

Mind and Menu: The Power of Food Choices on Mental Wellbeing

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Abstract

This “opinion” delves into the intricate interplay between dietary choices and their profound effects on mental and physical well-being. The article uncovers how various nutrients impact emotional states and cognitive function by exploring the connection between nutrition and cognition. Drawing insights from scientific research and ancient wisdom, the discussion delves into the threefold division of foods as elucidated in the Bhagwat Gita—Sativik, Rajasik, and Tamasik—and their influence on mind-body equilibrium. The abstract highlights the significance of balance in food choices, underscoring the need to tailor dietary patterns to individual requirements. By illuminating the potential for even minor dietary adjustments to yield substantial impacts on mental health, the “opinion” encourages readers to make conscious, informed decisions about their nutrition, thereby fostering a more harmonious relationship between their minds and bodies.

Keywords: Nutrition, Emotions, Mind-Body Synergy, Cognitive Function, Dietary Balance

Introduction

Have you ever wondered why different people prefer different foods? Is there any way in which our particular food choices have an impact on our emotions? To answer these questions in this “opinion”, let us dive into the basics first.

Our body is a complex machinery with multiple systems working homogeneously to ensure survival and well-being. Our cognition is a complicated system that affects every other system and, in turn, gets affected. Simply, what affects the mind affects the body and vice versa. Now, we all have experienced how our mind affects our body—for example, feeling sleepless when anxious or losing appetite when angry. This happens because your emotions dictate your state of mind and thus affect your involuntary activities such as sleep and hunger. Emotions are pivotal in regulating health and promoting overall functioning when operating in a particular range. However, the relation between emotion and food intake is bilateral [1].

Effect of Nutrition

Every nutrient in food has a specific target in the body and plays a particular role. Each micro to macronutrient has a selective role in our physical and cognitive health according to its requirement. There is an observable improvement in depression and anxiety symptoms through intake of antioxidants sufficient to be considered an adjunct therapy to antidepressants [2]. Similarly, a suitable intake of foods rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids during pregnancy can provide the infant with DHA es-

sential for brain development [3]. Thus, it is safe to assume that food intake has short-term and long-term effects on cognitive patterns. What you eat could dictate your short- or long-term personality traits.

Sativik, Rajasik and Tamasik Food

The Bhagwat Gita describes the Triguna (three characteristics) food system in detail. According to the Bhagwat Gita (chapter 17, verse 7), the mind and body are interdependent. Of the total food we eat, the majority part becomes waste and gets excreted, and a small part is used for the wear and tear of the body. Similarly, a microscopic part of nutrition, which is the extract of the entire metabolic process, contributes towards making the mind, i.e. facilitating cognition. What we eat assists in forming our thoughts and emotions, thus contributing to the development of permanent and semi-permanent personality traits [4].

Food is also dear to everyone in three ways. Yajna RpaRtha and charity hear now the distinction between them. ||7||

All foods can be divided into three groups: Satvik, Rajasik and Tamasik. Satvik foods are fresh, fragrant, seasonal and have the highest nutritional values. These foods are instrumental in providing the consumer strength, energy and immunity. It helps to maintain harmony between

body and mind, thus improving the mental health state of the consumer. Since this food is easy to digest and mild to consume, it ensures optimum health of the gut-brain axis [5].

Foods in the Rajasik group are stimulating and overly tasty, such as fried, pickled, spicy and tarty food items. In moderation, they can help the consumer to stay steadfast and goal-oriented. When consumed in excess, they can cause irritability, anger and sleeplessness [6].

The Tamasik food group contains stale, leftover foods. It mainly includes items obtained by harming other forms of life (meat, fish) and abusive substances (alcohol, nicotine). Tamasik food causes the consumer to have a dull and confused mind. It can also promote aggression, anger and irritability in an individual.

Some of the foods classified in the three food groups are as follows:

Table 1: Classification of Food Sources

Satvik Food Sources	Rajasik Food Sources	Tamasik Food Sources
Fresh green vegetables raw or steamed with light seasoning	Pungent vegetables	Excessively starchy, canned and preserved food
Whole grains, legumes and millets	Excessively spicy, salty, sweet and sour food	Meat and fish, stale food
Fresh fruits	Jams, jellies, pickles	Flavoured and preserved canned food
Fresh fruit and vegetable juices	Soda, cola, wine	Hard liquor
Lightly roasted seeds and nuts	Fried food	Foods preserved with salts
Fresh milk, butter, curd, ghee, buttermilk	Sour milk and cream	Too cold milk, curd and cheese
Moderately used oils	-	Excessive intake of oil

The foods from all three food groups are essential in moderation. The Gita mentions in Chapter 6, verse 17, that adequacy and balance of everything is exceptionally essential. An adequately balanced diet is a combination of all three food groups. Like tuning a guitar, you must tighten the strings to an optimal level. If they are too loose, the instrument will not play, and the strings will break if they are too tight. An adequate balance between a healthy diet, exercise and recreation is essential for good health.

In the Works of a Proper Diet and Behavior and a Proper Movement

Yoga of Right Dream Awakening will be the Destroyer of Suffering || 17||

Maximum intake should be of Satvik foods, while Rajasik and Tamasik can be included as per requirement. The requirement of Tamasik and Rajasik food is dependent on their nutritive value. For example, if someone is deficient in Vitamin B12, plant-based food might be unable to provide it sufficiently. Meat, fish, and chicken are naturally rich food sources of Vit B12 and can thus help fight the deficiency [7]. The requirement can also be dictated by an individual's personal and professional needs; for example, a soldier might have higher requirements of anger and aggression provided by Tamasik food than a priest. However, excessive consumption, without the goodness of Satvik food to balance it out, can lead to frequent and unnecessary displays of aggression.

Accordingly, food choices should be made, considering requirements and desired results. Maintaining a healthy equilibrium between the three food groups can ensure the achievement of rounded wellness.

Small Changes Big Impact

Slight modifications to daily dietary habits can significantly improve an individual's overall health and well-being. In one of my recently conducted critical reviews, several research find-

ings suggested that curcumin present turmeric has an anxiolytic-like effect [8]. Curcumin is seen to work on reducing anxiety and can be used as an adjunct to psychopharmacotherapy. So, if a person is suffering from anxiety, they might see a difference in anxiety levels if they include curcumin-rich food in their daily intake. I suggest drinking a cup of lukewarm turmeric milk half an hour before bed. Such small changes can, therefore, significantly impact one's mental fitness. Ensuring food consumption based on one's requirements is a small effort. Starting with getting a consultation with a psychotherapist for your mental health evaluation and then pairing that information with a dietitian's consultation. This can help you draw an elaborate plan for general health maintenance. Make sure to include small changes like turmeric milk, antioxidant concoctions, etc.

Conclusion

The mind and body are two sides of the same coin and are thus affected by each other. This "opinion" sheds some light on the connection between the mind and the body and their interdependent effects. Through our limited understanding of human cognition, we can conclude that cognitive and emotive processes are affected by the type of food one consumes.

Maintaining a balanced diet pattern is essential by including foods from various sources according to personal requirements. No one food group can be considered superior as they all have a role to play. The proportions can be decided according to one's necessities. Attaining and maintaining a balanced diet is not as arduous as it appears to be. One must be mindful of their food choices and make a conscious effort if any modifications are needed. Food choices should not only be driven by likes and dislikes but also consider one's physical and mental requirements. So, let us embark on a journey of mindful eating, where each choice becomes a step toward nourishing both body and mind, fostering a harmonious synergy that fuels our pursuit of holistic wellness.

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