

Wednesday, 23 October 2024

Awakening to Conscious Digestion

So, we are talking about the inner version of the daily regimen, starting with waking up. What do you usually do soon after waking up?

You mentioned starting with some divine or spiritual practice, then you go to the toilet and walk with your dog. Maybe you snooze a few times. Is there anything else? Do you do something different?

You said you try to be conscious of your body and your state of mind. So, what is this process you're doing?

It sounds like it's about becoming more awake, more aware, transitioning from a state of sleep to a state of consciousness. That's great. So now let's discuss what Ayurveda says about this.

As Aurelia mentioned, Ayurveda emphasizes listening to yourself, and more specifically, listening to your digestive system first thing in the morning. According to Ayurveda, if you wake up and you feel like you haven't fully digested the food from the previous day, it is advisable to rest or sleep more. Surprising, isn't it?

Now, you might be wondering how to assess whether the food from the previous day has been fully digested. Ayurveda teaches that the fundamental key to good health is conscious living, and this includes being aware of your digestive system.

Malka, could you tell us some signs that indicate you have completely digested your previous meal?

Malka: *Burping? Evacuating stool?*

We are asking about the signs of digestion, not just elimination. Stool evacuation is part of excretion, not digestion. Let me clarify: digestion is the process of breaking down food, while excretion is the process of eliminating waste. Digestion, absorption, and excretion are different processes.

So, what is digestion? **Digestion is the process of breaking down complex food molecules physically, chemically, and biologically into absorbable forms. It's a transformative process.** It begins in the mouth, where the enzymes in your saliva, like salivary amylase, start breaking down carbohydrates. This process was written down in Ayurvedic texts thousands of years ago, and modern science has since confirmed it.

From the mouth, digestion continues in the stomach and small intestine, where various digestive juices and enzymes break down the food further. This includes mechanical digestion through chewing and stomach contractions, as well as biological digestion through the bacteria in our gut. The active phase of digestion ends in the small intestine, though some reabsorption of water and nutrients occurs in the large intestine.

Do you know how long it takes to digest a meal?

Malka: *Three to four hours?*

It generally takes about three hours for the food to pass through the stomach, but the full process of digestion and absorption continues for 10 to 12 hours.

And here's something surprising: the entire process of food moving through the digestive tract and being excreted as stool can take 60 to 70 hours. That means it can take two or three days for your food to completely leave your body as waste.

Now let's talk about chewing. Many of us swallow food too quickly without chewing it properly. Chewing is the first step in digestion, and if you don't chew thoroughly, it can lead to stomach problems. Simply by chewing your food well, you can solve many digestive issues.

Let's also touch on hydration. When should you drink water? Should it be before, during, or after a meal? It depends on your body's state.

- If you have strong hunger and tend to overeat, drinking water before a meal can help control your appetite and calm your digestive fire.
- If you have a normal metabolism, it's best to sip water during the meal.
- If you want to gain weight or stay hydrated, you can drink water after the meal.

Your needs will vary depending on your digestive fire, or "Agni."

Now let's talk about cleanliness. In Ayurveda, it's important to wash your hands, mouth, and face before and after meals. This isn't just about hygiene—it's also an energetic cleansing and an awakening. You're removing impurities from the body that you don't want to swallow.

When I started traveling in Europe 16 or 17 years ago, I noticed that many people don't wash their hands or mouths before or after meals. In India, every home or restaurant has a wash basin near the dining area. In many European homes, I've seen that people often use tissues or cutlery, which reduces the need to touch the food directly, so they don't feel the need to wash. However, this habit might contribute to the higher rates of dental issues I've observed.

Rinsing your mouth after each meal helps remove food particles and prevents the growth of harmful bacteria. If you don't clean your mouth after meals, these particles stay in your mouth until you brush your teeth at night, leading to dental problems.