

A Peaceful Stomach is a Calm Mind

Health begins in the intestine. When the stomach is at peace, everything else aligns. **Gautam Anand** shares two recipes that help make digestion simple

“*Daulat se nahin milta kabhi sehat ka zaiqa, Yeh woh ne‘mat hai jo sirf parhez deta hai.*”

The flavour of health can never be bought with wealth; it is a blessing bestowed only by restraint.

There was once a time in India when the condition of a man’s stomach was considered inseparable from the condition of his mind. Digestion was not merely biological; it was moral, intellectual, even civilisational. A calm stomach produced a calm temperament. A balanced meal was believed to create balance in thought itself.

The Bhagavad Gita speaks of foods that nourish life, sharpen clarity, strengthen the body, and elevate consciousness. Centuries later, the *hakims* and *vaidis* of medieval India carried this philosophy into daily life. Food was prescribed with the seriousness of medicine and the refinement of culture. Meals were designed not simply to delight the tongue, but to leave behind what old households called a distress-less aftermath – lightness, ease, clarity and repose.

In that older Indian imagination, the kitchen and the dispensary were never far apart. Herbalists often held greater authority than chefs. Spice boxes doubled as medicine chests. Restraint was considered sophistication, and overeating a form of vulgarity.

This was the enduring ideal of *zaiqa aur sehat* – taste and health seated at the same table. The true measure of a civilisation, it was quietly understood, lay not only in what it consumed, but in how gracefully it digested life itself.

The wisdom of this philosophy survived

not merely in royal kitchens or medical texts, but in the ordinary meals of Indian households.

Gut-healthy food, in the Indian understanding, was never fashionable cuisine; it was civilisation distilled into a meal. Slow-cooked *khichdi* enriched with *ghee*, lightly spiced lentils, fermented *kanji*, home-made yogurt, seasonal vegetables, ginger, *ajwain*, and *jeera* were valued not for culinary theatrics but for the quiet efficiency with which they soothed the stomach and strengthened the body. A good meal was expected to nourish without burden, to satisfy without exhausting digestion.

Modern science now speaks of probiotics, gut microbiomes, and anti-inflammatory foods, yet traditional Indian households understood these principles instinctively generations ago. The finest food was not the richest, but the kind that left one lighter in spirit, clearer in thought, and calmer in temperament long after the meal had ended.

Traditional Indian food wisdom also understood the balance between proteins, starches, and digestive aids long before nutrition science gave them technical names. Meals were carefully composed so that heavier foods were softened by lighter companions and proteins supported by digestible grains. Rice and lentils, *roti* with *yogurt*, *khichdi* with *ghee*, fish with lightly spiced vegetables, or meat tempered with fennel, ginger and mint were not accidental combinations but systems of culinary intelligence evolved over centuries.

The starch provided steady energy, the protein restored strength, while spices, ferments and herbs assisted digestion and

reduced heaviness. The aim was never aggressive dieting or excessive protein consumption, but harmony – food that sustained labour, sharpened the mind, and left the stomach settled rather than strained.

“*Pet saheeh ho to fikr bhi roshan rehti hai, Bhookh bigad jaaye to mizaj bhi badal jaata hai.*”

When the stomach is at peace, thought itself remains luminous; when appetite is disturbed, temperament begins to darken.

There was once a generation in India that trusted digestion more than ideology. Grandparents spoke of the stomach not merely as an organ, but as the seat of balance, judgment and temperament.

Long before modern laboratories began mapping the gut microbiome, traditional cultures had already intuited a profound truth: health begins in the intestine.

Today, science confirms what ancient medical systems such as *Ayurveda* long maintained. The gut is not simply a digestive mechanism; it is deeply connected to immunity, mood, sleep, inflammation, metabolism and mental clarity. The intestine has emerged as the body’s “second brain”, housing trillions of microorganisms that influence nearly every aspect of human well-being.

Indian food traditions evolved around this understanding. Fermented foods such as *idli*, *dosa* batter, *kanji*, home-made yogurt, pickles and buttermilk quietly nourished the microbiome centuries before the word “probiotic” became fashionable. Mughal and regional cuisines balanced richness with digestive intelligence through spices such as cumin, cardamom, fennel, *hing*, mint, and cloves. Grandmothers may not have known

Himalayan Trout with Pickled Shallots

Ingredients

For the pickled shallots

• 2 medium shallots, peeled, sliced into fine rings • 1/3 cup apple cider vinegar (with the mother, unfiltered) • 1/3 cup warm water • 1 tsp raw honey • 1/2 tsp Himalayan pink salt

For the trout

• 2 fresh Himalayan trout fillets, skin-on and pin-boned • 1.5 tbsp *ghee* • 1 small fennel bulb, finely shaved (or a handful of baby *bok choy*) • 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice • fresh dill, mint or fennel fronds • sea salt and a pinch of white pepper

Method

For the pickled shallots

In a small bowl, whisk together the apple cider vinegar, warm water, honey and pink salt. Add the sliced shallots and leave to

macerate for 10 minutes until softened and lightly translucent.

Heat 1/2 tbsp *ghee* in a skillet over medium heat. Add the shaved fennel with a small pinch of salt and sauté gently for 2-3 minutes until tender but still retaining a slight crunch.

Arrange on warm serving plates.

For the trout

Pat the trout fillets completely dry and season lightly with sea salt.

Heat the remaining *ghee* in the skillet over medium-high heat. Place the fillets skin-side down and press gently with a spatula for 10 seconds to prevent curling. Cook undisturbed for 3-4 minutes until the skin becomes deeply crisp and golden.

Turn the fillets carefully. Lower the heat and add the lemon juice to the pan, allowing it to emulsify with the *ghee*.

Spoon lemon-*ghee* butter over the trout for 1-2 minutes until just cooked through.

Serve

Place the trout over the warm fennel, skin-side up to preserve its crispness. Lift the pickled shallots from their brine and scatter generously over the fish.

Finish with fresh dill, mint or delicate fennel fronds. A final drizzle of the warm lemon-*ghee* pan juices brings everything together.

Note: Use a freshwater fish as an alternative to the trout’s availability.

The Gut-Healthy Angle

Himalayan trout is rich in highly bioavailable protein and omega-3 fatty acids. Supports intestinal lining and helps calm inflammation. Quick-pickling the shallots softens the harsher fibres while introducing beneficial organic acids that aid digestion and support stomach acidity.

Pure *ghee* contains butyrate – the preferred fuel of the colon lining – while remaining free of lactose and casein.





Khamiri Roti

Ingredients

- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1/2 cup *atta* + *maida* mix (optional for softer texture)
- 3 tbsp old dough / sourdough starter / natural *khamir*
- 1 tsp jaggery or honey
- 3/4 tsp salt
- warm water as needed
- 1 tbsp yogurt (optional but traditional)
- *ghee* for finishing

Method

Mix flour, salt, jaggery, yogurt and *khamir*. Add warm water gradually and knead into a soft dough. Cover and ferment 6–8 hours in warm weather (overnight in winter). Once airy and slightly sour, divide into balls. Roll slightly thick.

Cook on a hot *tandoor*, inverted wok, or heavy *tava* until puffed and charred.

Finish with a touch of *ghee*.

The Gut-Healthy Angle

Traditional *khamiri roti* works beautifully with and helps enhance digestion when eating the following:

- slow-cooked *dals*
- *yakhni*
- *Salan Qaliya Qorma*
- lightly spiced *kebabs*
- vegetable stews.

Especially effective when eaten warm and fresh rather than reheated repeatedly.

Someone famously said: “Before probiotics arrived in capsules, India quietly fermented them into its daily bread.”

the word *lactobacillus*, but they understood instinctively that the stomach required rhythm, moderation and care.

Modern industrial life disrupted these habits. Refined sugar, processed foods, hurried schedules, stress and perpetual stimulation altered the way people eat and live. Urban India increasingly suffers from acidity, obesity, diabetes, fatty liver disease, IBS, and chronic digestive disorders despite possessing one of the world’s richest culinary traditions. Fast food, late-night eating, endless caffeine, and sedentary work cultures have weakened not merely digestion, but the rhythm of life itself.

This phenomenon is global. Japan cultivated longevity through moderation and fermentation; the Mediterranean world through seasonal eating and slow communal meals; Korea, Central Asia and Europe through *kimchi*, kefir, sauerkraut, and sourdough. Across civilisations, humanity repeatedly discovered the same principles: moderation, seasonality, slowness and microbial diversity.

Yet the modern crisis extends beyond food itself. Contemporary life encourages people to eat while scrolling, driving, working or worrying. Stress has become dietary. The gut-brain connection now reveals how anxiety, trauma and emotional exhaustion directly affect digestion. The body speaks emotionally through the stomach long before language catches up.

Even Mahatma Gandhi approached digestion with almost political seriousness. Gandhi experimented constantly with food, fasting and portion control, treating the stomach as both a moral and physiological discipline. He believed overeating dulled not merely the body, but the mind and spirit.

In his *asbrams*, meals were intentionally simple: modest quantities, seasonal ingredients, slow chewing, and long intervals of restraint. He often wrote that most illnesses arose not from scarcity, but from excess – from eating beyond hunger and living beyond balance. His practice of measured eating anticipated many modern ideas surrounding caloric moderation, mindful consumption and metabolic health.

Yet Gandhi was no stereotypical “*dal-*



roti” ascetic. He enjoyed *aloo dum*, dry sautéed peas, purslane (*kulfa*), and simple *halke phulka rotis*. His relationship with food was disciplined, but never joyless. He understood something contemporary nutrition increasingly confirms: the body functions best not under perpetual abundance, but under rhythm, restraint, digestive rest – and above all, portion control.

Ironically, many affluent societies are now paying heavily to rediscover what traditional cultures once practised naturally: mindful eating, fermented foods, fasting, walking, fresh ingredients and slower living. The modern wellness retreat increasingly resembles the ordinary habits of earlier generations.

Still, pleasure remains central to civilisation. *Biryani*, *kebabs*, mangoes, wine, buttered *parathas*, and festive meals are not enemies of health. Traditional societies understood balance instinctively: feasting was followed by restraint, richness by simplicity, abundance by fasting.

The real danger is not indulgence, but permanent excess.

Ultimately, digestion is not merely biology. It is culture itself. A calm table, good conversation, seasonal food, evening walks, and emotional ease shape human health as profoundly as nutrients or medicine.

Modern science increasingly validates what older civilisations quietly understood:

Human beings do not merely metabolise calories. They metabolise atmosphere.

“*Sehat ka raaz daulat ke khazanon mein nahin,*

Sukoon-e-dil bhi zaroori hai hazm hone ke liye.”

The secret of health does not lie in vaults of wealth alone; even the heart requires peace for digestion to succeed.

And perhaps nations are no different.

A civilisation that cannot nourish its stomach eventually struggles to nourish its mind.

“Let food be your medicine, and medicine be your food.” – Hippocrates.