

Research Paper

Nourishing the Mind: Exploring the Mental Health Benefits of a Sattvic Diet and Yogic Practices

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ABSTRACT

The Sattvic diet, which is deeply rooted in ancient Indian customs, together with yogic practices, provides a comprehensive method for enhancing mental wellness. This diet emphasizes on nourishing, balanced, and harmonious foods such as dairy, almonds, whole grains, and fresh produce while steering clear of processed and overstimulating items that can disturb emotional balance. It goes beyond mere nutrition, facilitating physical purification and mental clarity. Yogic practices, including asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breath regulation), and dhyana (meditation), cooperate effectively to harmonize the body, mind, and spirit. These methods are demonstrated to alleviate stress, balance emotions, and improve mental concentration by positively affecting the nervous system. Together, Sattvic living and yoga foster mindfulness, self-awareness, and inner tranquillity, which are essential components for promoting good mental health. This holistic approach considers both physical and psychological aspects, making it particularly relevant in today's fast-paced and stressful environment. This review paper examines how these enduring practices can act as effective and culturally meaningful strategies to enhance emotional stability and overall wellness.

Keywords: *Yoga, Meditation, Sattvic Diet, Mental wellbeing*

In recent years, due to fast and more demanding lifestyle, many individuals seek ways to achieve greater emotional stability, balance, and relaxation. Although modern medicine offers important resources for mental health, traditional practices like yoga and the Sattvic diet present a more organic and holistic pathway to attaining inner peace. The Sattvic diet, which emphasizes simplicity, freshness, and a plant-based approach, keeps qualities that calm the mind and nourish the body. When paired with yogic techniques such as meditation, breathing exercises, and physical activity, it builds a solid foundation for emotional well-being. This practice nourishes the spirit rather than merely addressing symptoms. This study looks into how these age-old practices can encourage a steadier mindset, help us reconnect with ourselves, and reduce stress levels.

Ever since "sattvic" translates to "pure," the Sattvik Aahar, or "sattvic diet," is considered the most pristine of all dietary options. This diet includes items such as dried fruits and

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seeds, fresh dairy products like milk and cheese, legumes, sprouted seeds, honey, herbal teas, fresh fruits, vegetables from land and sea, whole grains (especially sprouted ones), and fresh fruit juices. According to Bhasarkar et al. in 2021, sattvic foods are recognized for their ability to avoid causing digestive issues. When food is well digested, the body more effectively absorbs nutrients, supporting its healthy functioning. Examples of sattvic cuisine include organic fruits, pure fruit juices, milk, honey, whole grains, vegetables from land and sea, cheese, nuts, seeds, legumes, sprouted seeds, and herbal teas. The dietary patterns prevalent in today's society contribute to numerous health problems.

In this era of epidemics, individuals are experiencing significant stress, resulting in anxiety and worry. The impact of modernization has greatly altered our eating habits. Consuming low-nutrient diets and junk foods can lead to anxiety and depression, making unhealthy choices such as Rajasik and Tamsik diets the worst for our health, whereas the Sattvic diet stands out as the best option. Consistent exercise combined with a Sattvik Ahar can help relieve worry and anxiety. Enjoying meals that are flavourful, aromatic, and varied in texture can enhance a person's appetite and food intake.

Research studies show that elevated stress and anxiety levels can lead to the co-occurrence of health problems and interfere with a person's eating habits (Bhasarkar et al., 2021).

What you eat reflects who you are. Based on the characteristics related to mental states, diets are categorized into three types: Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamsic. These dietary types exist in both sattva and manas, influencing how the brains are shaped by an individual's food choices. Known for its calming effects, sattvic food positively affects both mind and body, promoting a sense of purification, while tamasic food tends to decrease mental awareness, resulting in lethargic and disorientation, and rajasic food encourages energy and awareness. In this study researchers seek to investigate how the principles of diet and yoga can enhance overall mental wellness.

The Chandogya Upanishad asserts that an individual symbolizes what he/she eats; consequently, one's food choices impact the emotions and psychological states, leading to various psychological and physical issues. Poor digestion significantly affects one's emotional state, similar to how negative emotions can disturb one's digestive health. Strong-minded individuals can override their instincts and make positive decisions.

The food choices have consequences on both one's physical and emotional well-being, which encompasses to one's perceptions of food itself. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian healing system established over 5,000 years ago, includes a holistic approach that integrates the mind, body, and spirit. It promotes a comprehensive understanding of nutrition as a form of medicine, advocating for a healthy lifestyle, complemented by activities such as exercise, deep breathing, stress management, sleep, and other essential components of a well-balanced body.

Consuming Sattvic ahara fosters clarity of thoughts, positive thinking, wisdom, and intellect, purifying the mind and enhancing comprehensive well-being at psychological, social, and physical levels.

The term yoga is rooted in the Sanskrit word "yuj," which signifies fusion or yoke, and pertains to a series of exercises aimed at aligning the physical body, mind, and spirit with universal consciousness.

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Yoga is a spiritual practice that has its roots in India, and it's about way more than just physical exercise. There are many different styles, like Hatha Yoga, Kundalini, and Raja Yoga, which have been used for years to help people explore themselves and find mental clarity. With its blend of age-old wisdom and modern science, yoga proves to be an important tool for improving mental health in the diverse culture of India. Because of its origins, yoga is increasingly recognized as a potential treatment for mental health challenges. The core ideas from Indian Ayurveda and philosophy shine through the holistic approach of yoga, which has stood the test of time. By weaving yoga into mental health programs in India, we can create a sustainable and culturally sensitive way to support those facing mental health difficulties.

Yoga also taps into various mental processes known for their benefits on mental health. Techniques like mindfulness encourage being in the moment and help reduce the habit of overthinking, which can ease feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and worry. Pranayama, or breath control, is a key part of yoga practices; it not only helps with relaxation but also supports the autonomic nervous system in managing stress and anxiety responses in the body. Plus, yoga boosts emotional regulation and self-awareness, both of which are crucial for maintaining mental well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines empirical, contemporary, and qualitative research that illustrates the benefits of yoga and the Sattvic diet for mental health. Both approaches are recognized for their various psychological advantages, such as reducing stress levels and fostering emotional well-being and stability, while also possessing unique therapeutic aspects that require individual consideration.

Firstly, the highly distinct contributions of each discipline are assessed, highlighting how yoga provides a huge variety of mental health benefits through physical postures, controlled breathing, and meditation practices, while Sattvic living, having its roots in Ayurveda, promotes food healing. Secondly, next will be an outline of the therapeutic value having a Sattvic diet, with a focus on the bioactive substances which are present in certain sattvik spices (i.e. cinnamon, ginger, and turmeric) which helps in detoxification and improves emotional stability. Lastly, it focuses on many different studies on yoga therapies which demonstrates the potential of yoga in treating mental health conditions, it includes anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and ADHD. All of these aspects as a whole, provides a comprehensive understanding of how Sattvic diet and yoga are different but have complementary ways to improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

STRESS & ANXIETY

The Sattvik diet is beneficial for spiritual development since it fosters mental clarity and serenity. A sattvic diet can prevent mental illnesses like anxiety, mood disorders, depression, and hyperacidity while also reducing stress. Depression risk can be lowered by up to 35% with a diet rich in whole foods, such as fruits, nuts, whole grains, legumes, and unsaturated fats. (Sharma, U., and others, 2019).

Sattvik ahar does not cause any stomach irritation at all. So, Sattvik Ahar helps manage anxiety by keeping the mind calm and free from disturbance. Reduced anxiety is linked to normal diets, the Mediterranean diet, good eating habits, the anti-inflammatory diet, and more varied diets. Based on many several randomised controlled trials with different types of yogic practices and study groups, we can say that yoga often lowers anxiety and

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depression scores by about 40%, whether used alone or with other treatments. Yoga practitioners believe that yoga is beneficial for releasing repressed emotions and clearing the brain from these emotions. Although this process is slow but its benefits can be seen in a longer run. Yoga is one of the most powerful tools which helps in reducing stress and anxiety. The complexity of postures and breathing techniques involved in yoga are beneficial for calming both mind and body, which is why physicians will recommend it. Common mental health issues like anxiety and panic attacks can be prevented by practicing these postures and breathing exercises as a part of positive and effective self-care.

MENTAL CLARITY

In order to create a strong link between body and mind, Ayurveda stresses these facets of life and encourages us to adhere to fundamental principles. According to Ayurvedic teachings, those who embrace a Sattvic diet tend to enjoy better health and emotional balance. A Sattvic diet is thought to sharpen decision-making skills, nurture healthy relationships, ease mental tiredness, and strengthen the bond between the body and mind. The foods that embody sattva qualities are at the heart of a Sattvic diet. The purpose of this diet is to enhance mental clarity and vitality, which in turn uplifts the quality of spiritual practices like meditation, breathing exercises, reflection, and mindfulness. By incorporating Sattvic aahar—natural foods filled with positive energy—into diets, one can cultivate a clearer and more optimistic mindset. This clarity and stability nurtured by a Sattvic diet helps deepen the connection with oneself and the wider world around us. Breathing techniques, which are essential in yoga, assist people in regaining mental peace and balance. This sense of calm allows practitioners to develop a stronger internal connection. Many individuals dealing with conditions such as bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety often find it hard to be patient, which can lead to uncontrolled anger. Any yoga practice that combines effective techniques with pranayama breathing creates an opportunity to transcend the duality of the body and mind.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The Sattvic diet, which is high in fresh fruits and vegetables, contains critical nutrients and antioxidants that promote neurotransmitter function, mental stability, and resilience to stress and mood changes. Ayurveda offers a perspective that the food we consume directly influence our thoughts, emotions and overall life experiences. Components such as colour, aroma, freshness and the presentation of our meals play a crucial role in uplifting our mood. According to Ayurveda, when we consume food that is “pure” and “nourishing”, it is likely that our mood and emotions will also have a better sense of balance. Likewise, practicing yoga on a regular basis, helps to accelerates our energy, breath more deeply, and find balance without rushing. In this balanced state, self-control naturally grows. Because the mind has a pleasant experience, our brains especially will be likely to signal our bodies to feel more pleasant towards the connection we have with our body, leading what is similar to the feeling of ease and happiness. In short, there is evidence that yoga is associated with overall well-being. (Woodyard, 2011; Trulson & Vernon, 2019).

In other terms, the various different elements of yoga like physical activity, breathwork, and meditation, helps in enhancing psychological resources like (mindfulness, body consciousness, self-transcendence, social connectedness, and spirituality) suggested that they can help to achieve positive experiences in life. (Park et al., 2020).

INNER PEACE AND CALMNESS

Ayurvedic spices such as garlic, black pepper, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric and other condiments have curative properties. In addition to adding flavour to a variety of foods, spices and herbs have internal health benefits. The Sattvik diet provides excellent nutrients for promoting energy, physical endurance, and longevity. It's the purest diet. It keeps the body and mind tranquil. For these reasons, the Sattvik diet is good for mental health. The Sattvic diet promotes inner serenity, harmony, and contentment by encouraging a condition of balance and alignment with the natural cycles of life.

Through deep relaxation and centering while preserving air, yoga can help the mind become quiet. This exercise promotes self-control. By enabling you to completely feel its emotional qualities, yoga will enhance mental health moreover physical health.

Yoga has been demonstrated to have psychological advantages, including an improvement in overall well-being, according to numerous research (Woodyard, 2011; Trulson and Vernon, 2019). The reason for this could be those various aspects of the practice, including breathwork, meditation, and physical exertion, enhance psychological resources like self-transcendence, body consciousness, mindfulness, social connectedness, and spirituality, all of which support positive emotional experiences (Park et al., 2020).

SELF REALISATION

Sattvic diet aims to calm the mind, improve attention, and create an inner state of tranquillity that is favourable for meditation and self-realization by ingesting foods that are in balance with nature and infused with good energy (Joshi, M. A., & Sadhale, M. M. 2024). It is believed that certain meals can either relax or agitate the nerve system, having subtle impacts on the mind and emotions. Practitioners seek to develop a calm and clear state of mind that is favourable to meditation and self-realization by embracing a diet that encourages harmony and balance.

Sattvic living encourages us to have a close relationship with the natural world, ourselves, and one another. It is based on ancient wisdom and is governed by the values of mindfulness, simplicity, and purity. The Sattvic diet provides a means of nourishing the subtle levels of consciousness as well as the physical body, resulting in a state of well-being that permeates all facets of existence (Panda, N. C. 2022).

In yoga, visualizations and pranayama also promote open-heartedness, a more relaxed outlook on life, less judgment, and greater acceptance of oneself and others. Those who struggle with self-esteem can benefit from yoga, as low self-esteem or confidence is frequently cited as a contributing factor to anxiety and depression. Regular yoga practice aids in the progressive development and centering of your body. It boosts your self-esteem. Yoga breathing also aids in removing self-doubt from your mind.

RESULT

The table below summarises the major themes identified from the qualitative literature reviewed. These concepts were developed by the synthesis of recurrent concepts and reported experiences documented across studies. Codes represent recurring ideas or phrases identified and interpreted by original authors, which were then categorised into broader psychological themes.

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Theme	Representative Codes/Concepts	Synthesis of Findings	Supporting Sources
Stress and Anxiety	With breathwork, there is less restlessness, a relaxing impact, reduced tension, emotional peace, and relaxation.	Literature consistently links both the Sattvic diet and yogic practices with reduced stress and anxiety.	Bhasarkar et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020
Mental Clarity	Increased concentration, clarity, attentiveness, mental clarity, and improved decision-making	Practices were associated with improved cognitive function and mental sharpness.	Panda, 2022; Woodyard, 2011; Joshi & Sadhale, 2024
Emotional Balance	Inner steadiness, regulated emotions, less emotional reactivity, and a stable mood	Studies emphasized emotional regulation and resilience through both practices.	Trulson & Vernon, 2019; Pilkington et al., 2005
Inner Peace and Calmness	feeling of motionlessness, tranquility, a balanced body-mind relationship, relaxation, and profound calm	These practices contributed to a deep sense of calm and holistic balance.	Yadava & Nautiyal, 2023; Krishnamurthy & Telles, 2007
Self-Realization	Spiritual understanding, inner self-connection, higher consciousness knowledge, and introspection	Sattvic and yogic approaches supported spiritual awareness and introspective clarity.	Joshi & Sadhale, 2024; Patanjali Yoga Sutras; Park et al., 2020
Therapeutic Potential (Sattvic)	Dietary healing, gut-mind harmony, the therapeutic benefits of spices, and detoxifying dietary habits	Sattvic diet was framed as a preventive and curative system rooted in Ayurvedic nutrition.	Panda, 2022; Bhasarkar et al., 2021
Clinical Utility (Yoga)	Depression treatment, bipolar disorder coping, non-pharmacological treatments and ADHD support.	Yoga was mentioned as a useful supplement or independent treatment for a number of mental illnesses,	Sharma et al., 2005; Pilkington et al., 2005; Trulson & Vernon, 2019

DISCUSSION

This review of qualitative literature looked at the effects of yoga and the Sattvic diet for mental health benefits. It found recurrent and related themes such as self-realisation, emotional control, mental clarity, stress and anxiety reduction. Together, these findings offer compelling proof that these culturally based behaviours are lifestyle choices as well as holistic interventions that align with both modern psychological theory and ancient Indian philosophy. The Sattvic diet, based on Ayurvedic principles, emphasizes meals that are light, pure, and non-agitating. It closely ties into the concept of “Sattva”, which represents balance, harmony, and mental clarity. In all the studies reviewed, those following a Sattvic diet reported feeling more emotionally stable, experiencing fewer anxiety symptoms, and having better concentration. Many people mentioned they felt a sense of lightness in both their bodies and minds. These personal observations align with the Ayurvedic belief that food affects not just the physical body but also our mental state and self-awareness. This idea is backed by recent research on the gut-brain connection, which shows how nutrition can influence cortisol levels, neurotransmitter activity, and overall mental health.

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The combined effects of yoga and a Sattvic diet have been shown to significantly impact stress and anxiety levels. Various studies exploring the connection between gut health and mental well-being point to how food can influence stress hormone levels, brain chemistry, and mood, while also promoting yoga as a helpful intervention. Integrating yogic practices with a wholesome, pure diet can dramatically affect how individuals report their stress and anxiety levels. While the diet seemed to provide some physical relief and shifts in mindset, the yoga sessions—which included poses, breathing techniques, and mindfulness practices—resulted in even greater reductions in emotional distress, anxiety, and stress.

Regular yoga classes helped people manage their emotions more effectively, lessen anxiety, and achieve lasting mental peace, as shown in several studies. These findings resonate with psychological approaches like mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), which utilizes physical awareness and breathing methods to ease symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety. Controlled breathing can help regulate the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), lowering stress hormones like cortisol and fostering a sense of calm.

Beyond just mental benefits, combining yoga and a Sattvic diet can lead to significant improvements in mental health. Participants in the studies reported higher levels of self-awareness and resilience, resulting in greater patience, forgiveness, self-reflection, appreciation, and a more harmonious spiritual state. The Indian psychology model known as Panchakosha describes five interconnected aspects of human existence: the body (Annamaya kosha), vital energy (Pranamaya), thoughts (Manomaya), and wisdom (Vijnanavada). Together, yoga and a Sattvic lifestyle nourish each of these dimensions, allowing for holistic healing that is both restorative and preventive.

Additionally, these practices hold cultural and spiritual significance while also serving as forms of personal self-care. In a country like India, where formal mental health services may often be lacking, and stigma around mental health can be widespread, culturally embraced methods such as yoga and vegetarian diets provide accessible and non-judgmental options. These practices align with strong values of order, balance, and spiritual connection, making them effective choices for improving mental health on a larger scale, particularly in workplaces, schools, and educational contexts.

While existing studies show positive results, they do come with limitations since many involved small groups of participants. More rigorously designed mixed-method or qualitative studies are needed to investigate the broader mental health impacts of these activities and not just their short-term effects. Future research could also explore how to incorporate spiritual and yoga practices into therapeutic settings and evaluate outcomes among diverse groups, such as teenagers, caregivers, and individuals dealing with physical or mental health challenges.

CONCLUSION

By encouraging emotional balance, stress reduction, and self-awareness, the Sattvic diet and yoga techniques provide beneficial, culturally grounded approaches to mental health. The Sattvic diet, which emphasizes simplicity and purity, has been linked to a rise in inner peace and decreased worry. Asanas, breathwork, and meditation are examples of yogic practices that promote mental clarity and emotional control. When combined, they support both contemporary psychological frameworks and more traditional models like Pancha Kosha. In environments where stigma and a lack of resources endure, these practices offer easily

accessible, reasonably priced mental health support. However, to successfully incorporate them into standard mental health care, more thorough, culturally relevant study is required.

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Conflict of Interest

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