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Issue #40 | October 15, 2022

# Love Life, Love your Liver

It's critical to take good care of this very vital organ of our body, writes leading hepatologist Dr Chetan Ramesh Kalal

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#### Publisher's Note



#### **Happy Diwali!**

Dr Chetan Ramesh Kalal has prudently penned the cover story on our all-important liver and how to take care of it. Notwithstanding, there is always a song endorsing a drink where the heroine, the cabaret artist and vamp, encourages the man around whom the song and dance is to have a drink. Meena Kumari in Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam. who pleads with her man to stay back, is the first time a wife is shown drinking to get her huband's affection. Then there is Raj Kumar in Kaajal, who coaxes his wife to have a drink "chu lene do naazuk hothon ko kuch nahi jaam hai yeh". There is also Shashi Kala who sings "sheeshe se pee ya paimaane se" in the movie Phool Aur Pathar. It's a standard formula — every seductress entices the guy with a drink.

Almost every party scene has a piano, there's free flowing liquor and the hero or heroine venting their angst. Every Helen cabaret number has a heart broken chap who is trying to drown himself in alcohol whereas his lady love is flirting around with the villain. There is also Sadhana's famous song from Intakaam, "kaise rahun chup maine pee hi kya hai." The story of Devdas is about an alcoholic who finally dies of excessive drinking. Besides these party songs there are a whole lot of Holi songs which glorify bhaang, whether it's Amitabh Bachchan in "Rang barse", or "Khai ke paan Banaras wala" or Mumtaz in "Jai Jai Shiv Shankar". The moral of these stories is to eat, drink a lot and be merry.

In more recent times there's Honey Singh who raps "Chaar bottle vodka kaam mera roz ka", which has done really well on the music charts. Once the party is going really strong, the DJ plays all these happy hour numbers and the party rocks on. There is a classic Punjabi joke where a man goes to the doctor who asks him "Sharaab peete ho?", and the man replies, "thodi jaldi hai par pee lunga".

Our liver being no less important than our hearts, we need to make sure its health and vitality is our topmost priority as seniors. That said, this Diwali be wise and drink responsibly. Happy Diwali and all the best for the coming year.

Nicharn Set

**Vickram Sethi** Publisher and Editor-in-Chief



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## Love Life, Love Your Liver

In India today, liver disease is a major public health concern. It is currently the tenth leading - and quickly ascending - cause of death in the country, writes *Dr Chetan Ramesh Kalal* 

Recently, a senior citizen of around 70 years came for a medical consultation. The gentleman was diabetic but otherwise seemed fit. Upon clinical examination and prescribed tests, he was diagnosed with both liver cirrhosis and a liver tumour. Upon hearing his medical diagnosis, the patient was in a state of shock. Enquiries during the ensuing clinical interactions revealed that the patient had been suffering from fatty liver disease (FLD) for many vears but had been informed by his general practitioner not to worry about FLD. Ignorance and negligence thus contributed to the seriousness of FLD manifesting in its present criticality.

India is celebrating Amrit Mahotsav of its independence and is on the cusp of both progress and development. We aim to be a developed nation soon and no doubt we will reap the benefits of development and prosperity. However, all progress, development and prosperity is at risk if the citizens do not wake up to the health-care dangers that lurk in this upward journey. Rising incomes and societal changes come with their own health challenges - consumption of fast food, unhealthy habits, sedentary lifestyle, and alcohol consumption. These lifestyle changes may lead one to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, liver disease, mental health issues and more. All of these are on the rise; some are detected and addressed, but the majority of them go unreported.

With this background, let me now address the human body's critical organ: the liver.

#### **Know Your Liver**

The liver is the second largest organ of the human body after the brain. It performs more than five hundred complex functions daily. The liver plays a key role in the body's metabolism, detoxification, and protection against disease. It is known to possess an amazing ability to regenerate in a short span.

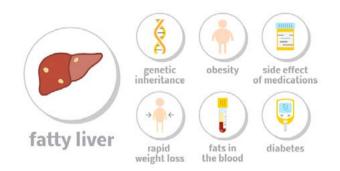
Liver health is therefore important for everyone, of all ages, but more so in the elderly. The liver is responsible for many vital functions, such as filtering toxins from the blood, producing bile to help digest fats, storing vitamins and minerals. As we age, the liver becomes less efficient at performing these functions which can lead to a build-up of toxins in the blood causing a variety of health problems.

#### Risk factors for Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)



In India today, liver disease is a major public health concern. It is currently the tenth leading - and quickly ascending cause of death in the country. The most common known cause of liver disease is

#### CAUSES OF FATTY LIVER



fatty liver - non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) which is responsible for the majority of the liver cases. Other common causes include alcoholic liver disease, viral hepatitis and drug-induced liver injury.

#### Liver Disease and Lifestyle

Aberrant lifestyles have pushed the liver of millions of individuals to their limit. leading to a silent smouldering epidemic of lifestyle liver disease known as the fatty liver disease. It is believed that one-third of the world's population suffers from some form of fatty liver disease. A study done in Kerala, India, reported a prevalence of 49% and a staggering 60% prevalence among obese school going children. On a country basis, fatty liver disease is scaling up and has percolated into all socio-economic strata. But it's also a myth to cast fatty liver disease as a modern world disease. The Charakasamhita, the traditional Indian medical text written in the second century BC documented metabolic imbalance quite explicitly.

Fatty liver is a condition in which excess fat accumulates in the liver. This can lead to inflammation and scarring of the liver, and can eventually lead to liver failure. Fatty liver is most common in people who are overweight or obese, and who are diabetic. It is also more common in people who consume alcohol excessively. In India, the prevalence of fatty liver is on the rise primarily due to the increase incidence of obesity and diabetes. Fatty liver is a major cause of chronic liver disease and is a leading cause of death from liver disease.

The good news is that fatty liver is a preventable condition. Losing weight, eating a healthy diet, and exercising regularly can all help to prevent fatty liver. In some cases, medications may also be necessary.

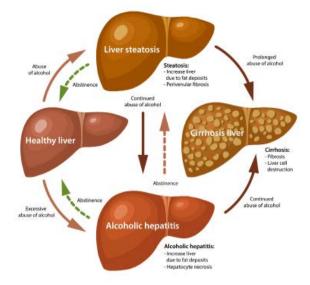
Drug Induced Liver Injury

The prevalence of drug-induced liver injury (DILI) in India is not well known. A recent study found that DILI was the third most common cause of liver injury in a tertiary care hospital in North India. One of the most common causes of DILI in this study were paracetamol (acetaminophen). As recently as 2019, Giloy has been promoted to the public in India as an immune booster to prevent novel coronavirus. Recently, although in small number, it has been reported that Giloy use can manifest in the development of herb-induced liver injury (HILI) with autoimmune features in some patients. DILI can be caused by a wide variety of drugs, both prescription and over-thecounter. The most common symptoms of DILI are fatigue, nausea, and abdominal pain. DILI can often be difficult to diagnose, as it may mimic other liver disorders.

If you suspect that you or a loved one has DILI, it is important to see a hepatologist (liver specialist) for proper diagnosis and treatment. There is no specific treatment for DILI. The best way to prevent DILI is to be aware of the signs and symptoms and to avoid taking multiple medications. If you must take multiple medications, be sure to tell your doctor or pharmacist about all of the medications you are taking.

#### **Alcohol and Liver Disease**

Alcohol consumption is one of the commonest causes of cirrhosis after fatty liver disease. Almost 20% of all liver disease patients (irrespective of etiology) are current alcohol consumers. Thus, alcohol amounts for a significant part of the liver disease burden across the world. Further, a significant proportion of liverAlcoholic liver disease



related mortality of unknown etiology may well be attributable to alcohol as patients may withhold their history of alcohol use because of various socio-cultural and insurance-related issues. Concomitant significant alcohol intake may be present in well over 50% of patients with other liver diseases including Hepatitis C and NAFLD. It is speculated that the burden of Alcohol Liver Disease (ALD)related mortality is under-estimated by almost two-fold because of these various factors. One also needs highlight the fact that while there are partially evidencebased limits for "unsafe" daily or weekly alcohol consumption, there is little evidence behind any proscribed "safe" limit. The apparent health benefits of small quantities of alcohol has been much touted in the medical and non-medical literature. But strong evidence to the contrary has emerged from the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD). There are no safe limits for alcohol as the estimated beneficial effects on cardiac disease strongly off-set other health hazards particularly cancer. This notion of "no safe limit of alcohol consumption" has been

highlighted in a recent UK guideline. The evidence-based advice in clinics should thus be "complete abstinence" although this may not be acceptable or feasible for patients due to socio-cultural reasons.

#### Age and Liver Disease

As population ages, the number of people with liver problems also surges. As we age, our bodies change in many ways. One of those changes is that our liver functions start to decline. This can lead to a number of problems, including an increased risk for liver disease.

There are many different types of liver problems, ranging from mild to severe. Common liver problems among the elderly include fatty liver disease, hepatitis, and cirrhosis. Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that can be caused by a viral infection, alcohol abuse, or other factors. Cirrhosis is a late stage of liver disease characterized by scarring and poor liver function. Cirrhosis is a chronic liver disease that can lead to liver failure. There is no cure for cirrhosis, but early diagnosis and treatment can improve the outcome.

### You Are Responsible for Your Liver's Health

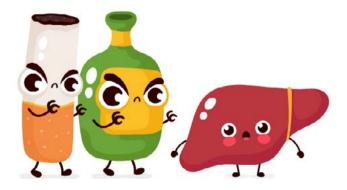
While many liver problems can be effectively managed with medication and lifestyle changes, some can lead to serious complications and even death. It is important for people who are at risk for liver problems to be aware of the signs and symptoms, and to seek medical help as soon as possible. If you are an elderly person with liver problems or are caring for someone who is, there are some things you can do to help manage the condition and improve your quality of life.

First, avoid excessive alcohol

consumption. Alcohol can damage the liver and lead to serious problems. If you do drink alcohol, stop it completely. Second, eat a healthy diet. A healthy diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Avoid processed foods and foods high in fat and sugar. Third, exercise regularly. Exercise helps to keep your body healthy in many ways, including improving liver function. Fourth, get regular medical check-ups. This will help your doctor catch any problems early and treat them before they become serious. Avoid overthe-counter medications and don't selfmedicate. If you take care of yourself, you can help keep your liver healthy as you age. Manage stress. Vaccinations can help to protect against hepatitis and other diseases that can damage the liver. By following these simple tips, you can help to keep your liver healthy and support its vital role in your health.

Ingrain a healthy lifestyle. You are your best health supervisor. At the least make sure you get timely intervention. Like the 70 year old patient from the beginning of this article. With treatment, he is now cured of the liver tumor and is listed for a transplant.

Choose life, love your liver.





At 5pm every Saturday, leading doctors from across the country speak with Seniors Today readers. And answer their questions.

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# Fast to Aarogyam

*Fasting purifies the body, boosts stamina, enhances endurance, stabilises blood pressure levels, regulates sugar levels, promotes focus and nourishes physical health for a good life, writes Nagesh Alai* 

Two weeks ago, I happened to dine out at an organic gourmet restaurant, curiosity aroused by an interesting appellation, Nude Food Café, set in an outhouse of an old bungalow on a main throughfare. Eclectic menu apart, I noticed that they serve only half a glass of water. Used as I am to drink a full glass; I was about to ask for more when I noticed the coaster saying "We serve only half a glass of water. If you want more, please ask. We do not wish to waste water. What is left in your glass is used to water the plant". There were plants and trees aplenty around. A compelling messaging indeed - both from an environment perspective as well as tempered consumption.

Talking of tempered consumption, it reminds me of a long standing lawyer friend, nudging 70, but who is as fit and sprightly as he was in his 30's. Between the daily home to station and station to office walks and all the in-between speed-walks to the High Court and the City Civil courts for hearings, he never put on an inch of weight in all these decades. A believer in public transport, he hardly ever used his car except for weekend family outings. What has also been his consistent practise is to eat sparingly and being happy with just 60 to 70% filled stomach. I have yet to come across a healthier individual. He is frugal and tempered in all his consumptions – be it sensory or sartorial needs.

Contrastingly, another well-wisher who has since migrated to the cosmic world, had a constant battle with the bulge in the 40 odd years that I knew him. Fleeting between profligate and frugal consumption of everything and hopping from one dietary fad to another, all of which were as transient as his excitement levels, he never could win the war with the bulge. South Sea, Keto, Atkins, intermittent, Mediterranean, no carbs – you name it, every single diet plan bowed out of his experiments. A sharp brain given to wit and enjoyment of all that life has to offer, he never gave up trying different methods to lose weight, but was eventually resigned to his girth, but with mirth.

A healthy mind in a healthy body is reflective of the age old conviction on mindful living to stay healthy, not just physically but mentally too. While physical exercises play their role in good health, fasting too plays its role. If fasting is an integral part of Hinduism (or Sanatan Dharma), it is a common practice in several other religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and so many other faiths. Many of the fasting practices are linked to festivals while several other are linked to lunar positions. Myriad other practices have evolved over a period – driven by individual needs or recommendation by health experts.

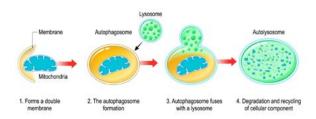
Several Hindus fast on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, depending on their 'ishta devi-devatas' or on Ekadashi or Sankashti or Angarika or on the occasion of Mahashivartri or Ganesh Chaturthi or Navaratri. Muslims maintain 'roza' from sunrise to sunset for a period of 30 days during their ninth month Ramadan (Ramzan), after spotting the crescent moon. Christians fast during the 40 days period of Lent, when they remember the various events leading up to the death of Jesus Christ. While these are illustrative, several other religions have similar practices on various occasions.

Our body is an engineering marvel working to clock work precision created by nature or the divine. If we have to keep it running smoothly, we need to rest its system periodically so that it can keep inveterately functioning between our birth and death. Fasting is but a way of abstinence to give that much needed rest and recoupment. These facts are validated by various medical practices like ayurveda, naturopathy, allopathy, homeopath, allopathy, unani and several other medical researches and studies.

To illustrate, in Ayurveda the central premise is that our health is dependent on 'agni' or digestion. If our digestion is good, we will be healthy. If our digestion is poor, it will lead to poor health. A bad digestion or a low agni will disturb the fine balance between the various digestive elements or doshas like vata, pitta and kapha, leading to accumulation of 'aama' or toxins/wastes in our body and cause poor health or disease. To maintain the fine balance and keep the digestive system working efficiently, fasting is a necessary practice. All schools of thoughts on fasting and medical practices converge on the rationale of fasting.

In essence. Fasting or abstaining from food is observed by people for specific or extended periods for spiritual or medical/ therapeutic or general health reasons. It purifies the body, boosts stamina, enhances endurance, stabilises blood pressure levels, regulates sugar levels, promotes focus and nourishes physical health for a good life.





Talking of fasting, many would be knowing about 'autophagy', a Nobel award winning study by Yoshinori Ohsumi, a Japanese scientist. His finding is that when we fast rigorously for 24 to 48 to 72 hours (will depend from case to case - should be done under medical advice), cells break down old and useless proteins and reuse them for energy. Healthier cells eat the dysfunctional or inefficient cells to regenerate new healthy cells. Autophagy has been known to prevent or cure chronic disorders, cancer and other infectious diseases. Benefits of autophagy are similar to those of the severe penance followed by rishis and sages of vore and even today by some across India and some Asian countries.

There are several fasting methods (only illustrative ) one can consider:

1) Fasting one day every week, either the full day or mornings or nights

2) Having only alkaline fruits on select days in a week.

3) Intermittent fasting – going without food variously for 16 hours or 12 hours or 8 hours in a period of 24 hours

4) Setting a regimen for different days of the week – like only carbs on one day, only fruits on another day, only vegetables on the third day, only nuts on the fourth day, regular all-in food on the fifth day and so on.

5) Rigorous fasting including not having water (only those who can manage ) for one or two days in a month.

6) Regular food for lunch and only fruits or salad for dinner

7) Heavy breakfast, medium lunch and light dinner

8) Very small portions 4 to 6 times a day, with a gap of around 3 hours in-between each.

9) Shifting calory intake – 1800 for breakfast, 1200 for lunch and 800 for dinner.

10) Limiting non vegetarian food to one or two days in a week

11) Vegan

12) Atkins or Keto or South Sea or Mediterranean or similar

The choice of the diet will depend on the health parameters of individuals and should preferably be done under medical advice.



As with anything else in life, moderation is the trick, not swinging to extremes. Overindulgence can lead to acidity as can underindulgence. The body too has its own limitations and response mechanisms. At the end of the day, its best to have food as medicines rather than having medicines as food. Fasting is but a natural alternative to medicines. Let us test our resolve during the upcoming Deepavali and Christmas and try tempering our consumption of all the festival goodies, sweets and calories.

A sound body in a sound mind is possible with a 'Fast to Aarogyam'

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# seniors

Seniors Today was born a little over two years back, and has grown to be India's \*1 Destination for Seniors Today. We started with a monthly e-magazine and later a daily newsletter, both of which are available for everyone to read without any payment. Our content is now available in English and Hindi.

We offer a comprehensive understanding of issues pertaining to seniors— health, wellness, happiness, travel and even talent. With Health Live @ Seniors Today, we have a weekly consultation with a top-notch doctor. Then there's Seniors Have Talent, a singing competition for seniors, and The Seniors Kitchen, where you could share your popular recipes with the rest of the world.

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# Hitting the sweet spot – Gujarati cuisine



## *Malti Gaekwad* cooks up a mouth-watering food journey which forms an intrinsic component of Gujarati cuisine

Indian food and the variety it has, has always been an interesting subject with foodies across the world. The huge diversity of our country in its terrain and agricultural output itself contribute largely to the variety we see in our local and basic food. Firstly there is a northsouth divide. The majority of North Indians are wheat eaters whereas the Southern States consume more of rice. From these two major regions emerged many tasty dishes. Which were initially meant to provide a staple nutrition. Adding spice and flavours to the original spread, of the various influences of the invaders, mainly Mughal (not so much the British.)

We know that it is rich Mughlai cuisine which has left a lasting impact on Indian food probably for the better. Another influence is seen coming from the many Royal kitchens that dotted our vast country. Each Royal family prided itself in having its own signature dishes which are now reaching the common Indian, largely through Heritage hotels and their restaurants.

As communities we may be stickers for our own food be it aloo paratha or chhole bhature for a Punjabi and idli sambar for a Tamilian. In an individual capacity we are opening up to trying different foods as we travel and explore through the country and outside it too.

Thaali is a popular thing and easy to order especially when we travel. It provides a balanced, nutritious meal along with a variety of things. Best for an "on the move" busy person who doesn't want to waste time on deciding what to order. In the Western parts of our country the popularity of a thaali is the highest. The Gujarati thaali features at the top as the choice even outside Gujarat. Obviously the best thaali is available in Ahmedabad and Vadodara. Originally Gujarati food was very simple. Gujaratis are fond of eating and love to snack. While one can snack anytime, the average Gujarati likes to eat snacks even as part of their meal! The cuisine is full of - to die for mouth-watering farsan (snacks). You have a large variety of freshly made dishes like dhokla, idra, khaman, khamni, khandvi, bhajiya, kachori, thepla, handvo, muthiya, paatra, samosa, patties and many others. While there is a large variety of dry snacks too like khakhra, ganthiya, phaphda, chevdo, bhuso, papad-papdi, the list is endless.



The different regions of Gujarat, North, South, Saurashtra and Kathiyawad have added to the varieties with their specialities. The sweet flavours in dal and kadhi are due to the dependency on jaggery to counter the saltiness that permeates coastal region of Saurashtra. To compensate they add lime, tamarind and kokum. Hence the food of the coastal areas results in this sweet and sour taste.

There is certain similarity in the simple yet hardy and wholesome food of North West Frontier Provinces - now Punjab and Sindh and Kathiyawadi cusine.... With brinjal bharta, dal, tandoor baked bajra or jowar bhakhri and Makki ki roti with dollops of white butter or ghee, jaggery and chhaas or lassi to top it all.

While the food of the Surat region and costal belt here is quite different.

The identity of the popular Gujarati Thali is formed by the coming together of many cuisines from all over the state. Gujarati food is often accused of being loaded with oil but one can actually make a healthy choice! ...... Gujarati food is mainly vegetarian, a typical Thaali – has choice of 3 seasonal vegetables (1 dry veg + 2 semi gravy) and 1 pulse item and two varieties of farsan, one steamed and one fried. At an average every home would have 1 seasonal vegetable + 1 pulse veg + dal/ khadi as the main meal. .....the other variety of dishes like dumpling gravies, pulses (kathol), sprouts etc., outnumber the actual vegetable dishes. This fusion is in fact very



well balanced, healthy and nutritious diet with a combination of wheat and non-wheat rotlas, rice, fermented rice, split chickpea, variety of lentils, millets, grains where the food is largely baked or steamed and one can by choice avoid adding the oil on top as garnishing or "tadka."

The sweet dishes too include variety of items made by using broken wheat fhadha lapsi or kansaar, sheero- halwa made from sooji with ghee and gud.

Even sukhadi, magaj, mohanthaal etc. are popular and healthy sweetmeats.

Every season has its specialities as in other regions of our country. In the winter it is Undhyu and jalebi, while in the summer it is Aamrus and rotli.

While Shikhand poori is welcome anytime of the year in milk rich Gujarat.

Typically a Gujarati thaali in any restaurant will offer anything between fifteen to twenty items which include dal, subji, kadhi, kathol, farsaan, kachumbar, papad, chutney, choice between khichadi and rice, bhakri, rotli and poori and at least two desserts. While in Baroda, MANDAP restaurant is the best go to place for an excellent, memorable and affordable authentic Gujarati thaali.





The food is relished not only by all types of visitors coming to Baroda, but is a popular destination for the local Barodians as well. Some families are known to have a fixed booking for one weekend every month, while others make it a point to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries of their parents only at Mandap...... Because the elders/ parents enjoy this food. They seem to have an emotional connect with it since almost four decades. The restaurant too has maintained its taste, quality and standard. So next time you are in Baroda...you know where to head!

South Gujarat, especially Surat and surrounding areas are famous for another mouth-watering stand-alone dish called Undhiyu or Undhiya. This is a winter favourite because all the vegetables used in it are abundantly available in the winter months. It is a mixture of potatoes, sweet potato, yam, small round brinjals and a variety of beans called papdi in the local language. Another important ingredient is oval shaped dumplings made of fenugreek leaves called methi na muthia. These are first fried by themselves and later added to the dish when it is being cooked. But it does take a lot of oil and spices to make this variety. There is a non-vegetarian version of it also which is made by using tender chicken. A popular variant of this same dish is the rural and healthier version of the same, where all the vegetables are put into an earthen pot matka,

which is sealed on the mouth and cooked with simple masalas, in an open fire, this is called Umbadiyu. It's a baked alternative to the oily one and equally or tastier option. This dish is nutritious and filling, however people like to have it with green garlic chutney and jeeni sev (fine noodle like a savoury made from besan.) While offering it to guests one can add pooris, jalebis and fresh buttermilk which would make it a complete meal.





Gujarat is also known for its religious population and the many festivals round the year.... Where alongside celebratory decorations, pandals and pujas, people fast for days together like, during the two Navratris or Naratas, the holy month of Shravan and special days like Ekadashi, Chauth etc. So naturally there is a wide variety of dishes made for those who observe a fast. "Fast Food" albeit of a different kind. They are more like snacks which are made from tubers



like potato, sweet potato, elephant foot yamsuran or jimikand, Taro root – arbi, dry fruits, coconut, groundnuts, rajagrah and singodha powder, sabudana etc, basically no grains like wheat, rice, pulses and our common vegetables. Just to name a few – Leelo Chevdo, Sabudana Khichdi, Kaatri, Farari Chevdo, Sabudana or Kaju wada and various sweet dishes too, especially ladoos of different types made from milk and dry fruits.



We all love our traditional food and talking of thaali, different types of thaali (which actually means a fixed menu, which can be easily ordered) we have not only the popular Gujarati thaali, but Punjabi, Bengali, Goan, and South Indian thaalis available at different restaurants all across the country. Now that we Indians have started travelling and are open to trying different kinds of food...Imagine if we could get a universal standardized INDIAN THAALI everywhere...... Give it a thought as to what all food items it could/should include. You could go up to 10 individual items, that should form a filling, notorious and tasty meal for any Indian. Think about it.

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# Pain – our common denominator

We all understand pain well as we've all been through different types and intensities of it. While most painful conditions are usually treatable with home remedies and rest, it's always better to be vigilant and informed, writes *Dr Nandini Saini* 

An uncomfortable feeling, ranging from a prick or tingle to a severe throbbing or pulsating sensation. Everyone suffers from it due to some reason, which could be very mild, or an indication of a deeper illness. We often tend to ignore the aches and pains in our body, though it's our nervous systems way of signaling that something is wrong. Most people will try home remedies, like in ice pack, oil massages, and poultice. There are, however, a few conditions, which definitely shouldn't be ignored.

So, what could the pain indicate? It depends on the body part affected, and the reasons could be as simple as a sprain. It could also be a more severe condition, requiring extensive checkups and treatment.

#### Abdominal pain

Abdominal pain can be due to a lot of reasons, depending on the area affected. It could vary from mild to excruciating, constant to spasmodic, depending on the cause.

#### - Right sided

A sudden, unbearable pain in the right lower side of the abdomen could be appendicitis, an infection in the appendix. It can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting.

Pains in the upper right abdomen, increasing in intensity gradually, can be indicative of gall stones. It is usually accompanied by indigestion, nausea, a sensation of heaviness in the abdomen. In extreme cases, the gall bladder ruptures, making it an emergency.

#### - Kidney stones

A sharp shooting pain starting from the back and radiating forwards could be due to renal calculi. The pain typically occurs when the stone moves from its position; it could be accompanied by bleeding in urine.



#### -Lower abdominal

A pain in the lower abdomen could be due to urinary infection or an intestinal disease, like obstruction.

**-Dysmenorrhea** - Menstrual cramps are pains experienced by women before, during or after their monthly cycle. Though they are usually tolerable, at times the pains could be too extreme and require

### medical intervention. **Chest pain**

We usually associate chest pain with a cardiac eventuality. However, there can be other reasons for experiencing pain in the chest region.

-**Myocardial Infarct** – A myocardial infarct (heart attack) can present with severe pain in the chest, sometimes radiating to the left arm. The person often complains of restlessness and excessive perspiration.

Recurrent chest pain, called angina pain, is also heart related, caused by inadequate blood flow to the heart.

- Acidity – Acidity, too, can present with

pain in the chest. It is usually accompanied by burning sensation in the chest region and nausea. There could be a history of eating spicy food, or fasting for a long time.

- **Pulmonary embolism** – A blockage in one of the pulmonary arteries, presents with unexplained pain or pressure in the chest, possibly radiating to the jaw or back. The person may also complain of shortness of breath.

**A pneumothorax** – air or gas in the chest cavity- can also present with similar symptoms.

#### **Back pain**

Backache is one of the most common pains people experience. We usually tend to either ignore them or take them in stride. But at times, they need to be taken seriously.

The causes could be mechanical (due to injury, muscle strain) or radicular (a pinched nerve, with the pain radiating along its path)

- **Upper back** – extends from the nape of neck to just below the rib cage .The common reasons for pain in this area is postural or injury. Sometimes, a spinal disc herniates (slip disc), and if it presses on a nerve, you could have severe pain. One of the more critical reasons for upper backache can be aortic dissection- a condition in which there is a tear in the aorta, causing an internal bleed.

- Lower – Also called the lumbar region, the lower back extends from just below the ribcage to the sacrum. Pain in this region is common and everyone complains about it at some point in their life. The pain is usually exertional, postural or due to an injury. Obesity and age related degeneration also contributes to lower backache.

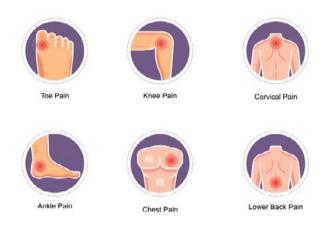
Though not common, the pain could also

be a symptom of spinal tumors.

**Types – acute:** Begins suddenly and lasts few weeks. Responds to rest and home remedies.

**Sub-acute :** persists from 6 weeks to 3 months, and it may require investigations and medical intervention.

**Chronic :** Lasting over 3 months, this pain can be moderate to severe and may not respond to treatments, requiring medical and/ or surgical intervention.



#### Headache

Most of us have suffered through a headache at some time orb the other. There are a lot of reasons for a headache- stress, hypertension, fever, to name a few.

 Migraine – A migraine is generally described as a one sided headache, shooting or hammering. It is sometimes preceded by an "aura"- a sensation which people recognize as the beginning of migraine. Migraine can be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, intolerance to light. There is usually a triggering factor which causes migraine; it could be sun exposure, hunger, very bright light.

- **Aneurysm** – A brain aneurysm is a ballooning of the blood vessel of the brain, which has a tendency to rupture, causing a hemorrhage. The bursting aneurysm causes pain, described as excruciating, the

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worst pain ever experienced. It could be accompanied by neck stiffness, sensitivity to light, double vision, confusion or unconsciousness.

A brain tumor also gives rise to headaches, which are aggravated at night, while sleeping or just after waking up. Sneezing or coughing can aggravate these headaches too.

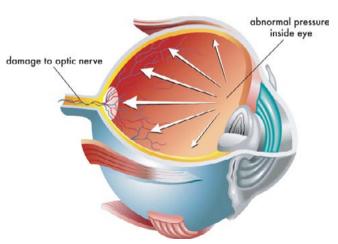
#### Ophthalmalgia (Eye pain)

Eye pain is usually the result of an injurya foreign particle in the eye, wearing lenses for a long time. But there are certain conditions giving rise to deeper, more severe issues.

Ocular pain is more superficial, caused by rubbing the eye or presence of a foreign object. It is often accompanied by burning or itching. Washing the eye and antiallergic eye drops usually give relief. Orbital pain is more severe, could be shooting or gritty. It requires a closer investigation and treatment. Some of the causes of orbital pain are:

- **Glaucoma** – Affecting the optic nerve, this disease is characterized by increased intra ocular pressure. Along with pain the individual could also complain of nausea, patchy or blurred vision and redness of the eye. Left untreated, glaucoma leads to blindness.

GLAUCOMA



- **CVS** – Pain, eye strain or blurred vision, with a prolonged history of exposure to the computer, points towards Computer Vision Syndrome.

- Optic neuropathy – An umbrella term, this covers all the reasons that cause damage to the optic nerve, which sends visuals from your eye to the brain, enabling you to see. The damage is due to inadequate blood supply to the nerve; the causes are varied – inflammation, clots, nutritional deficiencies. The symptoms include pain in the eye socket, flickering vision or loss of vision on one side.

#### Jaw pain

Jaw pain is not only common, but also debilitating, as it hinders the ability to chew and swallow food. The causes can be infections, tooth cavities, TMJ disorders. It can also be a sign of a heart attack, with the pain radiating from the chest to the jaw.



#### General bone pains

Bone pains are fairly common, especially as one ages. They are described as severe, deep seated pains, often aggravated at night. The causes are many- injury, Calcium and Vit D3 deficiency, and osteoporosis. However, it is also one of the signs of bone cancer. Any unexplained bone pains should be thoroughly investigated.

#### Joint pain

Joint pains are usually experienced by

elders, due to wear and tear of the muscles and tendons holding the joint together. Dislocations, injuries, fractures can also cause joint pains.

#### - Degenerative changes

Degenerative changes are commonly seen in the hip or knee joints, with the cartilage between the bones breaking down. These are slowly progressing conditions, accompanied with stiffness of joints, and difficulty in using them. Advanced cases have to undergo surgical replacement of joints.

#### - Rheumatoid changes

An auto immune condition, this is characterized by pain, inflammation and joint stiffness, especially in the mornings. The person could also suffer from fever, fatigue and weight loss.

#### Heel pains -

Heel pains are often felt due to ill-fitting footwear or pressure on the heels for an extended period of time, such as standing or walking for a long time. The other reasons are:

- **Spur** – Spurs are caused by calcium deposits in the back or lower portion of the heel, causing pain and inflammation around the joints.

- **Plantar fasciitis** – Plantar fascia is a thin and long tissue band connecting the heel to the front of the foot. Pressure or an injury to this tissue results in inflammation, in turn giving rise to pain and stiffness of the heel joint.

#### Calf pain -

Calf pains can be a result of exertion or strain. However, a severe, sudden pain in the calf can be due to a condition called DVT (deep vein thrombosis), formation of clots in the deep veins of the calves. These clots can travel anywhere in the body, and prove dangerous. There is usually a history of immobility due to bedrest or long travel times. It could be accompanied by hyperpigmentation of the calf skin; it may also feel hot to the touch.

#### Pain in big toe -

Pain in the toe can be quite annoying, and at times cause difficulty in walking. Fractures, in growing toenails, stubbing can all cause this pain. Systemic illnesses such as gout are known to affect the big toe, with severe, intolerable pain, swelling and tenderness.

#### Dysuria

Painful urination generally makes people think of a urinary tract infection, treated with anti-biotics. However, it could also be a sign of prostate or bladder cancer. A recurrent pain while urinating should be brought to the attention of a physician. Also, keep an eye out for bleeding, weight loss, reduced appetite- they all could point toward a serious illness.

#### Testicular pain

A sharp, intolerable pain, usually one sided, can be indicative of testicular torsion, a condition in which the blood flow to the testes is cut off. It is an emergency, and the individual should be rushed to the hospital. If ignored, the reduced blood flow will cause damage to the testicles. Other causes are injury, infections or testicular cancers, but the pain in these cases is either temporary or of gradual ascent.

#### Neck pain

The neck is one of the most common areas for pain and stiffness. Bearing the weight of the head, the neck is vulnerable to pain due to injuries, and can result in restricted movements.

- **Positional** – Postural pain is one of the common complaints, caused by long periods of sitting in front of laptops or sleeping in the wrong position. Besides pain, people might also complain of stiffness of the neck muscles.

- Cervical Spondylosis – A condition in which the vertebrae in the neck area degenerate. The pain can vary from mild to excruciating, at times with inability to move the neck. The person might also experience numbness in the hands or fingers.

- **Meningitis** – Neck stiffness and pain, along with a high fever, is one of the classic clinical signs of meningitis, and shouldn't be ignored.

#### **Breast Pain-**

Heaviness and mild pain in the breast tissue is a common symptom of premenstrual syndrome- many women suffer through it on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, breast cancer can also present with similar symptoms; it's often difficult to differentiate between the two on clinical history alone. It's better to get yourself investigated to reach a conclusive diagnosis. If you feel hardness or a lump, with pain or even without, then you definitely need to meet your physician.

#### Pains due to wounds

These are usually temporary and will disappear within a few days, at the most. However, if it doesn't, and is accompanied by swelling and /or oozing from the wound, it could indicate an infection, requiring antibiotics. Diabetics, in particular, need to be careful, as the healing process is impeded by the high sugar levels.

Though it's true that most pains are usually treatable with home remedies and rest, it's always better to be vigilant and informed. Timely medical intervention can help prevent extended illnesses and morbidities.

# It's festive time, but wait my skin needs help!

### *Deepa Desa* shares some skin care advice to help you through the festive season

Diwali ushers in the official party season. One which continues all the way into early 2O23. This also means it's officially time to dust the cobwebs off the corners (read: selfcare and home care). Whether you decide to pull a game of poker or sashay to endless parties, let's get you feeling and looking your best!

If you don't like the idea of being injected by a dermat, or are as disappointed with "parlour facials" as I am, then look no further than two or three products to help you get that glow and zing to your skin which will last longer than a mediocre facial.

Man or woman, it doesn't make a difference – you need to cleanse your skin every day. Like proper cleansing, with a gentle cleanser, preferably cream or oilbased, this is because our ageing skins deplete sebaceous glands leaving us dry and itchy. Safe to try; Inscinn – hemp seed oil and neem, or Forest Essentials –saffron and neem cleansers. Even if you skip all other skin care steps, a good cleanser and moisturiser will reap kind rewards to your skin.



As a daily routine, for at least three months, use good quality products that deliver nutrients into your epidermis. The weather has taken a turn. Dry polluted air, the hallmark ambience that defines our next three months, is generally not good news for our skin. Without having to devote too much time to make it headachy, develop a daily habit to use a good quality 10-20%Vitamin C serum, and sunscreen during the day. Vitamin C is an antioxidant that fights free radicals and most importantly boosts collagen production in our muscles. Which means your skin looks fresh and firmer with regular use. If Vitamin C is used daily for a fortnight, research indicates that your skin shows up a brighter and more even tone due to a reduction in hyperpigmentation.



Before you sleep, apply 1-2 ml of retinol serum. Start with 0.5% - 1% for ninety days. There could be side effects of skin irritation especially if you don't use a moisturiser on top of the serum.Follow the instructions carefully. According to clinical research, "Retinol in liquid crystal formulation is safe and provides significant clinical benefits associated with unification of skin colour, overall skin tone, skin elasticity, and moisture. Regular use of retinol typically results in brightening of the skin and reduced signs of ageing. The objective findings confirmed the effectiveness of the procedures." A moisturiser with hyaluronic acid, the best ingredient for delivering hydration to our skin cells, is the perfect way to layer the serum and call it a day. Brands that work

well and are easily available online are LaRoche-Posay, Olay Regenerist, CeraVé, Sesderma, Kiehls to name a few, and are not going to burn a hole in your pocket. Finally, a relaxing foot rub and hand love with a nourishing cream – Palmers and Kiehls are good for nourishing dry skin. This last routine erases much of the physical pain and fatigue that our hands and feet feel at the end of a long day. That's it! You're done.



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Microdermabrasion works well with men who have thicker skin

#### A note on exfoliation Exfoliation is the removal of dead cells from the skin's surface. This process helps amplify the effectiveness of the serums and moisturiser you apply after deep cleansing. Less is more with senior skin and exfoliation. Our skin gets dry, sensitive and more delicate as we age. Excessively scrubbing your skin will deplete your skin's barrier and oil production, leading to more sensitivity and redness and even microtearing of the skin tissue. If you want to know how to effectively exfoliate your face, visit your skin care specialist or dermatologist to discuss controlled options. A professional can recommend a chemical (peels) and mechanical (microdermabrasion) exfoliation treatment that best meets the needs of your skin. How often should you exfoliate vour face? Treatments should be scheduled once a month or bi-monthly at most.

Just make sure you keep your skin healthy and nourished on a daily basis by drinking good quantities of water. Give your skin a treat once in a way, by using a face mask -— the sheet ones are userfriendly -— with hyaluronic acid to hydrate or Vitamin C to brighten and firm, as the latter works on your collagen levels, which in turn strengthen and firm up your skin. And even if you think there are too many (lines and wrinkles), so what? Become a master at wearing your age gracefully.

You know by now that the best products in the world will help only superficially, if you're not taking care of yourself holistically. Exercise helps circulation and keeps your skin looking fresh. Keep yourself in a positive mindset by using chants, music, yoga, meditation, friends and habits that make you truly happy. Disconnect from people and situations that are toxic and bestow a nagging discontent to your being.

Keep your calm. Laugh a lot. Eat well. Sleep deeply.

Repeat. Now check your skin in the mirror!

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# Music can heal the wounds, that medicine cannot touch.

Debasish Mridha

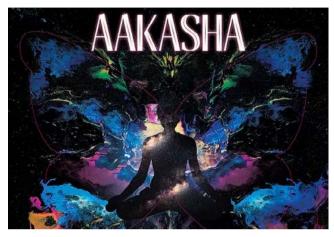
# The magic of meditative music

Music has healing powers. It has the ability to transport a person out of themselves for a few hours. *Narendra Kusnur* unravels the immense varieties of music and musical instruments that can help you attain inner calm

IT'S been 25 years since sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar released Chants Of India, which consisted of Vedic and other Hindu prayers set to music. Produced by former Beatle George Harrison, the album was a resounding success, often used while meditating. In a similar category, vocalist Pandit Jasraj and his nephew Rattan Mohan Sharma released Gayatri in 1999. Themed around the iconic prayer, it became a must at many homes.

Over the years, many albums have been released in India to aid meditation and help listeners attain peace of mind. While some have used the ancient texts, others have had themes revolving around different practices or instruments. Some have focused on music therapy aimed at reducing stress and helping people with ailments, whereas others contain pleasing instrumental music played on santoor, bansuri, sitar or sarod. There are also Zen meditation melodies and music created by followers of specific movements like Osho and Art Of Living. All these are broadly clubbed under spiritual music, and labels like Times Music, Saregama India, Music Today. Strumm Spiritual and T-Series have regularly put out such albums.

Over the past few months, there has been a sudden rise in such releases, either as albums or as songs. Some of these are based on new concepts. To begin with, there is Aakasha, blending new age, ambient, chant and meditation music, and using the Gayatri Mantra as a motif. Featuring singer Monica Ryan, arranger Keerthy Narayanan, producers Mia Moravis and Siddhant Bhatia, flautist Pravin Godkhindi, mandolin player U. Rajesh and spoken word performer Gregg Braden among others, the album released by Resensitize Records contains 11 meditative tracks.



In a similar vein, but not using Indian chants, sarod players Amaan Ali Bangash and his brother Ayaan have teamed up with producer Kabir Sehgal on Sand And Foam, inspired by the works of Lebanese-American writer Khalil Gibran. As the album "aims to take listeners on a musical voyage, while exploring narratives of identity, belonging and self-discovery" it belongs to the broader genre of positivelyinspiring music. The same is the case of Mantram, an album by sarod legend Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's son Alam Khan, who uses mantras on loop or as seed phrases. The sound, however, is very new age and contemporary. There's also the album Timeless, in which German singer Deva Premal and British musician Miten have been inspired by mantras.

Among singles, there have been two releases of the famous 'Algiri Nandini Strotram'. Singer Kavita Krishnamurthy has released the video of an earlier live performance composed by violinist L. Subramaniam and featuring violinist Arve Tellefsen and the Global Symphony. On the traditional front, there is a fantastic rendition by 10-year-old Nivedita Padmanabhan, with Narayan Mani on veena. Also using chants is 'Global Primordial Beat' by American musician Jai Uttal, known for his east-west fusion based on Indian mantras and kirtans.



CLEARLY, the field of meditative and chant-based music is very large. According to a study conducted by the University of Nevada, Reno, "Native American, Celtic and Indian stringed instruments, drums and flutes are very effective at relaxing the mind even when played loud". The study says that sounds of rain, birds and nature are also relaxing, besides light jazz, easy listening and certain slow-paced movements in western classical music.

In India, certain instruments have been promoted to help stress management. Pandit Shivkumar Sharma's santoor has been a favourite, and thematic albums like Upanishad Amrit, Antardhwani and Mountain Breeze are recommended, though one can listen to any raag played by him to feel serenity. His son Rahul Sharma as released the albums Zen and The Yogi in a similar space. Bansuri maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia has played on albums like Music Therapy For Motivation And Rejuvenation and Dhammapada, based on the teachings of Buddha. His nephew Rakesh Chaurasia has released Jal Shanti with composer Hanif Shaikh and singer Lalitya Munshaw, besides the album Bliss – Reiki Healing.

A popular album is Vanraj Bhatia's Indian Meditation Music, which has four tracks themed around stilling the body, sense withdrawal, concentration and contemplation. Flautist Ronu Majumdar's Music For Pranayam has also had a great response. Sitar player Pandit Shashank Katti has specialised in music therapy and his album Garbhankur for expectant mothers and the foetus has often been recommended. Among western instruments, the piano, violin, cello and light saxophone also help in relaxing the mind.

Besides instrumental music, there are many chant-based series. While the streaming platforms have many Oshothemed releases and Buddhist chants like 'Om Mani Padme Hum', there is an entire Art of Living series featuring artistes Bhanumathi Narasimhan, Sahil Jagtiani, Rishi Nityapragya and Vikram. Then, there are classics like M.S. Subbulakshmi's 'Sri Venkatesa Suprabhatham', whose effects are miraculous when played early in the morning.



Often, the choice of chants depends on a person's individual musical choice and requirements, be it the philosophy behind the music, or the choice of instruments. It is also said that forcing yourself to listen to relaxation music that irritates you can increase tension instead of reducing it. Very often, one may experiment between different styles, and one can refer to the accompanying



box for some popular releases in the genre. Once one has chosen the music, there

are a few basic things to follow. Experts say one may keep aside a specific time, lasting at least 20 minutes. In a study on music for meditation, researcher and stress management expert Elizabeth Scott says it is important to get into a comfortable sitting position and relax, stay focused on the music, and continue with the practice till time runs out.

Scott says one may begin with shorter tunes, and then slowly go in for longer ones. One can even time one's practice with the number of songs chosen, and thus have a rough idea when to stop.

Listeners have many options on types of music, and with albums easily available on the streaming platforms, one can easily discover newer tunes. However, barring instances like Ravi Shankar's Chants Of India, Jasraj's Gayatri and the thematic albums of Chaurasia, there has been little organised advertising and promotion of such releases. Very often, albums are just released without any buzz, and listeners discover them while browsing or through word of mouth.

In the end, one can always find the most suitable music and enjoy the benefits of meditation. A little 'self-time' with soothing music can always brighten up the day.



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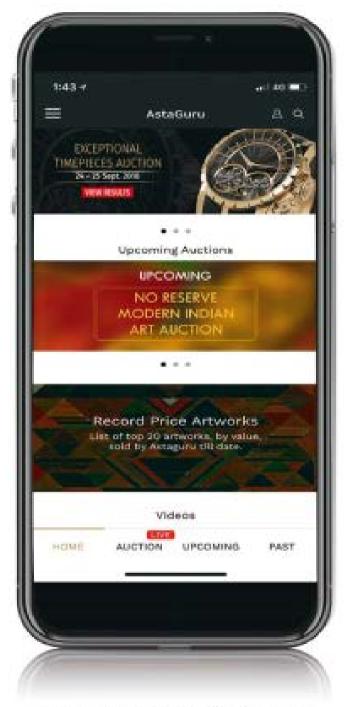
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