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## The Role of Meals for the Japanese People in Modern Times

	
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### ABSTRACT

One of the purposes of eating is for the intake of nutrients; however, it is not the sole purpose. Space foods and other supplementary food may be sufficient if they were more nutritious. In addition, eating meals can be a time, wherein one communicates with other people or it can also be one's purpose for living. The series of actions leading to eating is accompanied by emotional ups and downs, which may be useful for stimulating the five senses. In this article, we will describe what is generally known about the subject and the author's opinion on the various meanings of meals.



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## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the main purpose of eating is nutrition and growth, but that is not the sole purpose<sup>1)</sup>. Considering the population on Earth, it has long been said that there is not enough food. Having said this, it may be recommended that the solution is entomophagy. In addition, the utilization of food such as space food may also be necessary. It has been said that the time has come when food must be manufactured in consideration of energy efficiency. In Japan and other countries, microorganisms are starting to be used as dietary supplements. These may be considered sufficient if they were very nutritious. In addition, eating meals can be a time wherein one can communicate with other people, and it can also be one's purpose for living. Eating is thought to be stimulating for the five senses because of the ups and downs of emotions one goes through before partaking in meals. In other words, one's purpose in eating can be to see the colors of the food, smell the ingredients and to notice the food that are in season. This article describes, what is generally known about the subject and the author's opinion on the various meanings of meals.

### **Characteristics of insect food and space food**

Insect foods and space foods mentioned here refer to things that have been around for a long time. Insect foods are processed by frying or boiling the insects and then seasoning them right after. Space food is shaped like a tablet; it is quite tasteless and the colors of the original ingredients are not obvious. Interestingly, in recent times, insect food has gained popularity, and simultaneously, some people have also stated their preference to partake of space food as their meal.

What are the advantages? In terms of insect food, it is theorized that by eating insects as food, one can ingest high-energy ingredients without having to give much time and effort. For example, cereals can only be harvested by watering them for one year or several months. On the other hand, livestock animals can only be harvested and processed into foodstuffs if they do not grow for several years. In terms of grains, they have to be given as bait, which is costly as well as time consuming. It can also be thought of as losing the grain energy that people need. On the other hand, wild creatures grow by themselves and can become the source of needed human nutrients in some cases. The same is true for fish that are only natural. However, it is no longer possible to think that the harvested fish can be used as food without considering the variation of the catch and the fact that there are only a few species

available in nature. It has become a situation that requires the same effort as livestock, such as returning (releasing) fry to the wild and farming. In the present study, insects are either kept as pets or killed by using insecticides. However, it has been understood that the nutritional value in insects is high, and this began to attract attention as to it being used as an ingredient. In developing countries, it has long been eaten as a high source of protein. In particular, insects that are harmful eat cereals that can be easily obtained. If these insects can be used as food, it is thought that food that humans intake can be produced more efficiently. At present, there are only a few people who recognize the value of insect food, even upon knowledge of the fact that the rate of processing food is low, while the rate of supply is high. However, when eating insects is focused on and the consumption is concentrated, this situation will be an issue and the food cannot be eaten immediately.

Thus, it is thought that growing fish is a necessity. With regard to insects, although they are known to be nutritious ingredients, unfortunately, they are not delicious. For this reason, together with other circumstances, insects are not an extremely popular food.

With regard to space food, it has garnered much attention from the public every time a rocket is launched outside the earth. Space food was originally developed for the sole purpose of providing nutrition, but approaches to making them like regular food is gradually being adopted. Because space food is stored in space stations for a considerable amount of time, developments have been made in consideration of its taste, texture and appearance. The direction with regard to the development of space food has greatly evolved. These changes include the efforts of reproducing meals from the hometowns of the astronauts. In order to prevent boredom, many foods with different tastes and appearances have been developed to stimulate the senses even with the retention of the same number of calories. Given that the areas in a spacecraft are narrow, mealtimes become one of the most enjoyable times and can help in the suppression of mental disorders such as neurosis. Although the information might not seem as much yet, there are progressive efforts being made in the development of technology to reconstruct the excrement of astronauts into space food. However, the idea of the types and freshness of ingredients on the earth is not in this field.

### **A series of actions leading to food intake**

Let us consider the process leading to a regular meal.

**1) Purchase of foodstuffs:** Purchase ingredients at a store. Some people, including you, may naturally know or think about what ingredients are seasonal, what colors and shapes are fresh and which ingredients taste good. You may be able to know such information by communicating with the store clerk. If you meet someone you know on the way, you can communicate with them as well. You may be able to get ideas regarding one's menu of the day or you might come up with a new dish just by looking at the ingredients.

**2) Cooking:** If you have a family, you can cook together and prepare the food while talking. Even if you are alone, you may also be able to get ideas for cooking by searching for information on the Internet, articles on social media, and information on TV. Even if your family does not help, you may be motivated to cook for someone just by spending time and talking.

**3) Eating:** If you are living with your family, you can often have meals together. During that time, the family can talk about various topics such as what happened that day, the seasoning of the dishes. This type of exchange of information has led to love. If you make a meal only for yourself, you can tell when the meal is delicious, when the seasoning is a bit too light, and what you can do to improve the dish for tomorrow. If you just eat what you bought, you might no longer think about cooking, but you might want to change your meal the next day.

**4) Cleaning:** It seems that what follows the cooking is the clean-up time. This can be an opportunity to think about ecological things such as the proper disposal of food and the amount of garbage. This way, when one is thinking about the flow of eating, communication and emotions toward other people are usually happening simultaneously<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>. In addition to nutrition, it can also be seen that taste and appearance affect emotions<sup>1, 6, 7</sup>.

Figure no. 1 shows how Japanese people place importance on the act of eating<sup>7</sup>. It can be seen that "eating delicious food" is more important than "nutrition", while "pleasant eating" is considered more frequently rather than "satisfaction".

### **"Itadakimasu" and "Gochisousama"**

In Japan, it is customary to say "Itadakimasu" before eating and "Gochisousama" after eating. These words are of Buddhist origin and learning how to say them is a part of the disciplines learned from childhood. "Itadakimasu" means to get (= Itadaku) the life of various creatures that are ingredients. "Gochisousama" means to thank the person who took the time

to collect the ingredients, cook and serve the meal<sup>5</sup>. Both words convey gratitude and prayer. On the other hand, the Christian practice of saying “Amen” before meals can be interpreted as giving thanks and prayers to God. Given all this information, it can be understood that such courtesy practiced with regard to meals include implications other than nutrition.

### **About Japanese cuisine (Washoku)**

Japanese cuisine has developed through the historical changes of Japanese culture and society. In contrast to Yoshoku (Western food), such dishes are sometimes called Washoku, a type of food that uses the original taste of ingredients and cherishes the seasonality. Washoku was registered in 2013 as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage after having been evaluated for the following: a) Respect for diverse and fresh foods and their taste, b) Healthy diet with excellent nutritional balance, c) Expression of natural beauty and seasonal changes, d) Close involvement with annual events such as New Year. These considerations show that having meals is not in agreement with the concept that dishes and ingredients are only for nutrient intake.

Seasonal ingredients are delicious, abundant in the market, cheaper and more nutritious. For these reasons, it is considered an opportunity to enjoy different types of food. People can also taste natural lye and bitterness peculiar to wild grass (for example, horsetails, bamboo shoots, and butterburs).

Figure no. 2 shows the ratio of eating and drinking of seasonal foods<sup>7</sup>. In Japan, there has been an annual event every season that is related to food. Although it is not related to Washoku alone, it seems to be able to assess whether events (season) are important as Japanese eating habits. From this figure, the event meal that seems to be eaten by the whole family at the end and at the beginning of the year has garnered the top percentage (over 70%). On the other hand, those with different tastes of food, such as confection (bean cake) and Japanese rice wine (New Year’s ceremonial sake), or those whose dietary habits seem to decrease with age are a low percentage.

### **CONCLUSION**

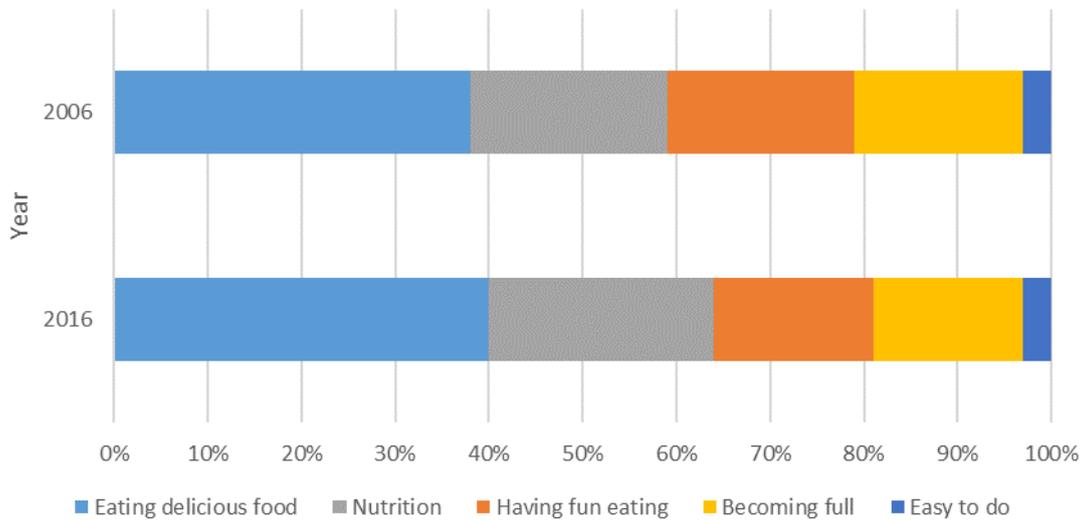
As mentioned above, eating has a purpose that is not just about taking nutrients. In short, it is one of the things that can help improve QOL. Tomorrow, you may want to do better by not just eating food for nutrients, but also to experience things through eating delicious food.

There may be different cuisines a person will want to have as a prize for working hard and studying hard, or as a reward after finishing a task. Eating different cuisines affects people's lives differently, and it can be said that some people feel happy when eating<sup>3, 5, 7</sup>. If the food is eaten and it has no taste or fragrance, partaken merely just to get nutrients, the purpose of living may be diminished. Eighty-four percent of people are satisfied with their eating habits; however, results show that Japanese are less dissatisfied with food<sup>7</sup>. As shown in figure no. 1, this satisfaction includes the taste of food and the enjoyment of eating in addition to nutrition and satiety. In many countries, the question, "What would you eat for your last supper?" is sometimes asked. It can be thought that an individual might answer it by thinking about a delicious and tasteful meal while recollecting some good memories in relation to past meals. Food can also provide a sense of happiness. However, if the current population growth rates remain and if food production rates stay the same, there may be times when there is not enough food for the population, and it may not be possible to feel the seasons like Washoku. The time may come when euglena (plankton, a food popular in Japan) and insect food become staple foods. Even so, we believe that the search for food that can stimulate the senses and make eating time more important should continue.

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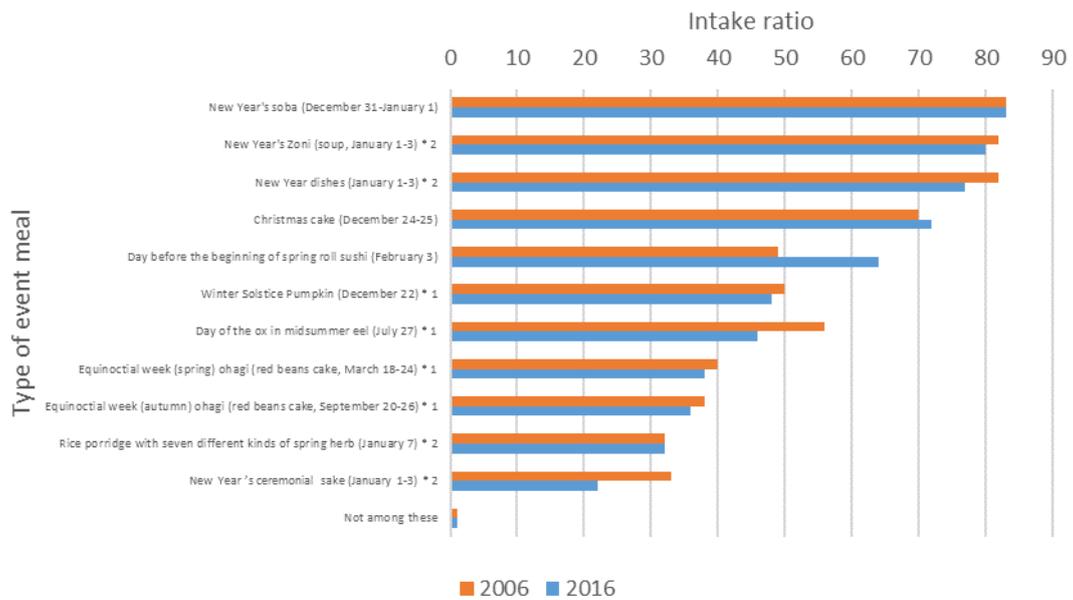


**Figure No. 1: Important Contents in meals**

Based on data from Reference 7.

Surveys were conducted in 2006 and 2016 for Japanese people between the ages of 16 and 70.

Analyzed with multiple answers allowed.



**Figure No. 2: Event food intake rate**

Based on data from Reference 7.

Surveys were conducted in 2006 and 2016 for Japanese people between the ages of 16 and 70.

Analyzed with multiple answers allowed.

\* 1: Changes from year to year (dates listed are for 2019).

\* 2: The approximate time has been decided, but the time is less strict depending on the year and region.