

Swasthya - The Physical Body

Dietary Approaches to Cultivate a Robust Level of Ojas

As we have discussed, Ojas is the vibrant, animating and energizing life force of the body that is responsible for the generation of heightened levels of physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

And when it comes to building robust levels of Ojas into our life, diet is arguably one of the most important means of doing so.

Why is this the case.

There are many reasons but the most important is the fact that at the biochemical level, the food we eat literally goes on to become our physical body. Food doesn't help build the body or nourish the body or fuel the body. It physically and literally becomes the body at the cellular level, helping to create and regenerate our cells and tissues in an ongoing manner every second of the day. So think back to what you ate 3-4 hours ago; that food, whether healthy or unhealthy, good or bad, is now creating the body you live in and experience the world through.

As such, the condition of your body and mind right now, at this very second – the mood you are in, the levels of energy you are experiencing, your collective vitality and the presence or absence of any unwanted symptoms – are heavily dependent upon what you have fueled the body with over the last few hours. Both Western and Ayurvedic medicine are in agreement on this concept.

Viewed in this light, we can see why our diet has such a massive impact upon our levels of Ojas. If we eat foods loaded with sugar, refined white carbohydrates, chemicals, salt and a lack of whole-food goodness, then the raw materials that go on to build our cells and tissues are weak, disease promoting and lacking in vital energy, goodness and essential nutrients. This all conspires to collectively reduce the levels of Ojas in our body.



However, contrast this with a diet that is loaded with whole-food, plant-based goodness. Such foods – fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, wholegrain breads and carbohydrates, healthy fats and protein and lots of fibre – contain such an overwhelming abundance of essential vitamins, minerals and nutrients that it is impossible for the body to not thrive when being nourished in such a way. Doing so ensures that every cell in our body is being created in an environment that promotes high levels of Ojas, radical health and the inhibition of disease promoting mechanisms.

Another subtle but profoundly important concept here is that of Sattva. Whilst having many meanings, Sattva essential relates to anything that is pure, clean, energizing and health promoting.

And many foods are Sattvic including all fresh fruit and vegetables; these foods are alive and active and contain in them all of the energy of the natural environment in which they have grown, including the energy of the sun. As such, through the process of eating and metabolizing these “living foods,” they freely offer up this pure energy and vitality that is so abundant in them (particularly if they are organic/home grown) so that our body can in turn benefit from this life giving energy. The ultimate end product of this is a drastic elevation in the levels of Ojas in the body because all of the sudden our body has access to a whole new source of energy that can drastically enhance the functioning of the physical body at the cellular level.

Sattvic Food Challenge:

To help you assess the volume of Sattvic foods you are consuming, head over to the “Six-Tastes of Ayurveda” series in the Ayurvedic Mentor and check out Episode 3 which deals with the naturally sweet tasting foods, most of which are Sattvic by nature. In this series you will also find a comprehensive list of the most important sweet foods; look through these life-giving foods and assess your daily diet to determine how many of such foods you are consuming on a daily basis.



OJAS abundant food

Once we are ensuring the daily consumption of Sattvic foods, the next priority is to home in on the specific foods that inherently contain very high levels of Ojas due to their unique phyto-chemical make-up. Prioritising the daily consumption of such foods is one of the most important health promoting decisions we can make as it ensures that we continually “top-up” the levels of Ojas in the body on a daily basis.

Furthermore, there is compelling Western evidence to suggest that these Ojas boosting foods alter the chemistry of the body in a way that increases the electrical and hormonal production of energy in the body; in other words, the production of Ojas.

For example, most of the high Ojas foods listed below are very high in potassium whilst being very low in sodium. The consumption of these foods increase the levels of potassium in the body which, through the activity of a cell mechanism called the “sodium-potassium pump,” increases the amount of electrical energy each cell produces. This in turn increases the collective energy output of the body, resulting in increased levels of bodily vitality, radiance and physical capacity. As such, this is a Western, evidence-based understanding of the Ayurvedic view of why these Ojas heavy foods induce such an increase in the generation of energy, vitality and health in the physical body.

Top Ojas Boosting Foods:

- Bananas
- Dates
- Figs
- Avocados
- Sweet potatoes
- All leafy green vegetables (kale, chard etc)
- Almonds (these are particularly high in Ojas)
- Brazil nuts
- Walnuts
- Milk
- Mung beans
- Courgettes
- All whole grains
- Ghee
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Hemp seeds
- Tahini
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Raisins
- Maple syrup
- All sweet juicy fruit, such as mangoes, ripe stone fruit etc
- Raw honey
- Dark, high antioxidant foods (blueberries, beetroots, red grapes etc)
- Coconut – fruit, oil and milk

Ojas Boosting Challenge 1:

Take a look at the above list of foods and assess them against your typical daily diet. If you feel that your levels of Ojas are low (as per the Ojas assessment form in the first module), try to proactively increase the consumption of the above foods each day. If you do this, most people notice a discernible gain in their collective levels of energy and wellbeing within 30-35 days.

Foods That Naturally Deplete OJAS

In the same way that there are foods that are naturally high in Ojas, there are also a large number of foods that deplete it. These are “dead” foods that contain a complete and total absence of energy, vitality and life energy. Not only do these foods do nothing to build-up the levels of Ojas in the body but through their inherently inert nature they actually reduce our levels of Ojas, leaving us feeling tired, flat and de-energised in both body and mind. Unfortunately, the standard Western diet is saturated with such foods; bleached white carbohydrates, sugar, inflammatory foods, processed meats, microwave meals, hydrogenated fats, emulsifiers, processed salty foods and much else besides.

And it is no coincidence that as our consumption of such foods has increased over the last 30-years, our general levels of health have dropped and the rates of most chronic diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, neurological conditions, strokes and Alzheimer's disease, for example, have correspondingly increased.

Why? Because we are fueling and regenerating our body with foods that provide an absolute lack of Ojas.

Both the Ayurvedic and Western arrives at the same conclusion in this capacity; reducing the intake of such foods is absolutely essential if we are to maximise our chances of a long, happy and healthy life.



Ojas Depleting Foods:

- Refined sugar
- Refined white carbohydrates
- All processed foods
- Poor quality fats
- Foods containing emulsifiers, nitrates and hydrogenated fats
- Poor quality, farmed meat and fish
- Alcohol (in excess)
- Foods containing E numbers
- Stimulants such as caffeine (in excess)

Ojas Boosting Challenge 2:

Have a think about your typical daily food intake (and perhaps keep a food diary to help quantify this) and assess how many of the above Ojas depleting foods you typically consume each day.

If you feel your Ojas levels are low, your challenge is to proactively reduce the consumption of such foods in favour of the Ojas boosting foods discussed above.



OJAS Boosting Tonics and Recipes

Because Ojas is such an essential concept, the adoption of different techniques for cultivating higher levels of Ojas is an integral aspect of Ayurveda in terms of enhancing the quality and quantity of our lives.

By proactively increasing the intake of Sattvic and high Ojas foods, and reducing the consumption of Ojas depleting foods (as discussed above), we go a long way to achieving this.

However, Ayurveda takes this further via the use of a selection of culinary tonics. These combine an abundance of high Ojas foods into one recipe, the combination of which provides an Ojas boost that is greater than the sum of the individual foods the tonic contains. Ayurveda advocates the regular consumption of such tonics as a means of elevating our Ojas levels to progressively higher states.

In the next module (Module 3) we have provides a list of 5 key Ojas boosting tonics and recipes that are incredibly effective in this capacity, which include:

1. The famed Ojas Tonic
2. Ojas Energy Balls
3. Ojas Protein Elixir
4. Ultimate Ojas breakfast
5. Date and Nut Ojas Loaf

I can't recommend enough experimenting with these, finding the ones you enjoy the most and then enjoying them on a regular basis.

See you in the next module!

