Concept and role of diet as a component of Naturopathy and yoga therapy

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Diet is an important component of a comprehensive naturopathic healthcare plan. Food is regarded as medicine at many systems of medicine but this is more obvious and apparent in Naturopathy. Naturopathy promotes and encourages the natural food, i.e., the food which is provided by nature and is consumed essentially in the natural form. The concept of diet is little different in modern medicine.

In Naturopathy food is classified as acidic or alkaline, live or dead food, eliminative, soothing, constructive, vegetarian or non-vegetarian, liquid, fruit, and mono fruit diet, etc. Naturopathy gives more emphasis on raw food rather than cooked food. According to it, to remain healthy 80 % of the food items should be alkaline, i.e., uncooked and only 20 % food items should be acidic, i.e., cooked. In Yoga, the food is classified as Sattvik, Rajasik and Tamasik. In this paper, a review of the concept of diet in Naturopathy and yoga comparing to other systems is made and the significance of some important rules of diet therapy in Naturopathy and yoga are tried to be highlighted.

Keywords: Diet, Diet therapy, Aahar Chikitsa, Food as medicine

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Diet (Aahar) is an important component of Naturopathic plan of disease management. Right food is so much important to health as per the belief of Naturopathy that it is often regarded as a medicine. Naturopathy insists that our food must be as natural as possible. There is not only an insistence upon a complete natural diet, but naturopathy equally insists that food should be produced under natural conditions and consumed in natural form without being altered by man. Natural food if properly selected, rationally combined, and judiciously consumed may have a remedial value to cure disease by supplying the alkaline elements in organic form. These organic mineral elements in food preserve the tissues from disorganization and from putrefaction. These vitalizing minerals, salts and vitamins are vital to health through warding off the diseases and premature aging. Naturopathic preference is for food with their natural properties to help health and resistance to external influences and diseases. Accordingly, the food having excess fat, fast food and junk food, etc., are discouraged and fresh seasonal fruits, fresh green leafy vegetables and sprouts are encouraged as healthy food items in Naturopathy.

Diet is now being recognized as one important single factor responsible for health and also the disease. According to Sir Robert Mc Carrison, ‘the right kind of food is the most important single factor in the promotion of health; and the wrong kind of food is the most important single factor in the promotion of disease’. Hippocrates in the 5th century BC wrote, ‘I maintain that research on the subject of diet is of all objects of medicine most worthy of our closet attention. It will contribute much, both in re-establishing health, and preserving those who are at present in normal health, by providing them with a sound constitution’.

Naturopathy believes ‘that disease is a disturbance of the function or the structure of any organ or part of the body; chronic diseases are associated with an accumulation of foreign matter, waste products, dead cells, poisonous elements and dangerous toxins. These poisonous products are the result of lowered vitality, imperfect elimination, and faulty digestion brought about by the sluggish functioning of every organ. Such conditions of the body are due to denatured, demineralised, and devitalized foods which have interfered with the natural metabolism of the system. Hence, such a diet is the cause of practically all diseases of the body and mind.’
Classification of food

Various classifications are found in regard to food items in various systems of medicine. Some of these concepts in brief are as under:

Concept of diet in modern medicine

In modern medicine food items are classified in terms of carbohydrates, fat, protein, vitamins, minerals and water. Carbohydrates are the main source of energy. Fats or lipids are the concentrated form of energy in the food. Proteins are structural constituents to cell membranes. Vitamins and minerals are accessory nutrients, and water is an ideal vehicle for transporting dissolved nutrients and waste from the body. To remain healthy, this is important to have a balance of all these essential components in the diet.

Concept of diet in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda diet is given extreme importance. According to Ayurveda, the diet should be simple, easily digestible, and small in quantity. A person with weak digestive capacity should take diet containing less protein, that too for one to two times. Water should be taken half an hour after food. But those with good digestive capacity can take water along with food. Alcohol, coffee, tea should be avoided in such cases.

In Ayurveda food is classified into 12 groups: grains, pulses, meat, vegetables, fruits, salads, wines, water, milk and milk products, sugar cane products, cooked foods and accessory foods (e.g. oils and spices). Ayurveda further emphasizes that dietary consideration is an important component of every prescription in Ayurvedic therapy. Sometimes, dietary management itself is a complete treatment. According to Acharya Lollimbaraja, if wholesome diet is given in a planned way then a separate medicinal treatment may not be required as the diet itself can take care of the disease. Similarly if unwholesome diet is being permitted, then also treatment is not required as the disease is not going to be cured in that case.

Concept of diet in Yoga

Shrimat Bhagavad gita defines the yogan diet as under:

Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning are dear to those in the passion. Such foods cause distress, misery and disease. 17.9

Food which is cooked a great deal to increase its taste appeal, that which stimulates the nervous system, speeds up metabolism and activates is called rajasic. Such foods as coffee, tea and tobacco are usually considered rajasic. These foods will energize, but not in the sense of lending a clear, balanced energy. Rather they tend to stimulate and push the body lightness, alertness and energy and create a keener consciousness.

Sattvik food

Foods dear to those in the mode of goodness increase the duration of life, purify one’s existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, fatty, wholesome, and pleasing to the heart. 17.8

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga. 6.17

The Bhagavadgita also classifies food as Sattvik, Rajasik and Tamasik. It has elucidated the three categories of food and its effect on human body and mind. These are defined as follows:

Sattvik food

आहार: सत्त्वरागश्च सत्त्वतिहारी तद्यथा ॥
रस्या: बिहान: स्थिरः हुः आहारा: सात्त्विकप्रप्या:। 17/8 ॥

Foods that are fresh, whole, natural, of good quality yet mild, neither over nor undercooked are experienced as lending a calm alertness and at the same time a state of quiet energy. Such foods are called sattvic. They are said to nourish the consciousness. They not only provide nourishment for the body, but they do not adversely affect the overall energy state. They add vitality to the total system by bringing a perfect, harmonious balance of energy states in the food itself. They don’t pull energy from the body, they don’t weigh it down, they don’t make it heavier; neither do they irritate it nor push it beyond its capacity. Rather, they provide a precise balance of nourishment and create no undue experience as sattvic. They are the ones which are likely to give the body lightness, alertness and energy and create a keener consciousness.

Rajasik food

कृतबलन्तवावमुःशुचरात्मकतिहारीसुरतिहारी ॥
आहारा राजस्वप्या हुः खोकामयप्रत्या:। 17/9 ॥

Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning are dear to those in the passion. Such foods cause distress, misery and disease.

Food which is cooked a great deal to increase its taste appeal, that which stimulates the nervous system, speeds up metabolism and activates is called rajasic. Such foods as coffee, tea and tobacco are usually considered rajasic. These foods will energize, but not in the sense of lending a clear, balanced energy. Rather they tend to stimulate and push the body lightness, alertness and energy and create a keener consciousness.

Tamasik food

कृत्वान्तर्थवाद्विभाष्यद्विभाष्यमविदाहिन:।
आहारा तमस्यप्या हुः खोकामयप्रत्या:। 17/10 ॥

Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning are dear to those in the passion. Such foods cause distress, misery and disease.
organism to increase its speed and to indulge more in physical activity, sensual pleasure and “creature comforts.” *Rajasic* food is the fare of the bon vivant and of the epicure. Spiced and cooked to perfection with gobs of rich sauces, it tempts one to eat more and leads the attention into the savor of the food and away from internal signals.

**Tamasic food**

**Yogic** concept of food takes into consideration the total dimension of human existence. Apart from the atoms and molecules, from which our gross physical body is made of, we all possess *Prana*, mind, intellect, emotions and spiritual dimensions. *Yoga* is that process by which we can bring in an integration of the entire personality at all these levels. The stamina of the body is to be developed, the *Prana* should be flown freely, the mind should calm down, the emotions should be stabilized and cultured. In totality the bliss should arise to keep oneself happy and healthy.

A balanced diet according to *Yoga*, is the diet which restores balance at all levels. The *Yogic* diet believes in the concept of *Mitahara*. This postulates that the final effect of intake of diet depends upon the following three factors:

- **Quality of food**: It should be *sattvik* and more akin to the natural from of it.
- **Quantity of food**: Half of the stomach should be filled with food, one forth with liquid and the rest one forth should be empty for the free flow of air (gases).
- **State of mind while taking food**: While during meals one should be calm and quiet; should relish the food, and not be engaged in any form of intense thinking activity.

**Concept of diet in Naturopathy**

According to Naturopathy, accumulation of waste and systemic poisons is the cause of the majority of diseases arising within the human organism. Therefore, it is imperative that the neutralizing and eliminating food elements be provided in sufficient quantities. Naturopathy aims to reduce these foods in the natural dietary and to increase the purifying and eliminating fruits and vegetables.

Diet therapy is both an art and a science. Naturopathy deals with the subject of diet therapy in an elaborative way. It is so important that the food is given the status of medicine in Naturopathy. The real factors concerned in diet are the proper balance of food, food production, preparation and consumption in accordance with natural requirements. Proteins, starches, sugars, vitamins, mineral salts and roughage have to be considered in relation to human needs so that health can be the result. If the people learn to select, combine and balance their food suitable to age, occupation, climate, it would make a lot of difference in their health and resistance to disease.

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**Easily digestible.**

**Completely fulfils the average nutritional needs of an individual, when used in proper combination.**

**Most ideal diet for those who are engaged in higher mental pursuits.**
not eat correctly or rationally and on top of it do not get sufficient exercise, fresh air, sun shine, and adequate rest and so neglect the laws of Nature, it is not possible to attain and maintain good health. We have to pay the penalties exacted by Nature.

Naturopathy encourages that to remain healthy the food items must contain 80 % alkaline and 20 % acidic substance. The proteins and carbohydrates are acid forming, and the fruits and vegetables are alkaline. This concept is based upon pH value of the blood. However, in making the diet prescription, Indian Naturopaths also consider the Ayurvedic as well as Yogic concepts of diet as these are very near to the concept of Panch mahabhutas and fit in the acidic or alkaline food items as per the requirement at different stages of the treatment. Naturopathy advocates Sattvik food for healthy persons.

Naturopathy believes that ‘food has a great influence on the mind because everything we eat and drink is transported by the blood which sustains the nervous system. Therefore, the quality of food has much to do with the quality of the mind.

In Naturopathy food items are generally classified on the basis of the acidic or alkaline ash they leave in the body after digestion. The broad classification of these food items are acidic and alkaline food, live and dead food, eliminative, soothing and constructive food, fruit diet, liquid diet, raw diet, mono diet, etc. Some of these diets prescribed in Naturopathy are defined as under:

**Raw diet**

Raw fruits and vegetables are the ideal foods, low in calories, but high in nutritive value. They contain the vitamins and minerals required by the body in their natural state apart from their healing properties. Raw diet consists of fresh and dry fruits, raw vegetables, nuts, sprouted whole grain cereals and pulses, etc.

**Mono diet**

The mono diet means using only one kind of food at a meal, and not the same one continuously.

**Eliminative diet**

The dietary items beneficial in the cleansing of the system come under eliminative diet. During the first stage of treatment eliminative diet pattern is followed which encourages the detoxification of the body by eliminating the morbid matter and toxins from the system by way of activating the eliminative organs, i.e., kidneys, intestines. The eliminative diet is very near to fasting. Therefore, the food items like citric juices, lemon water, tender coconut water, etc., are generally prescribed as eliminative diet. It is also known as cleansing diet.

**Soothing diet**

In second stage of Naturopathy treatment when the body is almost clean and detoxified, the patients are kept on soothing diet for sometime which is slightly filling wherein patient don’t feel as he or she is fasting and action is not as vigorous as eliminative diet. The food items in this phase generally consists of the fruits, salads, boiled/steamed vegetables, sprouts, vegetable soups, butter milk, wheat grass juice, etc.

**Constructive diet**

In the third phase of treatment when the body is fully detoxified and patient is free of disease condition, he is prescribed constructive diet whereby his new blood, lymph and body cells are building up normally. The food items in this phase generally consist of wholesome flour, unpolished rice, pulses, sprouts, curd, etc.

Being alkaline, these diets help in improving health, purifying the body and increasing immunity. To this end, a proper combination of food is also essential. Moreover, the time and state of mind is equally important while taking food. Naturopathy physicians advice and provide naturopathic diet especially to the indoor patients apart from teaching them regarding the importance of diet in health and disease. Most of the Naturopathy hospitals have a well developed kitchen and diet centre with all the requisite equipments and facilities of preparation of cooked and un-cooked food items. The indoor patients are provided wholesome and quality naturopathic diet as per their disease condition and prescription. They are also advised to follow the diet pattern at their home and be in touch with the physician for further modifications in the diet schedule, if any, so that the management of the disease could be done properly and effectively.

One cannot expect to have good health by just observing proper diet but neglecting other laws of health. To build and maintain proper health it is necessary to observe the health laws in totality which is summarized as under:

- fresh air and sun shine;
- deep breathing exercise;
- correct posture;
- rest;
- recreation;
- relaxation;
- sleep;
- right mental attitude;
- internal cleanliness;
- proper elimination

**Diet and diseases**

Naturopathy believes that the diseases are the manifestation of violation to the laws of nature. Modern science acknowledges that lifestyle is one substantial reason for diseases. Lifestyle diseases include metabolic syndrome and cancer. There are considerable epidemiological evidences suggesting that appropriate lifestyle changes including inclusion of exercise and dietary modification may lower the risk for these diseases.

To get rid of disease and to improve the vitality one has to follow the laws of nature in terms of exercise, rest, diet, etc. and follow the Yogic way of life to manage the lifestyle related disorders effectively. In a review article, Shruti Agnihotri et al. (2016) emphasized that regular practice of Yoga promotes strength endurance, flexibility, and facilitates characteristics of friendliness, compassion, and greater self control while cultivating a sense of calmness and well-being.

In another study Shruti Agnihotri et al. (2016) shown that the Yogic intervention decreased the use of rescue meditation. Overall the study shows that Yoga can be practiced as an adjuvant for better outcome of asthma.

Yoga and Naturopathy, the drugless systems of healing improve the functioning of entire body system by correcting the lifestyle.

**General rules**

There are some golden rules to be followed by the persons who want to be healthy. These are enumerated as under:

a. In order to insure the full benefits of mouth digestion, the starchy foods should be thoroughly masticated and mixed with saliva.

b. The drinking water must be at natural temperature as it comes from well or hydrant.

c. Food and drink should never be taken hot or icy cold. This habit may, in time, ruin the best stomach and the finest set of teeth.

d. Do not eat when overtired or emotionally excited.

e. Do not eat the heavy meal of the day between working hours.

f. White Bread and pastry should be avoided altogether or used very sparingly. Bread and other cereal products should be prepared from whole meal only.

g. Green vegetables are most beneficial when eaten raw with a dressing of lemon juice.

h. Fruits and vegetables are rich in all the mineral salts in the live, organic form, and therefore the addition of inorganic mineral table salt is not only superfluous but positively harmful.

i. After the vegetables are thoroughly washed and prepared, place them in the cooking vessel, adding only enough boiling water to keep them away from burning, cover the vessel with the lid, and let them steam slowly in their own juices. The leafy vegetables (spinach, beet tops, etc.) contain enough water for their own steaming. If placed in a vessel over a slow fire enough juice will gather in a few moments to prevent burning.

j. Cook all vegetables only as long as is required to make them soft enough for easy mastication. Do not throw away a drop of the water in which vegetables have thus been cooked. Use whatever is left for the making of soups and sauces. These are just a few of the more important rules which if strictly followed, will soon improve the digestion and insure better elimination from free movement of the bowels.

**Foods to be avoided**

For getting optimum health and prevention from disease Naturopathy advises to avoid following health harming and disease developing items:

1. Tobacco in the form of Zarda, Khaini, Bidi, Cigarette, Cigar and Pan masalas.

2. Coffee, Tea, Chocolate and Cold drinks.

3. Over use of salt.

4. Alcohol and drugs.

5. White sugar, fine flour, maida and its products like bread, biscuit, sweets, namkeen, puri and ice-cream, etc.

6. All processed, refined, tinned, preserved and chemically prepared factory foods.

7. All foods kept overnight and stinking foods.

8. Egg, meat, fish, fried food, polished rice, condiments and pickles, etc.

9. All garden and farm products with pesticides and disinfectants.
**Foods to be taken**
Similarly Naturopathy advises for edible food items which are necessary for maintenance and improvement of physical and mental health as under:

1. Vegetables - All green fresh vegetables such as Lauki, Torai, Parval, Tinda, Cabbage, Turnip, Beet, Carrot, Cucumber, Spinach, Radish, Tomato, Methi, Dhania, etc.
2. Cereals - Unpolished rice, Wheat flour with bran.
4. Sprouts - Moong, Moth, Gram, Methi, Wheat, Alfalfa, Ground nut, etc.
5. Dry fruits - Date, Fig, Raisin and Currant.
6. Fresh fruits - All seasonal fresh and ripe fruits like Guava, Pear, Apple, Banana, Papaya, Cheku, Orange, etc.
7. Juice - Fresh juice of Pine apple, Orange, Carrot, etc.
8. Soup - Vegetable soup.
9. Liquid - Lemon water, Coconut water, Mattha, Butter milk, etc.

**Conclusion**
The concept of diet in Naturopathy is nearer to nature. It recognizes food as medicine. The patients are successfully advised wholesome Naturopathy diet along with other Naturopathy treatment modalities to manage the disease conditions. However, there is an urgent need of providing correct dietary education to the people so that they could understand the concepts of diet and utilize the knowledge for the prevention of disease and betterment of health. More research studies and trials are required to be initiated by the researchers especially of Naturopathy to know and evaluate the effectiveness of Naturopathy diet not only in the management of lifestyle related and psychosomatic disease conditions but also in the prevention of disease and promotion of positive health.

Dr J M Jussawalla, in his book ‘Natural Dietetics’ has very importantly stated that, ‘all serious dietetic research has unanimously reached the same conclusion that one of the chief causes of the constitutional deterioration of our state of health at present is to be found in the defective diet of the so-called civilized nations. Once the science of healing is linked with the knowledge of dietetics the treatment of diseases will be greatly revolutionized.

An immediate attention of all the concerned is required, as it is the need of time to link the knowledge of diet with the science of healing to reduce the burden of so called costly treatments to manage various disease conditions.

By reviewing the literature available regarding diet and its concepts in Naturopathy, it may be concluded that the concepts of diet therapy in Naturopathy are well narrated and in practice among the Naturopathy practitioners, patients, and Naturopathy followers over the globe.

Naturopathy believes in purity of diet and also in the concept of ‘we are what we eat’. As clearly stated in one of the ancient text:

‘Purity of diet and nutrition can only help us to maintain physical, vital, mental purity and spiritual harmony in life thereby we can manage the dualities of life and pave the path of liberation’.

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