



THE BUDDHA'S ONE-MEAL PRACTICE

A Prototype of Intermittent Fasting for Holistic
Health in the Modern Era

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Abstract

This article aims to study the Buddha's eating practices and analyze their consistency with the principles of Intermittent Fasting (IF) in modern healthcare. The study employed a documentary research methodology, examining the Tipitaka, commentaries, and related research. The findings reveal that the Buddha consumed only one meal between morning and noon, fasting from afternoon until the following morning. This aligns with the ๑๖/๘ IF method, which involves ๑๖ hours of fasting and an ๘-hour eating window. The Buddha's eating practice benefited both physical and mental health, promoting lightness, energy, and mental clarity. These benefits correspond with current medical research findings on IF, which show its effectiveness in weight control, chronic disease risk reduction, and anti-aging. Additionally, the study found that the one-meal-a-day practice of Buddhist monks has positive effects on health and spiritual practice, consistent with Buddhist concepts of healthy eating. Adapting the Buddha's eating practices offers an interesting holistic approach to health care in the modern era.

Keywords Eating practices, Buddha, Intermittent Fasting, Healthcare, Buddhism

Introduction

In the present era, health problems are an important issue that the world is interested in, especially non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, which are mainly caused by inappropriate eating behaviors, lack of exercise, and stress. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that approximately 41 million people die from NCDs each year, accounting for 71% of all deaths worldwide (WHO, 2020). This situation has led to the search for effective and sustainable health care approaches. Over the past decade, Intermittent Fasting (IF) has received much attention in the health science and public health circles because there is scientific evidence supporting that IF can help control weight, reduce the risk of NCDs, and slow down the deterioration of the body (de Cabo & Mattson, 2019). The benefits of Intermittent Fasting are summarized as follows (cited in Phruephat Songthiang, 2018).

1. Promotes longevity. A 2017 study from Harvard School of Public Health showed that fasting tends to increase lifespan.

2. Increases autophagy, which helps remove and recycle damaged cells, reducing the risk of diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

3. Increases growth hormone. A study from the American Society of Medical Investigation found that temporary fasting stimulates the production of growth hormone, which helps burn fat and build muscle.

4. Reduces swelling and inflammation. A 2015 study from Yale University found that fasting prevents inflammation associated with diseases such as type 2 diabetes, vascular disease, and Alzheimer's.

5. Helps clear the mind and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. A 2016 study found that fasting helps the nervous system and brain function better.

6. Helps with weight loss. A 2014 study found that fasting for a period of time can help people lose 3-8% of their weight in 3-24 weeks.

7. Prevents type 2 diabetes, reduces blood sugar levels, and insulin resistance.

8. Prevents cancer, helps differentiate between good and bad cells, and reduces inflammation and oxidative stress, which are factors that cause cancer. Intermittent Fasting (IF) has many forms, such as fasting for 16 hours and eating within 8 hours (16/8), fasting 2 days a week (5/2), or fasting every other day (Alternate Day Fasting). However, although IF may seem like a new concept in the health industry, if we look back in history, we will find that restricting the time of eating has been a long-standing practice in many cultures and religions, especially in Buddhism, which is evidenced in the Tripitaka that the Buddha ate only one meal from morning to noon and advised monks to follow. Therefore, a comparative study between the Buddha's eating practices and the current IF principles is interesting and important in many dimensions, as follows

Physical Health Dimension. Analyzing the consistency between the Buddha's one-meal diet and the IF principle will help understand the benefits to physical health in various aspects, such as weight control, reducing the risk of NCDs, and slowing down the deterioration of the body, which is consistent with the research results of modern medicine that support the benefits of IF for physical health (Mattson et al., 2017).

Mental Health Dimension. In addition to the benefits to physical health, the one-meal diet in Buddhism also aims to promote mental health and meditation practice. Comparative studies will help understand the effects of time-restricted eating on mental health, mood, and attention, which is consistent with research that found that IF may increase levels of the neurotransmitter BDNF, which affects learning, memory, and mood (Mattson et al., 2017). Cultural and ethical dimensions Studying the concept of eating in Buddhism will help understand the cultural and ethical dimensions related to food consumption, such as the concepts of *bhojanemattanyuta* (knowing the right amount of food consumption) and *ahare patigulasanya* (considering food as impure), which can be applied to create awareness and change eating behaviors in today's society.

Knowledge integration dimensions .This study integrates knowledge from two disciplines Buddhism and modern health science, which will help create new knowledge that combines traditional wisdom with scientific evidence, leading to effective and sustainable holistic health care approaches.

Social innovation dimensions. Applying the concept of eating one meal a day in the current social context may lead to the creation of social innovations in health promotion and NCD prevention, which are major public health problems worldwide. The background of the comparative study between the Lord Buddha's diet and IF has interesting developments as follows

During the Buddha's era, the Lord Buddha announced the principle of eating only one meal and advised monks to follow it, which is recorded in many Tripitakas, such as in the Kokkupama Sutta, which states the benefits of eating only one meal as "having less illness, less physical discomfort, being light, having strength, and living happily" (Thai Tripitaka, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Edition, Volume: 12, Pages: 236, 2539). In the Bhaddalika Sutta, it states, "If we eat a meal before a meal, we will feel the virtue of having less illness, less disease, being light, having strength, and living happily. Bhikkhus, you should eat a meal before a meal, only one meal" (Thai Tripitaka, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Edition, Volume: 13, Pages: 129, 2539), etc.

The commentary era. Commentators have elaborated on the principle of eating one meal a day by linking it to other principles such as Bhojanemattanyuta and Ahare Patikulasanna, leading to a wider range of interpretations and applications.

The Buddhist Reform Era (19th-20th centuries) There was a revival and reinterpretation of Buddhist principles by Buddhist scholars and scholars such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), who explained the principle of eating one meal a day in the context of modern society.

The Medical Research Era (20th-21st centuries) Medical research on the effects of calorie restriction and intermittent fasting on health began, leading to the development of the concept of Intermittent Fasting (IF) in the health sciences.

The Knowledge Integration Era (present) There has been interest in comparative studies and integration of knowledge between the principles of eating a meal in Buddhism and the concept of IF in modern health science, in order to develop a holistic approach to health care.

The comparative study between the Buddhist diet and IF is important in creating new knowledge and health innovations as follows

1. Confirmation of the effectiveness of traditional wisdom. This study will help confirm that traditional Buddhist wisdom about diet is consistent with modern scientific evidence, which will increase its credibility and wider acceptance.

2. Development of holistic health care guidelines. Integrating knowledge from Buddhism and health science will lead to the development of health care guidelines that cover physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions, which are in line with the needs of today's society that emphasizes holistic health.

3. Creation of innovations in NCD prevention and treatment. The results of this study may lead to the development of health care programs that combine IF principles with Buddhist concepts to effectively prevent and treat NCDs.

4. Promotion of sustainable health behavior change. Applying Buddhist principles together with IF may help create motivation and a deeper understanding to change health behaviors, leading to sustainable changes.

5. Development of Buddhist nutrition knowledge. This study may lead to the development of a new field of study called "Buddhist nutrition", which combines modern nutritional knowledge with Buddhist principles.

In this study, the researcher will analyze and compare the eating practices of the Lord Buddha as stated in the Tripitaka and commentaries with the principles of IF that are accepted in the current health science community. The main points to be studied are as follows 1. The form and timing of eating/eating 2. The effects on physical and mental health 3. The principles and reasons behind the practice 4. Cautions and exceptions in the practice 5. Application in the current social context. In addition, the researcher will survey medical and health science research related to IF to analyze and compare with the results mentioned in Buddhist scriptures, which will lead to the synthesis of new knowledge that combines traditional wisdom with scientific evidence.

This study has several challenges, such as interpreting ancient scriptures to be consistent with the current context, linking religious concepts with scientific principles, and applying knowledge in a multicultural society. However, the researcher believes that this study will be of significant benefit to the public health sector and Buddhist studies,

especially in developing holistic health care approaches that respond to health problems in the 21st century.

Ultimately, a comparative study between the diet of the Buddha and Intermittent Fasting not only links the past and present, but also builds a bridge between East and West, between religion and science, and between spirit and body, which will lead to the sustainable development of human life in the future.

The Buddha's Diet

A study of the Buddha's diet requires evidence from Buddhist scriptures, especially the Tripitaka, which is an important source of information recording the Dharma and the life of the Buddha. From the study, important evidence regarding the Buddha's diet is found as follows

1. Eating a single meal. In the Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga, there is a Buddha's statement that shows the Buddha's diet of a single meal, which is as follows

"Bhikkhus, we do not eat in the late hours. When we do not eat in the late hours, we feel less sickness, less physical pain, lightness, strength, and live happily. Come, you all should not eat in the late hours. When you do not eat in the late hours, you all will feel less sickness, less physical pain, lightness, strength, and live happily." (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996)

From the above Buddha's statement, it shows that the Buddha ate only one meal, by abstaining from eating in the late hours, which means the period after noon until the dawn of the next day.

2. Time of eating. In the Kakkupama Sutta, the Buddha advised the monks to eat only one meal, specifying the time more clearly as follows

"Monks, when we eat only one meal, when we eat only one meal, we will feel less sickness, less physical pain, lightness, strength and live happily. Come, you all should eat only one meal. When you eat only one meal, you will feel less sickness, less physical pain, lightness, strength and live happily." (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996)

From this Buddha's words, when considering together with the text in the Vinaya Pitaka above, it can be concluded that the Buddha ate only one meal from morning until noon and abstained from eating from afternoon until dawn of the next day.

3. Exceptions to eating. Although the Buddha usually ate only one meal, he allowed exceptions in some cases, such as when he was sick or when there was a necessity, as appears in the Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga, which allows sick monks to eat late at night. (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996) demonstrates flexibility and the importance of health.

4. Eating in moderation. In addition to eating only one meal, the Buddha also emphasized eating in moderation, as seen in the Phochanasappaya Sutta, which speaks about knowing the limits in eating, as follows

"A monk in this Dharma Discipline, having considered carefully, eats not for play, not for intoxication, not for decoration, not for adornment, but simply to sustain this body, to make life go, to prevent hardship, for the body, to support the celibacy, thinking, 'I will eliminate old feelings and will not allow new feelings to arise, and I will have life, blamelessness, and a happy life' by practicing in this way." (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996)

From all the evidence mentioned, it can be concluded that the Buddha's eating method consists of the following main principles

1. Eating only one meal from morning until noon
2. Abstaining from eating in the afternoon until the next morning
3. Being flexible in case of illness or necessity
4. Eating in moderation, considering the benefits to the body and the practice of

Dhamma

Consistency with the principle of Intermittent Fasting (IF)

Intermittent Fasting (IF) or intermittent fasting is a very popular weight loss method today. IF weight loss involves setting a time for fasting and eating without focusing on changing the pattern of food consumption. However, setting a time for eating will reduce

the amount of food eaten and the energy from the food received. During the fasting period, the body will secrete less insulin, resulting in a decrease in the conversion of blood sugar to fat, resulting in a decrease in subcutaneous fat storage and weight. During the period when insulin levels are low, the body will secrete more growth hormone and norepinephrine. These hormones will help the body burn fat and increase energy metabolism without reducing muscle mass like continuous fasting (<https://www.bangkokhospital.com/content/intermittent-fasting>, 2020). There are many forms, such as

1. Fasting for 16 hours and eating within 8 hours (16/8)
2. Fasting 2 days a week (5/2)
3. Fasting every other day (Alternate Day Fasting)
4. Fasting for 24 hours 1-2 days a week (Eat-Stop-Eat)

When comparing the eating methods of the Lord Buddha with the principles of IF, it was found that they were very consistent, especially with the 16/8 pattern, which has the following characteristics

1. Eating time. The 16/8 IF specifies the eating time within 8 hours, which is consistent with the Lord Buddha's eating from morning to noon, which is approximately 6-8 hours.

2. Fasting period. The 16/8 IF specifies the fasting period for 16 hours, which is consistent with the Lord Buddha's abstention from the afternoon until the next morning, which is approximately 16-18 hours.

3. Flexibility. Both IF and the Lord Buddha's eating are flexible, with IF allowing the adjustment of the time period as appropriate. While the Buddha also allowed exceptions in cases of illness or necessity. **4. Consideration of food quality**

Both IF and the Buddha's diet emphasized food quality and eating in moderation. IF emphasized eating nutritious food, while the Buddha taught us to consider the benefits of food for the body and the practice of Dhamma.

Health benefits

The Buddha's diet and the principle of IF are beneficial to both physical and mental health, as follows

1. Physical benefits

1.1 Weight control. Limiting the time of eating reduces the amount of calories consumed, resulting in weight loss (Welton et al., 2020). In addition, intermittent fasting stimulates fat burning and increases the levels of hormones that help accelerate metabolism, such as norepinephrine (Zauner et al., 2000).

1.2 Reduces the risk of chronic disease. IF helps balance the hormone insulin, reducing the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease (Malinowski et al., 2019). Studies have found that IF helps reduce blood sugar levels and insulin resistance. And significantly reduce blood pressure (Sutton et al., 2018)

1.3 Slow down aging. Intermittent fasting stimulates the autophagy process, which helps eliminate damaged cells and slows down the deterioration of the body (Mattson et al., 2017). It also helps reduce chronic inflammation, which is a cause of age-related diseases (Jordan et al., 2019)

1.4 Increase the strength of the immune system. IF helps reduce inflammation in the body and strengthens immunity (de Cabo & Mattson, 2019). Studies have found that intermittent fasting stimulates the creation of new types of white blood cells, which increases the efficiency of the immune system (Cheng et al., 2014)

1.5 Balance hormones. IF helps balance various hormones in the body, such as increasing levels of human growth hormone, which helps burn fat and build muscle (Ho et al., 1988).

2. Mental benefits

2.1 Promote mental health. Intermittent fasting increases levels of the neurotransmitter BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor), which affects learning, memory, and mood (Mattson et al., 2017). Studies have found that IF may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety (Michalsen et al., 2003).

2.2 Increase mental clarity. Eating one meal helps to clear the mind, preventing drowsiness, which is beneficial for practicing Dhamma (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2014). This is consistent with studies that found that IF increases mental clarity and the ability to focus (Mattson et al., 2017).

2.3 Practice self-control. Limiting meal times is a way to practice discipline and self-control, which can be applied in other aspects of life (Ganesan et al., 2018).

2.4 Reduces attachment to food tastes. Eating one meal reduces attachment to food tastes, freeing the mind from the influence of greed and desire. (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2014)

The concept of eating for health in Buddhism

Buddhism has a profound and comprehensive concept of eating for health, which can be applied to holistic health care, as follows

1. Bhojanemattannuta, Knowing the amount of food to eat. Buddhism teaches us to know the amount of food to eat by considering the benefits of food to the body and practicing Dhamma, not eating for pleasure or satisfying cravings (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2014). This concept is consistent with the principle of IF, which emphasizes controlling the quantity and quality of food eaten.

2. Aharl Patikulasana, Considering food as impure. Buddhism teaches us to consider food as impure in order to reduce attachment to the taste of food and appetite (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2014). This concept helps us to control our consumption better, consistent with the principle of IF, which requires self-control in limiting the time we eat.

3. Sappaya, 7 things that are suitable and supportive of practicing Dhamma. In the principle of 7 Sappaya, there is Phochana Sappaya, or suitable food, which means food that is beneficial to health and Dhamma practice (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2557). This concept is consistent with the principle of IF, which emphasizes the selection of nutritious food that is beneficial to the body.

4. 4 Foods, food for the body and mind. Buddhism mentions 4 types of food. Kavalinkarahara (food is rice), Phassahara (food is contact), Manosanjanahara (food is intention), and Vinyanarahara (food is consciousness) (Phra Phromkunaphon (P.A. Payutto), 2557). This concept shows the connection between physical food and mental food, consistent with IF's holistic health care concept.

5. Eating only one meal for monks. Eating only one meal for monks in Buddhism is a practice that has been passed down since the time of the Buddha. With the aim of good health and meditation practice (Phra Maha Sompong Talaputto, 2011), this practice is very similar to the principles of IF.

Application of the Buddha's Diet for Health Care for Modern People

The application of the Buddha's diet for health care for modern people can be done as follows

1. Start step by step. Changing eating behavior should be done gradually, starting from reducing meals from 3 meals to 2 meals and gradually adjusting to one meal or starting from IF 12/12 before adjusting to 16/8 to allow the body to adjust.

2. Choose the right time. Choosing the right time to eat should be considered according to the suitability of each person. You may choose to eat from morning to noon according to the Buddha's method or adjust to morning to evening according to the convenience of the current lifestyle.

3. Focus on food quality. When eating one meal or during a limited time, you should choose food that is highly nutritious, complete, and sufficient for the body's needs, emphasizing vegetables, fruits, good quality protein, and beneficial fats.

4. Drink enough water. During fasting, you should drink enough water to maintain the body's balance. You can drink plain water, herbal water, or herbal tea that has no calories.

5. Practice mindfulness and food consideration. Apply the principles of food consideration according to Buddhism by practicing mindfulness when eating, considering the value and benefits of food. Do not eat greedily or obsessed with taste.

6. Adjust according to your physical condition. You should observe the effects on your body and mind. If you feel tired or if it affects your health, you should adjust your method to be appropriate, such as increasing the number of meals or adjusting the time you eat.

7. Consult an expert. Before starting the practice, you should consult a doctor or nutritionist, especially those with chronic diseases, pregnant women, or the elderly, to ensure that the practice is appropriate and safe.

8. Combine with exercise. Eating a single meal or IF should be done in conjunction with appropriate exercise to build health and maintain muscle mass.

9. Give importance to rest. Getting enough sleep is important because fasting can affect the quality of your sleep in the early stages. Getting enough rest will help your body adjust better.

10. Practice patience and self-control. Eating a single meal or IF requires patience and self-control, which is a mental training in itself, consistent with the principles of Buddhism.

Conclusion

The Buddha's eating habits are consistent with the current principles of Intermittent Fasting (IF), especially the 16/8 pattern, which limits the eating period and increases the fasting period, which is beneficial to both physical and mental health, helps control weight, reduces the risk of chronic diseases, slows aging, strengthens immunity, and promotes mental health. The concept of eating for health in Buddhism, such as Bhojanemattanyuta, Aharae, Patikulasanna, and the 4 foods, can be applied together with the IF principle for holistic health care. Applying the Buddha's eating habits to daily life can be done by starting step by step, choosing the right time, giving importance to the quality of food, and practicing mindfulness while eating.

However, changing eating habits should be done with caution and consulting with experts to suit each person's physical condition and lifestyle. Combining the Buddha's eating habits with modern medical knowledge will help create a balance in taking care of both physical and mental health, which is an important foundation for having a good quality of life in the present era.

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