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ISSUE 232/ AUGUST 2022

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Foods to Enhance your Yogic Practice

Words: Martin Hutton

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The beauty of yoga is that it is for everyone. No matter if you are young or old, male or female, adult or child. No matter what your level of fitness or what your background is, whether you are an office worker or a professional athlete. Yoga is enjoyed by a wide variety of people. However one thing most of us have in common, the one question I get asked most regularly, is: What should I eat?

Put simply, our diet should complement our yoga practice. Why take the time to ensure we look after our body through yoga when we are not taking the time to care about what we put in it, be it in general on a day-to-day basis, or more specifically before and after our sessions?

Initially, we will look at our general diet, detailing exactly what the body needs, to give us a healthy foundation. Then we will go deeper, to ensure high performance during and quick recovery after classes.

To function at our highest level we need to eat the correct amounts of high-quality proteins, carbohydrates, and fats.

Firstly protein. Let's look at options that can add variety to our diet, from lesser-known sources. You will find quality protein in foods such as lentils,

beans, nuts, peas, spinach, sprouts, broccoli, mushrooms, sweetcorn, and asparagus. Not only are these foods high in protein they will provide you with fibre, something that the more well-known meat-based sources of protein, such as beef, chicken, and fish do not contain.

Secondly, we have carbohydrates and the best source of quality carbs are fruit and vegetables. Any and all, try as many as possible to get that variety in. All fruits and vegetables are different and have different vitamins and minerals within. For example, even different coloured peppers give you different nutrients. That is why they vary in colour from red to green to yellow, because they contain different vitamins that your body thrives on, so try and ensure variety in your diet as much as possible.

Same with fruits, try and not just stick to the usual ones you pick up and eat. Make a point to experiment and try some watermelon, grapes, kiwi fruits, pears, pomegranate, or mango for example. Again this will give your body the extensive goodness that it needs and not just an overload on certain nutrients while creating a deficiency in others.

(You may notice that some of these foods overlap, such as broccoli/asparagus/spinach, etc and that is why

these foods are sometimes classed as 'superfoods' as they provide you with so much of what your body needs. On top of that is the fact that they also have high water contents so they have the added bonus of keeping you hydrated, something that is vital for you before during, and after your yoga classes especially, which we will look at more later)

Finally, we have healthy fats and you should get these from nuts (Brazil, almonds, cashews) avocados, olives, fish, and seeds (chia, flax, sunflower, etc). These also have the added bonus of being high in quality protein.

Eating these foods will give your body what it needs in general and allow you to get the most from your yoga practice. However, what you eat immediately before and after your practice can have a large bearing on your performance so let's get a bit more specific.

Before your sessions, you do not want to be eating too heavily therefore fruits are a great option to indulge in because they are filling and give you slow-release energy due to the natural sugars contained. They are also high in fibre which helps you feel satiated quicker without feeling uncomfortably so while containing vitamins and minerals that will help you get the most from your class.

The 'king of fruit' beforehand would be a banana, the best quality carb source there is. Your body breaks down the sugars and glucose to give you the necessary energy throughout (an added bonus is that, unlike energy drinks or bars which will give you an instant energy burst but wear off quickly, a banana is slow release and will keep you energised consistently throughout).

An added benefit is that it also assists in preventing cramps and fatigue and can speed up the recovery of your well-worked muscles after your session due to the high levels of potassium (of which you can sweat out during a class). Best time to eat it? Around 45 minutes to an hour for maximum benefit.

Another quick and easy food that is perfect pre-class is raisins. With a medium glycemic index, they release their energy more slowly to sustain you and are a good source of iron which can be lost during exercise. Iron is better absorbed alongside vitamin C, so pairing this snack up with an apple would be perfect (which as well as being high in vitamin C can also help



with endurance to keep you going throughout your session. On top of this they are also a natural anti-inflammatory which helps with fatigue and recovery.)

If your class is in the morning, porridge is an ideal energy source and the perfect pre-workout meal. Made from nutritious oats, a consistent energy supply is guaranteed due to the complex carbohydrates. It is again high in fibre, giving you a feeling of satiety without feeling 'stuffed'.

Once your class is over you should look at aiding the recovery of your well-worked muscles and replenishing depleted vitamin and mineral resources. A mixture of carbs and proteins is recommended here.

Broccoli is the perfect veg to eat post-session. It is ideal for assisting

with muscle recovery, meaning you will be ready for your next class quicker and it also helps the body absorb proteins, so it is great paired with fish (an excellent source of healthy fats as well as protein).

Other options for good combinations would be greek yoghurt and berries, grilled chicken and roasted vegetables, scrambled egg and avocado, or hummus and veg sticks (using carrots, celery, a mixture of peppers, etc), quinoa and salmon or multigrain toast and nut butter.

Finally, something that is vital for both pre and post-yoga sessions is water. Being properly hydrated gives you the optimal opportunity to maximise your results. Go into a class dehydrated and you feel drowsy and

sluggish. Increasing your water intake after a class, especially a hot class, will help replace the water and electrolytes lost during and get you back to where you were quicker, especially important if your next class is the following day.

Putting a bit more time and effort into how we eat and drink either side of our yoga sessions will ensure that we get the most out of them and experience the results we desire and that our hard work deserves.

Martin Hutton. Nutrition coach and owner of NutriYoga who specialises in working with yoga teachers and students worldwide to adapt their diet to compliment their yoga practice, to become stronger and healthier, more in tune with their body and become mindful eaters.

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