

# Review of effect of Modern Food Habits on Mind w.s.r. to Ayurveda

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**Abstract**—Anxiety has become one of the most prevalent mental health challenges in contemporary society. Although it is commonly linked to psychological stress, competition, and lifestyle pressures, Ayurveda provides a deeper and more integrative explanation by identifying diet (Aahara) as a central factor influencing mental equilibrium. Long before modern science described neurotransmitters or the gut–brain axis, Ayurveda emphasized that food directly affects not only physical nourishment but also emotional stability and mental resilience. According to Ayurvedic principles, Aahara is one of the three fundamental pillars of life. It governs digestive fire (Agni), maintains Dosha balance—particularly Vata, which regulates nervous functions—and shapes the mental qualities known as Satva, Raja, and Tama. When food is unsuitable in quality, quantity, timing, or manner of consumption, digestion becomes impaired. This leads to the formation of Ama (metabolic toxins), obstruction of mental channels, and gradual disturbance of psychological balance, often manifesting as anxiety.

Modern dietary patterns dominated by processed foods, excessive stimulants, refined sugars, irregular eating schedules, and distracted eating habits weaken digestion and overstimulate the nervous system. From an Ayurvedic perspective, these habits aggravate Vata and Raja while increasing Tama, resulting in restlessness, emotional instability, fear, and mental fatigue. Contemporary research supports this view by demonstrating strong links between gut health, hormonal fluctuations, altered microbiota, and anxiety disorders.

Ayurveda also recognizes individual mental strength, or Satva Bala, as a key determinant of resilience. While stress may be unavoidable, a nourished digestive system and balanced diet strengthen Satva, enabling the mind to cope more effectively. Importantly, Satva is not fixed; it

can be cultivated through conscious dietary choices and mindful living.

In conclusion, modern anxiety is not merely a psychological phenomenon but a reflection of disturbed internal balance driven largely by faulty food habits. Ayurveda reminds us that lasting mental well-being begins with restoring digestive harmony. Food, when chosen and consumed wisely, becomes the first and most powerful medicine for mental health.

**Index Terms**—Ayurveda, food, satva, anxiety, mind, diet.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are.”

— Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Anxiety has emerged as one of the most common mental health concerns of the modern era. While it is often attributed to stress, competition, and fast-paced lifestyles, Ayurveda offers a deeper understanding by identifying food (Aahara) as a fundamental determinant of mental well-being. Long before the discovery of neurotransmitters and the gut–brain axis, Ayurveda recognized that what we eat directly shapes not only our physical health but also our emotional resilience and mental stability.

The Ayurvedic Food–Mind Connection

Ayurveda considers Aahara as one of the Trayopastambha (three pillars of life), along with sleep and regulated conduct. Food influences:

Agni (digestive and metabolic fire)

Doshas, especially Vata, which governs the nervous system

Trigunas—Satva, Raja, and Tama<sup>1</sup>

Manovaha Srotas (channels of the mind)

Ayurveda clearly states:

“आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धिः”. (Purity of food leads to purity of mind)<sup>2</sup>

When food is inappropriate in quality, quantity, timing, or manner, digestion becomes impaired, leading to Agni dushti, formation of Ama, and disturbance of mental balance—ultimately manifesting as anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

## II. MODERN FOOD HABITS AND THEIR AYURVEDIC IMPACT

### 1. Processed and Junk Foods

Modern diets are dominated by processed, packaged, and ultra-refined foods that are heavy (guru), low in prana, and difficult to digest. These foods weaken Agni and promote Ama formation, which obstructs both bodily and mental channels. Such foods increase Tamo Guna, resulting in mental dullness, confusion, fear, and anxiety associated with lethargy. Modern science mirrors this view by linking poor gut health and altered microbiota with mood disorders, including anxiety and depression.

### 2. Excessive Stimulants and Caffeine

Tea, coffee, energy drinks, and aerated beverages possess ushna, tikshna, and ruksha qualities. Excessive consumption aggravates Vata Dosha and Rajo Guna, overstimulating the mind. This leads to restlessness, palpitations, overthinking, insomnia, and panic-like anxiety—features commonly observed in today’s youth and working professionals.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Irregular Eating Patterns

Skipping meals, late-night eating, and eating without hunger disturb Vata, resulting in anavasthita chitta (unstable mind), excessive worry (chinta), and unexplained anxiety. Modern research correlates these habits with blood sugar fluctuations and increased stress hormone release, further destabilizing emotional regulation.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Excess Sugar and Refined Carbohydrates

Refined sugars and carbohydrates create a cycle of stimulation followed by energy crashes—initially increasing Raja, then promoting Tama. This

oscillation leads to irritability, mood swings, and anxiety episodes. Insulin spikes and neurotransmitter imbalances further reinforce this pattern.

### 5. Stale, Reheated, and Frozen Foods

Foods that are stale, reheated, or frozen are considered nisprana (devoid of life force). These foods promote Ama and reduce Satva Guna, leading to mental fog, emotional heaviness, and anxiety marked by lack of clarity.<sup>6</sup>

### 6. Eating While Distracted (Screens, Stress, Multitasking).

Eating while watching screens or under stress leads to Agyana Aahara (unknowing consumption), causing improper digestion even if the food is wholesome. It reduces mental satisfaction, increases stress response & even hampers emotional regulation. Modern science correlates it with impaired digestion, reduced parasympathetic activity & higher perceived stress levels

“An anxious mind often reflects a disturbed digestive system.”

## III. GUT–BRAIN AXIS: AYURVEDA VALIDATED BY MODERN SCIENCE<sup>7</sup>

Modern research recognizes the gastrointestinal tract as highly sensitive to emotional states.<sup>8</sup> Feelings such as anxiety, fear, sadness, or excitement can trigger gut symptoms like nausea or abdominal discomfort. Importantly, this relationship is bidirectional—a distressed gut can send abnormal signals to the brain, leading to anxiety and depression even in the absence of obvious psychological stressors.<sup>9</sup>

Ayurveda explains this through impaired Agni and Ama affecting Manovaha Srotas, proving that anxiety is often not merely psychological, but deeply rooted in digestive imbalance.

“Healing the mind begins with healing the gut.”

## IV. MENTAL RESILIENCE, SATVA, AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Not all individuals exposed to stress develop anxiety. Some display strong internal resilience, while others rely on supportive social networks. Ayurveda explains

this through Satva Bala—the strength of the mind. Individuals with strong Satva tolerate stress better, whereas those with weak Satva are more susceptible to Raja and Tama dominance.

Crucially, Ayurveda emphasizes that Satva can be strengthened through proper diet, lifestyle, and mindful conduct, making mental resilience a cultivable quality rather than a fixed trait.

#### V. AYURVEDA'S HOLISTIC LEGACY IN MENTAL HEALTH

While ancient civilizations often attributed mental illness to supernatural causes, Ayurveda adopted a holistic and rational approach. It emphasized the inseparable connection between diet, lifestyle, emotional balance, and mental health—an understanding that aligns closely with today's biopsychosocial model.

Warm, freshly prepared, seasonal foods enriched with spices like turmeric, ginger, and cinnamon were recommended to promote digestion, vitality, and emotional stability. In contrast, excessive processed foods and stimulants were warned against for their destabilizing effects on both gut and mind.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Modern anxiety is not merely the product of external stressors but a reflection of internal imbalance created by disturbed food habits. By weakening Agni, promoting Ama, aggravating Vata, and disrupting the balance of Satva, Raja, and Tama, modern diets silently erode mental resilience. Ayurveda reminds us that the mind does not exist in isolation—it is continuously shaped by what we eat, how we digest, and how consciously we live. Treating anxiety without correcting dietary habits offers only temporary relief. True and lasting mental well-being begins with restoring digestive harmony and nourishing Satva. In an age of rising anxiety, Ayurveda's wisdom stands clear: healing the mind must begin with healing the gut, and food must be recognized as the first medicine for mental health.

“When food loses Satva, the mind loses peace.”

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