

Guidelines for Healthy Eating

In Ayurveda, we believe that *how* you eat is more important than *what* you eat. Eating is one of the most sacred experiences we do everyday – our food is made of atoms and molecules that have been around in different forms since the dawn of time. When we eat, we are asking these ancient structures to become part of our bodies. Rather than thinking of meal time as a way to “fuel the tank,” understand that the food we take into our bodies will literally become the tissues of our body. If we learn to eat food with respect and awareness, the food can join well with our bodies. If not, the food has difficulty digesting and may cause gas or other digestive upset. Poor digestion ultimately results in the formation of *ama*, or toxins, which leads to disease. Therefore, we should try to make eating a *Sadhana*, or type of sacred meditation.

The Five Major Rules

- Begin meals by taking a few deep breaths with eyes closed to connect with your food or by saying grace.
- Eat in a calm environment without distraction. Avoid television, radio, and reading materials while eating. Avoid excessive conversation and all conversation about emotionally tense issues.
- Chew your food until it is an even consistency. This requires you to pay attention to the food in your mouth. There is no magic number of times to chew your food. Chewing is the first part of digestion and chewing well helps us to better digest and absorb our food.
- Eat at a moderate pace until you are 75% full. Overeating makes digestion difficult and is a leading cause of disease in our society. After eating, we don't want to feel heavy or hungry; we want to feel satisfied. Satisfaction occurs naturally when the stomach is 75% full.
- After your meal, allow some time to pass before moving on to your next activity. It's best to wait 15-20 minutes for food to digest, but if you're in a hurry, at least take a three to five slow breaths to close the meal.

Additional Guidelines

- Drink only small amounts of warm liquid with meals. One-half cup of warm or room temperature water is plenty for most meals. Drinking large volumes of liquids with food dilutes the digestive enzymes in the stomach that are responsible for the break-down and absorption of food.
- Take all water and drinks at room temperature or warm, both at mealtimes and throughout the day. You can think of your digestion like a fire – the stomach uses hydrochloric acid to start breaking food down, and food has to come up to body temperature in order to digest properly. Drinking cold liquids and eating cold foods is like pouring ice over a fire while you're trying to stay warm.
- The body's rhythms mirror those of the planet. Therefore, since the sun is strongest at noon, so too does our digestion peak at noon. Therefore, it's best to eat your largest meal for lunch.
- Allow three hours in between meals for food to digest. When the next meal is taken too soon, the body stops what it has been digesting and moves back up to start digesting the food entering the body. This leaves food undigested in the body, which creates digestive upset such as gas, and leaves food particles unabsorbed by the body.
- Eat food prepared with love. The energy of the cook is always in the food. Avoid food prepared with negative emotions. We eat not only the food but also the emotions and energy surrounding the food and its preparations.