



# Ayurveda

Ancient Wisdom  
for a Modern  
Lifestyle

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# What Is Ayurveda?

The ancient science of Ayurveda has as much relevance today as it did to people of ancient India, where it originated at least 5,000 years ago. In the 21st century, we use Ayurvedic wisdom as a tool for balancing our lives—whether we want to have more energy, lose weight, improve our moods, or simply feel healthier. Ayurveda is based on the principles of living in harmony with the cycles and rhythms of nature. As you will see, its concept is natural and simple, yet highly effective.

**Ayurveda treats the whole individual—not just symptoms of an illness.**

A highly individualized approach to wellness, Ayurveda takes into account your unique constitutional makeup as well as how your health shifts according to the seasons and even at different times of the day. When all the lifestyle and environmental elements are in balance as prescribed in Ayurveda, you will feel a vitality that can only be achieved through a healthy regimen that factors in food, rest, daily routines, and mind/body practices such as meditation and yoga. Balance encompasses all parts of a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual makeup. It accounts for how we interact with our families, friends, and people we work with. It's truly a holistic approach to wellness.

There's a famous Ayurvedic saying: "With proper diet and lifestyle, there is no need for medicine; without proper diet and lifestyle, there is no use for medicine." Indeed, Ayurveda treats the whole individual—not just symptoms of an illness.

In this study guide, we'll delve into the principles of Ayurveda, a Sanskrit word that translates to "the science of life." We'll also look at imbalances in the body/mind/spirit and how to use natural methods to gently move them back into balance.





## The Five Mahabhutas (Elements)

In Ayurveda, the universe, the world, all matter, and all living things (including people) are comprised of combinations of five elements: Space (or “Ether”), Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. These five (*pancha*) are called the *mahabhutas*, or *panchamahabhutas*.

When the body is out of balance, *mahabhutas* with opposite qualities are used to restore equilibrium.

We experience the world through sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell, and these influence biochemical functions in the body.

Knowing the physical and energetic characteristics of each of the mahabhutas is key to understanding Ayurveda because these elements combine in infinite variety to create our personal mind/body constitutions, and they are the building blocks for creating balance.

When the body is out of balance, mahabhutas with opposite qualities are used to return that imbalance to balance (ie., health and well-being). The panchamahabhutas are fundamental to Ayurvedic diagnosis and treatment.

Below are descriptions of the qualities of the five mahabhutas.<sup>1</sup> We’ve included the associated senses because the sensory organs are the channels through which our bodies interact with the elements. For instance, sound or music might be incorporated for balancing the Space element, or scented oils (aromatherapy) might act upon the Earth element. We experience the world through sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell, and these sensory perceptions influence hormones and other biochemical functions in the body.





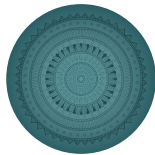


**1. SPACE**  
hearing

**SPACE** (*akash* in Sanskrit) is empty, formless, weightless, and clear. Sometimes called “Ether,” Space refers to the sky rather than “outer space.” In the body, Space correlates with spacious places such as the abdomen, chest cavity, mouth, nose, and gastrointestinal tract. Psychologically, Space gives rise to feelings of peace, freedom, compassion, isolation, emptiness, and anxiety.

Sense: **Hearing (sound)**                      Organ: **Ear**

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**2. AIR**  
touch

**AIR** (*vayu* in Sanskrit) is dry, cold, light, clear, and full of motion. A harsh wind is a good example of this mahabhuta. In the body, air moves through the lungs (respiration), brain (synapses and nerves), muscles (heart and circulatory systems), and through the intestines (elimination). Emotionally, Air expresses as happiness, excitement, fear, and anxiety.

Sense: **Touch**                                      Organ: **Skin**

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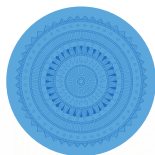


**3. FIRE**  
sight

**FIRE** (*tejas* in Sanskrit) is hot, changeable, dry, and illuminating. In nature we see Fire in the sun, which provides light and warmth. Anatomically, Fire is associated with metabolism, sight, and the digestion, absorption, and assimilation of food. Fire is the emotional source of anger, hatred, ambition, and drive.

Sense: **Sight**                                      Organ: **Eyes**

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**4. WATER**  
taste

**WATER** (*aap* in Sanskrit) is flowing, wet, heavy, cold, and cohesive like the ocean. In the body, Water is represented by plasma, saliva, cerebrospinal fluid, urine, sweat, obesity, and edema. Emotionally, Water creates contentment, love, and compassion.

Sense: **Taste**                                      Organ: **Tongue**

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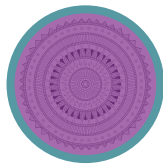
**5. EARTH**  
smell

**EARTH** (*prithvi* in Sanskrit) is heavy, cold, dense, stable, and solid—just think of the characteristics of dirt. Earth manifests in the body as all the anatomical structures: bones, nails, teeth, hair, and skin. In terms of emotions, Earth is associated with groundedness, growth, forgiveness, attachments, greed, and depression.

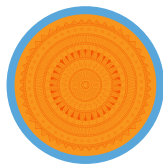
Sense: **Smell**                                      Organ: **Nose**

# Getting to Know the Three Doshas

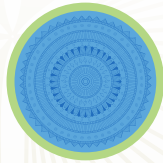
We can identify our primary mind/body type and use that understanding to make the wisest, most nourishing choices for ourselves.



**VATA**  
Air + Space



**PITTA**  
Fire + Water



**KAPHA**  
Water + Earth

Ayurveda identifies three bodily/metabolic types, called *doshas*. These doshas—known as *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—are biological energies that govern the physiology, psychology, and subtle energy of the body. The doshas are essentially our guides for choosing foods, activities, and lifestyle habits that create and maintain balance within our unique constitution.

The three doshas derive from the five mahabhutas—the elements of nature—and are closely related to the qualities of each element. Here’s how the five mahabhutas combine to create the three doshas:

**Vata** = Air + Space

**Pitta** = Fire + Water

**Kapha** = Water + Earth

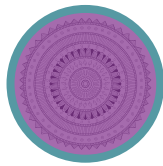
According to Ayurveda, we’re born with a proportion of the doshas that’s unique to us. While everyone has some proportion of all three doshas on a cellular level, we typically have one predominant dosha along with a strong secondary dosha. Our physical and mental characteristics will be associated with these two doshas. They are also the doshas most likely to be affected by dietary and lifestyle imbalances. It’s also possible, though rare, that someone might be “tridoshic”—in other words, that person has an equal amount of all three doshas.

A central theory in Ayurveda is that when the birth constitution and current constitutional state align closely, greater overall health will be achieved. However, a large divergence between these states indicates imbalance.

Using the principles of Ayurveda, we can identify our primary mind/body type and use that understanding to make the wisest, most nourishing choices for ourselves.

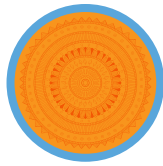
# Overview of the Balanced and Imbalanced Doshas

Here's a brief description of the general characteristics of the three doshas. (You can find further information in the chart on page 8.)



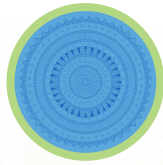
**VATA**  
Air + Space

**VATA** types tend to be thin, light, and quick in their thoughts and actions. Change is a constant part of a Vata's life. When Vata types are balanced, they are creative, enthusiastic, and lively. Out of balance, a Vata may develop anxiety, insomnia, or irregular digestion.



**PITTA**  
Fire + Water

**PITTA** types tend to have a medium to muscular build and are often intelligent and determined. In a state of balance, Pittas are warm, humorous, and good leaders. If out of balance, Pittas can be overly critical, irritable, and may demonstrate an overbearing Type-A personality.



**KAPHA**  
Water + Earth

**KAPHA** types naturally have larger physical structures and are slower moving and methodical. Balanced Kaphas are extremely loving, compassionate, and calming to be around. When out of balance, Kaphas can be lazy, lethargic, and overly stubborn.

The chart on the next page shows common physical and mental characteristics for each dosha.



## Common Physical and Mental Characteristics for Each Dosha



**VATA**  
Air + Space



**PITTA**  
Fire + Water



**KAPHA**  
Water + Earth

Build	Thin and bony; little muscle development	Medium; developed and proportional musculature	Large bones, broad frames; strong and well-proportioned
Weight	Light: often has difficulty gaining weight	Average: little problem with gaining or losing weight	Heavy or obese: have trouble losing weight
Hair	Dry and brittle	Fine and often lighter in color; premature graying and hair loss common	Thick and oily; often curly and dark.
Hands	Thin, dry, cold	Medium-size; often hot and sweaty	Thick, cool, and often clammy
Nose	Thin and bony	Thin and pointed	Large and thick
Temperature	Cold	Warm	Cool
Mental/Emotional Characteristics	Artistic, adaptable, perceptive, spontaneous, charismatic	Confident, joyful, a natural leader, has a sharp memory, strong sense of discernment	Patient, gentle, romantic, good listener, community oriented
Speech	Talkative	Forceful	Deep; few words
Activity	Quick	Sharp	Slow
Routine	Variable	Precise	Methodical
Under Stress	Anxious	Irritable	Withdrawing
Sleep	Light	Little, but sound	Heavy
Appetite	Variable	Strong	Slow, steady
Digestion	Irregular	Strong	Slow
Elimination	Irregular, constipated	Loose stool	Regular

# The 15 Subdoshas

The three doshas are each divided into five *subdoshas*, which are located within an anatomical area.

An Ayurvedic doctor looks beyond doshas to their subdoshas to gain a better understanding of your health and to be more precise in advising you how to make lifestyle changes that support mind-body balance. Although the subdoshas are most often used as diagnostic tools by experienced health practitioners, they can help you get a clearer picture of Ayurveda’s subtleties and the general characteristics of each dosha.

The three doshas are each divided into five subdoshas, which are located within an anatomical area. Each subdosha is associated with a health concern that should be addressed. Following is a list of the subdoshas for the Vata, Pitta, and Kapha doshas.<sup>2</sup>

VATA Subdoshas	Location	What It Does	When Imbalanced
<i>Prana</i>	Head or brain	Controls inhalation, the senses, mind, consciousness	Worry, fear, insomnia, headaches, overactive mind
<i>Udana</i>	Throat, lungs	Controls exhalation, speech, memory	Speech problems, sore throat, coughing, fatigue
<i>Samana</i>	Stomach, small intestine	Controls movement of food through the digestive tract	Indigestion, gas, diarrhea, constipation, poor nutrient assimilation
<i>Apana</i>	Colon, pelvis	Controls elimination, sexual function, menstruation	Constipation, diarrhea, menstrual disorders, hormonal imbalance, urinary problems, lower back pain
<i>Vyana</i>	Heart, whole body	Governs the heart, circulatory system, nervous system	Poor circulation, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, anxiety

PITTA Subdoshas	Location	What It Does	When Imbalanced
<i>Sadhaka</i>	Heart, brain	Responsible for memory, discernment, heart function, emotions	Indecision, anger, jealousy, heartache
<i>Alochaka</i>	Eyes	Responsible for optical perception	Poor vision, eye disorders
<i>Pachaka</i>	Small intestine, stomach	Controls digestion and absorption of food	Indigestion, acid stomach, gastritis, nausea, ulcers
<i>Ranjaka</i>	Liver, spleen, red blood cells	Distributes nutrients to cells, detoxifies the body	Hepatitis, jaundice, anemia, blood disorders, anger
<i>Bhrajaka</i>	Heart, whole body	Controls skin pigmentation and texture	Skin irritations, eczema, psoriasis, hives, melanoma

KAPHA Subdoshas	Location	What It Does	When Imbalanced
<i>Tarpaka</i>	Sinuses, cerebrospinal fluid	Protects	Hay fever, sinus congestion, stuffy nose
<i>Avalambaka</i>	Thoracic area (heart, lungs, chest, back)	Lubricates and nourishes lungs, heart, spine	Asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, back pain
<i>Kledaka</i>	Stomach	Protects stomach lining, gastric secretion, digestion and absorption	Indigestion, gastritis, peptic ulcers, slow digestion
<i>Bhodaka</i>	Tongue, mouth	Controls taste, saliva, speech, lubricates mucous membrane	Loss of taste, receding gums, plaque
<i>Shleshaka</i>	Joints	Lubricates joints, nourishes bones and cartilage	Rheumatoid arthritis, inflamed or swollen joints



# Gunās: Pairs of Opposites

## The 10 Pairs of Gunas

Heavy	Light
Cold	Hot
Oily	Dry
Dull (or Slow)	Sharp
Stable	Mobile
Soft	Hard
Smooth (or Slimy)	Rough
Dense (or Solid)	Liquid
Gross	Subtle
Cloudy	Clear

When an imbalance manifests in the body, we treat it by increasing the opposite quality.

We've already established that Ayurvedic medicine is all about balance, and one of the ways we think about balance is in terms of contrasts between opposites: Heavy or light? Soft or hard? Clear or cloudy?

There are 20 attributes, or qualities, that express these dichotomies. In Sanskrit, they're called *gunas*. These pairs of qualities can teach us much about physiological and emotional balance.

Each attribute in a pair of gunas affects the other according to two fundamental Ayurvedic principles:

1. *Samanya*: Like increases like.
2. *Vishesha*: Opposites decrease each other.

In Ayurveda, when an imbalance manifests in the body, we treat it by increasing the opposite quality. For instance, if you're too hot (a condition we might call "aggravated" Pitta because heat is a Pitta quality), you can reduce the heat (or "pacify" the Pitta) by drinking something cold, taking a swim, or ingesting Ayurvedic herbs with cooling properties.<sup>3</sup>

Another common example is a person who's predominantly Kapha and who's trying to lose weight. Kapha is characterized by a rounder body type and by gunas such as heavy, slow, cool, oily, damp, and stable. To lose weight, the Kapha person will want to balance these gunas with their opposites and decrease excess fat tissue associated with an imbalance of Kapha. Therefore, that person will want to favor foods that are lighter; easier and faster to digest; low in fat; moderate in protein; and that taste bitter, pungent, and astringent.

The gunas are important in Ayurveda because each is associated with a different dosha, and each helps us identify what “pacifies” or “aggravates” a dosha. From reading about the three doshas and their subdoshas, you may already have begun to see a pattern in the qualities that indicate those doshas. For convenience, though, it helps to see which guna—which qualities—are present in which doshas.

If a dosha possesses a particular guna, then adding qualities of a similar guna will aggravate that dosha. For instance, a person with a dominant Vata dosha is likely to feel cool in general because that guna is typical of Vata. In winter, when temperatures drop, the Vata’s chilly feeling probably intensifies because cold weather is compounding an already cool body sensation. We call that an aggravation of the Vata dosha.

### The Gunas for Each Dosha



**VATA**



**PITTA**



**KAPHA**

1	Light	Light	Heavy
2	Cold	Hot	Cold
3	Dry	Oily	Oily
4	Sharp	Sharp	Dull
5	Mobile	Mobile	Stable / Slow
6	Hard	Soft	Soft
7	Rough	Smooth	Smooth
8	Liquid	Liquid	Dense (Solid)
9	Subtle	Subtle	Gross
10	Clear	Clear	Cloudy

Contrast the Vata person's response to winter weather with a Pitta person, whose natural tendency is to feel warm. In winter, the Pitta dosha is pacified because lower temperatures balance out the heat guna in that person. Generally speaking, Pitta people feel more comfortable during winter months than in summer when temperatures rise. The chart below shows how each of the 20 gunas affects each of the three doshas.<sup>4</sup>

The Gunas	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Heavy	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Light	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies
Cold	Aggravates	Pacifies	Aggravates
Hot	Pacifies	Aggravates	Pacifies
Oily	Pacifies	Aggravates	Aggravates
Dry	Aggravates	Pacifies	Pacifies
Dull	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Sharp	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies
Stable	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Mobile	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies
Soft	Pacifies	Aggravates	Aggravates
Hard	Aggravates	Pacifies	Pacifies
Smooth (Slimy)	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Rough	Aggravates	Pacifies	Pacifies
Dense (Solid)	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Liquid	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies
Gross	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Subtle	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies
Cloudy	Pacifies	Pacifies	Aggravates
Clear	Aggravates	Aggravates	Pacifies



# Finding Your Prakriti & Vikriti Constitutions

Qualities converge to determine an overall lifelong constitution, called the *prakriti*, and current dosha imbalances, called *vikriti*.

So far, you've learned about the five mahabhutas (Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth), the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), the 15 subdoshas, and the 10 pairs of gunas. Now it's time to see how all these qualities converge to determine an overall lifelong constitution, called the *prakriti*, and current dosha imbalances, called *vikriti*.

Prakriti is a person's basic, individual constitution, consisting of either Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—or some combination of the doshas. Your prakriti is determined at conception and relates to physical and emotional qualities that have stayed with you fairly consistently throughout your life. It sets the baseline for individual characteristics and personal tendencies that endure, such as basic adult height, eye color, hair texture, and bone structure.

## The Seven Prakritis

Although all three doshas are present in every person's constitution, the proportion varies from person to person. There are seven prakritis in Ayurveda. The first set occurs when one dosha predominates:

1. Vata
2. Pitta
3. Kapha

There are three dual prakritis, in which two doshas are predominant, although generally, one dosha is slightly stronger than the other.

4. Vata-Pitta
5. Pitta-Kapha
6. Vata-Kapha

And there is one “tridosha” prakriti, in which all three doshas are present in nearly equal amounts.

### 7. Vata-Pitta-Kapha

Most people fall into the single- or dual-dosha categories; Vata-Pitta-Kapha is rare. However, remember that even if your prakriti is single or dual, you still have some percentage of the less predominant doshas in you. For instance, if your prakriti is Pitta-Kapha, there’s some Vata in your constitution.

When our health is optimal, it’s because the proportion of all three doshas matches our prakriti. When the proportion diverges from the prakriti, the result is imbalance and illness. We all experience temporary body changes, like gaining or losing weight, developing the flu, or feeling fatigued. This altered constitutional makeup and state of the doshas reflects our current state of health. This present-day picture is called the vikriti.

When the vikriti doesn’t match the prakriti, a person often feels like something’s “off” or might tell others, “I’m not feeling like myself.” The results of this misalignment could be temporary, like feeling stressed out and irritable from overwork, or they could manifest as a diagnosed illness such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Either way, Ayurveda reestablishes the person’s natural balance by removing the cause of the imbalance or by introducing the opposite quality. For example, if overwork is the source of your unease, you could either quit your job (removing the cause) or add more rest, relaxation, play, and meditation into your daily schedule (introducing the opposite quality).

When someone is severely imbalanced for a long time, it’s possible that his or her true prakriti is masked and that a person is expressing a mind-body type that isn’t actually the one he or she was born with. By getting healthy and clearing out toxins (*ama*), it’s possible to remove the unwanted patterns and uncover the true prakriti.

# Our Physical Bodies: The Dhatus and Malas

Digestion metabolizes  
food into vital tissue:  
(*dhatu*), energy, and  
waste (*mala*)

According to Ayurveda, digestion is the single most important determinant of physical good health. As it digests, the body breaks down food substances and metabolizes them, converting them into vital tissue: (*dhatu*), energy, and waste (*mala*).

First, let's talk about the dhatus, the physical building blocks of our bodies. Ayurveda identifies seven tissues that are responsible for the function and structure of the entire body. (You'll notice that the dhatus correspond to our Western concept of anatomy.)

The Seven Dhatus	What They Do
<i>Rasa</i> (plasma)	Rasa literally means "sap" or "juice," and the body's plasma and lymph carry nutrients from digested food to the organs.
<i>Rakta</i> (blood)	Blood oxygenates the body and is essential to life.
<i>Mamsa</i> (muscles)	Our system of muscles covers the bones and allows the body to move and maintain physical strength.
<i>Meda</i> (fat)	The body needs fat for insulation and lubrication for the organs.
<i>Asthi</i> (bone/cartilage)	These solid structures give our bodies form.
<i>Majja</i> (bone marrow)	The semi-solid marrow adds life by filling the bone.
<i>Shukra</i> (reproductive fluid or tissue)	Capable of creating life, the male and female tissues are the essence of all the bodily tissues.



When digestion is functioning properly, everything that has been eaten will be entirely digested—thus nourishing and constantly replenishing all of the dhatus. When these dhatus are in proper balance, good health is the result.

The other products of digestion are the three *malas*: waste in the form of urine, feces, and sweat. As long as the malas are properly eliminated from the body, all is well. However, if digestion is in any way impaired, mala is left behind as food substances pass through the seven dhatus, leaving a toxic by-product called *ama*.

Each of the malas has a specific elimination function in the body.

The Three Malas	What They Do
Urine	Removes water, salt, and mineral wastes so that blood pressure remains stable and body fluids are balanced.
Feces	Transports solid waste from the body and supports the intestinal walls.
Sweat	Expels excess water and toxins and is responsible for regulating body temperature and skin tone. <sup>5</sup>

# Digestion: Agni, Ama, and Ojas

“Life span, health, immunity, strength, energy, positivity, creativity, emotional balance, muscle formation, a lustrous complexion with good skin tone, homeostasis, and vital breath—all these depend on our ‘body-fire’ or *agni*.”

—The Charaka Samhita, an Ayurvedic medical text

In Ayurveda, we are not *what* we eat—we are what we’re able to *digest*. We may think of proper digestion as a key component of weight management—and it is—but that’s only one part of the benefit. Good digestion is essential to *overall* health, both physical and emotional. Ayurvedic guidelines aim to rid the body of excess toxins and fat while promoting the transformation of unhealthy tissues into foundational building blocks for vibrant health.

Ayurveda focuses on transforming the entire body; its dietary principles apply to everyone who wants to benefit from optimal digestion, tissue formation, and overall well-being. When digestion is functioning properly, the food we eat and the emotions we process will be entirely digested—with no residue left behind. When digestion and elimination are impaired, the result is malas (waste) being left in the dhatus, leaving a toxic by-product called ama, which can build up in the body and contribute to the disease process.

## Agni: The Fire of Digestion

The internal force that’s responsible for the creation and maintenance of strong digestion is called *agni*—the “digestive fire” that stimulates the metabolic breakdown of the foods we eat. Increasing agni promotes healthy skin, appetite, energy, balance, a clear mind, strong digestion, and a healthy immune system. According to Ayurveda, most health and weight conditions can be linked to a suppression of agni or to suboptimal digestion.

Agni's fire quality is responsible for transforming raw substances into a form that can be assimilated into usable tissues. It's present in the two aspects of metabolism:

- **Catabolism:** the breaking down of a substance into a smaller substance
- **Anabolism:** the creation or building of tissue from smaller components

From an Ayurvedic point of view, agni is embodied in Pitta, which contains both the fire and water elements and is the force of metabolism and digestion. Agni cannot exist by itself—it is always contained by Pitta. In addition to transforming substances, agni is also responsible for the power of appetite and the degree of body temperature.

Certain habits or behaviors can disturb and weaken agni, including:

- Overeating
- Irregular eating
- Intake of heavy, cold, old, or contaminated food
- Eating foods that aren't suited to your dosha
- Eating when you have indigestion
- Inappropriate adaptation to your geographic location, time, or season
- Suppression of natural urges
- Excessive fasting
- Faulty administration of purification procedures

## Seven Ways to Kindle Agni

When your agni is strong, food is well-digested and all wastes are eliminated via urine, feces, and sweat. There are a number of simple ways to help keep your agni functioning optimally:

1. Drink warm water containing the juice of half a lemon each morning. Lemon detoxifies the liver and stimulates peristalsis, which eliminates constipation.
2. Avoid ice-cold beverages (they reduce agni) and opt for warm water or hot tea.
3. Make lunch your biggest meal of the day because that's when your agni is strongest.
4. Eat a light dinner at least two hours before bed (when agni, like you, rests).
5. Choose warm, cooked foods over raw ones because they're easier to digest.
6. Cook with digestion-aiding herbs and spices: ginger root, mint, cinnamon, and fennel seeds.
7. Exercise daily. A brisk walk or a yoga class stimulates your metabolism and digestion.

## Ama: Blockage and Toxins in Your System

Ama is the undigested food residue that lodges itself within the tissues and organs when digestion is poor and agni is low. From a Western medical perspective, this relates to “tissue sludge” such as excess fat, plaque, and cholesterol that clog the major channels of the body. Too much ama creates fatigue, generalized pain throughout the body, depression, susceptibility to infections, a dull appetite, and oversensitive digestion.



Symptoms of too much ama include:

- Stagnation such as constipation, sinus congestion, and difficulty breathing
- Waking up tired, lethargic, energy-less
- A tongue coated with white mucus, especially in the morning
- Feeling achy and stiff
- A sense of heaviness in the body as a whole or in the abdomen
- Lacking mental clarity and concentration
- Frequent indigestion, gas, bloating, and/or stomachaches

There's a saying in Ayurveda that "You have to be careful about what you eat, or your food will begin to eat you!" This occurs through the development of ama, which leads to obesity and a host of diseases. From an Ayurvedic perspective, poor digestion and an excess of ama is linked to most major illnesses or problems, even those extending beyond the gastrointestinal tract. In considering "digestion," Ayurveda considers how well we're digesting our thoughts, emotions, and sensory impressions on a daily basis. Improper digestion in these areas can lead to a host of physical and mental disorders.

It's important to note here that in Ayurveda, "digestion" isn't always just the gastrointestinal process we learn about in biology class. "Digestion" also refers to experiences that we process through the five senses—and the emotions that result. For instance, the words you speak and hear during a "heated" argument with your partner could result in feelings of anger or fear. When you "ingest" those emotions, the body responds in much the same way as if you ate a handful of jalapeño peppers—you would feel physically ill. Undigested emotions can lead to

a buildup of ama just as easily as food that doesn't agree with your stomach. The quality of agni will determine whether these nonphysical elements get trapped in the body as ama.

### Three Ways to Reduce and Treat Ama

1. **Prevent:** Follow the dietary and lifestyle recommendations for your dosha to avoid creating ama in your system.
2. **Reduce:** If ama has already formed, adjust your diet, take detoxifying Ayurvedic herbs, and fast.
3. **Treat:** Undergo purifying *panchakarma* treatments (see page 46) to flush out ama that has already been absorbed by the tissues.

### Ojas: The Result of Perfect Digestion

*Ojas* is the end product of perfect digestion. Ojas is the subtle luster of skin, shine of the eyes, and the radiance of good health. Recent research has linked this Ayurvedic concept to proper neurotransmitter function and overall homeostasis of physiology. In short, ojas is what we all wish to attain: a perfect balance of healthy mind, body, and spirit.

### Signs of Ojas

- You feel rested upon awakening.
- Your skin has a healthy glow
- Your tongue is pink and clear
- Your body feels light, regardless of your weight
- You feel centered throughout the day
- Your digestion is strong without bloating
- You feel energized and enthusiastic
- Your mind is clear
- Your body has a pleasant smell
- You rarely get sick

## Tips for Improving Ojas

To give you a better idea of how ojas feels, follow a few guidelines:

- Laugh and smile a lot
- Take time to relax
- Meditate regularly, especially in the evening
- Exercise your creativity
- Spend time in nature
- Offer your gifts to others
- Follow your heart's passion
- Engage in joyful physical activity  
(as opposed to “working out”)

# Ayurvedic Nutrition and Diet: The Science of Nutrigenomics

**Ayurveda favors vibrant foods that are full of vital life energy, or *prana*.**

Food is central to Ayurveda because what we put in our bodies ultimately builds our dhatus and provides the fuel for life. For that reason, Ayurveda favors vibrant foods that are full of vital life energy, or *prana*. Those foods include organic fruits and veggies, high-quality grains and oils, and whole foods in general that are not overly processed or synthetic.

Foods that are frozen, canned, and refined are devoid of nutritional value and are usually processed with artificial colors, flavorings, additives, preservatives, chemical pesticides, and genetically altered ingredients. These foods lack *prana* and contribute to an array of imbalances and illnesses.

Increase the following foods in your diet:

- Whole grains and legumes (brown rice, quinoa, barley, beans, lentils)
- Fruits and vegetables (local and seasonal whenever possible)

The following high-quality foods should be used sparingly:

- Natural sources of sugar (honey, maple syrup, stevia, agave)
- Nuts and seeds (sunflower, pecans, flax seeds, walnuts, almonds)
- Unrefined oils (organic sunflower oil, extra-virgin olive oil, *ghee*)



## The Six Tastes

Ayurveda identifies six primary tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent) and considers their presence in our diet essential for optimal nutrition and metabolism. It recommends that we try to incorporate each taste into *every* meal we eat.

While most foods are a combination of tastes, they can typically be classified according to one or two predominant tastes. Each taste works within the physiology in a unique way. Sweet foods are known to build the tissues of the body, for example, while spicy foods stimulate digestion, metabolism, and circulation. Bitter foods (such as dark, leafy greens) and astringent foods (such as spices) are considered the most detoxifying and “lightening” foods. Sour foods are known to stimulate the enzymatic activity of the stomach and improve digestion, while salt helps maintain the fluid balance of the body.

Incorporating the six tastes into our diet can be accomplished through simple ingredients:<sup>6</sup>

Taste	Quality	Food Examples
Sweet	Cooling	Fruits (peaches, plums, red grapes, melons, oranges), sweet potatoes, carrots, beets, grains (rice, quinoa), milk and dairy foods, herbs (basil, licorice root, peppermint, fennel)
Sour	Heating	Lemon, lime, green grapes, hibiscus, yogurt, cheese, fermented foods, vinegar, miso, tamarind, pickles, herbs (caraway, coriander, cloves)
Salty	Heating	Sea salt, kelp and other sea vegetables
Bitter	Cooling	Dark-green leafy vegetables, dandelion, spinach, chard, rhubarb
Pungent	Heating	Onion, radish, mustard, mildly heating spices (cayenne, cumin, black pepper, chili peppers)
Astringent	Cooling	Salad, beans and lentils, cranberries, pomegranates, okra, parsley, various herbs and spices (turmeric, saffron, basil, alum)

It's best to incorporate the Six Tastes into your diet and then fine-tune these tastes according to your dosha or individual body type. For instance, if you're a Pitta type, your body may run a little hotter or more acidic than someone of a different dosha. You'll still want some pungent foods in your diet, but you would want to tailor your food choices to contain less heating or acidic foods.

Likewise, if you naturally have a predominance of Kapha in your constitution and are trying to lose weight, you may need to decrease the excess fat tissue associated with an imbalance in Kapha. If that's the case, you'll want to favor foods that are lighter, easier to digest, low in fat, moderate in protein, and rich in bitter, pungent, and astringent tastes.

In addition to encompassing a complete nutritional spectrum, a balance of the six tastes will help reduce food cravings—a key component of learning to eat in a way that balances your constitution.

### The Effect of the Six Tastes on the Doshas

This chart<sup>7</sup> shows the mahabhutas in each of the tastes and how the particular qualities of a taste affect each dosha. Again, you'll want to minimize the amounts of a taste that you eat if it's already present in your dosha. (This is an example of one of the basic Ayurvedic principles: like increases like.)

Taste	Element	Quality	Dosha It Increases
Sweet	Earth & Water	Cold / Damp / Heavy	Kapha
Sour	Earth & Fire	Hot / Damp / Heavy	Pitta
Salty	Earth & Water	Hot / Heavy / Moist	Pitta & Kapha
Bitter	Air & Space (Ether)	Cold / Dry / Light	Vata
Pungent	Fire & Air	Hot / Dry / Light	Pitta & Vata
Astringent	Air & Space (Ether)	Cold / Dry / Light	Vata

Below is a quick look at the tastes that are most recommended for each dosha and those that can actually aggravate a dosha if you eat too much of them.<sup>8</sup> Remember that no matter what your doshic makeup, you will want to consume all six tastes in your diet, but you should favor tastes that balance the primary dosha you're working to reduce.

Dosha	Best Tastes	Most Aggravating Tastes
VATA	Salty, Sweet, Sour	Bitter, Astringent, Pungent
PITTA	Sweet, Bitter, Astringent	Pungent, Sour, Salty
KAPHA	Bitter, Pungent, Astringent	Sweet, Salty, Sour

### The 15 Superfoods

The National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control coined the term “superfoods” for foods and spices that help prevent disease because they contain phytonutrients, vitamins, minerals, naturally occurring antioxidants, and fiber (except for meat, dairy, and sweeteners). In addition, superfoods are all natural, unprocessed, free of additives and preservatives, and readily absorbable by the body.

Modern science is now confirming wisdom that Ayurveda has taught for millennia: that foods have the power to heal. In fact, superfoods have the following beneficial effects on the body:

- Antioxidant/anti-aging
- Anti-inflammatory
- Cancer-preventing
- Immuno-modulating
- Hormone-balancing
- Cholesterol-lowering
- Blood-pressure regulating
- Adaptogenic

In Ayurveda, we call these nutritional superstars “full of prana” because they are vital to our health. Choose organic and non-genetically-modified (GMO) versions of the following 15 superfoods, and eat them daily and when they’re in season:

1. **Whole grains:** quinoa, amaranth, brown rice, oats, barley
2. **Mixed beans and legumes:** mung beans, black beans, kidney beans
3. **Oils** (raw and cold-pressed): sesame oil, coconut oil, extra-virgin olive oil, ghee (clarified butter)
4. **Dark leafy greens:** spinach, leeks, kale, cilantro, collard greens
5. **Cruciferous vegetables** (contain cancer-preventing compounds): broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage
6. **Lean meats:** fish, salmon, turkey
7. **Root veggies:** carrots, sweet potato
8. **Colorful fruits:** mango, kiwi, cantaloupe, dark grapes, papaya, orange, pomegranate, apple, avocado
9. **Colorful veggies:** red and orange peppers, tomatoes, green chilies, zucchini, squash, bok choy, artichoke
10. **Spices:** turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, black pepper, cumin
11. **Nuts** (good brain foods): almonds, walnuts, pecans, brazil nuts, pine nuts
12. **Dairy:** lowfat milk, lowfat yogurt, ghee
13. **Mixed berries** (organic only): blueberries, blackberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries
14. **Seeds:** flaxseeds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds
15. **Sweeteners:** honey, maple syrup, jaggery (solidified raw sugarcane juice), Sucanat (unrefined sugar cane)



## Spices: Your Kitchen Pharmacy

Using certain spices at every meal can help raise agni, therefore leading to general good health. One reason Indian spices are so distinctive and colorful is that they stimulate the senses—especially smell and taste—which aid digestion and balance your mind and body.

In addition, spices themselves have medicinal properties. For instance, the turmeric in a curry dish is rich in antioxidants and is good for liver health. A dash of cinnamon on your oatmeal helps fight inflammation and improves circulation. A sprinkle of cardamom on your chai can help relieve gas, bloating, and indigestion. And the ginger in your stir-fry possesses qualities that reduce arthritis and may even help prevent cancer.

The lists below<sup>9</sup> are by no means exhaustive, but they represent some of the best spices for boosting the healthfulness of meals. Most spices are pretty potent, so you need only small amounts.

### Best Spices to Balance Each Dosha



#### VATA

Cardamom  
Cumin  
Ginger  
Cinnamon  
Pink (Himalayan) salt  
Cloves  
Mustard seed  
Black pepper



#### PITTA

Cinnamon  
Coriander  
Cardamom  
Fennel  
Turmeric  
Ginger  
(fresh, not dried)



#### KAPHA

Ginger  
Chilies  
Black pepper  
Cumin  
Turmeric  
Cinnamon

## 10 Tips for Eating Mindfully

Eating with greater awareness is another primary Ayurvedic dietary guideline. Rather than eating certain foods out of habit or to fulfill cravings, put greater time and attention into the foods you choose. Take the time to savor the food as you're eating it. Mindful eating can be particularly helpful for managing weight.

1. Sit down to enjoy your meal and foster better digestion. Eat at a moderate speed (no gobbling) and focus on the food, not the TV or other distractions.
2. Favor warm or room-temperature liquids over cold, carbonated beverages.
3. Eat until you're about two-thirds full rather than completely satiated to avoid overeating.
4. Don't eat meals late at night.
5. Chew your food thoroughly: 32 times per mouthful.
6. Choose healthy snacks.
7. Take a moment to give thanks for the food you're consuming.
8. Avoid eating frozen, leftover, packaged, or microwaved foods.
9. Incorporate seasonal foods into your diet.
10. If you don't currently eat organic foods, begin by buying at least one organic item per week.<sup>10</sup>

# Daily and Seasonal Routines: The Science of Chronobiology

**Living in harmony with the rhythms of nature—day and night, sun and snow, heat and wind and dampness—is crucial to life balance.**

Taking care of yourself and finding life balance is just as important to good health as eating right, so it's not surprising that good life habits—such as personal hygiene, meal times, proper elimination, and sleep—are key Ayurvedic practices.

Living in harmony with the rhythms of nature—day and night, sun and snow, heat and wind and dampness—is crucial to that life balance. Because we humans are part of nature, we must also balance the external world—the ecosystems and seasonal changes of our environment—with our specific prakriti, the doshic makeup that makes us unique.

There are five unique cycles in nature we can learn to harmonize ourselves with. The Circadian Rhythm is the 24-hour cycle of night and day to which many of our bodily processes are coordinated with. In addition to the Circadian Rhythm created from the Earth spinning on its axis, there is the 12-month Seasonal Rhythm marked by the Earth's journey around the sun. The monthly cycle of the moon orbiting the Earth creates the 28-day Lunar Rhythm. The moon also influences the 12-hour Tidal Rhythms. Finally, in addition to all of these Earthly-based rhythms, there is a much larger process at work, the Celestial Rhythm, in which we are influenced by the motion of planets within our solar system.

Of these five rhythms, the daily Circadian Rhythm is perhaps most useful to look at when first learning about Ayurveda. Ayurveda associates each dosha with specific times of the day, prescribing activities such as eating and sleeping with certain hours. Therefore, it's ideal to follow a regular daily routine for

Ayurveda associates each dosha with specific times of the day, prescribing activities such as eating and sleeping with certain hours.

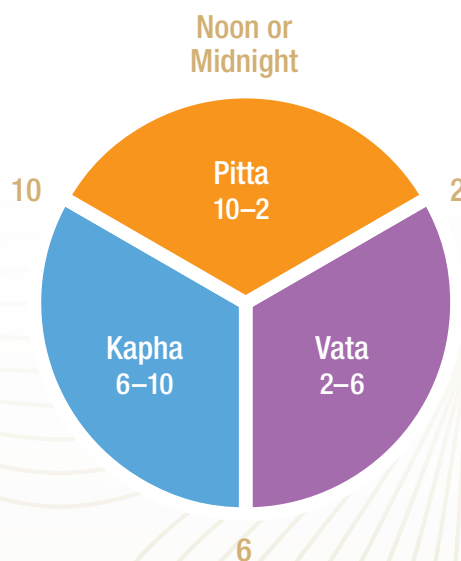
good physical, mental, and emotional health. Habits like staying up too late, eating at odd hours, and skimping on sleep because we're too busy can wreak havoc on our health.

**Vata:** Dawn and dusk are Vata times. At sunrise, we awaken and start moving; from mid-afternoon to dusk, we usually feel light and active as well. (2–6 a.m., 2–6 p.m.)

**Pitta:** Fiery Pitta times are midday and midnight: these are the best times for digestion of food. (10 a.m.–2 p.m., 10 p.m.–2 a.m.)

**Kapha:** The times for Kapha are early morning and evening. From the time we rise until about 10 a.m., we feel a bit sluggish and tired. The same is generally true from sundown until 10 p.m. when our energy decreases as we prepare for sleep.<sup>11</sup>

According to Ayurveda, each of our organs has a specific time during which its function is optimal. Morning is lung time; midday (when we're hungry) is stomach time; afternoon is liver time; late afternoon is when the colon and kidneys operate best.





## 10 Tips for an Ideal Daily Routine

Ayurveda prescribes a daily routine that's in tune with nature, called a *dinacharya*. It's the way a person would ideally spend the day for good health and well-being. Here's an outline of a *dinacharya*:

### 1. Wake up early.

- Rise at sunrise, or even before, to appreciate the peace and quiet of morning.
- Start the day by consciously feeling gratitude, saying a prayer, or meditating.

### 2. Practice daily hygiene.

- Brush your teeth and scrape your tongue using a stainless-steel scraper or spoon. If your tongue's coating is thick and white, that's a sign of too much ama in the system.
- Wash your face and eyes with cool water.
- Rinse your mouth with sesame oil.
- Put sesame-oil nose drops into both nostrils to clean the sinuses and lubricate the nasal passages—especially during winter.
- Drink a cup of warm water with lemon juice.
- Sit on the toilet at the same time every day and have a bowel movement. Proper and regular elimination is vital.
- Do a full-body self-massage with warm oil, which rejuvenates the skin, stimulates circulation, calms the nervous system, and lubricates joints. This can take as little as 15 minutes.
- Shower or bathe.

3. **Exercise or do yoga. Physical activity is recommended in the morning.**
4. **Eat breakfast between 7:00 and 7:30 am**
  - This should be a light meal.
  - Eat only when you feel hungry.
5. **Go to work or school. Perform your tasks throughout the day with awareness and compassion.**
6. **Eat lunch between 11 am and 1 pm**
  - Eat only when you feel very hungry.
  - This should be the largest meal of the day because your agni is strongest around noon.
  - Sit quietly for 5 minutes after eating. Then walk for 5 to 15 minutes to aid digestion.
7. **End the day's work with a walk in nature. Mild exercise and quiet time when you can reconnect with the natural environment will relax and rejuvenate you.**
8. **Eat dinner between 6 and 7 pm**
  - Have a light to moderate meal.
  - Sit quietly for 5 minutes after eating. Then walk for 5 to 15 minutes to aid digestion.
  - Avoid eating within two hours of bedtime to assure that your food is digested before sleep.
9. **Before-bed routine.**
  - Do some spiritual reading.
  - Drink warm milk to induce sleep.
  - Meditate for a few minutes.

**10. Go to sleep at the same time (around 10:30 pm) each night.<sup>12</sup>**

- Ayurveda describes sleep as the “diet of the mind” because it rejuvenates both the mind and body.
- To obtain the most restful sleep, try to retire around 10 to 10:30 pm, go to bed at the same time each night, and eat your dinner at least two hours before bedtime.
- Get at least seven hours of sleep per night. Studies show that anything less makes it more difficult for the body to detoxify and release body fat.
- We’re also likely to overeat when we’re tired, and fatigue can cause sugar and caffeine cravings.

### **Maintaining Balance as the Seasons Change**

The seasons, like the times of the day, are associated with the three doshas. Seasonal changes, including weather and temperature, affect our level of balance and require us to make adjustments to what we eat and how we exercise.

If needed, use balancing techniques (in the chart on the next page) to counter the effects of seasonal influences, especially during the weeks of transition between seasons. In general:

- Simplify your diet.
- Use occasional fasting as a tool because it allows the body to rest and readjust to changes in weather and patterns of eating.
- Cultivate peace and clarity by releasing negative emotions.
- Eat fresh, local produce year round. Avoid foods that are not in season whenever possible.



**VATA SEASON**  
Late Autumn  
through Winter

Favor warm food & drink.

Food should be well-cooked, easy to digest, and eaten with warm liquids.

Favor sweet, sour, and salty tastes.

Reduce pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes.

Reduce dry or raw foods.

Exercise lightly.

Dress to stay warm.



**PITTA SEASON**  
Midsummer  
through Early Autumn

Favor cool food & drink.

Favor sweet, bitter, astringent tastes.

Reduce sour, salty, and pungent tastes.

Avoid overheating when exercising (swim, walk at night).



**KAPHA SEASON**  
Late Winter, Spring  
& Early Summer

Favor a lighter diet.

Reduce dairy products.

Eat more pungent, bitter, astringent tastes.

Reduce sweet, sour, salty tastes.

Get plenty of exercise.

Dress to stay warm.

## 10 Tips for Positive Lifestyle Changes

1. Eat foods that are fresh, alive, and vibrant, such as fruits and vegetables, complex grains, nuts, seeds, sprouts, and clean water.
2. Eat small portions and chew your food well.
3. Drink plenty of water, about one ounce per two pounds of body weight each day.
4. Meditate daily for 20 minutes or engage in some form of regular self-reflection.
5. Undertake 30 minutes of brisk physical exercise daily.
6. Practice going to bed early and waking up with the sun.
7. Minimize compulsive habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs or tobacco.
8. Attempt to do something good daily.
9. Treat your body like a temple, not a trash can.
10. Do cleanses twice a year (spring and fall).



# Ayurvedic Mind-Body Practices

Feelings that aren't fully experienced or processed can accumulate as emotional toxins. Allow time in your life for self-reflection, practicing gratitude, and meditation.

Part of cultivating ojas is allowing time in your life for self-reflection, practicing gratitude, and meditation. Earlier we talked about ama, the build-up of undigested or poorly absorbed/eliminated food in the physical body. In the emotional realm, ama is the result of “undigested” emotions that lead to unpleasant, stagnant thoughts. Feelings that aren't fully experienced or processed can accumulate as emotional toxins. They often manifest as fatigue, irritability, lack of enthusiasm, depression, emotional reactivity, and cynicism.

## Self-Reflection and Journaling

There are a number of tools you can use for creating mind/body wellness. One is keeping a journal, which can give you a forum for self-reflection and intention setting. When you keep a journal, you're free to simply record your thoughts or work through a problem by writing about it.

Attaining lasting happiness requires that we enjoy the journey on our way toward a destination we deem valuable. Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain, nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain. Happiness is the experience of climbing *toward* the peak. Often writing about the struggles and joys we encounter in our daily life gives us new perspective on our path through life.

In a journal, you can also record your progress toward physical wellness or notice how you feel. This can be especially helpful when you're focusing on creating and maintaining balance in your prakriti.

There are no hard rules for your journal, but here are suggestions for basic content to include:

- What did you eat today (a general list rather than an overly detailed list)? Did your diet consist of all six tastes? Do you have any dietary goals for the next few days (cooking more or eating more “superfoods”)?
- How are you feeling in your body today? Include both positive and negative feelings, such as “lighter,” “heavier,” “less toxic,” “less pain,” “unmotivated,” “stuck,” etc.
- How are you feeling in your mind and emotions today? Include things related to relationships, work, and personal life.
- Write an affirmation for your life.
- Write goals for health or achieving freedom in some aspect of your life.
- Give thanks for the blessings in your life in order to promote positive energy in your body and mind. Create gratitude statements for all areas of your life: physical, relational, spiritual, financial.

### Seven Steps to Emotional Healing

1. Take responsibility for what you are feeling.
2. Identify the emotion.
3. Witness the feeling in your body.
4. Express the emotion in private to yourself.
5. Release the emotion through a ritual.
6. Share the emotion with a good listener.
7. Celebrate your emotional freedom!

## Meditation Practices

Meditation is one of the easiest ways to give your mind a break from an endless stream of thoughts and sensory impressions. The practice of meditation is found around the globe and is not bound to any one correct method. In fact, any person of any culture or faith can meditate.

Modern scientific research has shown regular meditation practices increase positive emotions and immunity, and have the ability to reduce anxiety, blood pressure, cholesterol, and muscle tension.

### Health Benefits of Meditation

- Slows breathing, heart rate
- Helps lower blood pressure
- Minimizes muscle tension and headaches
- Reduces anxiety attacks
- Elevates mood
- Allows the body and mind to relax
- Mitigates symptoms of chronic conditions like allergies and arthritis
- Speeds post-operative healing
- Reduces premenstrual symptoms
- Boosts the immune system

Early morning and early evening are particularly good times to meditate. We recommend spending a few minutes each day in meditation and focusing on breathing.

There are a number of techniques that people use to achieve a meditative state: Some use relaxed concentration; others allow a free flow of thoughts and observations.

- **Sitting Meditation:** Sitting on a floor mat or pillow with the legs folded into a lotus position. (A variant is sitting upright in a chair.)
- **Walking Meditation:** Walking mindfully while remaining aware of your surroundings.
- **Mantra Meditation:** Specific sounds or words are repeated to achieve a meditative state.
- **Gazing Meditation:** A steady gaze is placed onto an object.



# Exercise According to Your Dosha

Our bodies are designed to move and breathe and circulate our prana, or vital life energy. More than 5,000 years ago, the master Ayurvedic physician Charaka wrote: “From physical exercise, one gets lightness, a capacity for work, firmness, tolerance of difficulties, elimination of impurities, and stimulation of digestion.”

Getting regular exercise is the most powerful thing you can do to reverse the aging process. As Drs. William Evans and Irwin Rosenberg of Tufts University have documented, exercise alone improves muscle mass, bone density, strength, aerobic capacity, and many other key biomarkers of aging.

Physical activity figures importantly into the Ayurvedic concept of health just as it does in Western medicine. Each of the three types of exercise—flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular—are important, but Ayurveda takes them a step further and recommends various combinations of these exercises to achieve or maintain balance in the doshas.

To keep your body in peak condition for as long as possible, you need to exercise it regularly—without pounding your muscles and joints or turning red in the face. In the Ayurvedic view, exercise is meant to leave you feeling invigorated, happy, and ready for the day’s activities—not exhausted. The secret is to find physical activities that you like and ones that are suited to your doshas or unique constitutional type. Here are a few guidelines for each dosha.



## Vata Exercise Guidelines

Naturally enthusiastic, Vata types have bursts of energy but tend to tire quickly. If they are out of balance, Vatas are prone to pushing themselves too hard. Feeling dizzy, exhausted, or on the verge of cramping are all signs of Vata imbalance.

Those who are predominantly Vata benefit from grounding, slower-paced exercises such as tai chi, yoga, walking, short hikes, light bicycling, and dance because these pacify Vata. These activities develop much-needed strength, balance, and agility—as long as the person exercising doesn't overdo it.

In winter, indoor exercise is recommended for Vata people because they're averse to cold and don't have enough fat and muscle to protect themselves from the elements.



## Pitta Exercise Guidelines

Pitta types have a strong drive and tend to enjoy challenging sports such as tennis, basketball, jogging, long-distance bicycling, skiing, and nearly any outdoor activity. These body types need to avoid overheating and being overly competitive.

Someone who is predominantly Pitta may especially like winter sports and can handle cold weather better than Kaphas and Vatas. Swimming is a great exercise for Pittas because water cools excess heat in the body and relieves tension.



## Kapha Exercise Guidelines

Kapha types have great physical strength and stamina, and they tend to enjoy vigorous and longer workouts such as running, aerobics, dance, rowing, soccer, active yoga, and weight training. In general, the Kapha motto should be “get the blood flowing,” and any aerobic activity that works up a light to moderate sweat is powerful for clearing Kapha congestion and sluggishness.

A Kapha person's biggest challenge may be finding the motivation to exercise, especially if they haven't been moving much for a while. A brisk, half-hour walk can break the inertia. Kapha-balancing exercise is helpful for weight loss because it stimulates the body's metabolism and helps burn away unwanted fat and toxins.

### Yoga for Every Body

The Sanskrit word *yoga* means “union”—union of environment, the senses, body, mind, and soul. Yoga is a wonderful form of exercise for everyone, and there are many different types and styles from which to choose. Look for a local class or go online to find a style that suits you. Hatha yoga benefits all the doshic types. “Hot” yoga (such as Bikram) may aggravate Pitta types and may be slightly ungrounding for Vata people, but Kapha types often do well with this style—particularly while trying to lose weight. Kaphas also do well in advanced or more “athletic” yoga practices that demand strength and stamina.

Many yoga *asanas*, or physical postures, are suitable for all dosha types, and Sun Salutation (*Surya Namaskara*) is a complete mind/body/spirit exercise for all. That said, the following chart<sup>13</sup> highlights some asanas that are especially good for balancing each dosha.

## Yoga Poses for Each Dosha



VATA



PITTA



KAPHA

Sun Salutation (See next page)	Sun Salutation	Sun Salutation
 Garland Pose (Malasana)	 Cat/Cow Pose (Marjaryasana/Bitilasana)	 Warrior Pose (Virabhadrasana)
 Thunderbolt Pose (Vajrasana)	 Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)	 Triangle Pose (Trikonasana)
 Child's Pose (Balasana)	 Child's Pose (Balasana)	 Boat Pose (Navasana)
 Upward Hands Pose (Urdvha Hastasana)	 Seated Spinal Twist Pose (Ardha Matsyendrasana)	 Cobra Pose (Bhujangasana)
 Head-to-Knee Forward Bend (Janu Sirsasana)	 Full Forward Bend Pose (Paschimottanasana)	 Open-Legs Forward-Bend (Upavistha Konasana)
 Boat Pose (Navasana)	 Perfect Sitting Pose (Siddhasana)	 Peacock Pose (Mayurasana)



Yoga for  
All Doshas



VATA



PITTA



KAPHA



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Sun Salutation series

# Panchakarma (Detoxification)

Eating, exercising, and living in harmony with your dosha are essential for maintaining good health, yet Ayurveda offers an additional method for flushing ama out of the body. When the seasons change, or if you need to address a particular health concern, you may need to cleanse and rebalance doshas that are aggravated or deficient. In Ayurveda, this detoxifying process is called panchakarma—literally “five actions” or “five treatments” in Sanskrit.

Done under the care of an Ayurvedic practitioner, panchakarma is tailored to your dosha. Depending on your particular needs, it involves oil massages, steam-sweat treatments, herbal enemas, nasal administrations of herbs and oils, and/or gentle laxatives and emetics. All of these techniques cleanse the body of ama that has been absorbed by the tissues and that could contribute to illness.

One of the most effective healing modalities in Ayurvedic medicine, panchakarma detoxifies the body, strengthens the immune system, and restores balance and well-being.

By activating the body’s organs of elimination—the sweat glands, lungs, bladder/urinary tract, stomach, intestines, colon—panchakarma rejuvenates body, mind, and spirit.

## Panchakarma Treatments

Panchakarma can usually be done over a period of three days to a week and should be done at an Ayurvedic retreat center or office—where you check in for the complete holistic immersion—or at the office of an Ayurvedic practitioner near your home—where you can go daily for treatments. Either way, you should clear or lighten your schedule so that you can focus on supporting your body and mind in letting go of what it doesn't need—including old patterns, beliefs, and emotions.

Panchakarma therapy begins with a private consultation with a qualified Ayurvedic physician, who determines your prakriti and prescribes the therapies best suited to your imbalances and health concerns (if any). Trained therapists administer the procedures in a specific sequence. Panchakarma treatments are comfortable and deeply soothing, although some people experience periods of discomfort associated with toxin release.

Here's a list of some of the most common panchakarma treatments:<sup>14</sup>

*Abyanga:* A relaxing, herbal-oil massage that removes impurities by stimulating arterial and lymphatic circulation.

*Shirodhara:* A stream of warm, herb-infused oil is poured over the forehead to create a profoundly calming effect on mind, body, and spirit.

*Garshana:* A dry, lymphatic skin brushing—done with either wool or a silk glove—enhances circulation and cleanses the skin.

*Swedana:* This therapeutic steam bath is done by keeping the patient's head and heart cool while the rest of the body is heated. Sweating removes mental, emotional, and physical toxins lodged deep in the tissues.

*Udvaartana:* An exfoliating herbal paste is applied to the skin and finished with a lymphatic massage. The result is radiant skin and release of stagnant lymphatic toxins.

*Basti:* An herbal enema that flushes toxins out of the colon.

*Nasya:* An herbal preparation and/or oil drops are inhaled through the nose; the result is that the sinuses are cleared of excessive mucus.

*Five Senses Therapy:* This treatment combines the therapeutic effects of all five senses for holistic body and spirit harmonizing. (Each of the five senses is associated with one of the five mahabhutas.)

1. **Sound:** Vedic hymns and mantras that correlate to each imbalance are played.
2. **Touch:** Therapeutic touch enlivens vital points on the body called *marma*.
3. **Taste:** Flavors from herbal medicines are helpful to dosha balance.
4. **Sight:** Selected Ayurvedic colors fill the room.
5. **Smell:** Individualized aromatherapy is used.



# Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

Sanskrit is the world's most ancient language, and possibly the mother of the Indo-European languages. The word *Sanskrit* means “created to perfection” and is considered the language of the gods. All the Vedic scriptures were written in Sanskrit.

The 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet correlate with the chakras and the pranic body. Scientific research reveals that Sanskrit mantras activate the brain's neurons and restructure the neural pathways between the brain's two hemispheres, which may lead to what we might define as “a higher state of consciousness.”<sup>15</sup>

## A

**aap:** water (the Water *mahabhuta*).

**abyanga:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. This relaxing, herbal-oil massage removes impurities by stimulating arterial and lymphatic circulation.

**agni:** the “digestive fire” that stimulates the metabolic breakdown of the foods we eat. Agni promotes healthy skin, appetite, energy, balance, a clear mind, strong digestion, and a healthy immune system.

**akash:** space (the Space *mahabhuta*).

**ama:** undigested food residue that lodges within the tissues and organs when digestion is poor. This foul-smelling, sticky substance causes congestion or blockages that can be toxic to the body and is implicated in both physical and mental disorders.

**asana:** a physical pose in yoga that aligns the body for greater flexibility and strength and that maximizes the flow of *prana*.

**asthi** (bone/cartilage): one of the seven *dhatu*s. These solid structures give our bodies form.

**Ayurveda:** this 5,000-year-old consciousness-based system of healing comes from India and is based on the tenet that health is the state of vibrant balance in which all the layers of one's life are integrated. In Sanskrit, *Ayus* means "life," and *Veda* means "science or knowledge." In this mind/body/spirit approach, the individual is responsible for his or her own health. Ayurveda is comprehensive and considers all aspects of life, including nutrition, natural medicines, exercise, rest, and the emotions. Therapies are customized to suit the individual instead of standardized for the imaginary "average person."

## B

**basti:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. Basti is an herbal enema that flushes toxins out of the colon.

## D

**dhatu**s: the tissues that comprise the physical structure of our bodies. There are seven tissues that are responsible for anatomical function and structure: plasma, blood, muscles, fat, bone/cartilage, bone marrow, and reproductive fluid/tissue.

**dinacharya:** the ideal daily routine for staying healthy and attuned with nature's circadian rhythms.

**dosha:** a functional principle that determines a person's constitutional type according to physiological and psychological attributes. The three doshas are *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*.

## G

**garshana:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. A dry, lymphatic skin brushing—done with either wool or a silk glove—that enhances circulation and cleanses the skin.

**gunas:** ten pairs of opposite qualities expressed as dichotomies: heavy/light, cold/hot, oily/dry, dull/sharp, stable/mobile, soft/hard, smooth/rough, dense/liquid, gross/subtle, cloudy/clear.

## K

**Kapha:** one of the three *doshas*. Kapha is comprised of a combination of Water and Earth *mahabhutas* (elements).

## M

**mahabhuta:** the five fundamental elements or building blocks of nature. The five mahabhutas are Space (*akash*), Air (*vayu*), Fire (*tejas*), Water (*aap*), and Earth (*prithvi*).

**majja** (bone marrow): one of the seven *dhatus*. The semi-solid marrow adds life by filling the bone.

**mala:** waste from digestion. There are three forms of mala: urine, feces, and sweat.

**mamsa** (muscles): one of the seven *dhatus*. The muscles cover the bones and allow the body to move and maintain physical strength.

**mantra:** a sacred word or phrase used to raise the level of spiritual awareness.

**marma:** an energy point on the skin. Touching or massaging marma points is one aspect of *panchakarma*.

**meda (fat):** one of the seven *dhatus*. The body needs fat for insulation and lubrication for the organs.

## N

**nasya:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. An herbal preparation and/or oil drops are inhaled through the nose. The result is that the sinuses are cleared of excessive mucus.

## O

**ojas:** the state of being in a perfect balance of healthy mind, body, and spirit. Ojas results when the digestive fire, *agni*, is working and when *malas* (wastes) are eliminated.

## P

**pancha:** the number five.

**panchakarma:** a purifying, detoxifying Ayurvedic treatment program that reduces or eliminates *ama* that has built up in the body's tissues, undigested waste products, and obstructions.

**panchamahabhutas:** The five elements. See *mahabhutas*.

**Pitta:** one of the three *doshas*. Pitta is comprised of a combination of Fire and Water *mahabhutas* (elements).

**prakriti:** a person's individual constitution which has been more or less consistent for life. The prakriti consists of either *Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha*—or some combination of the three *doshas*.



**prana:** vital life energy that circulates throughout the body and throughout the universe.

**prithvi:** earth (the Earth *mahabhuta*).

## R

**rakta** (blood): one of the seven *dhatu*s. Blood oxygenates the body and is essential to life.

**rasa** (plasma): one of the seven *dhatu*s. Rasa literally means “sap” or “juice.” When we refer to the *dhatu*, rasa means plasma, which carries nutrients from digested food to the organs.

## S

**shirodhara:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. A stream of warm, herb-infused oil is poured over the forehead to create a profoundly calming effect on mind, body, and spirit.

**shukra** (reproductive fluid or tissue): one of the seven *dhatu*s. Capable of creating life, the male and female tissues are the essence of all the bodily tissues.

**subdoshas:** Each of the three *doshas* is divided into five subdoshas, which show various, specific traits within its *dosha*.

**swedana:** one of the *panchakarma* treatments. This therapeutic steam bath is done by keeping the patient’s head and heart cool while the rest of the body is heated. Sweating removes mental, emotional, and physical toxins lodged deep in the tissues.

## T

**tejas:** fire (the Fire *mahabhuta*).

**tridoshic:** having a more-or-less equal amount of all three *doshas* (*Vata-Pitta-Kapha*).

## U

**udvartana:** one of the panchakarma treatments. An exfoliating herbal paste is applied to the skin and finished with a lymphatic massage. The result is radiant skin and release of stagnant lymphatic toxins.

## V

**Vata:** one of the three *doshas*. Vata is comprised of a combination of Space and Air *mahabhutas* (elements).

**vayu:** air (the Air *mahabhuta*).

**vikriti:** a dosha imbalance, one that diverges from the constitution that was determined at your conception (*prakriti*).

## Y

**yoga:** means “union” and refers to the union of the lower and higher selves. The physical poses of yoga (*asanas*) are designed to create flexibility and strength of body and mind.

## Notes

1. Source information for the attributes of the five mahabhutas comes from Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 8–10.
2. Information about the subdoshas comes from Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health: The Complete Mind/Body Guide* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 80–86, and from Manisha Kshirsagar and Cristina R. Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press, 2011), 6–8.
3. Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, 14.
4. The guna chart was created with help from Kshirsagar and Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook*, 10.
5. Kshirsagar and Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook*, 14.
6. The source information for the Six Tastes table comes from the *7-Week Yoga for Weight Loss Workbook* (PowerPoint presentation, Dosha Guru, 2013) and from *The Yoga for Weight Loss Workbook* (Dosha Guru, 2013), 11.
7. The Six Tastes chart is reprinted courtesy of the *7-Week Yoga for Weight Loss Workbook* (PowerPoint presentation, Dosha Guru, 2013).
8. The “Best Tastes” information is reprinted courtesy of *NutriiVeda™ Program: Mindful Body Transformation* (©Zrii), 13.

9. Information on the spices comes from the *7-Week Yoga for Weight Loss Workbook* (PowerPoint presentation, Dosha Guru, 2013).
10. Information about eating with awareness is from *NutriiVeda™ Program: Mindful Body Transformation*, 13.
11. Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, 57.
12. Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, 51–53.
13. Source information for the yoga-by-dosha chart comes from Kshirsagar and Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook*, 65, and *7-Week Yoga for Weight Loss Workbook* (PowerPoint presentation, Dosha Guru, 2013).
14. For more on panchakarma, see Kshirsagar and Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook*, 42–45.
15. Sanskrit historical details were sourced from Kshirsagar and Magno, *Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook*, 74.