

## The Six Tastes of Ayurveda

A simple way to make sure that you are getting a balanced diet is to include the six tastes (sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter, and astringent) in each meal. The energy and intelligence of the natural world is packaged for your consumption in these six tastes. Including all six tastes in every meal not only ensures that all major food groups and nutrients are represented, but it also provides you with the feeling of satisfaction in eating. When you finish a meal feeling satisfied, you will be much less likely to find yourself raiding the cupboards or refrigerator two hours later.

The typical American diet tends to be dominated by the sweet, sour, and salty tastes (the main flavors of a hamburger). We do need these tastes, but they can lower metabolism, especially if eaten in excess. The pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes, on the other hand, are anti-inflammatory and increase metabolism.

Let's look at each taste group in more detail.

### The Sweet Taste

Foods that provide the sweet taste are rich in carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Grains, cereals, breads, pastas, nuts, milk, dairy, fish, fowl, red meat, and oils are all classified as sweet foods. Sweet fruits include bananas, cherries, papayas, mangoes, peaches, pears, and raisins. Examples of sweet vegetables, which contain a predominance of complex carbohydrates, are artichokes, asparagus, carrots, cauliflower, okra, squash, and sweet potatoes. All food from animal sources is considered sweet. If you examine your grocery cart at the checkout counter, you will probably recognize that you consume a greater volume of foods in this category of flavors than any other.

Since the sweet category covers a wide range of potentially edible substances from candy to quinoa, it is important to note that when we talk about including the sweet taste in our diet, we're never referring to refined sugar. Instead, we want to consume sweet foods that are balancing and nutritious. Here are our recommendations:

- Favor fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and nuts. In addition to supplying your energy needs, they are good sources of fiber.
- Reduce your consumption of all foods made with flour, especially during the week 3 Cleanse. Be aware that even if a loaf of bread is labeled "whole wheat" or "whole grain," it is still usually made from grains that have been pulverized into flour rather than from whole or cracked grains. Thus, most whole wheat bread ranks just as high as its white-bread counterparts on the glycemic index. Instead of eating bread, focus on eating grains in their natural state, including quinoa, wild rice, millet, and wheat berries.

- Favor fresh, organic dairy products. While there is ongoing controversy about the health benefits of dairy products, our position is that as long as you don't have allergies, consuming organic dairy products in moderation can have a balancing effect and enhance the experience of the six tastes. During your week 3 Cleanse, we encourage you to eliminate dairy products from your diet because they can be a little hard to digest. Although the ghee is made from a dairy product (butter), it is boiled and the milk proteins and sugar (lactose) are removed; it is therefore an oil and not a dairy product. People who are sensitive to the proteins or sugar in dairy can take ghee, as it doesn't contain these ingredients.
- If you are not a vegetarian, reduce your intake of red meat, favoring fresh cold-water fish and organic eggs. During your week 3 Cleanse, we suggest eliminating eggs and reintroduce them after the cleanse, if you include them regularly in your diet.
- Favor organic polyunsaturated and monounsaturated oils. The major sources of polyunsaturated fats are nuts, seeds, fish, algae, leafy greens, and krill. Good sources of monounsaturated fats include olive oil, peanut oil, canola oil, avocados, and most nuts. Avoid eating foods with partially hydrogenated oils, which are commonly used in processed foods such as crackers, chips, and cookies, as well as in nondairy creamers.

## The Sour Taste

The sour taste results from the chemical action of organic acids on your taste buds. Citric acid, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), lactic acid, butyric acid, and acetic acid (vinegar) are just a few of the acidic chemicals you may have heard of that contribute to the sour taste of foods. A regular dose of the sour taste awakens your appetite and enhances your digestion. It also slows the emptying of your stomach, reducing the insulin-stimulating effect of carbohydrates. Sour foods are usually excellent sources of vitamin C and flavonoids, which protect against heart disease and cancer. They also provide soluble fiber, which may reduce the chances of both coronary heart disease and diabetes.

As with the sweet taste, there are some sour foods that are more nutritious than others. Favor fresh fruits, including tart apples, apricots, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, cherries, grapefruit, grapes, lemons, oranges, pineapples, and tomatoes. Organic yogurt is also a good source of the sour taste. Fresh yogurt provides acidophilus bacteria, which are helpful in balancing your digestive tract. Although aged sour cheeses can be delicious, you may want to use them sparingly as they can be more difficult to digest.

Favor oranges, grapefruits, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, and tomatoes while reducing your intake of pickled foods, green olives, alcohol, and vinegar.

Many fermented condiments, such as pickles, green olives, vinegar, salad dressings, and chutneys also carry the sour taste. Although they are helpful in stimulating digestion, they are best consumed in small amounts. Alcohol also contains the sour taste but isn't an optimal source and we encourage eliminating alcohol during your cleanse.

## The Salty Taste

Salt is the flavor of ion-producing minerals on the tongue. In addition to common table salt, the salty taste is contained in fish, soy sauce, tamari, seaweed, and salted meats. The principle salt of our diet is sodium chloride, which comes from mines or naturally salty bodies of water.

In the right dose, salt enhances the flavor of our food and stimulates digestion. It lubricates our tissues because we need salt in our body to hold onto fluid. It also is mildly laxative. However, too much salt can contribute to high blood pressure and fluid retention and may play a minor role in the development of osteoporosis. Be aware of your salt intake, recognizing that it is an essential taste but one that must be taken in moderation.

## The Pungent Taste

We often use the terms “hot” or “spicy” to describe the pungent flavor. The spiciness of pepper, ginger, and other pungent sources comes from essential oils that interact with chemical receptors on our tongue. These pungent essential oils are natural antioxidants. In fact, their ability to neutralize decay-causing free radicals may explain why pungent spices were commonly used to preserve food before the invention of refrigeration. The natural chemicals in hot spices are also antibacterial.

The pungent or spicy taste is found in chili peppers, onions, garlic, chives, leeks, fresh and dry ginger, radishes, mustard, and horseradish. In addition, many culinary spices, such as basil, black pepper, cardamom, cayenne, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, oregano, peppermint, rosemary, and thyme, carry the pungent taste.

Adding spice to your life will serve both your palate and your health. Modern scientific research has shown that natural compounds contained within spicy food sources such as onions, leeks, chives, and garlic may help lower your cholesterol level and blood pressure. Other studies have found that these pungent foods can protect you from carcinogens in the environment. Pungent foods enhance the appetite and stimulate digestion. If you have ever eaten a spicy meal at a Mexican, Indian, Chinese, or Thai restaurant, you will also know firsthand that the pungent taste promotes sweating and clears the sinus passages.

## The Bitter Taste

Green and yellow vegetables are the primary source of the bitter taste. Common examples include bell peppers, broccoli, celery, chard, eggplant, endive, spinach, and zucchini. Most green leafy vegetables range from mildly to very bitter. Bitterness reflects the many natural phytochemicals (*phyto* is Latin for plant) contained in vegetables that have a wide range of health-enhancing effects. For instance, broccoli and cauliflower are rich in phytochemicals known as *isothiocyanates*, which have been shown to help fight cancer and heart disease. Asparagus, green peppers, and cabbage are rich in flavonoids, which protect against damage to the body's DNA, fight infection, and may even reduce your risk for memory loss.

Many herbs also carry the bitter taste and are important components of a healthy, balanced diet. Chamomile, cilantro, coriander, cumin, dill, fenugreek, licorice, rhubarb, rosemary, saffron, sage, tarragon, and turmeric are examples of culinary herbs and spices that contain the bitter flavor. Most medicinal herbs such as echinacea, aloe, black cohosh, gentian, goldenseal, licorice, passionflower, skullcap, and St. John's wort are predominantly bitter due to their high concentrations of phytochemicals. Small amounts of the bitter taste enhance the flavor of food and contribute to your well-being.

### **The Astringent Taste**

Astringent foods produce a drying, compacting, and puckering effect on our physiology. Although modern science does not classify the astringent property as an actual taste, the natural chemicals that produce astringency have many health benefits, including the regulation of digestive functioning and enhanced wound healing. Examples of foods that carry the astringent taste include tart apples, artichokes, asparagus, beans, bell peppers, buttermilk, celery, cherries, cranberries, cucumbers, figs, lemons, lentils, mung beans, mushrooms, pomegranates, persimmons, potatoes, soybeans, spinach, green and black tea, coffee, and whole wheat and rye grain products.

Beans, legumes, and peas are rich in complex carbohydrates, vegetable protein, and both soluble and insoluble fiber. Beans and legumes also provide us with folic acid, calcium, and magnesium. Soaking the beans and adding bay leaves helps eliminate the oligosaccharides that can create gas and bloating and facilitates easier digestion. During your week 3 Cleanse, we recommend small, easy-to-digest varieties of beans, such as mung beans and lentils.

### **How the Six Tastes Create Balance and Satisfaction**

The human brain sends hunger signals when it becomes aware of the need for food. As we eat, our taste buds send messages to the brain informing it if we have ingested foods that provide the energy and nutrients we need. The six tastes are the codes that inform our nervous systems of a meal's nutritional content. If we sample foods that correspond to each of these tastes throughout the day, our meals will provide a wide assortment of health-promoting nutrients. If we do not have all flavors available, the brain is not satisfied and continues to send signals to eat more. As a result, we take in too many calories but remain malnourished. In order to include all six tastes in your meals, you may need to experiment with different food and new spices.

Enjoy the experiencing of nourishing your body with delicious, flavorful food!