

## Ayurvedic-vegan diet for good health

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Ayurvedic-vegan diet for good health (Thinkstock photos/Getty Images)

*Chef Darshana Thacker combines the ethical principles of a vegan diet with the ancient tenants of Ayurvedic cooking*

Darshana Thacker grew up in a family that followed the tenets of Ayurvedic cooking. Then eight years ago, the Los Angeles-based Ayurvedic chef turned adopted veganism. She found that the two diets shared a sense of ethics and health and now she marries them together to have the ideal meal plan for healthy living.

"Ayurveda is a way of life, which brings you in an alignment with yourself," says the chef who is in the city to talk about her Ayurvedicvegan diet. "According to me, a vegan diet because of its ethical values fits into an Ayurvedic life."

So while she eats no animal products, she plans her meal according to the dosha type/body constitution (see box) and ensures the balance of the six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, pungent, astringent and bitter), textures, colours and nutrients (balance of proteins, carbohydrates and fats). She also adopts the Ayurvedic cooking methods such as steaming vegetables, soaking and sprouting beans and lentils, and rinsing grains well before cooking.

So how does she ensure that the body is nourished with enough proteins? She says, "Research indicates that we require only 10 per cent of our total daily calories to maintain a strong healthy body; it is very easy to meet this target on a whole foods, plant-based diet.

In fact, there is strong evidence suggesting that protein intake higher than that, especially of animal protein, poses potential risk for diseases."

Of the 20 essential amino acids required for building protein, she says, our body can produce 11 and the other nine are available through various food. It is not necessary for the body to get the remaining nine from the same food — the body breaks down and stores the individual amino acids in a pool when protein is consumed. It will restrict the protein as and when required.

Thacker says, "It is very difficult to be protein deficient on a calorie dense diet. From a whole foods and plant-based diet, you get a perfect balance of protein, carbohydrates and fat. This has ample quantities of phytochemicals, antioxidants, fibre, vitamins and minerals."

An animal-based diet consisting of dairy, meat and eggs protein brings with it saturated fat and cholesterol. Thacker recommends a good source of plant-based protein for bananas, brown rice, barley pearl, quinoa, whole wheat bread, chickpeas, lentils, soymilk, broccoli, tofu, and spinach.

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