



TRADITIONAL AND HEALTHY FOOD

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ABSTRACT

Food, one of the primary sources of energy, helps replenish energy expended during mental and physical activities. Food, which provides energy, is one of the main reasons for good health. It is important to eat healthy, hygienic and nutritious food, in keeping with the requirements of the body and the tenets of measure and method. During an earlier era, food was looked on as a form of medicine also. Our forebears lived long and healthy lives on account of the natural and nutritious food they ate. It is easy for us to follow the same principle of eating natural food prepared hygienically and with care.

KEYWORDS : Replenish, hygienic, tenet, forebears, nutritious, care.

INTRODUCTION:

Civilisation, culture and refined food habits originated in the ancient land of Tamils, from where it spread to other parts of the world. It was customary for Tamils to treat food as a form of medicine and it helped them live long and healthy lives. Traditions often have their roots in families from where it extends to the entire society. The need to travel to different places, as a part of one's trade or profession, has brought changes in food habits and paved the way for a variety of ailments and related problems. Food habits, common to people from all over the country has become imperative.

TRADITIONAL FOOD HABITS OF TAMILS:

When we view the foods used in the ancient periods of the Tamils, they gave importance to Little Millets. The most important ones among them are kodu (varagu), foxtail (Thinai), barnyard (Kuthiraivali), little millet (Saamai), pearl millet (kambu), jowar (maize), ragi and foods like fenugreek ball, ragi dosa, sweetened multi-grain balls, paniyara twister, sesame rice, mango-seed curry, flattened rice with peas rice, natural milk, etc. If we take such kind of healthy food, we can nourish our physical body. Ancient people's food contained only with these little millets. We can maintain our physical body, when we eat such healthy food varieties daily. The health of the ancient people contained foods of little millets.

During early period, the Tamils ate food ball (kali), which gave them physical strength and energy. Before going to work in the field, they ate fenugreek, jowar, ragi, black gram or pearl millet balls. Food balls are solid food. When they went to the field to work after having such foods, they were able to do any kind of hard work. As these foods gave stimulant, capacity, energy and power, they considered it to be the best practice to maintain health.

KINDS OF LITTLE MILLET FOODS:

The traditional little millet foods are: foxtail millet halwa, little millet- string hopper, samai vegetable briyani, banana-stem pachadi, mixed-vegetable kootu, barnyard-curd rice, jowar dosa, groundnut chutney,

saamai-pepper pongal, foxtail- mixed sweet, foxtail -hot paniyaram, samai-kara puttu, tri-fruit mix, foxtail ghreer, jowar paniyaram, foxtail adhrasam, barnyard white pongal etc. These traditional foods are not only satisfy the hunger but also give energy and has medicinal values.

“From food to food of body” (Purananuru)

“Who gave food gave life.” (Manimegalai)

“As food is, likewise the thought.” (Namazhwar)

Therefore, method of little millet food habits is to realize the purity of food simplifying the life with greatness.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF GRAINS:

THINAI (Millet): Helps relieve problems born of phlegm and flatulence. It contains plenty of proteins, fibres, fats, minerals, iron and Beta Carotin.

Kambu (Millets)

Contains plenty of calcium and iron.

Corn

Contains carbohydrates and fats

Varagu

It is the traditional food in many countries across the world. Varagu contains fibres and flour and is easy to digest.

KEZHVARAGU: Once considered the staple diet of the poor, kezhvaragu now is a part of the diet for the sick and even the rich. It strengthens the body and can be fed as gruel to infants. Made into Idly, Dosa or sweets, it is ideal for children.

KUDIRAIVALI: Kudiraivali contains proteins, iron, calcium and fibres, which makes it ideal for people suffering from diabetes, blood pressure or cancer. The fibre in Kudiraivali helps relieve cardiac problems and remove fat from the blood vessels.

Siddha Medicines and Pubescent Girls:

Girls who have attained puberty should be provided with special medicines and care in keeping with the Siddha system. The medicines should be administered at least once a day for a short period, following puberty. Sesame seeds, black gram and asafoetida should necessarily form a part of their diet and medication; it prevents the onset of menstrual problems and makes delivery of children, at a later stage, easy. Good health of a country and its people depends, to a very large extent, on the health of its women. Sweets made of sesame seeds as well as gruel made of black gram and fenugreek help improve menstrual discharge besides preventing body or hip pain, ovarian cysts and hormone problems.

TYPES OF FOOD:

Food can be classified into Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic, depending on the type of emotions, viz. peace, pleasure or pain, they produce.

“Life energies seeking to realise their origin is Sattvic; when immersed in pleasure, it is Rajasic; when mired in evil, it is Tamasic”
- G. K. 1168

Fruits, vegetables, grains and greens, which give rise to the noble sentiments of patience, love, compassion and tolerance, are Sattvic in nature. They are ideal for people on the spiritual path as they induce peace and tranquility. Beetroot, carrots, turnip and yam are Tamasic food and they produce mischievous and pleasurable deeds. Meat, cardamom, cloves and chillies, which produce evil and cruel thoughts, are Rajasic. They often are the cause behind ailments and are best avoided. A strict vegetarian diet is ideal for people on the spiritual path.

PADARTHA CHINTAMANI:

Padartha Chintamani, a text prepared by the Siddha sages of an earlier era, explains in detail the benefits of consuming water, milk, pulses, rice and many other items. It also provides details of the types of rice, milk and other food items. Besides the above, the text also explains the kind of food to be taken during the different stages of human life, according to the age-old tradition of Tamil people. Vethathiri Maharishi had advised that food should be in keeping with the climatic conditions of the place people live in. A simple diet, ideal for people of all ages and times, is given below. Grains cultivated in wet and dry lands, essential for physical and mental wellbeing, should form a part of the daily diet.

“Gruel made of rice or other cereals, along with grated coconut, may be taken in the morning. Midday meal should consist of rice and plenty of vegetables; leavened bread (chapatti) and vegetables are ideal for supper. Milk can be taken in plenty, but coffee and tea are to be avoided” - G. K. 924

Breakfast consisting of gruel prepared from grains should be had by 6.30 or 7.00 in the morning. Midday meals, made of rice, clarified butter (ghee) and vegetables, should be eaten between 12.00 and 12.30 in the afternoon. Leavened bread (chapatti) along with vegetables and fruits is ideal for supper. According to Maharishi the above dietary regimen is good for all, irrespective of the place they live in.

WAYS TO CURE AILMENTS:

“Ensure good digestion, excretion and eat in moderate quantities for health and long life” – Kural 943

Eating when hungry, or when what was taken earlier has digested, is ideal. Overeating has to be avoided with care. The quantity of food should be just sufficient to make one hungry at least an hour before the next meal. This is what the old adage **“eat only when hungry”** means. Food should occupy only ½ the stomach; the other ½ should be filled with water and air, in equal proportions.

FOOD AS MEDICINE:

Traditional food often acts as medicine; fenugreek, for example, relieves diabetic problems. It is roasted, powdered and added to the curry in India. Idli and Dosa, which contain fenugreek, can be eaten regularly. Pepper acts as an antidote for toxic substances besides providing heat to the body. Cumin seeds serve to cool the body, while garlic regulates gas and removes excess fat from around the heart muscles. Turmeric works as a germicide. Fibrous food help in digestion, assimilation and excretion of body wastes. Coconut, beans, oranges, grapes mangos and pomegranates are good for excretion.

CONCLUSION:

Good health is when the Panchabhoothas, seven body components, three impurities, three gunas and six tastes are in balance. Changes in food habits and style of living, which often are at variance with the laws of Nature, pave the way for ailments and related problems. Food, which contains unsuitable chemicals, often becomes a reason for ill health. Despite the easy availability of traditional food items people choose to eat things like pizzas and burgers. Let us confine ourselves to traditional food, free of dangerous chemicals; money, which is spent on medicines, can be utilised for purchasing grains that are good for health. Let us adopt and follow the practice for the benefit of the future generations.

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