (Firth, et al., 2020).

According to a study on vegetarian diets by Lietzmann (2005), this diet is helpful in promoting good health by reducing conditions including dementia, gallstones, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, hypertension, diabetes and osteoporosis. Plant-based diets have the potential not only to improve human health but also to reduce the environmental impacts associated with high consumption of animal-sourced foods such as meat and dairy products. The production of plant foods, such as fruits and vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, produces lower greenhouse gas emissions than that of animal foods. Reducing unprocessed foods and consuming plant based foods helps in mitigating all the environmental problems and also help preventing biodiversity loss. So these foods have dual benefits of human health as well as planetary health.

Kashyap et al(2014) study reveals that boys who were habitual and less habitual of junk food had significantly lower scores in jumping as compared to non habitual adolescent boys. Junk foods consumption was also associated with increased odds of psychological distress in children and adolescents. (Hanieh Malmir et al, 2022). Risks of abdominal as well as general obesity was found to be prevalent due to junk food consumption (Moloud Payab et al., 2015)

From the above review of literature it is evident that yogic diet plays an important role in promoting wellbeing of children by providing a number of health benefits in various dimensions. Yogic diet is found to promote physical, mental as well as psychological health of children.

Analysis of the above literature review:

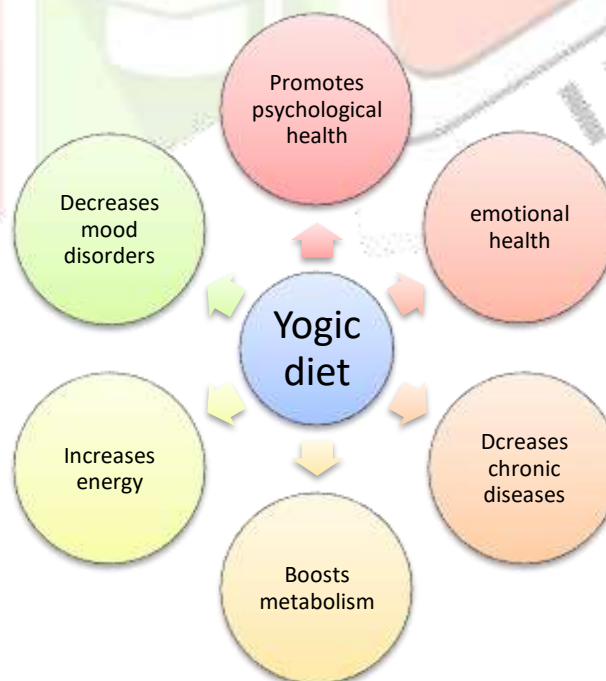


Fig 2: Depicting the benefits of Yogic Diet

Measures to incorporate yogic diet among children

To develop children acquire proper eating habits, following recommendations are suggested.

- Parents need to emphasise children regarding the need to follow proper diet.
- Schools can conduct awareness programmes for parents regarding nutrition, health and hygiene etc
- School canteens should provide healthy snacks to children.
- School need to have rules regarding the types of food, snacks that children get to schools in their lunch boxes.
- Fruits and vegetables need to be part of everyday snacks of children.
- The mid day meal programmes in government schools should be properly implemented in line with yogic diet.
- Cleanliness while preparing, serving food needs to be ensured in all government schools.
- In science, the topics related to nutrition, food need to be taught emphasising the cultural aspects associated with these topics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, following a plant based yogic diet is foundational for nourishing all systems of the body. Yogic diet is a healthy diet that provides physical and mental health. It acts as a preventive medicine by preventing the onset of physical and mental ailments. This diet is all the more important for children as they are at the growing stage and also require nourishment of all systems of their body. It also removes various stresses, phobias, pressures of children and gives sound physical and mental health.

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