

Healthy Diet and Recipes

OK, it's time to lay to rest a notion—namely that healthy meals taste bad. Sure, all those prepackaged diet meals taste bad, but they aren't really that healthy. Raw mustard greens aren't going to float anybody's boat either. Celery shake? Yuk.

In fact, the healthiest meals you can make also taste the best. If they don't taste really great, they aren't healthy. Really. Here's how that works. You see, if something tastes great, you salivate over it prodigiously. Your other gastric juices get pumping away spontaneously.—Stomach acid. Just the right amount of bile. Everything gets working. Then you digest better, produce more nutrients, and make fewer toxins.

You should be happy while you're eating. That's not just a moral stricture. If you're happy, you have positive neuropeptides floating around in your body. Positive neuropeptides help you digest better. Again, you create more positive chemicals in your body and fewer toxins. Happiness is a digestive aid.

On the other hand, food that tastes yucky is bad for digestion. Stuff that “turns your stomach” just doesn't get digested well, and that wreaks havoc throughout your system. For starters, it sits in the colon and tries to attach bad stuff to the linings there. It sends free radicals catapulting through the system looking for healthy molecules to attack. It's not good. It makes you sick in the long run, and sometimes in the short run, too.

The Munificent Meal

It's best to have your main meal of the day at noon, when the digestive fire is highest. Here's what to put on the plate of your sumptuous meal, which is nevertheless quite easy and quick to prepare. Once we've given you the big picture, we'll break it down component by delectable component in the rest of the chapter:

- A small piece of ginger to awaken the appetite before you begin
- Some nice, whole grain, such as rice
- A nicely spiced bean dish, such as *dal* (chicken instead for the non-veggies)
- Green, leafy veggies
- Flat bread (known as *chapati* or *roti*)
- Green, leafy *chutney*
- Fresh cheese (*panir*)
- Nuts, perhaps walnuts
- A nice, gentle sweet
- *Lassi*

That's the meal. Eat it every day for lunch, and you'll do wonders for your health. You can vary lots of the participants, so it doesn't become boring. You can have all kinds of whole grains, various veggies, numerous nuts, and so on. And, with a few spices and the right preparation, the combination is a taste delight (way, way more sumptuous than, say, a Big Mac from McDonald's).

Jolly Ginger

To make sure your digestion is wide awake and ready to roll, take a thin slice of fresh ginger root and sprinkle it with a little salt. Eat this right before you start your meal to put your digestion on high alert.

A Wholesome Whole Grain

Whole grains are healthy, but most people aren't even too sure what they are. It's hard to tell the whole ones from the partial ones. Whole grains keep their fiber, their vitamins, and their minerals like zinc and potassium, whereas processed grains lose some. The complete grains have antioxidants, lignans, phenolic acids, and other phytochemicals. They are rich in healthy things, whereas partial grains come along with much of those things stripped out. The fiber enhances digestion, and other phytochemicals in the whole grain aid in disease prevention.

Here are some whole grains to choose from (gluten-sensitive people should avoid grains with gluten):

- Barley
- Couscous
- Millet
- Quinoa
- Rye
- Rice

Prepare your rice so that it is cooked but still firm and the grains don't stick together. *Basmati rice*, available at Indian groceries and most health food stores, is the king of all rices. It's a high-quality long-grain rice that has a unique aroma when cooked. Here's one way to prepare Basmati rice:

Basmati Rice

Directions:

1. Wash the rice in several changes of cold water.
2. Put the rice in a saucepan and add 1 ½ times as much water as you have rice.
3. Bring to a boil, then stir, cover the pan, and reduce to a simmer.
4. Simmer gently for 10 minutes.
5. Remove the pan from the heat and let it sit covered for 5 minutes.
6. Fluff the rice with a fork and serve.

Beneficent Beans

Often overlooked in American cookery, to be served with franks on a picnic, beans are a potent nutritional player in the diet. First, they have protein. You don't have to eat meat to get protein. You help your cause a lot if you eat beans, dals, and lentils. Second, this family of foods (which we simplify to just "beans") also has fiber, like grains. So, in having beans, you're doubling up your beneficial fiber. Third, beans have complex carbohydrates and vitamins.

You can use them all kinds of ways: appetizers, salads, soups, main dishes, sides, and even dessert. You've had rice pudding before, right? Well, beans can be used in desserts as well.

If you want to choose a favorite, the Vedic medical tradition gives a nod to mung beans, the split ones with the skins removed (which are referred to as *moong dal* in Indian groceries). They're easier to digest than most of the other beans and dals. You can eat them every day without any bad consequences.

Here are some other nutritious beans, which you can get at a health food store or an Indian grocery:

- *Toor dal*—this yellow bean is quite nourishing and mixes very well with vegetables.
- *Chana dal*—yellow like the Toor dal, this one holds its shape even when it's fully cooked. Many enjoy its nutty flavor.
- *Urad dal*—This one you can get either split and hulled, or split with the skins still on.

Here's some advice on cooking with beans:

- Sort through them a bit before you cook them. You'll probably find an occasional small stone to remove.
- Rinse them several times before you cook them.
- For some beans, you should soak them for a while first to soften them up before cooking.
- Cook them well. When they're well cooked, the digestion can get right down to its task of transforming them into beneficial chemicals.
- Contrary to popular practice in the West, don't add salt before the beans are cooked. Acidic ingredients like tomatoes or lemon juice shouldn't go in either until you've cooked the beans. Then add these things and cook a few more minutes.
- What you can add are spices like cumin, black pepper, and ginger (which have a lot of health-promoting effects).
- To store your dry beans and dals, keep them in dry, airtight containers at normal room temperature.
- Beans keep, but try to use them within six months or so. As they get older, they lose moisture and take longer to soak and cook.

Here's a nice, basic recipe:

Split Moong Dal

(2 servings)

Ingredients:

- ½ cup split moong dal
- 2 cups water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ carrot, cut into thin slices
- ½ teaspoon fresh ginger root, grated
- 1 teaspoon Immunity Mix (see below)
- 1 tablespoon ghee (clarified butter)
- 1 teaspoon fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Immunity Mix:

6 parts turmeric

3 parts ground cumin

3 parts ground coriander

6 parts ground fennel

1 part powdered dry ginger

1 part ground black pepper

¼ part ground cinnamon

Mix the spices together well. (Store them in an airtight container in a cool place away from direct sunlight.)

Directions:

1. Sort through the dal and remove any small stones, then rinse the dal in cool water several times.
2. Put the water, carrots, and dal in a medium-sized saucepan, and bring it to a boil. (If foam forms on the top of the boiling water, skim it off and throw it away.)
3. Lower the heat, and continue to simmer the dal for 20 minutes until it is tender. (If you like a thicker dal, continue the boiling for another 5 minutes.)
4. Add the salt.
5. Melt the ghee in a separate saucepan. Add the ginger root, and sauté for several minutes. Add the Immunity Mix and sauté briefly, about 30 seconds, with the ginger root. (Be sure that you don't burn the spices.)
6. Add the spice mixture to the dal and stir. (Be careful. The dal may splash a little when you put in the hot oil.)
7. Add the lemon juice and fresh cilantro. Stir and serve.

Generous Greens

The dark green leafy vegetables, half-scorned in Western cookery as Popeye's strength builder, hold a high position as a health-promoter. They have beta-carotene, other carotenoids, lutein (an unyielding antioxidant), and—above all—DNA-enriching folate. They're rich in minerals like calcium and Vitamin A.

Vedic medicine has known about them forever and has held them in high esteem. Know what they have that Western medicine is just beginning to measure? *Prana* (a Vedic term), which is pure life energy. Also, according to the Vedic approaches, green leafies have juices in them that keep your body nice and fluid.—They keep open subtle channels in the body where nutrients have to flow if they're going to keep cells strong.

Here are some green leafies you'll enjoy:

- Bok choy
- Collard greens
- Kale
- Mustard greens
- Spinach
- Swiss chard
- Turnip greens

Different greens have different cooking requirements, of course. Some (spinach) are pretty tender and cook fast. Others (kale) take longer to get tender. But do cook them. Otherwise, your stomach may complain.

Here are two simple recipes:

Prana Dal

(Recipe for 3)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup moong dal
- 1 lb. fresh organic spinach
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- Pinch of ground coriander
- Pinch of ground cumin
- Pinch of ground ginger
- Salt to taste
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- A few pinches of black salt (actually looks pink, available at an Indian grocery store)

Directions:

1. Sort through the dal and remove any small stones, then rinse the dal in cool water several times.
2. Cook the dal with the turmeric, coriander, cumin, and ginger. You should have approx. 2 ½ cups of thin cooked dal when done.
3. Add salt to taste and cook a few more minutes.
4. Wash the spinach thoroughly, then lightly steam it for 2-3 minutes.
5. Put the dal and spinach in a blender, and blend for only 2-3 seconds, just enough to distribute the spinach throughout the dal without turning it into liquid.
6. Pour into serving bowls. Sprinkle with fresh lemon juice and a pinch of black salt. Serve it with rice or a chapati (a type of flat bread).

Sautéed Swiss Chard

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Swiss chard, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon ghee
- 1 teaspoon Immunity Mix (see below)
- Salt to taste
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice

Immunity Mix:

- 6 parts turmeric
- 3 parts ground cumin
- 3 parts ground coriander
- 6 parts ground fennel
- 1 part powdered dry ginger
- 1 part ground black pepper
- ¼ part ground cinnamon

Mix the spices together well. (Store them in an airtight container in a cool place away from direct sunlight.)

Directions:

1. Heat the ghee in a frying pan.
2. Sauté the Immunity Mix in the ghee very briefly, about 40 seconds, on low heat.
3. Add the Swiss chard and stir it into the spices.
4. Add about 2 tablespoons of water and cover the pan. Cook for about 10 minutes, until the Swiss chard is tender.
5. Add salt and lemon juice. Cook for a few more minutes, then serve.

Bountiful Bread

Know what's good about chapatis (flat breads)? You can use them instead of silverware. In some places in the West, people frown on such behavior. It's standard in the East, where touching the food is considered an integral part of the dining experience. Chapatis also taste good and contribute to the delight of the meal. You can buy them in the store or, if you have time, make them yourself.

Satisfying Sides

Enjoyment is an essential part of a healthy, delightful meal. Remember, you're trying to keep the celebration of life going on in your body at even its most quiet levels (well, all right, especially at its most quiet levels). To do that, you should keep pleasing your tastes in all kinds of ways. Variety is good. And spice is the variety of life. For instance, a nicely spiced chutney is almost a requirement for your healthy meal.

Chutney

There are a wide variety of chutneys to accompany your meals. Some are made with spices and cooked fruits. Others are made using cilantro, mint, or coconut. They do all kinds of good things for digestion, besides making the meal a lot more fun for your taste buds and for the rest of you. You can purchase them rather than making them yourself, and have a little with your meal.

Fresh Cheeses Such as Panir or Ricotta

Panir, if you aren't familiar with it yet, is great. It's very popular with those who do know it, because it's light and easy to digest, yet bursting with the nutritional value of cheese. (Some cheeses you buy at the grocery store may be aged and can produce free radicals in the body, which are harmful to the physiology. They are also very heavy and can clog up your system.) You might find panir at an Indian grocery, or you can make it yourself. Here's the recipe:

Panir

Ingredients:

- 1 quart of milk (not homogenized is better)
- Juice of 1 squeezed lemon

Directions:

1. Bring the milk to a boil.
2. Add the lemon juice. (The milk will start to curdle, but in this case that's what you want.)
3. Turn off the heat and let the substance sit for a few moments, then bring it back to boiling.
4. Remove it from the heat. When it is half-cool, strain the curds from the whey through any fine cloth. (Muslin is good, or several layers of cheesecloth.)
5. When most of the moisture has drained, gather the top of the cloth, tie it together, and hang it somewhere to drip. Let all the water drip through (which usually takes about an hour).

Yield: One cup of panir. You can cook it in with your veggies for a delicious and nutritious dish.

If you are going to make fresh cheese yourself, we recommend the panir. A similar cheese you can also make is ricotta; you can find recipes for it on the Internet. Ricotta is often available in grocery stores; if not, fresh cottage cheese will do.

Nuts

Don't forget to toss in a few nuts with your meal. Nuts keep falling in and out of favor with the diet crowd. "Oh, they have protein. That's good. Oh, they have too much fat. That's bad." In our crowd, they're good. Besides adding protein, know what they can do? Feed your brain, and the brain is the main switchboard for everything going on in your body. Walnuts have the healthy Omega-3 fats. It's best to soak your walnuts overnight before eating them, which removes a certain sharpness from them that makes them harder to digest.

Other nutritious nuts are sesame seeds (toasted), sunflower seeds, and almonds (blanched).

Here's a delicious, nutty recipe you can eat with your evening meal:

Nutty Delight

Ingredients:

- 2 parts sesame seeds, hulled
- 1 part white poppy seeds
- 1 part dried coconut (fresh, if you can get it)

Directions:

1. Soak everything together for about an hour, until it's soft.
2. Blend the mixture into a smooth paste.
3. Add this nutty paste to your vegetables or other foods as you cook them. Allow a tablespoon of paste per serving.

This mixture will help you sleep, and you'll wake up ready to attack the day with vigor.

Death-Defying Desserts

The health-conscious individual can be understandably reluctant about desserts. Don't desserts have processed sugars? Don't they have fats? Aren't they downright sinful? Not always, and it's important to indulge your tastes, as we said. A dissatisfied body is a body wont to fall sick. Have some tasty, fresh desserts. Here are some suggestions:

Fruit

Sweet, juicy fruits can be eaten, but not immediately after meals. It's best to eat fresh or cooked fruits as a healthy snack in between your meals. Have pears, apples, oranges, peaches, cherries, blueberries, mangoes, bananas. Whatever is in season is best. Dried fruits are great, too—apricots, dates, figs, raisins. An ideal dried fruit is an organic *Medjool* date. (If you've never had an organic Medjool date, you've never really had a date.) Their sumptuous richness can change your mind forever in favor of that fruit. You won't be able to eat just one. Two to four should meet your needs nicely.

Some Sumptuous Sweet

Some other delicious sweet following the meal is good. Rice pudding is an excellent choice. Especially if it's made with organic milk and raw sugar (instead of processed white sugar).

Lassi

For your noon meal, lassi can be a great aid to digestion. (It's better not to have it in the evening, though.) Drink the lassi after you finish eating. Lassi is made by mixing fresh yogurt with water, and adding a few other tasty ingredients. Yogurt in its native form tends to clog digestion a bit. But when you blend it with water and make it into lassi, it aids digestion. The reason for this is that blending thins the yogurt and changes its molecular structure.

There are many recipes for lassi. Here are three for you to choose from:

Sweet Lassi

Ingredients:

- 1 part cold yogurt
- 3 parts water
- Pinch of ground cardamon
- Pinch of sugar
- Splash of rosewater

Directions:

Blend all ingredients together. Include cardamon, sugar, and rosewater, to taste. Drink after lunch.

Digestive Lassi

Ingredients:

- 1 part cold yogurt
- 3 parts water
- Pinch of ground ginger
- Pinch of ground cumin
- Pinch of salt
- Pinch of black pepper

Directions:

Blend all ingredients together. Include ginger, cumin, salt, and pepper, to taste. Drink after lunch.

Lassi to prevent gas, bloating

Ingredients:

- 1 cup room-temperature water
- ¼ cup fresh homemade yogurt
- 1 pinch ground ginger
- 1 pinch ground cumin
- 1 pinch ground coriander
- 1 pinch salt

Directions:

Blend everything together for one minute. Drink after lunch to ward off gas and bloating.

Forget these “Fighting” (Contradictory) Foods

We don't like bringing this up in mixed company, but we feel that we have to . . . in the interest of preventing a lot of future indigestion in our readership. Look, some foods just can't get along with one another. You can't let them in the stomach at the same time. That's just the way it is. They curdle, annoy, stifle, or otherwise rile the other food. That might be all right if it were happening in a test tube somewhere, but you don't want it going on in your stomach.

Here is a partial list that has been developed, to help avoid the most common mistakes in food-combining found in the Western countries. Clearly, there are a lot more foods that don't get along than the few we have here.

Here's what to do.—Leave at least an hour between eating foods that are incompatible with each other. That's the basic guideline. You don't have to strain to do these things, just quietly have the intention. You don't have to stop altogether right away with your orange juice milkshakes. (Well, maybe you should.) But cut the orange juice in the shake a little bit each day until, voilà, there is none there.

1. Do not combine milk with:

- Meals that have mixed tastes, e.g. vegetables
- Sour foods, e.g. sour fruits, yogurt, etc.
- Fermented foods of any kind, e.g. apple cider, soy sauce, etc.
- Fermented herbal supplements, e.g. tinctures, etc.
- Pickled foods, e.g. gherkins and many Indian condiments
- Vinegar, or salad dressings containing vinegar
- Citrus fruits – oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes, etc.
- Green leafy vegetables – spinach, kale, broccoli, arugula, etc.
- Radish
- Eggs of any kind
- Baked foods containing eggs, e.g. breads, cakes, cookies
- Meat of any kind – beef, chicken, pork, turkey, fish, etc.
- Garlic
- Salt

- Foods containing salt, e.g. most processed foods, fish, sea vegetables, crackers, peanuts, etc.
- Alcohol

We know this list sounds all-inclusive at first, as in, “Fine, then when can I drink my milk?” Most people who have been following Vedic guidelines for a while don’t drink milk along with their meals. They drink milk. They have it before bedtime. Milk is good, but you have to watch the company that it keeps.

While we’re on the subject, milk is much easier to digest if you boil it first. Organic milk is recommended. The cows that produce this milk were not given bovine growth hormone, and the food they ate didn’t contain pesticides, herbicides, or antibiotics.

2. Use raw (uncooked) honey only. Do not heat honey or cook with honey. According to Ayurveda, cooked honey clogs the system and becomes toxic. Most honey you buy in the store has been heated during processing, so check the label closely to make sure you are buying “raw” honey.
3. Do not mix yogurt with sour fruits or melons or mangoes.
4. Don’t eat hot and ice-cold foods together (like the favorite—coffee and ice cream). Cold foods or drinks will suppress your digestion, whereas hot foods or drinks will activate it. This creates confusion in the system, disturbs the digestion, and results in formation of Ama (build-up of toxins in the physiology).

That’s it. Deciding not to mix foods can be a bit troublesome at first, like sorting through the stack of shoes in the closet and making some sense out of them. Once those shoes are sorted, you probably find it easier to make quick switches from business shoes to tennis shoes to cross trainers. Your stomach, similarly, likes to be able to know right away which foods to take on at which times.

Food. Everybody loves it. Nobody can get enough of it. Satisfy yourself one minute, and the next minute you’re ready for a fresh plateful of the stuff. Looking for a health-promoting ally? You’ll find one of the best in dear, adorable food. Grains, dals, fruits, and veggies can turn your body into a veritable fortress against unhealthy invaders. Following a few little precautions will help, such as using a little timing for when you drink your glass of milk. Use a little wisdom in how you eat, and your stomach will do its work better. Short term, a happier stomach means a happier you. Long term, it means a you that is much more likely to prevent the ravages of disease.

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