

# Ayurveda Elements

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## Five Pillars of Health

If we take the most important five aspects of daily routine, we end up with the following...

1. Rest – Nidra
2. Relationship – Maithunam
3. Exercise – Vyaayaama
4. Nutrition – Aaharam
5. Work - Nitya karma

1. Rest - Nidra: Sleep is the process through which we rejuvenate, repair and revive our system. This is the time our body and mind goes through repair and rebuilding. Best time: Sleep between 9 and 10 pm gives maximum quality. To improve sleep a gentle exercise is good before an early dinner. Foot massage in the evening also aids deep sleep. Direction of the head: Head should be directed to east or south to optimise sleep. This is to do with the magnetic fields of our body and that of the earth. Position of the bedroom: This should be decided based on Vastu Shastra principles. Feng Shui is the Chinese version of Indian Vastu Shastra. Signs of good sleep: One feels refreshed and energised after a good sleep. Sleep is peaceful, and is mostly unaware of dreams. One feels positive and happy after a good sleep. There won't be puffy eyes, headaches, sinus congestion, heaviness of the body, tiredness, aches and pain etc in the morning.

2. Relationship - Maithunam: Our relationship with the nature, society, family, colleagues and ourselves is important in building a healthy life. The first two limbs of yoga discuss this. Sexual relationship is also given importance in Ayurveda treatises as it is the most physical and intimate act of a relationship. General rules include -use aphrodisiacs, reduce the frequency in summer, sickness, low energy conditions and focus more on quality rather than quantity. The most important of all is how you relate yourself. This includes how much you value, respect and love yourself, how you talk to yourself etc.

3. Exercise - Vyaayaama: When? Exercise is best performed before eating. This prevents the formation of toxins in the system. It is never done soon after eating and just before eating or sleeping. It should be 2-3 hours after eating a normal meal. How much? Exercise is done until one's half strength is used. Over exercise results in depletion and permanent damage of the body. Reduce the intensity and duration during summer, but you may perform it to your maximum capacity during cold seasons. What type? Strengthening and stretching in symmetry in the right combination for your bodily requirements.

4. Nutrition - Aaharam: Here we will discuss the scientific way of eating. Nutrition - Aaharam: Are you just what you eat? In Ayurveda, the proper transformation of food into healthy tissue is based on the strength of the digestive fire (agni). The assimilation of nutrients and elimination of wastes is largely dependent on the efficiency of the digestive fire. So, Ayurveda believes you are what you assimilate. Perfect digestion creates radiant health and strong immunity. Unbalanced digestive fire leads to the improper transformation of food into toxins, the basis of all disease. Signs of perfect digestion: Clear, smooth skin; bright, clear eyes; balanced moods; regular and healthy appetite; absence of gastric disturbances and other diseases; glossy hair; light, flexible body; deep, refreshing sleep; abundant energy and vitality; positive attitude and lifestyle habits.

Signs of poor digestion Irregular appetite; frequent indigestion; weight loss / gain; coating of tongue; blotchy, dry or oily skin; lifeless hair; dull eyes; bloated abdomen with cramps / gas; undigested food in stool, dark or cloudy urine; disturbed sleep that isn't refreshing; excess mucous; body pains; gastrointestinal disorders and general fatigue. How did I get poor digestion? The following are some of the factors that contribute towards a weak digestion. By guarding against these you can prevent and treat most illnesses:

- Taking the wrong foods at the wrong time, in the wrong amount, in the wrong way or in a negative mental or physical environment. The most common dietary indiscretion in developed countries is over eating causing a phenomenon known as "the under-nutrition of over consumption"
- Premature stimulation, suppression or failure to attend to the body's natural urges such as thirst, hunger, urination, defecation, sleep, passing flatus & sneezing.
- Taking cold drinks or foods such as ice cream.
- Taking synthetic prescription / recreational drugs.
- Exposure to external toxins such as air pollutants, chemical beauty products and perfumes.
- Prolonged emotional strain such as stress, grief, anger and denial.

Optimise your nutrition: By practicing the following tips you will create perfect digestion. Remember to eat your liquids & drink your solids!

### **1. BEFORE EATING**

Am I really hungry? It is best to eat only when you are really hungry and when the previous meal has been fully digested (roughly 5 hours).

Do I need to go to the toilet first? It is recommended to empty one's bowels and bladder before eating. It is a sign of ill health to empty one's bowels immediately after eating.

Did I wash my hands, face & feet? Simple hygiene is important to avoid illness. Avoid taking a full shower or swim within three hours after eating as it draws the circulation away from the digestion.

### **2. DURING EATING**

Am I in congenial surroundings? Good company, conversation & surroundings are conducive to a contented mind, which assists proper digestion.

Did I express my gratitude? This may be in the form of a prayer to a higher power or at least to the people who helped to provide the meal.

Am I rushing? Eat at a moderate speed, taking care to chew each mouthful at least 10-20 times.

Am I appreciating this meal? Take time to appreciate the sound, the aroma, the texture, appearance and the taste of the food.

Do I need a drink? Small quantities of warm drinks encourage efficient absorption, elimination and the action of the digestive fire.

### **3. AFTER EATING**

Am I satisfied? It is important to remember that the stomach is only the size of a fist. In order to avoid over eating make it a practice to fill your stomach half with solid food, a quarter with liquids and leave the remaining one quarter empty for space to circulate to aid digestion.

One should avoid heavy labour, exercise or mental work for at least thirty minutes after eating.

A slow walk for five minutes is advised. Sleep is best avoided for three hours after eating as this causes the formation of toxins.

However, one may lie on the left side for up to fifteen minutes. A yoga pose known as Vajrasana is a good sitting posture to aid digestion.

The ideal diet: An ideal meal in Ayurvedic nutrition has all the following qualities:

- Fresh, locally grown, seasonal and organic ingredients.
- Consists of dishes with all the six flavours.
- Consists of four or more textures.
- Has a good balance between heavy and light, moist and dry, cooked and raw, cooling and heating foods.
- Suitable to the climate, the constitution of the eater, lifestyle and the condition of the body.
- Appears, tastes and smells delicious.
- Prepared lovingly in hygienic conditions.
- There are complementary proteins such as rice & dhal.
- Heavier foods should be eaten earlier in the meal and lighter foods towards the end.
- Cooking in healthy earthen, ceramic, bronze, copper or stainless steel vessels.
- In general avoid alcohol, meat, yeast, carbonated drinks, caffeinated drinks, tobacco, refined sugar, white flour, additives, preservatives and canned food.
- Eaten with full awareness.
- Big meals only eaten before 6 pm.

If your digestive fire is sluggish boost it by the following.

Before eating: 15 minutes before eating try the following recipe. Mix half a tsp grated ginger with half a tsp. lemon juice and a pinch of rock salt. After eating: Chew one teaspoon of equal parts of fennel seeds, cumin seeds, cardamom seeds, black pepper and rock sugar.

Fasting: Fasting is often the most effective way to purify your body of toxins. In Ayurveda, fasts are tailored according to the individuals degree of toxic accumulation, their strength and specific imbalance. To maintain health one is advised to have a cleansing tea fast or a warm water fast one day a fortnight in order to give the digestive system a rest, to re-establish proper eating habits and to expel accumulated toxins. A complete fasting is successfully done only in a stress-free environment.

A mental purification is followed at the same time, which involves silence other than prayers or affirmations, avoiding exposure to television, radio or noise and adherence to the principles of honesty, celibacy, cleanliness and service to others. Heavy mental and physical exertion is avoided at this time, however short walks in nature and self-massage are considered highly beneficial.

Eat to live: Once you have purified your body and established healthy eating habits nutrition should be easy to maintain. Obsessively worrying about your diet or feeling remorse after dietary indiscretion sets up a self-destructive pattern. We are not "living to eat" but we also have to be careful that we don't feed disease. By slowly incorporating these Ayurvedic principles into your life the benefits experienced should be incentive enough to follow them with ease.

5. Work - Nitya karma: Work is based on your constitution. Earth (rectangular, heavy-boned, solid looking) people are natural hands on, managerial, admin people who are designed to do repetitive style of work. Water types (soft, rounded, curvaceous, large eyed) ones are HR managers, listeners, carers, nurses, hospitable people. Fire types (angular, triangular, muscular) people are designed to challenging, radically transformative, fast, precise, competitive jobs. Air types (small, light, thin, small in shape) are performers, teachers, pop musicians, multi-taskers, quick-learners and communicators. Ether types (tall, slender, thin, long limbs and fingers/toes) are thinkers, philosophers, scientists, guides and meditators.

How much can I improve?

General

Health

5 = very true - 0 = not at all

1. I get headaches often
2. I feel heavy/tired when I wake up
3. I feel sleepy/tired after a meal
4. I get shaky/irritable/tired if I miss a meal
5. I get gas/bloated with some food
6. I get diarrhoea / constipation
7. I get tired in the afternoon
8. I have negative / upsetting dreams in my sleep
9. I get sore joints / back / neck
10. I have weight problems (loss / gain)
11. Though I eat fairly well, my energy is low
12. I get mouth ulcers/ cold sores
13. I get sinus/hay fever in winter
14. My scalp is itchy / my nails are ridged
15. I get stiff/tight joints
16. My hair falls especially under stress
17. I have difficulty making decisions
18. I get pain/blood with my bowel movement
19. I get rashes/itchy skin/psoriasis/eczema
20. I think the world is a very bad place

Total: I can improve another .....%

Digestion

5 = very true - 0 = not at all

1. I don't get hungry periodically
2. I never feel satisfied after a meal
3. I don't feel energised and relaxed after a meal
4. I crave sugar/salt/carbohydrate after a meal
5. Many times I feel sick after a meal
6. I take a long time to recover from a meal
7. I feel hypoglycaemic if a meal is delayed
8. I get headaches if a meal is missed or delayed
9. I get headaches during fasting
10. I tend to overeat
11. I am in a hurry and don't chew my food at all
12. I worry a lot during eating
13. I talk a lot during eating
14. I watch TV/read book /news paper while eating
15. I get gas/bloating often

Total: I can improve another ...../75

Sleep 5 = very true - 0 = not at all

1. I don't sleep well
2. I toss and turn
3. I get night sweats
4. I get nightmares
5. My sleep is light, any noise can disturb me
6. I remember my dreams
7. I am a "late night" person
8. I don't wake up refreshed, energised / positive
9. I am slow, sluggish and cranky in the morning
10. I feel like having more sleep in the morning

Total: I can improve another ...../50