

## **ORIYA & BENGALI CUISINE**

Indian food is typically associated with a lot of masala, spices and high calories. The dietary habits of people in the Eastern coastal states of Orissa and West Bengal include the consumption of a lot of fish. Cooked with very little or, at times without oil, these two eastern states offer a variety of low-calorie delicacies. There are many similarities yet vast differences in the Oriya and Bengali cuisine. Both regions have their distinctive food habits and cooking styles: Bhaja, Bhapa, Bhuna, Chachhari, Chhenchara, Dalma, Dalna, Dum, Ghanto, Jhol, pora, and tarakari. To the casual palate, the Eastern Indian food means rice and fish. Rice is the staple food. The other characteristic of coastal cuisines is the use of coconut in many recipes. Unlike other coastal kitchens, however, coconut oil is not used. The preferred cooking medium is mustard oil or refined vegetable oil (mostly groundnut). Traditionally food was cooked on cowpat (made of dried cowdung), wood or charcoal fires but recent years have seen an emergence of gas, electric, and microwave ovens.

In terms of day-to-day cooking, Eastern Indians don't use many spices. The main ingredients in most of their food is Paanch photan (in Oriya) or Phancch Phoran (in Bengali), which is a mixture of mustard seeds, coriander seeds, meethi seeds, black coriander seeds etc. This is used for seasoning. The other major ingredient is garlic and mustard seeds finely ground together, called as Besara in Oriya and Sorsho Bata in Bengali. Oriyas and Bengalis are rice eaters and along with rice, a typical Oriya or Bengali meal has to have a combination of a deep-fried vegetable; a mixed vegetable which is cooked with garlic and mustard paste and seasoned with paanch phootan; and of course, the ubiquitous Maccher Jhol (fish curry).

Oriya and Bengali cuisine recognizes and gives a place for the five basic tastes of astringent, bitter, sweet, sour and hot. While an Oriya meal does not have a specific course of serving the food items, an authentic Bengali meal does. It begins with bitters, either in the form of shukto (a kind of stew with vegetables, drumsticks or bitter gourd) and moves on in stages through the dhals with fries and fritters, a vegetable dish like a ghonto or chhokka, to the non-vegetarian items of fish or meat. Before ending on a sweet note, there is the occasional treat of an astringent or sweet chutney.

In general, Oriya and Bengali meals include one or more of the following.

- Rice, white and parboiled (most commonly used). Rice is the staple food in Orissa and Bengal and is incorporated in many ways. For example puffed rice is used frequently for breakfast and snacks.
- Rotis are consumed mostly at dinnertime or during breakfast.
- Dhals and legumes of various kinds. Most common dhals are toor, urad (especially to make cakes and snacks), gram and mung (most frequently used). Dhal is sometimes cooked with vegetables called “dalma.”
- Fish is an integral part of the diet. In fact it is considered auspicious, and no Oriya and Bengali function can do without fish. The fish curry is usually cooked with mustard and garlic paste. And there is a preference for Hilsa fish followed by Rohu and Katla (all three are fresh water fishes). The delicious Dahi Macch is prepared with fried fish dipped in gravy made out of curd.
- Mutton, chicken, and eggs, along with seafood are also used. The coastline offers an abundant variety of shrimps, lobsters, and crabs that are relished in a variety of cooking styles and often spiced up.
- Consumption of lamb and pork are not very common in Eastern India.
- Vegetables are consumed in different forms: stir-fried, sautéed, bhartha (pureed or minced vegetables), or curried with a paste of garlic, ginger, and onion. Fresh

vegetables are often seasoned with light spices (Paanch photan). Often vegetables are cooked with fish, mutton, and chicken, especially in the curry form.

- Fruits are consumed fresh, mostly as after dinner desserts. These include watermelon, mango, lichees, apples, oranges, guavas, papayas, and a variety of plantains, and bananas.
- Tea is the most popular drink and is usually served with milk and sugar. Use of coffee is rare in the average households. Other popular drinks are coconut milk (from the young coconut, mostly a popular street-side drink), Lassi, a delicious iced curd drink, and Nimbu paani (lemon squash).
- Ghee is served on top of rice to enhance flavor.
- Water is served with meals. Most people sit down on the floor on a mat during meals and eat with their fingers.
- Coconut – is abundantly available and mostly used in the cooking (curries, dalma, sweets, chutneys) etc.

### Sweets

People of Orissa and West Bengal are sweet lovers, and have always been known for their particular weakness for sweets. It is rare to see meals completed without sweets. The choice of sweets for Oriya and Bengali meals are unlimited. From the ubiquitous mishti doi and rossogolla, to the more rare pithey and pulli, the choice is boundless. Certain sweets are made on special events. Use of *chhana* (reduced milk) for making sweets is honed to perfection. *Rasogolla* and innumerable varieties of *sandesh* are available today. Besides these the tradition of home made *pitha*, and sweets made of rice powder, sweet potato, *kheer*, coconut and gur is still common.

### Meal Pattern for the Traditional Oriya/Bengali Client with Type 2 Diabetes

Time	Typical	Modified
<b>Breakfast</b> (7:30 AM)	1 cup tea with whole milk and sugar 1 cup chuda (puffed rice) upama	1 cup tea with skim milk (or 1% fat milk) and with no sugar (preferable). 2 slices of whole wheat roti/ bread toast. 2 table spoon of chutney 2 tsp margarine
<b>Snack</b> (10:30 AM)		1 fruit 3 graham crackers
<b>Lunch</b> (12:00 noon)	3 cups of rice 2 oz of meat or fish 1 cup of dhal 1 cup of stir-fried vegetables 2 table spoon of tomato/dhania chutney ghee, pickles	1 ½ cups of brown rice ½ cup of dhal 1 cup of vegetable curry 1 cup of stir-fried vegetables 2 oz of fish (low fat) or meat (white, lean) 1 cup low fat yogurt 2 table spoon of tomato or dhania chutney (fresh)
<b>Afternoon tea and snacks</b> (3:30 PM)	2 cups of Mudhi (puffed rice) and mixture (fried nuts and legumes)	½ cup dry cereal mix or 3 saltine-type crackers or 10 unsalted roasted peanuts ¾ oz salt-free pretzels 1 cup tea with low fat milk and no sugar.

<b>Dinner (7:00 PM)</b>	3 cups of rice 1 cup of dhal 3 oz of meat or fish 1 cup of stir-fried vegetables 1 cup of curry (mixed vegetable and chickpeas). pickles	1 cup brown rice 1 roti 1 cup stir-fried vegetables ½ cup mixed vegetables with chickpeas. 1 cup dhal or 3 oz of chicken or fish ½ cup salad
<b>Snack (9:00 PM)</b>		1 fresh fruit 1 cup of skim milk

### Healthy Foods

#### Starches

Roti  
Plain brown/basmati rice  
Roasted mudhi or chuda (puffed rice)

#### Meat or meat alternatives

Dhal (mung, toor, or masoor)  
Baked Fish or Chicken  
Pan-fried fish w/masala

#### Vegetable dishes

Stir-fried vegetables  
Dalma (mixed Vegetable w/ dal)

#### Dairy

Yogurt and buttermilk made w/ skim milk  
Raita made with low-fat milk  
Rasgolla and other steamed desserts

#### Fruit dishes

Plain fresh fruit

### Not so heart-healthy (use less often)

Parata fried with oil  
Pulao or fried rice w/ >1 tsp oil  
Chuda upama with oil and vegetables

Dhal with lots of oil or ghee  
Fried chicken or fish  
Fried fish in tomato gravy  
(cooked with oil and spices)

Vegetable curry w/ lots of oil and spices  
Dalma with coconut and ghee

Yogurt and buttermilk w/ whole or 2% milk  
Raita with fried boondi  
Desserts made with whole milk and or fried

Fruit salad with w/jaggery & nuts

### Weekend and Party Planning

Food plays an important role in social gatherings of Oriyas and Bengalis. Festivals and weekends are the time when people indulge in rich and high calorie food, alcoholic beverages, and soft drinks. Plan ahead and adjust your food intake for the whole day to avoid a heavy overload of carbohydrates and fats and protein. Request your host or the Restaurant to prepare 1-2 special or modified dishes for you!

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