

DIETING -n Buddhist View



Buddha had to recover his strength and he did this he said, by eating boiled rice. Then as now, rice was boiled in water with a pinch of salt added. Kummàsa was made by boiling various grains and pulses, but particularly Lyon beans (*Mucuna nivea*) and Black Gram (*Vigna mungo*), until it became thick and then making it into lumps. Although kummàsa was considered an inferior food it would actually have been both filling and nutritious. Buddha ate gruel made from barley meal and honey balls. This too would have been a nutritious and satisfying meal. From then on and until the end of his life, the Buddha ate whatever he was given, whether it was rich and sumptuous or plain and simple.

A common food he often ate was rice gruel which was probably made by boiling rice and water to a thin consistency and adding salt, a garlic clove and a few pepper corns. The Buddha said there were five advantages of this gruel; it dispels hunger, quenches thirst, regulates wind, cleanses the bowels and helps digest the remnants of food. At other times he ate much richer fare; rice with the black specks removed (*vicitakàëakabhatta*) together with a selection of sauces and curries. We are told

that on another occasion he was served pork with jujube fruit), The Buddha was once offered a meal of rice gruel cooked with jujube and sesame oil and mixed with pepper, garlic and làmajjaka. The Vinaya mentions that he also sometimes ate fruit such as rose-apple, mango, yellow myrobalan and embolic myrobalan. These last two fruits are tart-tasting but rich in vitamins A and C and iron. The Buddha once said that `the body comes into being because of food and is dependent on food. This was as true for enlightened people like himself as it is for everyone else.

Buddha said: `When a person is mindful and thus knows moderation in eating, his ailments diminish, he ages gently and he protects his life.

The value of the Buddha's advice to King Pasenadi Ý to eat with mindfulness (sati) Ý is only beginning to be recognized by dieticians and weight-loss experts. Eating mindfully helps turn a habituated behaviour into a conscious one where the possibility of choice is increased. It allows us to pause for a moment, think about and be aware of what we are about to do and why, and often this is enough to bring about a change in behavior. Mindfulness can also allow us to see the urge to eat as it arises and then just watch it with detachment rather than giving in to it. The regular practice of mindfulness of breathing will make it more likely that we will remember to be mindful before and while eating. Something else that can be helpful is to occasionally practice what can be called `eating meditation' Ý

eating alone and without haste, focused fully on what we are doing, being aware of the taste of each mouthful, chewing it fully, swallowing it completely before taking the next mouthful, etc. When supplemented with regular exercise and a well-balanced diet, mindful eating is a natural, gentle and effective way to maintain a healthy body weight.

It is significant that the Buddha chose to motivate King Pasenadi with a positive instead of a negative message. Rather than regale him with an account of the problems caused by obesity, he listed the benefits of losing weight – a reduction of bodily ailments (*tanu tassa bhavanti vedanà*), a slowing of the aging process (*saõikaü jãrati*) and a general enhancement of life (*àyu pàlayaü*) – all benefits of a healthy weight and diet confirmed by modern medicine. The Buddha knew that positive reinforcement is often more effective in motivating people.