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## A review study on understanding the importance of relation between yoga and diet

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### Abstract

Food is vital thing indispensable for the existence of life. Be it human beings, animals, or vegetation-all need food for their overall growth. The primary objective of food is to increase the duration of life, purify the mind, and avail bodily vigour. Food that promotes peace alters one's mental state, allowing them to receive higher spiritual light and gives fullness of life, is termed as 'Yogic Diet.' Such people quickly attain spiritual upliftment and thereby get rid of their sin. Nutrition is an intrinsic part of Yogic practices. The food we eat can have a profound impact on not only our body but mind also. Eating a well-balanced diet with sufficient nutrients is essential for maintaining energy levels, building strength and endurance, and supporting muscle recovery. Yoga and Ayurveda recommend inclusion of Sattvic foods in the daily diet which are light and healthy in nature. Foods that are vegetarian, high on antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and freshly made are believed to work wonders for your energy levels, happiness, calmness, and bring mental clarity. Such diet also works appropriately for building stamina and flexibility to perform Yoga asanas with ease. It also helps in enhancing focus which is important for achieving the meditative state. The modern lifestyle associated with a non-yogic diet brings suffering accompanied by physical and mental discomforts. A life controlled by the taste of the tongue is always full of pain and various fatal diseases. However, regular yoga practice and spirituality combined with the vegan yogic diet bring good health, mental peace, happiness, and bliss to life. This paper seeks to comprehend the concepts of yogic diet, mental health, and the relationship between the two.

**Keywords:** Yoga, diet, Sattvic foods

### Introduction

Food is a symbol of life and the existence of living beings. American psychologist Abraham Maslow divided the needs of humans into a five-tier model. He put physiological needs, i.e., food and water, as the primary need, essential for the survival of the human race. He explained that a person could survive easily even when his secondary needs (like security, Safety, Social needs, etc.) are not met, but his primary requirement for an adequate wholesome, nutritious diet is fulfilled<sup>[1]</sup>.

Food substance (solid or liquid) that living beings take through the mouth and go into the body to fulfil the lack of energy spent in physical and mental activities is called 'Diet.'

The word "Diet" is derived from the Greek word "diaita," which means "way of life." The Hindi meaning of diet is 'āhāra.' The word āhāra is formed when 'āñ' suffix and ghañ prefix is added to "hañ haraṇe" dhatu<sup>[3]</sup>.

Nutrition is an intrinsic part of Yogic practices. The food we eat can have a profound impact on not only our body but mind also. Eating a well-balanced diet with sufficient nutrients is essential for maintaining energy levels, building strength and endurance, and supporting muscle recovery. Yoga and Ayurveda recommend inclusion of Sattvic foods in the daily diet which are light and healthy in nature. Foods that are vegetarian, high on antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and freshly made are believed to work wonders for your energy levels, happiness, calmness, and bring mental clarity. Such diet also works appropriately for building stamina and flexibility to perform Yoga asanas with ease. It also helps in enhancing focus which is important for achieving the meditative state<sup>[2, 5]</sup>.

Yoga is as much about the body as it is about mind. The right diet can bring us in the right frame of mind. There are trillions of microbes in the gut microbiota that regulate various body functions. Scientific studies have established that there is a great connect between our gut and

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our brain. The gut-brain axis refers to the interaction between the gut and the brain. This involves multiple complex pathways and mechanisms.

One of key functions of the gut-brain axis is its role in digestion and nutrient absorption. The gut and the brain communicate through the enteric nervous system, which is often referred to as the 'second brain' due to its ability to operate independently of the central nervous system. This communication helps to regulate digestive processes such as enzyme secretion, gut motility, and nutrient absorption.

Nutrition can play a big role in keeping chronic diseases away. While we understand the importance of a healthy diet, we often crave for unhealthy foods to regulate mood swings and manage stress. We tend to munch mindlessly under stress and before we realise the entire box of cookies or a bag of chips goes into our system and begin to wreak havoc with our stress levels even more. This is a vicious cycle [7].

The more we eat junk food the craving for unhealthy stuff becomes more intense. The hidden sugar and salt content in these items can over the period of time make us obese and susceptible to many lifestyle diseases. Yoga can help support healthy eating habits. By reducing stress and promoting mindfulness, yoga can help individuals become more attuned to their bodies and make better food choices. Yoga can also aid in digestion and improve metabolism, which can help the body better process nutrients and maintain a healthy weight.

Many studies have provided that diet is important to mental health in the same way as it is to physical health. The WHO has long said that there is no health without mental health. WHO has explained health as "A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." It further defined mental health as "A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" [5, 6].

The critical new understanding that diet is important to both mental and physical health gives us the opportunity to think about public health, prevention and treatment strategies that

focus on dietary importance.

### Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is to explore and understand the relationship between yoga and diet and how it is positively influencing the lifestyle of general population especially younger ones aging between 12-16 years

The objectives of the study include the following:

- To identify and understand the awareness of importance of yoga and diet in daily life especially in adolescents
- To correlate the importance of these approach as one
- To aware this approach among the target population

### Methodology

A random study was conducted between the months of March 2023 and April 2023.

**Participants' size:** Total number of respondents aging between 12-16 years of age was selected for this study (n=50)

**Area/Location:** The study was conducted in the different schools of Kolkata located in the Minto Park and Ranigunj were taken

### Data Collection and Graphical Representation:

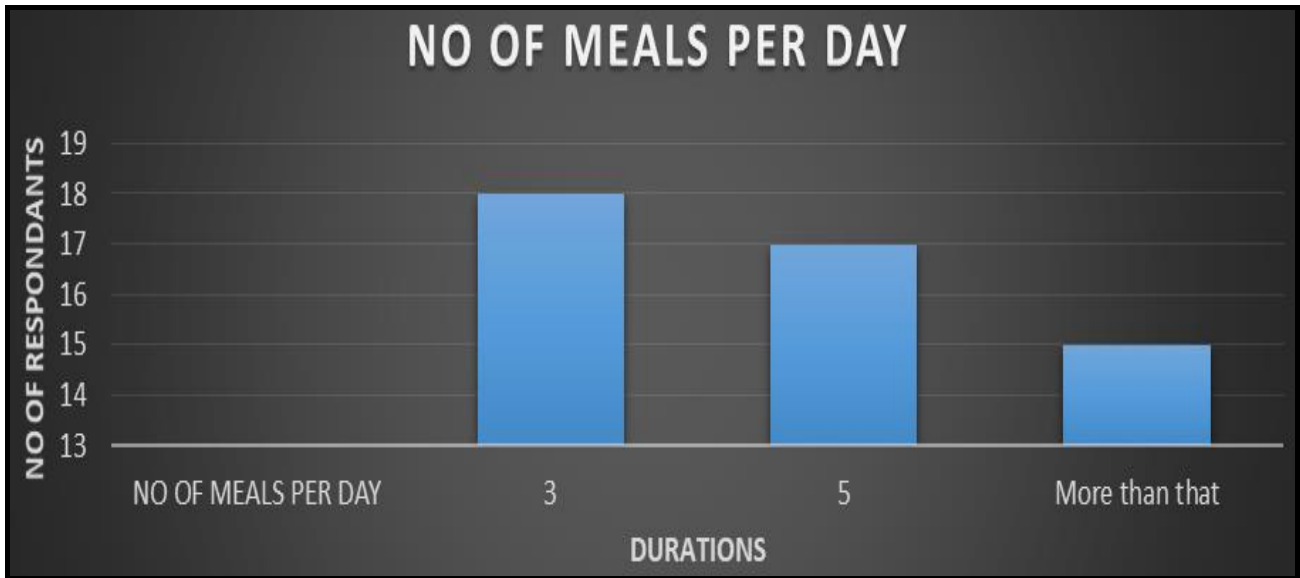
Participants were asked to fill up a survey form in order to understand awareness of yoga along with healthy eating habits. They were given form physically. The questions were based mainly on regular habits along with healthy eating; it was knowledge-based. Based on the responses column graphs were prepared and presented.

Keeping the responses in mind, some of the data were collected from websites such as Google scholar and PubMed to correlate the importance of yoga and diet in the daily life. Selection criteria for research articles and papers were restricted to 5-year window which consist mainly evidence-based and systemic reviews.

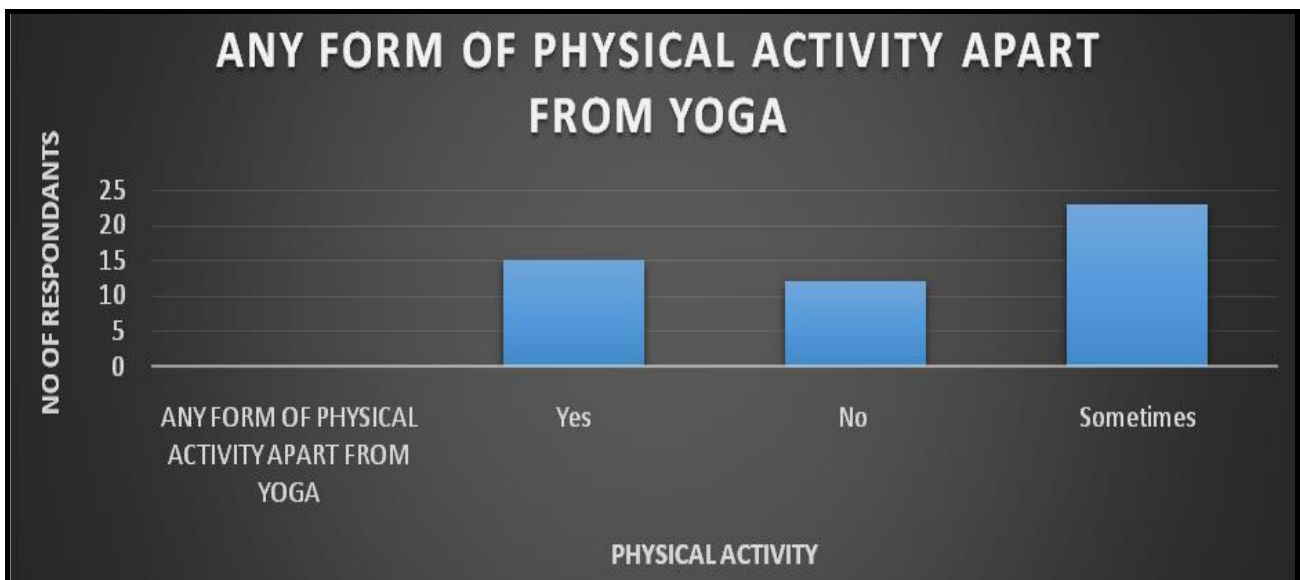
### Results



**Fig 1:** Show the frequency of practicing Yoga among the respondents (n=50; female). The respondents were found to practice yoga once in a month. Yoga can help with stress management in school going children, by improving physical and psychological resilience, emotional balance



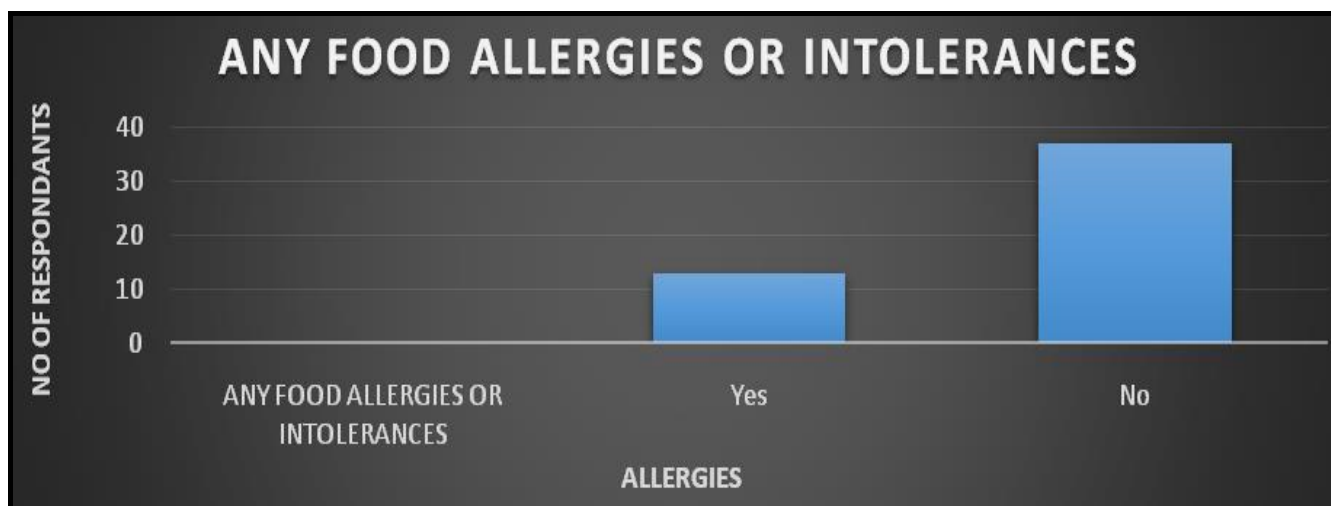
**Fig 2:** Show the frequency of taking meals among the respondents (n=50; female). As the present life style of ongoing students, number of meals and what they eat if very much important, more than increasing number of meals



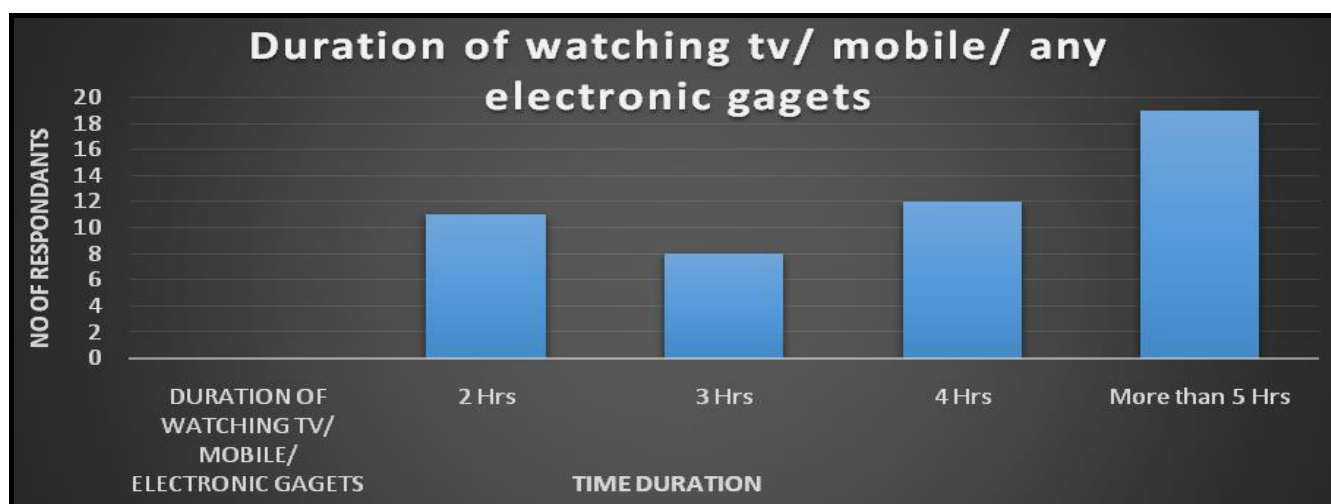
**Fig 3:** Show the form of physical activity apart from yoga among the respondents (n=50; female). For the load children carry in their mind and on their shoulder, they must have some physical activity



**Fig 4:** Shows the duration of sleep in weekdays among respondents. If digestion improve they will perform better day by day, with minimum hours of sleep as proper sleep does not mean long hours of sleep



**Fig 5:** Shows any food allergies of intolerance if any among respondents (n=50). We can alter their food, change of taste and keep them more active



**Fig 6:** Shows the duration/time period spent on electronic gadgets by the respondents (n=50). This is very important, because this is putting huge impression on their physical and mental state, also on their timing of having food and sleep

## Discussion

Yoga as a science and system of health and wellness management has gained immense popularity and promotion in recent past. Components of yoga, like Yogasana, Pranayama, Kriya and meditation have been and are being practiced and studied upon, in order to derive and describe the best of its benefits. Parallel to this, food and diet has also been described in various traditional, contemporary and classic yoga texts. The following article aims at extrapolating the philosophical and practical aspects of diet as per various yoga texts and its relevance and role in maintaining a healthy life. Nutrition is the sum total of the process by which the living organism receives and utilizes the materials necessary for survival, growth and repair of worn-out tissues. Food is the source of the fuel, which is converted by the metabolic process of the body into the energy for vital activities. Yoga literally means "union". It is a union of breath and the body, the mind and muscles and most importantly, union of the self to the divine. Yoga is a scientific system of physical and mental practices that originated in India more than three thousand years ago. Its purpose is to help each one of us achieve our highest potential and to experience enduring health and happiness. With Yoga, we can extend our healthy, productive years far beyond the accepted norm and, at the same time; improve the quality of our lives. Yoga is a 5000-year-old Indian philosophy that combines exercise, breathing, diet, relaxation

and meditation. It is a combination of physical and mental disciplines which make the body stronger and healthier and the mind calmer and more controlled, helping towards self-realisation. It emphasizes the relationship of body, mind and breath, the synchronization of the breath and movement, the use of preparation, counter pose, sequences of linked postures and modification of postures to suit individual needs<sup>[8]</sup>.

A Yogic diet gives a good health to the person. According to Hathayoga Pradipika the Yogi diet should be nourishing and sweet food mixed with, ghee and milk; it should nourish the dhatus (basic body constituents) and be pleasing and suitable. In the Gherand Samhita (5:22) the five vegetables are said to be balasaka, kalasaka, patolapatraka, vastaka and himalochika. These are green vegetables which are similar to spinach. Light, easily digestible pulses, such as mung, red lentils etc. are suggested as they supply protein, but pulses and gram such as horse gram, which are hard to digest and create flatulence, are to be avoided. All human values are losing their meaning and every person in striving to follow this unnatural modern life style blindly and is unknowingly acquiring highly disastrous habits. Hence, yogic diet is important for healthy modern life<sup>[4, 6]</sup>.

Westerners are more worried with the nutritive value of the food that they consume and the food items are analyzed on the basis of Protein, Carbohydrate, Fat and Vitamin etc. The balanced diet is definite on the basis of the quantity of these

values which can be increased or decreased depending upon the needs of an individual. Unfortunately, no thought has been given on sources of the food items, since no food item is prohibited to them. Therefore, it can be stated that Western dieticians have attentive their attention mainly on physical health. Effect of food on mind and behavior of an individual has not given much importance.

A satvika diet also referred to as a yoga diet or sentient diets is a diet based on foods that according to Ayurveda and Yoga, are strong in the sattva guna, and lead to clarity and upeksha (equanimity) of mind while also being beneficial to the body. Such food include water, cereal, grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, unpasteurized and homogenized fresh milk and fresh milk derivatives (mostly ghee, but also butter, cream, cheese (paneer), and yogurt (lassi), and raw honey. Foods that this system considers neither positive nor negative are rajasic, while those that harm the mind or body are tamasic. Foods that are kept overnight (leftovers) are considered tamasic, as they lose their vital essences and may have grown microorganisms. Any foods that involve the harm of another being are also considered tamasic, and overly-sweet foods are considered rajasic. Too much spice, sugar, or salt may render what was a sattvic food to become rajasic or tamasic. Foods that are considered the most sattvic of all are fresh milk from a happy cow (see the dairy section), and fruit fallen from a tree. This is because there is absolutely no harm done to the organism from which the nutrients came, but the organism gave the food willingly and with blessings<sup>[9]</sup>.

According to Yoga, food is considered as Brahma- All living beings are born out of food and are sustained by food and they have not only considered the food value in terms of nutrition but also tried to analyze the food value from the viewpoint of its source, season and geographical deliberation, as well as, individual's psychophysical constitution and taste. Thus the food is not only considered to be responsible for maintaining the physical health but also for our good or bad thoughts. That is the reason why, universally in Indian scripture yuktaharavihara has been recommended. Yogis like Svatahara, Vasiastha etc. have included ahara (food) as one of the components of Mahavrata - in line with Ahimsa, Satya etc. Thus it can be stated that according to Yoga the concept of ahara is not limited to the physical aspect which we satisfy through eating and drinking but it also includes all types of intake in the form of thoughts that we receive as a result of interaction in the society. Therefore, the source and effect of food have been discussed in detail and 'Yuktahara' or 'Matahara' (appropriate or measured diet) has been recommended<sup>[10, 11]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Yogic diet is specifically designed for yogic practices such that a Yogic practitioner does not get ill and throughout his practice he/she remains healthy. Yogic diet is mainly of vegetarian type. People having sedentary lifestyle can be immensely helped if they along with their regular Yogic practices also follow Yogic diet. As yogic scriptures say that certain dietary precautions are kept under consideration before practicing various Yogic practices. Yogic diet believes in the concept of mitahara and sattavik ahara. Thus intake of food for yoga sadhak depends on three things

1. Quality of food – It should be sattvik.
2. Quantity of food – Half of stomach should be filled with food. One fourth with water and one fourth should be empty for air.

As per the classical text of yoga, consumption of food in excess quantity and of poor quality acts as obstacle in the pathway of yogic practices. On other hand consumption of Mihahara, pathyaahar and sattvik diet helps in achieving yogic goals

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