Dear Readers:

Is the transdermal use of Castor oil ok? Is it ok to use Black Turmeric? How much daily dose of yellow turmeric? Do we have to soak quinoa? What about Kalonji seeds? And many more questions that Vaidya received recently. To send us your own questions, you may email us at: livingtradition@prana-center.com or simply visit Vaidya’s website at www.vaidyamishra.com and click on the “Ask Vaidya Mishra” tab on the top left side.

Castor Oil and Macular Degenerative Eyes

“Vaidya Mishra,

I read your Castor Oil Question & Answer [Ricin Toxicity - Castor Oil ~ June 6, 2013 - Vaidya Mishra's Newsletter #23, Volume 3]. . .and am concerned. . .I have been using it to remove my facial & eye makeup. . .thinking it was good for the skin & eyes. . .and based on Edgar Cayce Readings. . .it is so healing for many issues?!?!? The ingredients on the bottle: Pure, Cold Pressed Ricinus Communis (Castor) Oil ~ Certified by periodic laboratory tests to be free of pesticide residues. Please advise. . .and/or what would you recommend for Macular Degenerative Eyes. . .I am Pitta. . .I so wish to heal & protect my eyes. . .and keep my eyesight! Om! Shanti! Jan”

Dear Jan: I have not seen any side-effects, so far, from the topical application of castor oil. However, you being a pitta constitution, I would certainly recommend you don’t use it. Try to find some alternative pitta pacifying, or at least, non-pitta aggravating, nourishing oil. Jojoba is a good alternative. But you may like to try my own formulation, the Lalita’s Facial oil. Many women love this product and use it as a make-up cleanser. It has a very balanced blend of nourishing herbs and a very
light floral aroma. See if it works for you.

Otherwise, for your eyes, you should stay under the supervision of your medical eye doctor, but here are some ayurvedic tips. The eyes are an “agneya” fire organ, so they get affected when pitta is out of balance. You want to maintain a pitta balancing lifestyle and diet. For starters, Wild Amla is highly pitta pacifying, and nurturing for the eyes. It will be a good addition to your diet. You can have one tablet in the morning after breakfast.

DGL or de-glycerized licorice transdermal cream is very cooling and soothing for high pitta. Apply a small amount on the back of your neck on your cervical area, before going to bed, that will cool off your eyes.

Try to eat as many multi-colored fruits and vegetables as possible. Colored fruits and vegetables contain carotenoids. Carotenoids are yellow, orange, or red fat-soluble pigments, including carotene, which gives fruits and vegetable their colors. Research findings indicate that those who consume a diet rich in carotenoids from fruits and vegetables are healthier and tend to have less risks of developing eye diseases.

In general, avoid pitta aggravating foods and activity. Never skip or delay meals. Go to bed by 9pm latest, before pitta time. Read my Summer Booklet (available on www.chandika.com). It has many tips and guidelines for cooling off and balancing pitta, in general, and specially in the summer time.
Ganglion Cyst on Finger
“Dear Vaidya-ji,
Please can you tell me how to dissolve a ganglion cyst on the top of my right ring finger. It came there after drinking whey from panir for 10 days. It was too sour for me. How can I get rid of that lump? I am in very good health. Thank you. Regards, Bharati B.”

Dear Bharati: try using Mahakanchenar Transdermal cream followed by Prakrit transdermal creams (available at www.chandika.com) 3-4 times a day, apply and massage gently but consistently. Try this for 10 days. If, after 10 days, it does not go away, you may want to consult with your medical physician to get it surgically removed – this is a safe and effective routine procedure.

Kalonji Seeds?
“Namaskar Vaidyaji, I recently learned a lot about Kalonji oil or black seed oil being used for health. I have never heard any vaidya prescribing it. However, my mom has mostly used the seeds along with methi seeds to prepare turka for daals. What is your opinion on using Kallonji oil for health and weight loss purposes, please advise. Thanks, Ajay S.”

Dear Ajay: I recommend kalonji (or kalunji) in therapeutic doses in cooking on a regular basis. It’s a very good spice for hormonal modulation or balancing. But according to our tradition, it should always be used along with cumin, fenugreek, fennel, and ajwain. Your mom was already using it with fenugreek, which is wonderful. Kalonji is almost tri-dosha pacifying, that’s why it should always be used in moderation. Regular balanced usage can help the digestive system, the hormonal system in men and women, the eyes, hair, muscle toning, and
joints. Here is a good recipe you can use in your meals. Mix the ingredients in the following proportions and then grind in a coffee grinder. You may occasionally use the whole seeds as well in the same proportions, if you prefer.

**Masala Recipe**
1 part kalonji seeds
1 part fennel
1 part ajwain
1 part fenugreek

Use ¼ to ½ tsp per person, sauté in ghee and add to your dhal or rice.

**How Much Turmeric Daily?**
“Since I found Mr Vaidya Mishra with all of his teachings and knowledge, I began following his recommendations and buying some products. For instance, I just bought ghee and turmeric, but I need a little more information regarding turmeric. Since I live in the west coast, the only way to clarify my questions regarding the products Mr. Mishra sells, is through the internet.
1. If a person in "not" sick, how much turmeric is recommended daily when cooking (how many tsp a day?)
2. If one feels sick, (fibromialgia, arthritis), how many tsp(s) a day?

With gratitude,
Moni R.”

Dear Moni: please go to my SVA Health Channel on YouTube and watch the video on “How to use turmeric.” In general, for a healthy person, I recommend ¼ to ½ tsp turmeric powder cooked or sautéed in ghee in added to your meal with lunch and dinner.

Remember: NEVER consume raw turmeric, as it can heat up the liver too much too quickly. And never consume
large amounts of turmeric alone. Always cook it in ghee or with your vegetables and protein. My YouTube video will give you additional details. If someone has a medical condition as you mention, they should always check with their medical physician concerning whether they should consume any turmeric at all.

**Hing and Celibacy?**

“Is Hing something to be avoided by celibates? I’ve read that it’s an aphrodisiac, tamasic, and pitta aggravating. Thanks. Roger P.”

Dear Roger: Yes you are right. Hing (or asafoetida), is an oleoresin native to India, and used widely in cooking as well as for therapeutic purposes. It is used for flatulence, for indigestion, etc. However, it can be highly pitta aggravating. It should only be used in specific instances to pacify kapha and vata. When consumed by pitta individuals, it can overheat the physiology and act as a tamasic agent. It will trigger tamasic sexual energy when consumed unnecessarily – not in order to correct an imbalance but just as an addition for flavoring etc. It is then best to avoid it if one is celibate - specifically a pitta celibate!

**Bhumi Amla for Hepatitis C**

“Sir, Please, advise me about the bhumi amla , since my uncle is suffering with liver cancer in the category c (hepatitis) patient age is 67yrs .your word of advice will work wonder. Wait in for your kind revert, Vikas S.”

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Dear Vikas: yes, the sutras in the ayurvedic texts on Bhumi amla as well as contemporary research indicate that it is a potent plant that can restore balance to the liver and help with many liver conditions. However, in Ayurveda in general, but in my SV lineage in particular, we do not believe that one single herb can be the full answer for a specific disease or condition. No one single herb or ingredient can help correct a disease on its own. It has to be total care, encompassing the use of many different modalities and medicinal herbs. In addition, this has to be done under the supervision of an ayurvedic expert working in parallel with a medical doctor. I would recommend you take steps in that direction. Hope this helps.

**Policystic Ovaries**

“I am 36 years old and have Polycystic ovaries. I am trying to conceive but suffer from irregular periods. I am not sure when I ovulate. I want to become pregnant soon. Currently I am taking ayurvedic tablets which contain a mixture of Manjistha, Shatavari, Gokshur and Haritaki. I am taking another tablet which contain triphala guggul, kutki and shilajit. Can you give me your suggestions. SK”

Dear SK: It seem to me you need full guidance from an ayurvedic expert who will help your condition through SVA diet, ayurvedic Transdermal creams, as well as Nectar drops. If you live in the United States, I recommend 2 excellent physicians who are also SVA experts. You may contact either one of them: 1) Dr. Marianne Teitelbaum in New Jersey at 1.786.856.3330, or 2) Dr. Douglas Beech in Maryland at 1.301.951.9000.
**Soaking Quinoa?**

“Should quinoa be soaked? My understanding is that like nuts & beans, it contains phytic acid which binds to magnesium, calcium, iron and zinc and prevents the absorption of these minerals. Bitter saponin also coats the seeds and is toxic. If true, how long should we soak it? Nancy M.”

Dear Nancy:

Yes it is true. Quinoa contains Phytic acid which stores phosphorus in plant tissue. It is indigestible for humans. It also chelates (when ions and molecules bind metal) minerals such as zinc, iron, or even calcium and magnesium.

In addition, quinoa contains saponins – a toxic foaming molecule. It presence is indicated through the bitter taste in quinoa. This is beneficial during cultivation as it deters birds and other animals from consuming it but is toxic for human consumption - a mild eye and respiratory irritant, as well as gastro-intestinal irritant. Even though most of the quinoa sold commercially in North America has been processed to remove this saponin coating, it is best not to ingest it long term.

In order to make sure you do not ingest phytic acid or saponin, you may soak your quinoa as you suggest. You may soak ½ to 1 cup overnight and cook in the morning. However, here is a better way: rinse and then cook you quinoa with excess water. Either in a rice cooker or on the stove top. When you cook it with excess water you have to monitor it to make sure you don’t over cook it until it’s soggy and you have mushy texture. When your quinoa is cooked to the right consistency, remove from the pot, and strain it, and then rinse once more with warm water. Removing phytic acid and saponins through this cooking procedure is the best way, and you don’t have to soak your quinoa seeds then.
**Black Turmeric or Yellow?**

“Hello,

We only heard/talked/mentioned about yellow Turmeric. Researches never distinguished the benefits between Yellow and Black Turmeric. Recently, my friend who is a Chinese OMD, said that yellow turmeric is good for stomach, and black turmeric is good to fight with cancer cells. My grandmother also used only black turmeric when she lived in Laos 70 years ago. Because there were no yellow turmeric in the village or the villagers know that black turmeric was different with the yellow one? What kind of turmeric is good for prostate cancer. I wish you can shed a light on this issue. Thank you, Lavender A.”

Dear Lavender: yes there are 2 types of turmeric, yellow and black. Black turmeric is known as *Curcuma caesia*. It grows in North-East as well as Central India. Its medicinal use is prominent amongst many tribal communities – ingested orally in preparations or used transdermally as a paste. Due to its bluish black color, resembling the skin color of many Hindu deities, it has been used as a talisman, to ward off evil spirits, as well as an ingredient in some occult rituals.

In our SV tradition, things are different. We do not use black turmeric in our daily cooking, as it is considered to be highly pitta aggravating. Why? Black turmeric can stimulate the liver to excess. This can be a problem because when the liver is over-stimulated, it can over-trigger the immune system.

Yellow turmeric is not just for the stomach. It is fully supportive of the liver and other organs as well. The chemical contents of yellow turmeric are very balanced, so when used properly and daily, you can get all the medicinal benefits without incurring any unwanted side-effects. It is best to stick with
yellow turmeric, and to use it daily in cooking. Never ingest it in capsules, or alone. Hope this helps.

Thank you, Ellen

“I saw this article about indigenous Indian vegetables and thought about SVA--you and SVA practitioners like Divya Altar and BVT Life in NYC are helping to maintain and encourage their use with your recipes and recommendations. Very cool! Ellen S.”

Vegetable vendors sell a combination of products, but more of commonly preferred vegetables than of indigenous varieties.

Photo: Sangeetha Rajeesh

Biodiversity
21.05.2013

Time to explore the native veggie
Growing indigenous vegetables is on the decline in India – despite increases in vegetable production as a whole. Experts fear that this could have disastrous consequences for the population’s food situation.
According to the Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR), the country has produced 146.5 million tonnes of vegetables (including roots and tubers) during 2010 – 2011, placing India second globally. Given that Indian vegetable production is threatened by climate change, dwindling natural resources, uneven growth as well as unequal nutritional richness across the country, National Horticulture Board schemes appear to have concentrated more on the development and management of commercial horticulture rather than on encouraging sustainable cultivation of indigenous vegetables. More and more organisations are warning against the negative impacts that this could have on the population’s food situation.

The Asian Vegetable Research and Development Centre (AVRDC) began to work in India in 2006. Its current projects include improving vegetable production and consumption for sustainable rural livelihoods in Jharkhand and Punjab; as well as looking at the possibility of exploiting bitter gourd (Momordica charantia L.) to increase incomes, manage type 2 diabetes, and promote health. Dr. Warwick Easdown, Regional Director of the AVRDC South Asian regional office, says that their three-year old research on a smaller variety of bitter gourd that reduces blood sugar levels is very promising and that they will have confirmed results by end of 2014. “There are several indigenous vegetables that provide specific health benefits. Amaranthus (greens) is one that has four times more protein than cabbage, nine times more iron and 15 times more vitamin A when compared to ‘well-known’ vegetables.” But the stigma attached to indigenous vegetables in India has led to a steady decline in cultivation, Easdown says.

“The ‘well-known’ vegetables are easier to grow, manage and sell, and seed availability is not a problem,” observes Easdown. “By contrast, the native vegetables have always been associated with poverty. They don’t look attractive and therefore never end up in the rich consumer’s food basket.” He warns that there is an urgent need to spread knowledge about the heritage, nutrition and calorie values of traditional vegetables in India and improve their intent beyond local-level markets. Unless money can be made from indigenous vegetable production, they will disappear … and so will traditional cuisine, he fears.

The untapped potential
However, this is not the only problem. Professor M S Swaminathan who is Member of Parliament and Emeritus Chairman of the Chennai-based M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) observes that changes in daily diets as a result of disappearing native vegetable varieties are contributing to widespread protein and nutrition deficits. “When I was young,” he recalls, “our diet consisted of a wide range of beans, cucumbers, tuber crops and leafy vegetables, many of which have vanished today.” He remembers the earlier versions of dishes like *avial*, a typical South-Indian preparation with at least one dozen vegetables that had a number of indigenous sorts. “This is also gradually disappearing now,” he adds.

*Moringa Oleifera* or drumstick are indigenous to India and have been a backyard crop for as long as one can remember. The pods and leaves are cooked and served in various forms in the South of India almost every day. “The drumstick leaves are very rich in a wide range of micronutrients, but unfortunately, the National Horticulture Mission only promotes the cultivation and marketing of modern vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, green banana etc. and does not give attention to the vanishing indigenous vegetable crops,” Swaminathan observes. Research has established the importance of the drumstick tree in combating malnutrition, especially for infants and nursing mothers.

Easdown confides the lack of precise statistics on the list of Indian indigenous vegetables as a whole. There is even less on those near extinction. Many local varieties are grown in backyards, mostly for home consumption and never reach the commercial domain. “India continues to be a huge source of untapped vegetables and perennial indigenous herbs, shrubs and tree vegetables. They are our answers to alleviating hunger and malnutrition plus to improving health,” Easdown adds. According to N Anil Kumar, Programme Director of the Community Agrobiodiversity Centre, located at Wayanad, Kerala, and functioning under MSSRF, genetic variation in legumes and underutilised vegetables is of prime importance for successful breeding. Therefore, active participation of breeders, i.e. seed companies, is crucial. Researchers should identify the indigenous vegetables based on their agro-diversity and then allow for clear and concise characterisation. “This will help build nutrition literacy among end consumers,” Kumar feels.
From Punjab Makhana or fox-nut seed (thingzang in Manipur), a red, bitter berry called shundakai in Tamil Nadu, to lesser-known greens such as cephalandra, locally called kundru ki bail, Indian pandan, weeds such as gumma and water spinach alongside leaves of chickpea, ash gourd and pumpkin, all need to form part of our daily consumption alongside potatoes, cauliflowers and carrots, the staples across the country.

**The need of the hour is research**

Speaking on ADVRC’s work in the area of vegetable research, Easdown says that they have always promoted home gardens to encourage vegetable production and thereby better nutrition security. “AVRDC hosts a legume breeding programme focusing on improved varieties of mungbean (green gram) and vegetable soybean; we also encourage cowpea and yard-long bean cultivation,” he says.

AVRDC also carries out research into indigenous vegetables as part of its ongoing effort to diversify the range of vegetables. “Promising indigenous vegetables need research, and *Moringa* has a great potential to contribute to nourishment because all parts of the tree are edible,” Easdown informs, adding that research into this valuable tree has been an ongoing effort at AVRDC for more than a decade.

MSSRF, through their nutritional security programme, encourage backyard nutritional gardens for home consumption. This is done with chilli, drumstick, lemon, papaya and yam to provide nutritional needs of households. The institute has also an integrated community centred approach to address hunger and malnutrition through volunteers within village communities. These volunteers promote local remedies for prevailing nutritional maladies like the cultivation and consumption of drumstick, along with ragi or other locally grown millets. Leafy vegetables that can provide iron and fibre are also promoted

Dr. Anil Kumar of the Community Agro-biodiversity Centre says that under the biodiversity programme, their work is on “strengthening integrated conservation and practical use of genetic resources of neglected and underutilised crops and rare, endemic and threatened plants.” The problem is that for years, the government has done nothing to preserve and promote
Global diversity in vegetable crops is estimated at about 400 species, with around 80 species of major and minor vegetables reported to have originated in India. A recent study published in the open access journal Phytokeys says that the cucumber family (Cucurbitaceae) – pumpkins, melon, cucumber, watermelon, bottle gourds, and bitter gourd – can be traced to India. Molecular data has recently revealed that both cucumber (Cucumis sativus L.) and melon (Cucumis melo L.) are indigenous to India and likely to have originated from the foothills of the Himalayas. Some facts in brief:

India is globally
- the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables,
- the largest producer of mango, banana, coconut, cashew, papaya, and pomegranate and
- the largest producer and exporter of spices.

The country ranks first in the productivity of grapes, banana, cassava, peas, and papaya.

In the year 2012 alone, export growth of fresh fruits and vegetables in term of value is 14 per cent and of processed fruits and vegetables is more than 16 per cent.

In fact, an area of 21 million hectares is under horticulture in India and contributes over 230 tonnes of vegetables to the food basket of the country.

Source: Indian Council of Agricultural Research
Author: Sangeetha Rajeesh, freelance journalist, Chennai, India