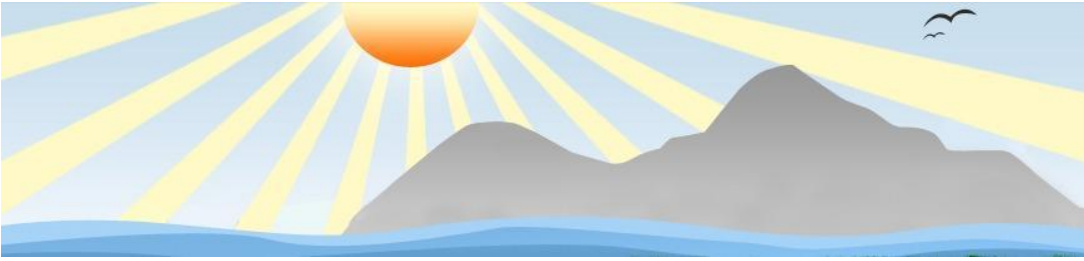


# Satmya

## Why Some Foods Work for Some People, Some of the Time



Since the time I first landed in Ayurveda, the traditional medical system of the Indian sub-continent, as a patient<sup>1</sup>, I've witnessed the rise and fall of the popularity of a bunch of different diets:

1. Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarian
2. Fat free
3. Pescatarian

---

<sup>1</sup> Back in the 1990s some chiropractors and acupuncturists advised me (from opposite viewpoints) about eating meat. Both sides claimed really good reasons for pushing me in one direction or the other, for my health.

I grew up with carrots, potatoes, corn and green beans, with broccoli, cauliflower or brussel sprouts on rare occasion.

So, in my 20s, I really loved finding vegetables I had never seen or tasted before; there were many!

I respected hugely the growing vegan movement of the '90s for the animal-rights education it was promoting and for supporting the planet's sustainability. But I noticed I did not function well without eating some meat and animal-derived nourishment, especially while recovering from an injury. Hearing that the Dalai Lama humbly accepted a similar fate helped me not waste time agonizing over something beyond my control, and instead moved me quickly towards supporting the people and institutions who shared my values.

Long before anyone uttered the term 'farm-to-table,' people who were championing farmer's markets for organically-grown produce began looking for ethical animal husbandry and food processing for their meats, cheeses, milk and eggs. This was a new venture among many like-minded eaters in the '90s, but it was spreading to more of us who had tried to be vegetarian or vegan and found that it was making us ill.

I learned to prioritize finding sources of hormone-free, ethically-raised meat, milk products, honey and eggs. These options were often more expensive (instead of less expensive in the case of many organic fruits and vegetables) because the scale of production reaching urban areas was still small. But we knew options wouldn't grow if we didn't support existing ones, and the reasons to support them were (and still are) numerous. We were creating new expectations in food production and consumption for not just my generation but for those to follow – and you're welcome! Thankfully, it has gained traction and persists as of this writing, for many adjacent reasons like eradicating the racism of food deserts, people learning wilderness survival skills and younger generations having strong interest in working the land themselves.

4. Vegan
5. Fermented foods
6. Raw foods
7. Supplements-dependent
8. Gluten free
9. Dairy free (Cow milk products; Goat milk is ok for all...)
10. Sugar-free
11. Atkins & Dukkan
12. Whole beans/ grains/ fruits
13. Smoothie-predominant
14. Cooked-only
15. No-grain
16. High-fat
17. Raw meat
18. Ketogenic

How could there be eighteen different attempts to define what is the “One Right Way?”

Now, as an Ayurvedist in private practice, I’ve been able to gather more information from:

- My own patients’ journeys
- Colleagues’ and professors’ case studies, and
- The ancient classical texts of Ayurveda  
(some \*really\* old books cataloging nearly everything under the sun about medicine-making and human eating on the Indian subcontinent).

So, with much humility, but also a lot of gumption, I’m here to tell you:

Not Every Diet Works for Everyone!

Many of you reading here have already figured this out, but I want to help explain why this is true.

There are reasons.

One of them has its own Sanskrit name, known as Satmya



Madhav Nidan, Chaukhambha Orientalia 8th edition 2007. No credit for artist stated

Per the old ayurvedic tomes, a regular diet for any human will have certain properties known to grow strong body tissues and nourish clear states of Mind, that keep a person glowing from within (without the need for camera filters). They even name specific food items. The geographical footprint of these long-ago Ayurvedists ranged from the tropical southern tip of India, up to the arid Himalayan mountain range in the North, out west to heavily rained-on Bangladesh and eastward to the varied climes within Pakistan. It's not hard to assume that these sages of old India knew quite a range of food-growing geographies and weather patterns when compiling what they knew about ideal foods versus those that were in regular use and not leading to good health.

They convened medical congresses with Chinese Medicine experts of their day, sometimes with input from European and African medicine systems of the times, as well. So, while they didn't know anything about people or food from entire continents (like what's now called the Americas, or Australia & New Zealand), they did have exposure to a wide variety of human foodstuff categories.





Being a creature descended from First Nations people of the Americas myself, I am grateful that ayurveda is universal wisdom and can be applied like a formula to any area of human habitation. Their description of the cosmic qualities found in Nature explain health-giving traits even of foods they did not catalog themselves, and validate that a food in one distinct part of the planet can become a staple to the generations of people living in the place where it is abundant. It becomes suited to them a.k.a. "Satmya."

Consider why and how it is that First Nations communities near the Arctic circle have flourished for eons amidst extreme weather conditions without having tasted your massaged kale salad or acai berry bowl (until more recent years). And consider that their seal oil might not digest terribly well among those of us eating it for the first time. Consider that cuisines heavy in complexly-aged cheeses form a backbone in one small part of the world, but do not digest well in nearly the rest of the world's population. Why? Because ... Satmya.

It's not really news anymore among some foodies that you and/or your ancestors became accustomed to subsisting off a particular diet. But to many, many people it IS still news.

Hence, I plead the following:

### **A Cranky Traditional Ayurvedist's MANIFESTO**

- 1) Stop telling people that eating one type of fruit (or\_\_\_\_, etc) versus another for their constitution comes from ayurvedic texts; it does not.**
- 2) Focus on restoring your diet staples to those your grandparents and great-grandparents were eating, or even further back if your people colonized and/ or were colonized and so stopped eating off ancestral lands & water bodies much longer ago than your great-grandparents.**
- 3) Consider sustainability of the planet and your food sources as you embark on this investigation.**
- 4) Enjoy your eating and learning about food, but not to the point of obsession.**
- 5) Take counsel with your own intuition, even along with expert advice.**



‘Satmya’ means - compatibility. It is used in ayurveda in a few ways, but here I’m using it to mean generations of people becoming accustomed to a food item.

It’s common sense, really.

I imagine you've got your own "But why?" story: A tale of your friend who tried the XYZ diet (take your pick...) and feels fabulous. They now really really really want you to come on board with it. But when you try it yourself you feel absolutely sick or at the least don't respond the way they did...

Did you "do it wrong"?

It's not you.

It's not them.

It's not their miracle diet.

It's Satmya.

Theirs is not the same as yours.

It is even more likely that your friend's diet works for them (and some of their like-minded family and friends), because their physical and mental temperaments may be more alike to each other than to you. This has to do with the ayurvedic term called *prakriti*: the ratios of cosmic elements {earth, water, fire, air, space} that make up your bodymind. Traditional Chinese Medicine has such an elemental system, too.

So, what to do?

Experiment.

A lot.

And, maybe, stick with what your grandparents were eating, because possibly it's not far off from what their ancestors were eating, going back a very long time.

And what if, like me, you have grandparents from a few different ethnic lineages and / or places of residence on the planet?

Experiment more.

And – more than once in your life, sometimes.





That's another way of understanding Satmya.

You might have subsisted well on foods from one line of your heritage awhile, but then shifted in your elemental balance and now no longer do well with those. And you may have become unaccustomed to food your other peoples ate, historically. Not because your own ancestors never ate them and processed them well, but because you, yourself, in the span of your own lifetime, might not have had the opportunity before now to eat in a way suited to your own heritage. You might not have had access to the foods, or known what they are. You might have spent years eating foods no longer suited to you (maybe never were suited to you...) and accidentally developed a bunch of food intolerances. You might do better on ancestral foods now, either with or without the need for an internal 'cleanse' of some kind.

You might not have had the opportunity, even, to consider what you eat at all, up until now. If you have, you may still be looking for some of the answers to your many questions, if you are reading this!

Many, many people have some imbalances of the cosmic elements in their bodies. For some people, there are imbalances in quantities so great that their body systems react badly even when they eat what is supposed to be good for them. Those folx aren't starting their experiments with a clean slate, to be blunt, and need to do some ayurvedic cleansing, specifically. An important topic, but for another article... Back to Satmya.



Now you know there's a word for a concept that helps name the experience of many. There is no one way to eat that's right for everybody, but there for sure are schools of thought and health regiments that work for large groups of people. Otherwise the diets wouldn't persist through generations of families as they do.

There are good diets out there. You might just not have landed upon yours – yet. Or the one that will work for you now, at this time of your life, even if it didn't work for you before.

So, when people suspect that information floating around claiming to be ayurvedic food guidelines can't possibly be right since they contradict one another (vegan vs meat-eating, for example), they're onto something. The truth is somewhere in between. *Satmya* can explain why some foods work for some people, some of the time.

Many Ayurvedists who are meat-eaters (or vegans) forget about *Satmya* when advising a wide range of people, and focus on what their own body does well or what the majority of their client/ patient base wants to know about.





Juiced green veggies



or home-made ghee? Or, both?

When people you know say that

- low energy,
- sluggish metabolism,
- food sensitivity-that's-not-quite-allergy,

are just the normal effects of being in mid-life, or having an auto-immune disorder, or a particular set of genes... Well, sometimes it's true, but often it's not. Often these three conditions are signs of someone not having identified what foods they are Satmya to and/or needing a clean-slate cleanse to begin to explore that.

We each have our own answers to discover for ourselves about health and body, and it's people's prerogative to identify these answers for themselves.

If you do not accept that these common symptoms are necessarily normal, however commonly they occur... If you are curious to keep looking for more information about why and what could improve them, a little or a lot, I encourage you to keep investigating down whichever healthnut rabbit hole you've dropped into currently and glean it for all it's worth! Whichever corner-of-the-universe of good health information you're exploring, I advise you

to take your new knowledge of Satmya along with you. It's a tradition-specific understanding, but can be universally applied. It's now yours and I encourage you to own it!

Ayurveda is one such knowledgebase with answers that might be right for you. The truth is that within ayurveda there are eating rules that apply to everyone, not one constitutional type and not others. Of course, there's the important fine-tuning of the way these rules play out in an individual person's life. Taking consideration of the elements that play largely in your constitution factors in, but not in the food lists circulating as 'ayurvedic.'

If you explore ayurveda, it's helpful to have a practitioner with deep roots in the tradition to supplement whatever self-help you can get from books, friends, websites, etc.

One such practitioner, this author of this manifesto, a practitioner of ayurveda, has more to say about it at [www.ayurveda-healthcare.com](http://www.ayurveda-healthcare.com) in both the website content and in more writings available for free and for purchase to provide more entry points for knowing how ayurveda might help you.

This traditional Ayurvedist wishes you much empowerment on your health journeys.

Warmly,

*Victoria*

The Nourishment Dictator

