

Ayurvedic Cooking for Boosting Immunity
Divya Alter's Recipe Demonstration for the Hindu American Foundation
April 18, 2020

Cooked Apple Pre-Breakfast

from *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen* (Rizzoli, 2017)

How do you start your day in terms of nourishment? Do you drink a glass of warm water with lemon juice or a cup of coffee or skip breakfast all together?

The famous Ayurvedic remedy of warm water with lemon juice first thing in the morning turns out to be not so Ayurvedic, after all. Lemons are quite acidic and sharp, and lemon water on an empty stomach is not recommended for someone with acidic digestion or blood. Too much water in the morning for someone experiencing weak, sluggish digestion will weaken one's digestive fire even more.

Here is another way for you to start your day: with a cooked apple.

Single foods eaten at the right time can have the most profound effect on our health. When I first heard about the Cooked Apple from my teacher, Vaidya Mishra, I was skeptical—is it really so important to eat it first thing in the morning? Why cooked and not raw? After trying it a few times I loved it so much that to date, stewing an apple is part of my morning pre-breakfast ritual.

This is the easiest, fastest recipe in my book. Yet its benefits put to shame the most extravagant culinary creations in the world. I change my cooking class recipes seasonally, but I include Cooked Apple in every class handout. I am thrilled when students come back and tell me about their morning apple experience. So here is my challenge for you: if you are a beginner in the kitchen, start with this recipe—it will build your confidence. If you don't have time to cook, make this recipe anyway—it takes only a minute to prep and you can shower while it's cooking—it won't interfere with your rushed schedule. If you want to create lasting family memories for your kids, make them Cooked Apple—they will always remember waking up to the heavenly apple aroma.

Try this recipe and see how it works for you. Remember that the key is to eat it first thing in the morning, as close to the time you get up as possible.

Serves 1 Prep: 1 minute Cook: 5 minutes Gluten free; Dairy free

- ½ cup water
- 2 whole cloves
- 1 medium apple, preferably a sweeter variety such as Golden Delicious, Gala, Fuji, Opal, or Pink Lady

For Fiery digestion: Make as it is or substitute a pear for the apple.

For Earthy digestion: Add a 1-inch piece cinnamon stick in Step 1.

1. Start boiling the water and cloves in a small saucepan. In the meantime, peel, core, and chop the apple into bite-size pieces. If you don't have time to peel it, at least cut the apple into 4 pieces and remove the core.
2. Add the apple pieces to the hot water, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 5 minutes, or until the apple is soft and translucent but not mushy.
3. Drain (you can reserve the liquid if you like—see Note), let it cool a little, and eat first thing in the morning.

Notes:

- You can eat this every day, no matter how you're feeling. Of course, there may be mornings when you don't feel like eating Cooked Apple; when that happens, don't!
- You may drink the cooking liquid as tea, add it to your oatmeal, or simply discard it.
- If you didn't peel the apple, discard the peels while eating it. Peels are hard to digest in the morning.
- With their warming and digestive qualities, cloves open the circulatory channels in the body without overheating it.
- Why cooked and not raw? During the six to eight hours of sleep we generally get, the metabolic fire of digestion in the stomach goes low, into a slumber mode, and in the morning it needs to be refueled again to full flame. Say you want to rekindle the embers of a bonfire: you will first feed it small twigs, and once ablaze, add logs of wood. Similarly, in the morning we have to reignite our slumbering fire of digestion with lighter, easy-to-digest foods such as a stewed apple and eat heavier foods such as grains, meat, eggs, yogurt, and raw fruit later, when our digestion is burning at its optimal strength. For most of us, late morning or afternoon is a better time for enjoying a raw apple.
- For small children, after cooking, remove the cloves, puree the apple, and feed it warm to the child. If possible, wait for two hours until your next breast-feeding to avoid reactions from the digestive incompatibility of apple and breast milk. Of course, if your child gets hungry, you can breast-feed her or him within less than two hours.
- Do not eat Cooked Apple if you have blood sugar issues.

An Apple a Day . . . More Benefits of Stewed Apple Pre-Breakfast

- Serves as a gentle daily cleanse for the digestive system
- Supports regularity
- Strengthens digestion
- Lowers acidity and excessive hunger
- Optimizes dietary pH balancing
- Boosts immunity to prevent most colds and flus

Immune Boost Tea

Here is a delicious Ayurvedic tea that acts both as a preventative and as a relief for viral infections. It really helps strengthen your body's defense system and it reduces congestion and cough. It is also an excellent digestive aid for balancing any Airy or Earthy gut discomfort. I made this tea a lot during the COVID-19 stay-at-home period in New York City. Even though my husband and I had no symptoms of infection, we would both relish this tea and think, "Ah, it's just what I needed."

Makes 3 to 4 cups

- 4 cups spring or filtered water
 - 3 tablespoons grated fresh ginger
 - 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
 - 4 green cardamom pods
 - ½ teaspoon ajwain seeds
 - Fresh lime or lemon juice to taste (about 1 tablespoon per cup)
 - Raw honey to taste
1. In a small saucepan, combine the water, ginger, fennel seeds, cardamom, and ajwain seeds and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
 2. Partially cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 10 minutes.
 3. Strain the tea and transfer it to a Thermos if you'd like to keep it hot for a few hours.
 4. To serve, pour the tea into mugs and let it cool down to sipping temperature, then stir in the lime juice and honey. Sip slowly.

Variation: For extra antiviral power, add 1 teaspoon dried tulsi leaves and ¼ teaspoon guduchi powder to step 3, before straining. Cover and steep for 10 minutes, then strain.

Virus-Busting Turmeric Broth

This recipe is perfect for when you're down with a cold or flu and feeling achy, congested, and without much appetite. It also works as a preventative for those conditions. More importantly, this broth does not taste like bitter medicine—it is delicious!

All of the ingredients below have proven to have an anti-inflammatory and channel-opening effect on the body. Beet leaves in particular are rich in TMG (Trimethylglycine), which supports liver detoxification and acts as antioxidant, energy booster, and more.

My husband Prentiss deserves all credit for creating this recipe based on the teachings of Vaidya R.K. Mishra.

Makes 1 serving

Prep 2 minutes **Cook** 3 to 5 minutes

- 1 ½ teaspoon ghee
 - ¼ teaspoon black mustard seeds
 - ¼ teaspoon fennel seeds
 - 1/8 teaspoon ajwain seeds
 - ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
 - 2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger
 - a piece of green Thai chile, minced (optional)
 - 2 tablespoons whole parsley leaves (preferable Italian parsley)
 - 2 tablespoons chopped beet leaves
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - 10 oz boiling hot water
 - 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice or to taste
1. In a small saucepan, heat the ghee over medium-low heat and add the mustard seeds. As soon as they turn grey and start to crackle, add the fennel, ajwain, and turmeric. Lower the heat and toast the spices for about 5 seconds, until they release their aroma, then add the ginger and optional chile--toast for a few more seconds; add the parsley, beet leaves, and salt. Toast for about 10 more seconds, then pour in the hot water.
 2. Cover and let the broth simmer on low heat for 3 minutes.
 3. Serve the broth in a bowl and let it cool down to sipping temperature, then add the lime juice. Sip slowly and chew well the spices and the greens.