



Short Review Paper

Religious aspects of diet

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Abstract

Everything we eat produces a sensation on the body and brain. The sensation created by food determines a specific mentality. Meat eating produces gross material reactions that develop the material or animal mental tendencies, whereas eating raw fruits and vegetables helps to reinforce and develop of the spiritual qualities. Food is a basic need of all living beings. Just as we cannot live without air and water, we cannot live without food. Food gives us energy to carry out our daily activities and keep all the systems of the body functioning well. Food supplies the nourishing substances needed by our body to build and repair tissues and to regulate various functions.

Keywords: Food, Vegetarian, Non-vegetarian and Diet.

Introduction

‘We are what we eat’

Healthy lifestyle choices can increase our physical and mental wellbeing. Just eating a balanced diet is not healthy living only. By eating a balanced diet we headed towards a better and healthy lifestyle. Eating right is not a habit its a life style. By eating right foods we gain energy and nourishment that your body need to stay strong and healthy diet also helps to prevent and fight infectivity and diseases. What you have in your plate not only affects your health that also exerts a definite influence upon the mind. Everything we eat produces a sensation on the body and brain. The sensation created by food determines a specific mentality. Meat eating produces gross material reactions that develop the material or animal mental tendencies, whereas eating raw fruits and vegetables helps to reinforce and develop of the spiritual qualities¹.

Food is a basic need of all living beings. Just as we cannot live without air and water, we cannot live without food. Food gives us energy to carry out our daily activities and keep all the systems of the body functioning well. Food transport the nutritious components needed by human body to construct and renovate tissues and to normalize various functions.

Since food has so many functions to perform to e keep us in good health, a study of the composition of various foods and the function performed by these components is essential if one has to enjoy good health.

Food and its functions

The role of food is much more than just keeping us alive and healthy. It adds flavour and pleasure to life. The main functions

of food are listed here: i. Physiological functions, ii. Psychological functions, iii. Social functions, iv. Physiological functions, v. Physiological functions.

Providing energy: The body need energy to carry-out voluntary and involuntary work. Voluntary work includes all processes which are not under the control of our will such as digestion, respiration and circulation and go on continuously irrespective of whether we are asleep or awake. Voluntary activities or activities which we wish to do such as walking, playing games, and working require energy, and the amount of energy required will depend on the nature of activity. The energy needed for these activities is supplied by oxidation of the foods we eat mainly carbohydrates and fats.

Body building and growth: It is one of the most important functions of food. An infant grows into a healthy adult by consuming the right kinds and amounts of food year after year.

Maintenance and repair: In the adult body, worn out cells are continuously being replaced by new ones. The daily wear and tear of cells needs to be maintained. Proteins, minerals and water are the main nutrients required for growth as well as maintenance of all the cells and tissues in the body.

Protective functions: Nutrients keep body cells in a healthy condition to ward off infection. They help in building up the body’s resistance to disease and help the body recover rapidly from any infection. These functions are performed by vitamins and proteins.

Psychological functions: We all have emotional needs such as need for love, attention and security. Food can play an important role in fulfilling these needs.

A mother can express her love for her child by preparing the child's favourite meal. Food can be given as a reward for good behaviour or deprived as punishment for bad behaviour.

People feel comfortable and secure when they are served food they have been used to consuming. Many people eat to relieve anxiety and frustration, while some may eat less or refuse food when they are depressed and lonely.

Social Functions: Food has dependably been the main attention of our social life. It has been a mean of love, companionship and joy at religious, social and family parties. Edibles is served practically on every single get-together like family unions, parties, get-together, official gatherings and so on., as tea, breakfasts, feast, supper and so on. On every one of these events, sustenance by implication fills in as an intense and successful instrument for creating social affinity.

Religious aspects of food

According to the Ayurveda, there are positive and negative attributes of diet. Holistic approach of healing is the main aspect of Ayurveda; it covers the diet factor in depth.

Ayurveda has categorised personality traits into three different kinds, based on the food we eat: i. Satvic, ii. Rajasic, iii. Tamasic.

Hinduism, oldest religion in the world, with a very rich customs and compilation of more than hundreds of saintly manuscripts followed all over Asian region for more than 5,000 years. According to Hindus all living beings are made by the creator hence they are sacred and are the pieces of God only, so all should be treated with admiration and kindness.

Mostly Hindus are prefer to be vegetarian because of their belief in the purity of life. As the Yajur Veda says: "You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever" (Yajur Veda, 12.32).

Buddhism in general does not disallow meat eating, while Mahayana Buddhism supporter of vegetarianism because of its benefits for developing compassion.

Christianity does not believe on any principle about diet — except that nothing is prohibited on religious reasons. Christianity is neither encouraged nor discouraged the meat eating. Christians peoples have right to make their own choices on diet; however, but there are some groups within Christianity that follow definite dietetic margins for various reasons.

Those who follow Islam, or Muslims, have the liberty of choose to be vegetarian or non-vegetarian for such medical reasons or for personal reasons, like the taste of meat. Islam never restricted people not to eat meat but a certain type of meat is allowed that is Halal.

There are many dietary restrictions in Jainism. The concept of vegetarianism in Jainism is come from the principle of nonviolence (ahimsa, literally "non-killing"). Vegetarianism is considered compulsory for everyone. They don't eat meat, fish, eggs, root vegetables or animal ingredients. In the Jainism diet is directly related to the religion.

Sikhism gives all the freedom to choose to the individual about what they want to eat and what they don't want to eat. According to the Guru Granth Sahib A Sikh is free to choose his diet there is no restriction on eating of meat but there is restriction on eating halal meat by a Sikh. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru however, prohibited "Amritdhari" Sikhs, or those that follow the Sikh Rehat Maryada the Official Sikh Code to consume non-vegetarian diet².

When we eat the flesh of a dead animal, we not only take in violence in our own spirit, but we can also become affected by the spirit of the dead animal. For us an animal have to sacrifice his life and feel pain.

In the process of dying, a animal felt pain, struggled, cried, tried to escape to continue living as long as possible. Since it was killed in a cruel way, it died in fear, twinge, mental and emotional torture and struggle. Then it has to be cut into pieces, devastated, processed and served to end up on a plate, consumed in human delight.

In human joy, one does not bother of the pain of the killed animals on the plate. Hence partaking in eating meat, one is not just taking and getting protein and nutrients, but the feelings of violence which develop in the animal from its unnatural death.

In the "Mahabharata" it is stated that the purchaser of flesh, seller and the eater all are considered as meat eaters. As the purchaser perform violence by his wealth, killer by killing the animal and the eater my enjoying its taste. There are three types of killing selling, eating and killing³ ("Mahabharata," 115:40).

Similarly, Swami Dayananda, in his book "The Value of Values" stated that days we should treat others as we would like to be treated. Ahimsa and vegetarianism connected by swami by stating that we should not assume of somebody as our dinner if we do not want to be somebody else's dinner⁴.

These are the some of the spiritual reasons, we have discussed here may have stemmed from the practical reasons people avoid from eating meat initially. Modern meat-eating Hindus will usually not eat beef or pork (which is rapidly changing), but eat all other kinds of meat.

There are many forms of vegetarian diets. Many diets come under the umbrella of vegetarian eating. The term vegetarian seems compact but is used more broadly than its true definition.

Table-1: Different types of vegetarian diets that exist.

Type	Description
Fruitarian	Those Who Only Rely On Dry Fruits And Fruits For Their Diet
Macrobiotic	Those Who Rely On Only whole, raw, "Natural" And "uncooked" grains and cereals.
Vegan	Those who do not consume animal foods, and eggs.
Lacto-ovo-vegetarian	Those who rely on milk, milk products and eggs for their diet.
Near-Vegetarian	Those do not eat red meat, however includes poultry, beef extracts and fats, fish, eggs and dairy products.

Why Vegetarian?

The main reason general population adopting vegetarian diets because of the cultural, religious and moral belief concerning about animal rights, health benefits and environmental issues. Athletes also do so for the same reasons similar to those of the general population. But, some athletes may adopt a vegetarian or 'near-vegetarian' diet to fulfil the requirement of carbohydrate for physical activity or manage weight. Especially sportswomen's, adopt vegetarianism as a method of avoiding red meat and/or restricting energy intake to manage a lean body composition favoured in some sports such as distance running.

The achievement stories of athletes who are world champions and also vegetarians became a motivational factor for the other athletes to opt vegetarian diet—Martina Navratilova (Tennis), Dave Scott (vegan and five-times winner of the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon) and Edwin Moses (Olympic Hurdling Champion). This fact sheet will help us to know why athletes choose a vegetarian diet, the nutritional issues that vegetarian athletes need to kept in mind and helpful tips for vegetarian athletes striving to maintain their health and optimise their performance in training and competition period.

It is concluded that an athlete can fulfill his nutritional needs by the vegetarian diet and can also perform well in the competitions.

Researches show that many athletes became much stronger runners almost immediately after becoming vegetarian. On other hand there are ample of world-class athletes (and not just endurance runners) that don't eat meat.

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar is a vegetarian. Vishwanathan Anand, the greatest chess player of India, is vegan. Anil kumble the famous bowler of Indian cricket team is a vegan. Sushil kumar, the grappler who won bronze at the 2008 Olympics and silver at the 2012 Olympics is a vegetarian by birth.

Vegetarian nutritional practices emerge to have a defending outcome from daily life diseases seen in many developed

countries. There are lower death rates in vegetarians because of coronary artery disease. Risk of cancer, obesity and diabetes among vegetarian individuals is also low⁵.

It not only diet that fully responsible for the health differences among vegetarian and non-vegetarian individuals, lifestyle can be another factor that can be responsible for the same^{5,6}. Till now, most of the nutritional research has been done on vegetarian women's of different ages. Apparent food concerns of vegetarian diets are more applicable to women's than males), which make clears to a little level the cause for the focus. generally, a vegetarian diet seems good to maximize game performance of players during preparatory and competition.

Even though several researches examining the health benefits of a vegetarian diet, but very few studies have investigated about athletic performance differentiations among vegetarians and non-vegetarians. No differences was found among aerobic or anaerobic capacities of forty nine (Twenty nine male; Twenty female) lacto-ovo-vegans and lacto-vegans players, contrasted with forty nine (Twenty nine male; Twenty female) harmonized non-vegetarian athletic controlled group⁷.

Niemen and some other researchers evaluated anthropometric, hematologic and metabolic factors of nineteen elderly women vegans with twelve elderly non-vegans. Result of the study shows that vegan subjects had considerably lesser blood glucose and level of cholesterol and likely to have a smaller amount of body fat than non-vegans. There is no difference were found on electrocardiographic variable among groups at sub-higher or higher workout loads. Further, no variations were established among groups for highest oxygen intake⁸. Due to the religious reasons Indians in big number are fully vegetarian; meat does have its nutritional benefits. Vegetarian persons are aware about the health benefits of non-vegetarian diet like it is a best source of protein, it contains amino acids. But, the followers of vegan diet believe that they can fulfill their requirement from the vegetarian diet only.

Naini Setalvad, food expert and health and obesity Consultant explains that no doubt that meat is a good source of protein, but it is not the only protein source. Vegetarians do not eat any type of meat and there is no such report that shows case of protein deficiency related to vegetarianism. There are various other sources of protein, such as legumes, pulses, bean, sprouts and even leafy greens. These food help maintain cholesterol as well as blood sugar levels'. She further adds chemicals are used in the most of the meats we get today. Now animals are no longer kept in their native inhabitations. Artificial diets are given to the animals consisting of grains, soy and their feeds contain artificial coloring and chemicals. These artificial foods and chemicals not only harm animal's health but also the consumer's. And thus, she believes, that one should relay on vegetarian sources of protein rather than meat⁹. Excessive intake of meat, mainly red meat (mutton, beef and pork), can lead to elevated risk of heart disease and cancer. Risk of cardiovascular

disease increase in the meat eaters by the sodium used in processed meat.

Lots of diseases can happen by consuming a non-vegetarian diet, which leads to increase in *Tama* component. The increase in the *Tama* component means increase in negative thoughts relating to various desires, greed, anger, etc. there is a direct correlation among the negative behaviour of the individual and non-vegetarian diet. On other hand vegetarian diet contains higher proportions of Sattva component which is responsible the spiritual thoughts in the individual. By eating a more *Tama* dominant non vegetarian diet, a person is more attacks by negative energies in comparison to vegetarian individual. The reason behind it is that meat is food of demonic forces¹.

Every vitamin, every mineral and every food has a distinctive and definite effect on our bodies and so as on our mental functions, and at some level, on our attitudes also. The effect of improper nutrition and toxins can be seen on our brain very earlier than the any other system of the body. Brain reacts fast, as it is considered as the most sensitive part of the body. Just as no individuals have the same fingerprints, no two individuals have the same biochemistry. Yet, we are enough alike for general ingestion of food for common health of both mind and body. A person's diet has an effect on his mind because the soul acts or has an familiarity of pleasure or pain through the medium of the brain. Excitement, lethargy, sleep, lustfulness and attraction towards sensuality are the some obstructions caused by dead food in the form of intoxication. And the intellect becomes unpredictable or weak by being influenced by the mind and the senses. And when the brain isn't clean, conscious, impartial and virtuous, it cannot draw power and happiness from the "Holy Soul" and cannot differentiate properly between good and evil, right and wrong.

In the 1980s a new discipline behavioural toxicology came into existence to study the effect of toxic chemicals on the human behaviour. Many researches showed that human behaviour is very easily affected by toxic chemicals. Latest studies showed that use of pesticides gave birth to higher level of aggression, abnormal thyroid hormone level. An article in a February 1996 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, "Chemical Levels and Delinquent Behaviour," favours the link between heavy metals and chemicals in the body and behaviour problems cause by them in human behaviour like attention deficit disorder, violence, and criminal behaviour.

Conclusion

We should consume food that should be good for both physical and mental health. The Indian science regards food to give

strength not only the body, but also to sustain the purity of mind and the soul. Just as alcohol affects the state of an individual's mind, so does every item of food and drink affects person's psyche. The very inclination to kill an animal or bird for meal gives a self the affinity to commit violence. It condenses one's sympathy, compassion and kindness.

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