

Ghee: Better than Butter

Why cook with plain butter when you can reap the health benefits of its clarified form?

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Your yoga teacher says a little ghee will help loosen up tight hamstrings, and your Ayurvedic physician recommends ghee for a host of ailments ranging from poor digestion to memory loss. But what is this liquid gold and how does it differ from regular butter?

Ayurveda places ghee, or clarified butter, at the top of the oily foods list, as it has the healing benefits of butter without the impurities (saturated fat, milk solids). *The Susruta Samhita*, an Ayurvedic classic, claims ghee is beneficial for the whole body, and recommends it as the ultimate remedy for problems stemming from the pitta dosha, such as inflammation.

Long a favorite of yoga practitioners, ghee lubricates the connective tissues and promotes flexibility, says Dr. Vasant Lad, director of the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Traditionally, the preparation has been used to promote memory, intelligence, quantity and quality of semen, and to enhance digestion. Modern science tells us that ghee also harbors phenolic antioxidants, which bolster the immune system.

Even better than ghee is aged ghee—up to 100 years—which treats alcoholism, epilepsy, fever, and vaginal pain, according to Ayurvedic physician Robert Svoboda. Medicated ghee (*ghrita* in Sanskrit), meanwhile, combines clarified butter with healing herbs. Ghee's benefits extend to topical use as well. Ayurvedic beauty expert Pratima Raichur suggests it as a massage base to calm sensitive pitta-type skin. *The Indian Materia Medica*, a widely respected source book for Ayurvedic remedies, recommends ghee, sometimes mixed with honey, as an application for wounds, inflammation, and blisters.

You'll find ghee at the health food store, but it's easy to make. Place 1 to 2 pounds of butter in a saucepan on low heat. Melt until white curds separate and sink to the bottom. When a drop of water flicked into the pan boils immediately, the ghee is done. Discarding the curds and store in a jar. If kept out of contact with water, ghee needs no refrigeration. Take 2 teaspoons per day as a supplement, or simply use ghee in your cooking. Just remember that ghee is fat, and only a certain amount of total fat is necessary in the diet. If you use ghee, reduce your total fat intake proportionately.