

Food for Thought!

We are built on what we eat. Good nutrition is an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle. Combined with physical activity, your diet can help promote overall health. But is there any other dimension of food? Can food manipulate how we feel and behave?

Think about it. Your brain is always functioning. It takes care of everything— your breathing and heartbeat, your senses, your thoughts and movements— it works hard twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, even while you're sleeping. This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That 'fuel' comes from the foods you eat — and what's in that fuel makes all the difference. Simply put, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.

Just like a car, the brain functions best when it gets supernal fuel. And just like a car, the brain can be damaged if crummy food is ingested.

In the '*Gita*', Krishna says that food determines the '*gunas*' of a man. And today, the proliferating field of nutritional psychiatry can vouch for this as it is finding many consequences and correlations between what you eat, how you feel, and how you ultimately behave.

We have all heard the saying "You are what you eat" as a pearl of wisdom. To understand that food, among other things, is instrumental in shaping our character, let us take two food substances which are basic ingredients nowadays and see the effect that they have on us mentally.

SALT: It seems very basic, very essential and harmless. Salt is, no doubt needed by us. But due to its presence in everything we eat from soups to snacks to meals, it goes far beyond the amount we should be eating.

Lately, salt has come to be known as 'White Poison' as it increases the level of sodium in our bloodstream and ruins the delicate balance, reducing the kidneys' ability to remove water. This causes higher blood pressure. While this may be the physiological side of things, there is a psychological side too. Increase in blood pressure will result in agitation and lead us to feel beset and angry, thereby upsetting our ambience.

SUGAR: This is also used extensively in today's world. Sugar is a very refined product which makes it washed off from all nutrients. Sugar only contains calories. This makes sugar an empty calorie food. This empty-calorie causes 'Sugar rush' after the consumption of food/drink with high sugar content.

Say, if a kid has eaten 50 gm of sugar today, the kid will become hyperactive, over nothing, just because of the sugar that he has eaten. In the long run, it makes him be recalcitrant and stubborn.

Salt and sugar are not the only substances which can bring about a mood change. Many substances can cause this. While some may cause a positive change, some cause animosities in us.

One of the main reasons why we are unable to alter our diet is because of our taste preferences. But we must understand that taste is not something that is inbred. We have acquired our tastes over time and with repeated consumption. An Indonesian may nauseate at the thought of Japanese cuisine. A Japanese may be repugnant to Thai cuisine. This goes to show that the real seat of taste is not the tongue but the mind. Hunger is the greatest impetus for taste.

Achievements in life are also determined by what you eat and the way you consume it. Food is a significant factor for holistic development.

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