

Conscious Eating Habits and the *HUNGER* Scale

One of the most fundamental principles in Ayurveda is that a healthy and optimally functioning digestive system is crucial to having a healthy and well functioning body. You've heard you 'are what you eat, right?' Well Ayurveda would say, 'you are how you eat' as well. Not only is it important to eat healthy, fresh, and *sattvic* food to begin with, we need to do it consciously to facilitate the digestive process.

Eat when you are hungry (but not too hungry).

Sounds obvious right? But we all have eaten when we are not hungry, sometimes emotional eating like when we are bored, lonely, sad, stressed or angry. Or we might 'preventatively' eat because we know we'll be hungry later. Or eat out of politeness to a host or hostess. The list goes on and on. If you are not hungry you will not have the digestive fire to digest your food. Bottom line. It will become *ama*, toxic waste stored in your cells.

<i>HUNGER</i> Scale										
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Empty		Begin			Stop			Stuffed		

You will have proper 'agni' or digestive fire between 2 and 3. By 2 you will be feeling very uncomfortable, often irritable or irrational. By 1, weak or light-headed. Going all the way to 'empty' is very destructive, increases Pitta and done often can lead to, and will certainly aggravate any Pitta imbalance. You will also have a very hard time not overeating and there will be a strong tendency to indiscriminately eat. You know, right, standing in front of the fridge or pantry, just stuffing down whatever you can find? Stopping close to a 6 will let you lose weight, 7 maintain and anymore gain.

Take your main meal in the middle of the day.

Our digestive fire is the highest during the middle of the day - Pitta time. This is the time of day that everything in nature (I didn't say everything in society or your life) supports your most optimal digestion of food. Yes, if you eat too much, or heavy foods, or if you weren't actually hungry to start with, you will feel tired and sluggish in the afternoon. BUT if you eat healthy (reasonable even) food consciously you WILL digest it better and have a full tank for an effective afternoon and evening.

Focus on your food. No tv, driving, computer, ipad, iphone or ipod. Don't talk up a storm.

Okay, maybe your ipod can be playing soothing music. But you get the point - when you are eating, eat. Period. I know this can be so hard, you will find yourself reading the back of your condiments - but it is worth it. You'll be much more likely to know when you are full, and you will more fully enjoy your food. Nothing is worse than finishing a great meal and thinking 'what happened, where did my food go?' And you will not digest this food properly - your energy needs to be in your abdominal area for good digestion.

Have a seat.

And do your best to stay seated. Try to get in the habit of planning ahead to bring everything you will need to the table. Getting up (or eating standing up) disturbs the downward moving Vata, apana Vata in our abdominal area that is responsible for moving our digestion along. When it's direction reverses it also has a tendency to 'blow out' our digestive fire.

Avoid cold food and drinks with your meals. Do drink some warm water or ginger tea.

Cold foods and drinks will dampen our digestive fire, and we want it sharp to 'burn' our food. Drink warm liquids instead, especially ginger tea. Also, try having any cold foods like salad at the end of your meal (European-style) instead of at the beginning.

Assignment:

Try this to lovingly shine more light onto your eating habits - for 6 weeks record all food and drink that you put into your body. Record where you were on the Hunger Scale when you began and finished eating. If you ate until you were past a 7, why? What was happening emotionally for you? Were you eating consciously? If you ate when you weren't really hungry, what was going on? Were you preventatively eating? bored? Make sure that you put an emphasis on LOVING. Be very kind to yourself. You are learning and seeing clearly what you could have done differently. It is such a wonderful thing to want to have a more balanced lifestyle! Congratulate yourself on your efforts.