



Healthy Food Asana - Yoga and Healthy Eating



Yoga and healthy eating share many common principles, which are not always apparent at first sight.

Yoga means ‘Union’ - between mind and body, the inside and outside. Yoga practise is a lot more than repetitive muscle action. It requires co-ordination between breathing, concentration and introspection, all of which have a subtle yet obvious effect on the mind. The mind takes an active part in any practice even if it remains behind the scenes. This mind-body union applies as well to healthy eating. For example, minimal eating or fasting lies at the base of a Tibetan monks’ way of life. The lighter the nutrition, the less demand on the body and the freer the spirit.

When you feed an engine with premium petrol, it performs more effectively. Similarly, feed your body well, and it’s easier to get on the right track and drive well. Suddenly our thoughts become lucid, our soul can speak clearly and we find it easier to listen and apply what we hear. The Union between what we are (the active body) and what we’d like to be (the soul’s deep desires) becomes more easily achievable. This is precisely the opposite of the familiar GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out). In this case, it’s Good In, (very) Good Out.

Another one of Yoga’s main tenets is increased awareness. Awareness means paying close attention to the way you do things, because every small detail has its importance and effect on the whole picture. When practising Yoga, we pay attention to every detail, and in the broader sense - to every action we take and to the way in which we take it. Healthy eating is also based on increased awareness. Those who follow the path of healthy nutrition quickly discover the strength of the link between the food taken and its effect on the body. Most of us lack this awareness or have it only partially. We eat whatever we fancy, drink what we like, gobble it up and stuff it in, and in the name of the good life we ignore the body’s alarm bells! In other words, most of us are not really aware of the true needs of our body (“I need my coffee first thing in the morning to get started” isn’t one of them) nor of its limitations. Developing this awareness, being able to listen to the messages your body gives, understand them and react accordingly is the present you get when you start eating more healthily. Naturally, if you combine the awareness gained from eating well with that acquired during Yoga practice, your ability to look after your private temple, your body, is increased manifold.

All the alternative approaches to health talk about free flow in the body and harmony between its different parts as a basis for good health. A body free from blockages - physical or mental - is a healthy body. In Yoga we work continuously on expanding, stretching, opening up and releasing blockages in the body. In natural healing and eating we aspire to do exactly the same thing. Since blockages are a breeding ground for disease, your nutrition should be one that avoids creating such blocks, allows for good drainage of body cells and provides free flow of nutrients to all parts of the body. For instance, naturopaths see constipation as the “mother of all diseases” and put a lot of





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emphasis on good bowel movement as a basic condition to nourishing the body and protecting it against disease. If you prefer to eat healthily, you know that what goes in is no less important than what goes out, and that the two are closely related. You're also aware that your body needs the best fuel around to work at its best. The best tactics to achieve this is harmony on your plate - not a combination of heavy foods that knock you down for hours, but a symphony of foods which complement and balance each other, and give the body more than they take from it.

Yoga isn't extreme or competitive. It doesn't have its Extreme channel versions or representatives at the Olympics (yet). It is essentially our personal work with ourselves. This is a rule which applies to healthy nutrition, too. There's no need to live on sprouts and wheat grass juice just because some TV figure recommended it; ideally, we should find our personal golden path. Nor is there much point in competing at the "I don't eat this or that league" because at the end of the day, in Yoga as in nutrition, each one of us has our own special needs and abilities, as well as the asanas (or foods) that suit us best. The important thing is to find the balance that's right for us personally. This balance can and should change according to circumstance - during menstruation, for example, people perform different asanas than usual, and when unwell take different food - but in any case this balance is personal and particular to us, so it is useless to compare it with what the others are doing or to rave about such and such achievements.

Yoga is about the aspiration for a perfect balance between strength and flexibility. Too much strength, and you become stiff; too much flexibility and you risk hurting yourself. Strength and flexibility complement each other and both are equally important. This principle applies perfectly to health nutrition, too. Press the gas too hard and you risk becoming a fanatic; become too flexible, and you might miss out altogether the importance of sticking to a good diet. It's important to stick to the hard core of healthy eating, the most significant principles, but it's no less important to show flexibility and adaptation when needed. A matter of fine balance.

In Yoga the free flow of 'prana', the breath of life, is strongly encouraged. This is our way to add onto and sustain the life power we were born with. Similarly, when eating healthily try to eat as much food as possible with 'life power', for instance fresh fruit and vegetables, or foods that were not damaged by lengthy cooking. Avoid dead, lifeless, over-processed food with endless shelf life. This kind of food has no 'prana' and won't sustain your life power; on the contrary - it takes away from it. Just as you wouldn't practise a harmful asana session intentionally, so you want to keep away from damaging your body repeatedly by eating unhealthy foods.

At the end of the day, both Yoga and healthy nutrition put an emphasis on personal experimentation and on self-improvement and development. In both cases, no one can do it for you; you and only you control the rate of experience and learning. Both Yoga and healthy eating offer a continuous, challenging and unending learning experience, which





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allows us to become aware of ourselves and our body in a more constructive way, to grow and develop clear and helpful insights regarding our bodies, minds, souls and lives. For those who are willing to pick up the gauntlet, the experience can be unforgettable.

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Life is not perfect. The important thing is how you react to the various ups and downs.

