

Ayurveda, the ancient holistic healing system of India, is a complete approach to health and lifestyle management. This system incorporates diet, exercise, life activity routines, psychotherapeutic practices, massage, and, of course, botanical medicine, which is the foundation of Ayurvedic therapeutics.

Therapy in Ayurveda is based on an understanding of the underlying concepts of energetics inherent in the Ayurvedic world view. Ayurveda assigns all matter/energy interactions in the world to a scheme of five primal elements (metaphorical concepts that describe physiological processes and environmental interactions): earth, water, fire, air and ether.

Element	Characteristics	Pharmacological effects
Earth	Heavy, tough, hard, dry, stable, dense, gross, smelly	Plumpness, heaviness, compactness, stability
Water	Liquid, oily, cold, dull, soft, slimy, strong taste	Stickiness, oiliness, compactness, softness, moisturizing, contentment
Fire	Hot, sharp, subtle, light, oily, vision promoting	Heat, oxidation, metabolism, luster, radiance, color
Air	Soft, light, cold, oily, rough, dry, subtle, touch promoting	Roughness, dryness, lightness, aversion
Ether	Soft, light, subtle, smooth, sound promoting	Softness, porosity, lightness

For ease of conceptualizing the actions of these energies, and for therapeutic application in diagnosis and treatment, the five elements, as they manifest in the body, are further condensed into three primal metabolic forces, called *doshas*. These forces underlie all of the theoretical foundation of Ayurvedic diagnosis and therapeutics.

Elements	Dosha	Characteristics	Actions
Earth and Water	Kapha	Cold, wet, heavy	Stability, solidity, lubrication, tissue building
Water and Fire	Pitta	Hot, wet, light	Metabolism, digestion, assimilation, body heat, glandular secretion
Air and Ether	Vata	Cold, dry, light	Movement, nerve regulation, respiration, circulation, excretion

Ayurvedic pharmacology is based on the concept of five primal elements, or "states of existence," which make up all interactions of matter and energy in the human body and in the surroundings. These five elements ("*mahabhuta*" in Sanskrit) are the basic foundation of the theory of anatomy, physiopathology, and pharmacology. Ayurveda considers it necessary to know only the state of proportionate balance of the elements in all parts of the body to effect an accurate diagnosis. Ayurveda does name diseases, but only for the convenience of discussion; all diagnosis is based on the energetics of each individual case.

As the body is composed of the five elements, all other substances on the planet are likewise composed. Botanical medicines interact with the tissues of the body according to innate characteristics of their five-element profile.

Botanicals are classified as to pharmacology based on several factors: taste (biochemical composition), qualities (physiological action), potency (effect on metabolic rate), and post-digestive effect.

Ayurveda predicts physiological effect by the intrinsic biochemical makeup of the botanical, which can be identified by taste. Ayurveda recognizes six tastes:

Taste	Component	Energetics	Characteristics	Action on Doshas	
Sweet	Protein, Carbohydrates, fats	Cold, wet, heavy	Pleasing, brain tonic, anabolic	PV↓	K↑
Sour	Organic acids	Hot, wet, light	Digestive, sialagogue, anabolic	V↓	PK↑
Salty	Minerals	Hot, wet, heavy	Moistening, expectorant, anabolic	V↓	PK↑
Pungent	Induces burning sensation	Hot, dry, light	Detoxifying, cardiac, catabolic	K↓	VP↑
Bitter	Alkaloids and other bitter principles, including terpenes	Cold, Dry, Light	Appetizer, drying, cooling, catabolic	PK↓	V↑
Astringent	Phenols (tannins)	Cold, Dry, Heavy	Stiffness, absorbent, catabolic.	PK↓	V↑

Ayurveda identifies disease as an imbalance of the doshas. The aim of Ayurvedic herbalism is to restore this proper harmony. By understanding the energetics contained in the plant, we can offset the accumulation of energy characteristic of the offending *dosha*, thus restoring the condition to its original proper functioning.

Personalize Your Diet with Ayurveda

Each of us is unique. As different as our body type is, so, too, are our nutritional requirements. Ayurveda recognizes this, and emphasizes the correct diet for each individual.

Diet is the first and most basic building block of good health in Ayurveda, and can be an effective treatment for disease, even when used alone. It is the safest therapy, and can be used by anyone as self-care. Of course, the results can materialize more slowly than more directed methods, such as herbal medicine.

Improper diet is the main underlying physical factor that induces disease. So, when we modify the diet, we also get at one of the underlying problems.

Ayurveda primarily evaluates the diet based on the energetic qualities of the food, and its effect on the doshas, not necessarily on the chemical (vitamin, mineral) content.

Diets for the Doshas

To achieve balance, the diet for treating each dosha will have the characteristics that are opposite that of the dosha that is dominating and causing the problem.

Dosha	Qualities	Diet Should Be
Kapha	Cold, Wet Heavy	Warm, Dry, Light
Pitta	Hot, Wet, Light	Cool, Dry, Heavier
Vata	Cold, Dry Light	Warm, Moist, Heavier

Usually, the diet that is best for you will be the same as the diet for your constitution, but remember, any dosha could be out of balance at any given time - treat what you are like now.

For example, if you are a thin framed, always cold person with dry skin, you have a Vata constitution, and should eat a Vata-balancing diet as your lifetime program. However, if this week you are retaining water, feel sluggish, and have a chest full of mucus, you are experiencing a Kapha imbalance, and should use a Kapha balancing diet until your body is again balanced and healthy.

Food Qualities

The food you eat will act in your body based on its energy properties, such as temperature, weight, and moisture, as we have discussed. The inherent taste, another way of recognizing biochemical composition, will also be important.

Ayurveda recognizes six tastes in food:

Taste	Characteristics	Examples
Sweet	Has an inherent, underlying sweetness (Macronutrients - protein, carbohydrate, fat)	Rice, honey
Sour	Organic acids	Lemon
Salty	Contains minerals	Kelp
Pungent	Hot and spicy	Chiles, onion
Bitter	Contains alkaloids, other bitter principles (such as various polyphenols)	Leafy greens
Astringent	Contains mainly tannins	Pomegranate

Foods for Balancing Kapha	
Energy	Warm, Dry, Light (Avoid cold, oily, heavy)
Tastes	Pungent, Bitter, Astringent
Strategy	Eat less total food, lowfat, low calorie, hot spices, occasional fasting, less frequency, largest meal midday
Emphasize	Dry and astringent fruits (apple, raisin) Vegetables, especially raw Dry grains (rice cakes) Hot spices (black pepper, chiles) Cooked beans with warming spices Spicy herbal teas (ginger)
Avoid	Sweet fruits Nuts Milk products Oil

Foods for Balancing Pitta	
Energy	Cool, Dry, Heavier (Avoid Hot, Wet, Light)
Tastes	Sweet, Bitter, Astringent
Strategy	Mild, bland food, served cool, raw, no hot spices, low oil, eat when calm, three regular meals
Emphasize	Sweet fruits Sweet and bitter vegetables (greens) Beans in general Natural sweeteners (maple syrup) Mild cheeses (cottage cheese) Sweet and cooling drinks (apple juice)
Avoid	Sour fruits Pungent vegetables (onion) Nuts Hot spices (chiles) Fermented milk products (yogurt) Oils

Foods for Balancing Vata	
Energy	Warm, Moist, Heavier (Avoid Cold, Dry, Light)
Tastes	Sweet, Sour, Salty
Strategy	Nourishing, easy to digest, warm, filling, heavy, moistening, strengthening, small frequent regular meals, mild warming spices, calm and concentrate while eating
Emphasize	Sweet fruits Cooked vegetables Cooked grains (oatmeal) Nuts Natural sweeteners Mild warming spices (basil) Milk products in moderation, especially warm
Avoid	Dry fruits Dry grains (rice cakes) Raw vegetables Cabbage family (broccoli) Beans in general Any food which causes gas

Common Herbs for the Doshas

	Balance Kapha	Balance Pitta	Balance Vata
Digestion	Cayenne	Aloe vera	Garlic
	Black pepper	Turmeric	Ginger
	Ginger	Fennel	Cinnamon
	Clove	Mint	Cumin
Elimination	(Elimination generally good)	Cascara sagrada Rhubarb root	Psyllium seed Castor oil
Energy	Garlic	Licorice root	Ginseng
	Cinnamon	Dandelion root	
	Basil		
Mind	Sage	Sandalwood	Valerian
	Basil	Hibiscus	Chamomile
	Scullcap		

Personalize Your Lifestyle with Ayurveda

As each person is viewed as an individual in the ways we've mentioned, so, too, can we understand how each person should conduct their life, according to the dosha they are seeking to balance. Your schedule, your relationships, your choice of exercise, all can be calculated using Ayurveda.

When Kapha dominates, people are slow and lethargic. They like a lot of sleep, and tend toward obesity. When Pitta dominates, people are hot, intense, aggressive, and demanding. When vata dominates people are spaced-out, flighty, erratic, anxious and insomniac. Through Ayurveda, the ultimate self-care system, we can adjust all these factors with careful lifestyle choices.

To Balance Kapha	To Balance Pitta	To Balance Vata
<i>Be Active</i>	<i>Be Calm</i>	<i>Be Moderate</i>
Stimulating activities	Rest and relax	Adequate sleep
Physical labor	Cut down the schedule	No staying up late
Stay warm, stay active	Cut down striving	Disciplined schedule
Sunbathing	Stay cool	Regular hours
Less sleep (shorter nights rest, no naps)	Take in cool breezes	Consistency
Mix it up (variety of activities)	Gardens and gardening, flowers	Take in the sun
Avoid cold and damp	Contentment	Sexual moderation
Cultivate physical challenges	Forgiveness	Mild physical effort
Mental stimulation	Simplify your life	Avoid wind and cold
Promote travel	Avoid the sun	Avoid overwork
Avoid "couch potato" behavior	Moonlight	Avoid all types of stress
		Avoid intense travel
		Avoid excess stimulation (TV, etc.)

Personalize your Exercise Routine with Ayurveda

For Balancing Kapha	For Balancing Pitta	For Balancing Vata
Get hot	Don't overheat, cool air	Stay warm
Sweat	Don't be fanatical - take a break	Mild only - don't overdo
Vigorous aerobic	Drink plenty of water	Regular routine - stick with a program
Work up to pushing your limits	Vary the routine to avoid boredom	Slow, gradual progress
Discipline	Varied overall fitness program	Walking
Powerful calisthenics		Stretching, yoga

Personalize Your Love Life with Ayurveda

Your relationship can improve if you understand the doshas. Ayurveda suggests a spouse of a different constitution. This helps you balance each other in the relationship, and prevents your offspring from being too extreme in anyone dosha. Two Vatas produce a child who is doubly Vata, for example.

For balancing Kapha	For Balancing Pitta	For Balancing Vata
Marry Vata	Marry Kapha or Vata	Marry Kapha
Active family life	Soothing conversations	Slow and Steady
Stimulating conversations	No confrontation	Less thinking, more acting
Encourage talking	Relaxing massages	Careful managing money
Go out and get interested	Take "cool off" breaks	Commitment
Encourage sexual interest	Slow down and cool off to take time and care for sex	Consistent and supportive behavior Caution with sexual experimentation
		Don't overtalk and overanalyze