The Science of Taste
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The rishis have categorized the food we eat into six different tastes: sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent. These tastes become "tastes" only after they contact the tongue. Their qualities may change according to which phase of digestion they are in; for example, on the tongue the effect is called rasa, as the food enters the stomach we call it the virya or energy, and the post-digestive effect is the vipaka. Usually the rasa and vipaka are the same, with different energies shown by the different tastes.

We can easily understand these differences if we become aware of the philosophical elements: sour is a combination of earth and fire; sweet is earth and water; salty is water and fire; pungent is fire and air; bitter is composed of air and ether and astringent is primarily air and earth. So we can see that the energy of sweet is cold. Sour, salty and pungent are hot. Bitter and astringent are both cold.

Since the nature of vata is air; pitta fire; and kapha water, we can readily see that the interaction of the food and doshas will give certain responses. For example, sweet - earth and water - will decrease vata (air) and pitta (fire) but increase kapha (water). Sweet is nourishing and tends to increase all tissues and cells; it also will eliminate thirst and hunger. However if taken in excess, kapha is aggravated and may become excessive, leading to disease. If too little sweet is taken, pitta and vata will be increased with resulting symptoms.

There are very few foods that have only a single taste, so the effects on the doshas will be variable according to the combination of tastes. Sweet taste is most agreeable to the body and helps it to grow and stay healthy. It satiates the mind as well as the physical senses. A good nutrient, it is valuable for the body's growth. If

it is used to excess the body becomes obese, lazy, heavy, lethargic, cold and has a tendency to catch colds with coughing, also urinary problems may occur, possible tumors and circulatory disorders. If balance is not attained, the symptoms will progress to the vata and pitta disorders. Examples of foods that have sweet taste are milk, butter, ghee, rice, honey, wheat, candy, sugar, licorice root, peppermint, most lentils, bananas, saffron, corn, millet, oats and other grains and fruits that combine more than one taste.

Sour taste is earth and fire and is hot, heavy and unctuous. Sour increases kapha and pitta and decreases vata. It stimulates the appetite and aids the digestion. It may excite the mind. It is a carminative and tends to nourish the heart. It will stimulate the flow of saliva which aids in propelling food along the digestive system.

If sour is used too much or alone, it stimulates thirst, increases pitta, inflammations and burning sensations in the throat and chest. Anemia and weak eyesight, giddiness and fevers may result. Itching skin also occurs. Sour taste is found in the following foods: yogurt, cheeses, green grapes, lemons, tamarind, vinegar, sourdough (also sweet) and combined with sweet in other fruits. Because of the heating properties sour may aggravate trauma. contagious bites, burns, fractures, bruises and crushing injuries.

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