

## HEALTH | AYURVEDA &amp; NATURAL REMEDIES

## Ayurvedic Wisdom to Address Healing on Every Level



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5 min.

Ayurveda has its source in ancient Vedic literature. It is a Sanskrit word, derived from two roots: *ayur*, which means life, and *veda*, knowledge. Science, according to the ancients, is knowledge arranged systematically and logically, and in the course of time ayurveda became known as the science of life—a science so vast that it encompasses our entire being: body, mind, and spirit.

## HOW WE COME TO BE

Ayurvedic literature is based on the Sankhya philosophy, which tells us that every human being is a creation of the cosmos—pure consciousness—in the form of male energy, called *purusha*, and female energy, *prakriti*. Purusha is choiceless, passive awareness; prakriti is choiceful, active consciousness. Purusha does not take part in creation; prakriti is the divine creative will. Prakriti creates all forms in the universe while purusha witnesses that creation.

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Prakriti is primordial physical energy containing the three attributes, or *gunas*, found in all nature (the evolving cosmos). The gunas are *sattva* (essence), *rajas* (movement), and *tamas* (inertia). These three are the foundation for all existence. They are contained in balance in prakriti, but when this balance is disturbed the gunas begin to interact, thus engendering the evolution of the universe.

The first manifestation from prakriti is Cosmic Intellect. From *mahad*, ego (*ahamkar*) is formed. Ego then manifests into the five senses (*tanmatras*) and the five motor

organs, with the help of sattva, thus creating the organic universe. The same ego further manifests into five basic elements (*bhutas*) with the help of tamas, to create the inorganic universe. Rajas is the active vital life force in the body which moves both the organic and inorganic universes to sattva and tamas, respectively. So sattva and tamas are inactive, potential energies which need the active, kinetic force of rajas in order to manifest.

## THE PLAY OF PERSONALITY

There is constant interplay between sattva, rajas, and tamas in every individual consciousness, and the relative predominance of one or the other is responsible for differences in psychological and moral dispositions. Sattvic qualities, for instance, manifest as consciousness, purity, and clarity of perception, which in turn make for goodness and happiness. People in whom sattvic qualities predominate are religious, loving, compassionate, and pure-minded. Following truth and righteousness, they have good manners, behavior, and conduct. They do not get easily upset or angry. Although they work hard mentally, they do not get mental fatigue. They are fresh, alert, aware, and full of luster, wisdom, joy, and happiness.

Movement and energy are due to rajas, and this leads to a life of sensual enjoyment, pleasure and pain, effort and restlessness. The people in whom rajasic qualities predominate are egoistic, ambitious, aggressive, proud, and competitive, and have a tendency to control others. They like power, prestige, and position, and are perfectionists. They are hard-working people, but lack direction. They are ungrounded, active, and restless. Emotionally, they are angry, jealous, and ambitious, but success does not bring them joy. They are not true to their inner consciousness. Their activities are self-centered and egotistical.

Tamas is characterized by darkness, inertia, heaviness, and materialistic attitudes. People in whom tamasic qualities predominate are less intelligent than others. They have a tendency toward depression and laziness and sleep too much. Mental work tires them easily. They like jobs with little responsibility; they love to eat, drink, sleep, and have sex. They are greedy, possessive, attached, and irritable, and do not care for others. It is difficult for them to focus their minds during meditation.

## THE PLAY OF THE DOSHAS

In addition to the mental qualities, there are three biological humors (*doshas*)—*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*—that govern all psychological and physiopathological changes in the body; they are present in every organ and cell tissue. Ether and air together constitute *vata*; fire and water, *pitta*; water and earth, *kapha*.

Even though *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* are present in everyone, they manifest in different combinations in each individual. For instance, there are basically seven body types: mono-types (when either *vata*, *pitta*, or *kapha* are predominant); dual types (*vata-pitta*, *pitta-kapha*, or *kapha-vata*); and equal types (when *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* are present in equal proportions). The balance of the *doshas* is also affected by the predominance of *sattva*, *rajas*, or *tamas* in each individual constitution.

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*Vata* is light, mobile, active, clear, astringent, and dispersing. It follows that *vata* people will have dry hair, dry skin, a dry colon, and a tendency toward constipation. Because of *vata*'s light quality, they will have a light body and frame and will be thin and underweight. The cold quality manifests as cold hands, cold feet, and poor circulation. Because *vata* is mobile, *vata* types are very active.

*Pitta* has hot, sharp, light, liquid, sour, oily, and spreading qualities, and if there is excess *pitta* these will manifest. *Pitta* is hot, and *pitta* people will have a strong appetite and a warm skin. *Pitta* is also sharp; the *pitta* person has a sharp nose, teeth, eyes, and mind. They use sharp words. They have a very sharp memory. Because of the oily quality, they have soft, warm, oily skin, straight oily hair, and their feces are oily and liquid. *Pitta* is light, and because of this *pitta* people have a moderate body frame and do not like bright light.

*Kapha* is heavy, slow, cool, oily, liquid, dense, thick, static, and cloudy. Those with a preponderance of this *dosha* will have heavy bones, muscle, and fat, and they will have a tendency to put on weight. They have slow metabolism and digestion, cool, clammy skin, thick, wavy hair, and big, beautiful eyes. Because of the slow quality, *kapha* people walk and talk slowly. They don't like jogging and jumping, but love to sit and do nothing.

Individual constitution (*prakriti*) is determined at the time of conception by the different permutations and combinations of *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. Every human being is a unique entity. The male seed (sperm) and female egg (ovum) carry within them the constitution of the parents, but at the time of conjugation the dominant factor in the sperm can either neutralize weaker or exaggerate similar attributes of the ovum. For example, a sperm of strong *vata* constitution can inhibit some of the characteristics of *kapha* in the ovum. The dry, light, rough, mobile qualities of *vata* will suppress the oily, heavy, smooth, and stable qualities of *kapha*. Because *vata* and *kapha* are both cold, this quality will be exaggerated in the fetus and the baby will be sensitive to cold. The child in this case will inherit a *vata-kapha* constitution. On the other hand, if both the sperm and ovum are *vata*, the offspring will inherit a *vata* constitution.

## FALLING OUT OF BALANCE

According to *ayurveda*, health is a state of balance between the body, mind, and consciousness as well as a state of inner balance between *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. The body itself is comprised of the three humors (*doshas*); seven tissues (*dhatu*s)—plasma, blood, muscle, fat, bone, nerve, and reproductive organs; three wastes (*malas*)—feces, urine, and sweat; and the fire or energy of metabolism (*agni*). Disease is a condition of imbalance in any of these. In other words, the root cause of disease is an aggravation of *dosha*—(*vata*, *pitta*, or *kapha*)—which can arise from a wide variety of causes, and once aggravated, the *doshas* begin to accumulate at their respective sites: *vata* in the colon; *pitta* in the intestines; and *kapha* in the stomach. If the provocation continues, the accumulated *dosha* overflows its original site and spreads throughout the body, entering tissue that is already weak, and creating a lesion there. Finally, pathological changes manifest in the affected organ—or even in the entire system.

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According to *ayurveda* there are seven major causes of disease: hereditary, congenital, internal, external, seasonal, habitual, and supernatural factors. Disease can also result from misuse, overuse, and underuse of the senses (hearing, touch,

sight, taste, and smell). The disease itself can be described by the number of doshas involved, the specific tissues affected, the quality or combination of qualities that aggravated the dosha, whether the disease is primary or secondary, the strength of the aggravation, and the length of time the disease has been manifest.

There are many recognized hereditary pathologies, such as tendencies or dispositions toward a specific problem or even actual abnormalities. Congenital causes include a mother's lifestyle, diet, habits, activities, emotions, and relationships which can affect the fetus. Internal conditions such as ulcers or a damaged liver may be caused by overuse of the sense of taste (too much hot spicy food, for instance). External traumas that may affect the doshas are violent actions such as automobile accidents and gunshot wounds.

Seasonal causes of disease are usually less direct. For instance, summer is bright, light, and hot; that is the pitta season. Autumn is cold, windy, and dry; it is a vata season. Winter is cold, windy, and wet, a kapha season. Spring is both kapha and pitta. Early spring is cool and damp—kapha, and later spring is pitta. Whatever the individual constitution, the doshas involved will be aggravated in their corresponding season. For instance, vata people have a tendency toward constipation, sciatica, arthritis, and rheumatism in the autumn. Pitta people may get hives, rash, acne, biliary disorders, diarrhea, or conjunctivitis in summer. The kapha person has a tendency to colds, coughs, congestion, sneezing, and kapha types of sinus disorders in the spring.

Natural tendencies such as overeating, improper diet, and smoking can also be a problem. Supernatural causes include sunburns, lightning, and the influence of planetary bodies. Disease can also result from imbalanced emotions; deep-seated unresolved anger, fear, anxiety, grief, or sadness also affects the doshas.

## DIAGNOSING ILLNESS

Included among the many techniques for diagnosing the disease process are the arts of interpreting the pulse and tongue as well as examining the urine. There are three basic types of pulse (vata, pitta, and kapha) and each has a distinct characteristic that can be recognized in the twelve different radial pulses. Of these, six are on each side—three superficial and three deep. There is a relationship between these pulses and the internal organs, and through them the fingers can feel the strength, vitality, and physiological tone of their respective organs.

Tongue diagnosis is another ancient ayurvedic art. This technique is based upon characteristic patterns which reveal the functional status of internal organs. Because the tongue is the mirror of the viscera, it reflects many pathological conditions that can be seen by simply observing the surface of the tongue. Some of these patterns are shown in the accompanying diagrams.

A discoloration and/or sensitivity in a particular area of the tongue indicates a disorder in the organ corresponding to that area. A whitish tongue indicates a kapha derangement and mucus accumulation; a red or yellow-green tongue indicates a pitta derangement; and a black to brown coloration indicates a vata derangement. A dehydrated tongue is symptomatic of a decrease in the plasma (*rasa dhatu*), while a pale tongue indicates a decrease in the red blood cells (*rakta dhatu*).

Ayurvedic physicians also do urine examinations in order to understand the doshic imbalance in the body. Body fluids such as blood (*rakta*) and lymph (*rasa*) serve to carry wastes (malas) away from the tissues that produce them. The urinary system removes water (*kleda*), salt (*kshar*), and nitrogenous wastes (*dhatu malas*) from the body. It also helps to maintain the normal concentration of water (*apa dhatu*) and electrolytes within the body fluids and to regulate their volume. In this way, urine plays a part in maintaining the balance between vata, pitta, and kapha.

For a clinical examination of urine, take a clean vessel and collect the early morning urine in midstream. Observe the color. If it is blackish-brown, a vata disorder is indicated; if the color is dark yellow, a pitta disorder. When there is constipation, or if the body has not taken in much water, the urine will also be

dark yellow. If the urine is cloudy, there is a kapha disorder. Red urine indicates a blood (*rakta*) disorder.

Normal urine has the typical uremic smell; a foul odor indicates toxins (ama dosha) in the system. Acidic urine, which creates a burning sensation, indicates excess pitta. A sweet smell to the urine indicates a diabetic condition, and the subject may experience goose bumps on the surface of the skin while passing it. Gravel in the urine indicates stones in the urinary tract.

## RECREATING BALANCE

To understand individuality is the foundation of healing, and therefore, according to ayurveda, we must understand the exact quality, nature, and structure of disease in

order to restore health. The body has its own intelligence, which creates balance in the system, and ayurveda helps that process. All ayurvedic treatment attempts to establish a balance between vata, pitta, and kapha. This is done in one of two ways: elimination of toxins, and neutralization of toxins; and both methods are effective on the emotional as well as the physical levels.

## RELEASING EMOTIONS

Anger, fear, anxiety, nervousness, jealousy, possessiveness, and greed are common human emotions. Our culture tends to treat them as negative, however, so most people learn in childhood not to express them. As a result, we begin to repress the natural expressions of these feelings at an early age. Ayurveda teaches us that these emotions must be released, for if repressed, they will cause imbalances which will result in disease-causing toxins.

The ayurvedic technique for dealing with negativity is observation and release. For example, when anger arises, be completely aware of it; watch the feeling as it unfolds from beginning to end. From this observation learn about the nature of the anger, and then let it go. Release it. All emotions may be dealt with in this way.

Fear is associated with vata; anger with pitta; and greed, envy, and possessiveness with kapha. If fear is repressed, the kidneys will be disturbed; anger, the liver; greed and possessiveness, the heart and spleen.

## CLEANSING

Toxins are also produced when aggravated dosha affects the biological fire (agni), which in turn affects digestion, metabolism, and assimilation. This means that undigested, unabsorbed, unassimilated food products remain in the body as ama, a morbid, nonhomogeneous, sticky substance that adheres to the tissues, clogs the channels, and creates toxicity. It enters the blood and creates toxemia, one of the root causes of disease. The root cause of ama, in turn, is the aggravated dosha attacking agni (fire), resulting in low digestion and metabolism.

The purpose of cleansing (*shodan*) is to remove excess doshas and ama from the body. It includes initial procedures (*purvakarma*) that move the doshas and ama from sites deep in the body to locations from which they can be eliminated. The five actions (*panchakarma*) then remove them by means of vomiting therapy (*vaman*) to

remove excess kapha impurities; purgation therapy (*virechan*) to remove excess pitta; *basti* for removing excess vata by enema therapy; *nasya*, or administration of certain herbal powders, medicated oil concoctions, and ghee into the nose to purify *prana*, mind, and consciousness; and *rakta-moksha*, traditionally bloodletting or blood cleansing in combination with certain herbs.

## NEUTRALIZING TOXINS

There are seven types of neutralizing (*shaman*), which balance and pacify the bodily doshas: kindling the fire (*dipan*), burning the toxic ama (*pachan*), fasting (*khsud-nigraha*), observing thirst (*trut-nigraha*), yoga stretching (*vyayama*), lying in the sunlight (*atap-seva*), and breathing. Shaman is primarily a spiritual method of purification; those who are not strong enough physically to face panchakarma, as well as those with emotional problems, are good candidates for it. Any pitta, vata, or chronic kapha disorder which affects either the immune system or the fire (agni) is a good subject for shaman. Shaman can be done in the healthy person as well because it has both curative and preventive aspects.

**Observing thirst is not to be confused with a water fast—that is taking water only. Observing thirst means not drinking water at all.**

The first shaman is kindling the bodily fire in order to burn accumulated toxins. This is absolutely necessary in kapha and vata disorders, especially when the subject has low gastric fire. Taking certain herbs internally, in special proportions, with honey, will accomplish this. Pippili, ginger, cinnamon, black pepper, and chitrak, among others, will help to kindle the fire. Concentrating at the solar plexus will also kindle agni, and that will burn the toxins in the physical, subtle, and causal bodies. This technique is very effective for kapha and vata types, but it should be done with great caution by pitta types.

Toxins can be burned (*pachan*) by taking teas made of certain herbs such as trikatu, chitrak, cinnamon, ginger, cumin, coriander, and fennel in certain proportions. All of these herbal teas should be used after meals so that food will be properly assimilated. Concentration, meditation, and contemplation can also improve pachan.

In cases of acute fever, acute indigestion, acute dysentery, and diarrhea, ayurveda suggests fasting (*kshud-nigraha*). In a normal fast the subject may eat small



quantities of cooked apple with ghee, or basmati rice with mung dahl and ghee, or just yogurt and rice. But in acute fever, acute diarrhea, and dysentery, it is better to eat nothing for several days. This will cause agni to kindle and burn the toxins.

Observing thirst (*trut-nigraha*) means not drinking water. It is very important when there are certain kapha disorders in which too much water is retained in the system. Ayurveda tells us not to give water, for instance, in kidney disorders like edema, when there is accumulated water in the peritoneal cavity, or in certain urinary disorders. Observing thirst is not to be confused with a water fast—that is taking water only. Observing thirst means not drinking water at all.

Next comes exercise (*vyayama*)—yoga stretching in particular. Exercise here means stretching the muscles in a certain direction, having set a goal that can be reached only with effort. The effort creates physical stress, which in turn kindles the fire. Ayurveda tells us that exercise improves circulation, accelerates the heart rate, enhances the combustion of calories, stimulates metabolism, regulates body temperature, and maintains body weight. In addition, it makes the senses alert and attentive, and the mind sharp. Proper exercise is a wonderful art of shaman.

Ayurveda recommends certain exercises for each individual constitution. The important seat of vata, for instance, is the pelvic cavity, so any exercise which stretches the pelvic muscles is good. Therefore the forward bend, backward bend, spinal twist, cobra pose, camel pose, shoulderstand, and plow pose help to move vata in a calming direction. Swimming is good for vata people, but jogging is not.

The important seat of pitta is the solar plexus, so any exercise that will stretch those muscles will be effective. The fish pose, boat pose, camel pose, locust pose, and bow pose will help to calm pitta. Swimming is good for pitta as well as vata.

The important seat of kapha is the chest, so exercises which stretch that area are effective. These include the shoulderstand, plow pose, locust pose, cat pose, cow pose, and bow pose. All of these improve the circulation of kapha in the pulmonary cavity. Jogging is good for kapha, but kapha people don't like jogging. Mountain climbing and hiking are also good for kapha people, but, again, they don't like to hike.

Lying in the sun (*atap-seva*) is another ancient shaman, for the sun is the source of heat and light as well as the source of higher consciousness. Pitta-predominant people can lie in the sun if they apply certain oils (sun blockers) to reduce their exposure, but they should not do this for more than half an hour. The vata person can

lie in the sun for about an hour. The kapha person can lie in the sun for more than an hour. If the proper care is taken, lying in the sun and meditating upon the solar plexus is a wonderful shaman for kapha and vata. It improves circulation, helps the absorption of vitamin D, and strengthens the bones.

### Lying in the moonlight is good for reducing pitta.

Today, however, lying in the sunlight can be dangerous, for the ionosphere and ozone have been damaged, and too much unwanted radiation (ultraviolet rays) reaches the earth. That aggravates *brajak-pitta* under the skin, and this can result in skin cancer. Those who have multiple moles should not lie in the sun. Lying in the moonlight is good for reducing pitta.

The last shaman is breathing. There are many different types of breathing exercises (*pranayama*), and there is a totally different science of breath that can be studied from an experienced teacher. But everyone should do some kind of proper breathing through both nostrils. One such exercise is to sit quietly, inhale deeply through one nostril, breathe into the lower abdomen, then slowly exhale through the opposite nostril; repeat on the other side and continue, alternating sides. This is called alternate nostril pranayama, and like all forms of shaman, it helps to bring balance to the mind, body, and consciousness.

## THE END RESULT

As we can see, then, ayurveda gives us insights which bring health and harmony to our daily life. It can also bring longevity and spiritual peace. It is a total healing art, for by understanding its basic principles, by understanding one's own constitution, and by understanding the exact nature and structure of doshic aggravation, it is possible to achieve harmony and balance by following the proper guidelines. Out of that balance comes the highest state of tranquility.

## RESOURCES

If you want to learn more about Ayurveda, the following books will be helpful.

*Ayurveda: The Science of Self Healing.* By Dr. Vasant Lad. Lotus Press, 1985. *Ayurvedic Cooking for Self-Healing.* By Usha Lad and Dr. Vasant Lad. The Ayurvedic Press, 1994.

*Ayurvedic Healing: A Comprehensive Guide.* By Dr. David Frawley, O.M.D. Passage Press, 1989. *Prakruti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution.* By Dr. Robert E. Svobada. Geocom, 1989. *The Yoga of Herbs: An Ayurvedic Guide to Herbal Medicine.* By Dr. David Frawley and Dr. Vasant Lad. Lotus Press, 1988.

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