

1A. BASICS OF GOOD HEALTH



Health is happiness

Health is not just about the absence of disease, but rather the presence of enthusiasm and aspiration, an ability to learn at every stage in life. It encourages one to be on—and stay on—a path of happiness and fulfilment.

Let's start with the Upanishads, a collection of texts central to many beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The Upanishads describe sukha, or happiness, as a state where our senses—sight, smell, touch, sound and taste—are all aligned with one another. Dukha, on the other hand, is a state where the senses are not aligned and is, naturally, the lack of happiness. Each of us has experienced this: the body in one place, the mind in another and the senses distraught. This lack of alignment is what the modern world calls 'stress'.

In Ayurvedic terms, 'health' can be translated as swasthya, a state where the swa (the self), is stha (centred). In other words, health is synonymous with the state of being centred, with all senses aligned—or as Mahatma Gandhi described it, a confluence of thought, speech and action, and no conflict between them. Yoga, for one, guides us to health on the path of shanti, or peace, and the yoga texts teach us that swasthya is step one to both inner and outer peace.



Satvik food is simple, sensible and seasonal

1. **Simple:** Food which is cooked at home, which you have grown up eating, which your grandmother recognises. E.g. Dal-chawal-ghee for dinner and not soups and salads.
2. **Sensible:** Eating food with common sense and with all senses, counting prana instead of calories, eating wholesome and not in parts, and eating fresh and not packaged and processed. E.g. Poha, upma, idli, dosa, paratha for breakfast and not packaged cereals and oats.
3. **Seasonal:** Food which is fresh, in season, which grows locally in the same environmental conditions, and also food according to the season. E.g. Jowar in summer and bajra in winter instead of multigrain bread.

*Eat local, think global*

The world today is fatter than what it was just ten years ago, and yet the dangers of hunger loom over us just as much as they did. Globally, we are facing what is called as the double burden of malnourishment. On the one hand is a population that eats so much that they could die because of the excesses, and on the other hand is a population that doesn't have access to three square meals a day.

This issue surely deserves the attention of governments, needs serious policy changes and more importantly advocacy for local food and food systems. And this is where each one of us can contribute individually. As a regular traveller, you must have noticed

that from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Bangalore to Boston, every airport serves the same food from the same big food chains. The burger, the pizza, the coffee chains dominate, and even after a long hunt, a restaurant that serves local food or even a local beverage is hard to come by. And it's exactly this uniformity in eating across the globe post the industrialisation period that is the leading cause of obesity, and now, as scientists are beginning to realise, of climate change too.

Local food is climate resilient. It blends into the local food systems and grows in a manner that allows for other crops and the surrounding eco-system of fruits, flowers, insects, bees, etc., to flourish. It's nutrient rich and, by default, a culture fit for the population of that land. It makes economic sense too, as it allows small farmers to grow local food without heavy investments (and unpredictable returns) into bio-technology, modified seeds and even labour. All in all, it helps keep the people, their land and their forest in a good shape.

Essentially, it's about going back to the wisdom of our forefathers, of eating local, regional and seasonal. What it needs is the glam quotient. Local food is where yoga was twenty-five years ago—waiting to be adopted, valued and packaged as the healthiest thing you could be on.



THE SELF-LIMITING CURVE

i was recently invited to Jordan to speak about yogic wisdom on eating right and how eating according to traditional Indian food wisdom leads to a lean body and a meditative mind. Eating what is local, fresh and seasonal, eating slowly and learning to stop before the stomach is stuffed is an integral aspect of leading a yogic lifestyle.

It's also based on the common sense that only the person who digests the food should decide how much to eat, not some dietitian. Learning to eat till one feels light and energetic and not dull and torpid needs practice. Appetite is a moving entity and we are all differently hungry, and that's exactly why diets which reduce humans to a set of numbers—height, weight, calories—invariably backfire.

Arab culture has a beautiful system in place, one that is in tune with the yogic philosophy of eating light and right. You are only allowed either one, three, five, seven—basically an odd number of cups—for Arabian coffee with dates, both local to the region. This has an inbuilt system to respect the fact that the human stomach has different needs every day and ensures that you don't land up over-eating/drinking. On a day you feel like two cups of coffee, you stop at one, on a day you are feeling like four you stop at three, at all times leaving part of the stomach empty. It allows for easy movement of food within the stomach and leaves you feeling light in the body and meditative in the mind.



The world's healthiest diet

If you asked me what the world's healthiest diet is, I would say it is the one that keeps you connected with: 1. Farms 2. Forests and 3. Family heritage.

Because then it would allow you to view vegetables like aloo or colocasia in good light. Then you would value it for being the wild and uncultivated vegetable of the monsoon. You would pay a farmer who didn't have to invest heavily in labour or chemicals to grow it. Your family would have at least three recipes to cook it. And you would have friends who would devour it.

All of this is important because food plays higher roles in our lives than what we realise. It brings people together, it teaches us to eat in sync with the climate, it allows us to develop gratitude for those who grow and cook our food.

And in increasingly lonely lives full of free wi-fi and unlimited diet fads, we should hold on to that connect with our food like our life depends on it, because it really does depend on it.



The three pillars of good health

Food | Exercise | Sleep

1. Food

Local | Seasonal | Traditional (cooking/recipes)

Local and seasonal produce will provide all the nutrients you need and traditional methods of cooking will ensure that these nutrients are available for your body to assimilate.

2. Exercise

Strength | Flexibility | Stamina

Your workouts should address all these parameters and not focus on just one of these. Also, at least 150 minutes of exercise every week should be the goal.

3. Sleep

Two- to three-hour gap after dinner | No gadgets sixty to ninety minutes prior | Fixed bedtime and wake-up time
Good sleep is crucial to ensure that you recover from exercise and that the food you ate can give you the nutrition you need. Also, plays a big role in hormonal balance.



Health professionals

A good doctor:

1. Instils confidence, not fear.
2. Cares about understanding your history beyond blood tests.
3. Develops a vocabulary to explain why what you have read on Google may/may not be relevant to your case (no rhetoric like ‘doctor kaun hai?’).
4. Keeps your time, as emergencies are not a daily affair (especially if it’s not a government hospital/clinic).
5. Doesn’t tell you to lose weight, but instead asks you to get fitter, stronger and exercise.

A good dietitian:

1. Gives you food-based and not nutrient-based guidelines.
2. Teaches you about food systems and not food groups.
3. Plans meals that are suitable to culture, community, region. Stays away from dos and don’ts list.

4. Encourages exercise and understands that walking is an activity, not exercise.
5. Sets you on the path of getting progressively fitter and not fatter. Junks the weighing scales.

A good trainer:

1. Teaches you to pursue fitness and not thinness.
2. Tweaks the dose of exercise based on your ability to recover from it.
3. Trains you for strength, stamina, mobility, flexibility and not for weight loss.
4. Educates you about muscles, movements, machines and not about the latest affair in the gym.
5. Looks out for you and not for phone notifications.



When the latest in nutrition science catches up with dadis and nanis

Highlights of Canada food guide, 2019

- Nutritious food can reflect cultural preferences and traditions.
- Eating together brings enjoyment, and fosters relationships between generations and cultures.
- Traditional food improves the quality of your diet.

What's more?

- Stresses on the importance of eating local.
- Recommends eating more protein from pulses and legumes (not just meat).
- Emphasises thinking about the environmental impact of your food choices.
- Most importantly, gives NO PORTION SIZES; instead tells you to pay attention to hunger and satiety.

Basically, never trade common sense for science, because science eventually catches up. And say thank you to your grandmother, look at her with renewed respect; being ahead of her times was her only crime.



Count what matters

Instead of body weight—the number of meals you eat outside or from packets.

Instead of body fat percentage—the number of workouts you do every week.

Instead of heart rate—how energetic or tired you feel.

Instead of sleep timers—how clear the skin looks or constipation or bowel movements.

Instead of the number of steps—the number of times you felt a sugar craving in the week.

Apps don't inform, they target you for your vulnerabilities. Health comes with taking responsibility for the self and not delegating it to an app.



App or Appa?

Food as a number	Food as a blessing
Eat a fixed portion	Eat as per appetite
Obsessed with food	Celebrate life beyond the body
Focus on results	Focus on the journey
Cheating during festivals	Celebrations during festivals

Food as a number	Food as a blessing
Customised to carbs, proteins, fats	Customised to culture, cuisine, climate
Exercise as punishment/compensation	Exercise as an integral part of life



Servings of self-empowerment

‘Eat rice? Cool. But you’ll tell me how much i can eat, right? Should i send my driver to fetch my plate and katori?’ asks my client.

‘i don’t need to know the size of your katori or plate; eat as much as you want,’ i tell her. ‘How will i lose weight then?’ she shoots back, throwing her hands in the air, exasperated. That’s it: she is convinced she will never lose weight if she eats as much as she wants.

Have you ever asked anybody how much money you should be making? Just like money, food is a resource too. And just like money, abusing food or investing your calories in the wrong foods has side-effects.

This paranoia with quantity is a modern-day curse that we have brought upon ourselves. The weight-loss industry has us convinced that we are simply incapable of stopping ourselves at the right amount; and that we need somebody, preferably a trained and certified dietitian, to constantly monitor our food portions and reprimand us if we’ve eaten ‘more’ than prescribed.

i find this trend ridiculous. If you are listening to anybody other than your stomach for advice on determining quantity, you are doomed to stay fat. Your stomach is your biggest diet guru, and if you are attuned to your gut, you will know the exact quantity you need to set the fat-burning process, well, burning. Eat less than what you need, and you set the stage to overeat at the next meal. Eat too much, and you have already overloaded your stomach.

The key is to eat out of need and not greed, or even worse, guilt. It's easy to figure out your needs if you listen to your stomach: the signals are loud and clear. The question is, are you paying attention or are you just changing channels and discussing the latest fad diet that's been cooked up? (*See infographic on page 13*)



The 'eat right' plan

How are you feeling today? Did you sleep well last night? Have you been complying with your exercise plans? Do you have sweet cravings post meals?

How many of us consider the above factors as a reflection of our health? But that's what they are, surrogate measures of metabolic health—your hormonal health, cholesterol levels, kidney and liver functions, gut health and much more. However, the public health narrative is almost always about losing weight. Often, at the cost of health gain.

This is why we started the twelve-week fitness project in the beginning of 2018. It was to reinforce common

Rujuta Diwekar

HOW MUCH TO EAT?

Portions and Proportions

Portions:

- Appetite varies due to many factors
- Can't fix a portion size as standard

Instead, use the **Mental Meal Map**



1 Visualise
how much
you want to eat



2 Serve yourself
half of
that amount



3 Eat slowly
and take
double the time

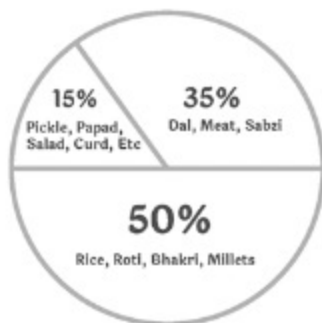


4 If still hungry,
start from
Step 1

Proportions:

- All time tested meals have roughly a 3:2:1 proportion of Grains : Dal/Sabzi : Pickle/Salad/Curd
- This allows for optimum digestion and assimilation of nutrients

Use the **Meal Proportion Map** for your meals



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sense and put control back in the individual's hands as far as health goes. More than 1.25 lakh people from over forty countries participated and saw improvements in metabolic health parameters, inch loss from their waists and developed a better relationship with food.

Most importantly, the culturally compliant food and lifestyle modifications were sustainable, as most

participants continued following them. Fitness doesn't have to cost you the earth, literally. It's 2020, climate change is a reality, and we need to go back to eating practices that were good for both people and the planet.

What follows is a cheat sheet to essential learnings from the twelve-week fitness project, a fast-track version that will help you reset yourself in ten days. It is uncomplicated, inexpensive, and more importantly, it's easy.

It is independent of influencers, gadgets and the weighing scale, and is about improving health and losing weight as a consequence. Repeat that after me. Because that is exactly how metabolism works and not the other way around.

Most importantly, i promise you that if you follow this eating plan for the next ten days, you will report better sleep, less bloating, more energy, and be on the path to losing those inches in a sustainable manner.

Before we start, here are some ground rules:

- Don't start your day with tea/coffee.
- Eat home-cooked meals as often as possible.
- Eat your meals without your phone next to you.
- Structure your meals as follows: pre-breakfast, breakfast, mid-morning snack, lunch, 4–6 p.m. meal, dinner.
- Patronise what grows around you, is in season and is cooked in your kitchen.

Meal plan

1. *Eat a banana or any other fresh fruit first thing in the morning.* Or soaked almonds or soaked raisins. You

can have a traditional home-cooked breakfast (idli, dosa, poha) about forty-five minutes to an hour after this.

Why: Fitness is built one step at a time by small but daily actions. The body rewards consistency over anything else.

2. *Add ghee to every meal—do this gradually if this is a new habit.* So, add ghee to one meal first, then gradually increase it. Put in as much as enhances the taste of the food and does not mask it. Also, take into account the food item: rice-dal, roti-vegetable will need lower quantities; puran poli, dal baati will need more.

Why: Ghee is the ultimate Indian superfood. It is a fat that breaks down other fats, is excellent for digestion, keeps joints healthy and skin glowing. Ghee also reduces sweet cravings.

3. *Have a mid-morning snack.* You can have a fresh fruit or a homemade laddoo or barfi (traditionally made as per season). Or a seasonal/homemade drink such as coconut water, buttermilk, nannari, nimbu sherbet (with not more than one teaspoon sugar), etc.

Why: The Ayurvedic wisdom behind including these drinks during the day was to stoke the appetite, ease digestion and boost the immune system. They introduce diversity to your diet, allowing you to celebrate the season, through eating roots, flowers and leaves.

4. *The 4–6 p.m. meal is your most important meal of the day.* Plan this as carefully as you would your lunch or dinner. You could eat a chapatti with ghee and jaggery. Or choose between poha, upma, dosa, egg-toast, murukku or homemade coconut, gram or gond laddoo. If you have early dinners, then just have some groundnuts with jaggery.

Why: I always tell my clients that the key to losing weight lies in what they eat between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., a time when most of us are very hungry and also the most careless in our eating. By eating something wholesome in the evening, you can eat a light dinner. This is the make-or-break meal; this decides whether you will have long-lasting fitness or whether it will fizzle out in the next couple of weeks.

5. *For dinner, eat rice with sambar, rasam or dal and any vegetable you want to add.* For the rice, pick hand-pounded or single-polished rice, instead of brown rice, for your everyday use.

Why: This is easy to digest, and a complete meal. Rice and dal also improves sleep quality. It is suitable for people of all kinds of constitutions according to Ayurveda (vata, pitta and kapha doshas).



A public appeal

Lockdown has made us fall in love with home-cooked food again. Don't let that go.

The current crisis has forced us to relook at many aspects of our life—be it work, travel or relationships. And it seems to have driven home one point: let's get back to basics. In a sense, it has brought out the romantic in us. People are posting and raving about the blue skies, the sighting and chirping of birds and—this almost brings a lump to my throat—the goodness of dal-rice. It's like people have realised that the most intimate relationship we share is with food, and it remains central to our lives, especially to our quarantine life.

In a sense, it took a pandemic for people to see that food is much more than a sum of carbs, fat and protein. And the macros that matter are safety, survival and sustenance. The panic shopping, even at the risk of getting infected, is a testament to just that. For the first time in the twenty years of my career, i am being asked questions about immunity-boosting foods. Till now it was only about what can one do to accelerate fat-burning. i am enjoying this interest, celebrating it.

It's wonderful to see people return to basics, to discover that when you are short on time and other resources but still need to eat to stay strong and secure, it is the khichdi that comes through, not the smoothie. The question, though, is whether the learnings of the lockdown will stay with us. Will the love for home-cooked food and virtuosity of jhadu-pocha transition into our real lives once things are back to normal?

Well, i am a sceptic. In the early 1990s, when Cuba faced food and fuel shortages due to the US embargo, Cubans took to small-scale gardening and cycling, and as a population lost weight and rates of heart disease and diabetes dropped. But when the economy picked up in the new millennium, those habits didn't stick, and weight and related diseases rose. Long story short, disasters or emergencies may throw up a few good things, but they don't make for a life-long learning. Not when it's forced.

So, once life is back to normal, actively re-initiate your love for home-cooked food. What you are doing right now is a one-night stand, but it's worthy of a long-term relationship. Pursue it once the lockdown is over.

