



June 10, 2016

# Introduction to Ayurveda

with Jackie Shaffer

## Today's topics

From the Vedas: Ancient Source of Yoga and Ayurveda

Qualities of the Elements

The Doshas

Qualities and Tastes

Yoga Practice & Ayurveda

## From the Vedas: ancient source of yoga and Ayurveda

### The scope of Ayurveda

“Ayurveda is the knowledge of the entire span of life, including beneficial and detrimental ways of living, how to achieve happiness and how unhappiness is created.”

*(Caraka Sutra Sthana 1:41)*

As *Ayus* means “life” and *Veda* means “knowledge” or “science”, the literal meaning of Ayurveda is “the science of life,” life in the Ayurvedic sense, integrating the body, the mind, senses and soul.

As a complete philosophy of life, it provides guidance on a whole range of activities and lifestyles in order to maintain a natural balance within body, mind and soul. Ayurveda encompasses positive and negative aspects of living, including eating, sleeping, working, relaxation and conduct.

The diet, herbs, exercises, therapies aim to assist each of us to maintain and enhance all aspects of health.

## Elements of the Three Doshas

<b>Vata</b>	<b>Pitta</b>	<b>Kapha</b>
Air + Ether	Fire + Water	Earth + Water

## Attributes of the Three Doshas

<b>Vata</b>	<b>Pitta</b>	<b>Kapha</b>
Dry	Oily	Heavy
Light	Sharp (penetrating)	Slow
Cold	Hot	Cold
Rough	Light	Oily
Subtle	Mobile	Slimy (smooth)
Mobile	Liquid	Dense
Clear		Soft
		Static (stable)
		Cloudy (sticky)

## QUALITIES

1. Heavy	Light
2. Hot	Cold
3. Moist (oily)	Dry
4. Dull	Sharp
5. Smooth	Rough
6. Solid	Liquid
7. Soft	Hard
8. Firm	Flexible
9. Subtle	Gross
10. Clear	Viscous

Source: *Eternal Health, the essence of Ayurveda*, Dr. Partap Chauhan, pp. 111-112.

## TASTES AND THEIR QUALITIES

SWEET elements Earth and Water  
*Qualities: cold, heavy, moist*

SOUR elements Earth and Fire  
*Qualities: hot, light, moist*

SALTY elements Water and Fire  
*Qualities: hot, heavy, moist*

PUNGENT elements Fire and Air  
*Qualities: hot, light, dry*

BITTER elements Air and Space  
*Qualities: cold, light, dry*

ASTRINGENT elements Air and Earth  
*Qualities: cold, heavy, dry*

*A cooling effect is produced by bitter, astringent and sweet tastes (rasas).*

*A heating effect is produced by pungent, sour and salty tastes (rasas).*

### The six TASTES according to Ayurveda

Sweet – Earth and Water – builds tissue

Sour – Earth and Fire – aids tissue, digestion

Salt – Water and Fire- lubricates, digestive aid

Pungent – Fire and Air – increases taste, decreases gas

Bitter – Air and Space – cleanses, increases digestion

Astringent – Air and Earth- cleanses blood, tightens tissue

<http://www.kripalu.org/article/167/>

# Yoga and Ayurveda

by **Deborah Knox**

Vata, pitta, and kapha are the three mind-body principles, or doshas, in Ayurveda, the blend of which determines our individual constitutional makeup. Understanding which yoga styles, postures, and pranayama techniques support or weaken each dosha can help us address short-term and long-standing imbalances. Following the wisdom of Ayurveda, we can bring ourselves back into natural alignment with life.

## **Vata**

Meaning "that which blows," vata is related to the elements of air and ether. It provides the motion necessary for our physical, mental, and emotional processes. Vata types are mentally quick, alert, flexible, and creative. When out of balance, vatas feel over-amped and ungrounded, and may suffer from mental and physical restlessness, insomnia, or anxiety. They're the ones who eat while talking on their cell phone while on a treadmill. Vata energy can be very uneven, marked by spurts of frenetic activity followed by exhaustion. This dosha can get aggravated by dry, cold, and windy weather; overstimulating environments; travel; lack of routine; and a lot of change.

You can ground (earth) and soothe (water) excess vata by bringing the Mother principle into your life—learning how to calm and nurture yourself. Slowing and quieting down. Keeping warm and moist. Establishing self-care boundaries and a supportive routine.

## **Asanas**

Poses that work on the colon (the bodily seat of vata), intestines, pelvis, lumbar spine, and sacroiliac balance vata by bringing energy back down into the base of the torso. Spinal twists and inversions of all kinds soothe this dosha. Sitting and standing forward bends are choice poses, particularly for insomnia; boat, plank, staff, and plow are also powerful vata-reducers. To support grounding, work with standing poses such as mountain, triangle, warrior, and tree. Avoid back bends, such as bow, cobra, pigeon, and arch, which increase vata, or hold them briefly. If you enjoy vinyasa, do sun salutations S-L-O-W-L-Y. Let child's pose lead you back to your innate innocence and trust. End your practice with a long Savasana (20–30 minutes); it is really okay to do NOTHING for a while.

## **Pranayama**

Activating breathing practices such as those used in Kundalini Yoga can aggravate vata, so only use them when you are feeling balanced and in need of clearing or energizing. Integrating and deeply relaxing, alternate-nostril breathing is a better ongoing practice for you. The bhramari (bee) breath, named after its high-pitched resonating sound, also calms vata.

## Styles

*Keywords: calming, grounding, warming, slow, routine, contemplative.*

Because vatas tend to be hyperflexible, they can injure themselves while doing yoga. By getting a strong start in an Iyengar-based practice, which emphasizes proper alignment, you can build strength and grounding while teaching your body the correct yoga vocabulary. Since Ashtanga Yoga can be very stimulating, keep an eye on whether you are feeling more ungrounded or shaky afterwards, and pay attention to moving consciously and properly to avoid injury. (But use this style medicinally if you are running cold or are energetically blocked.) You can benefit from Bikram's heated classroom and the regularity of the 26-posture series; watch for overstimulation and be sure to rehydrate afterward. Kripalu Yoga is also recommended as its heart-opening, nurturing approach can get you out of your head. Classical Sivananda incorporates many corpse poses after each short series of active poses, inviting stillness, integration, and relaxation—nectar for any vata.

## Signs of Balance

Greater groundedness, clarity, calm, open-heartedness.

## Pitta

Associated with the elements of fire and water, pitta is pure vitality, enthusiasm, and intensity. Meaning "that which cooks," pitta regulates our digestion, metabolism, appetite, and vision and forms the basis of our intellect and capacity for discernment. Solidly built, strong, passionate, and ruddy in complexion, pittas sunburn easily, lose hair early, and burn the candle at both ends. Embodying the ennobling characteristics of warriorship, you are known for your willpower, focus, courage, goal-orientation, decisiveness, self-discipline, and mental acuity. When out of balance, you may become competitive, fast, quarrelsome, dominating, impatient, resentful, intolerant, and fanatical. The bodily seats of this dosha are the small intestine, eyes, and blood. The liver also plays an important role in pitta-related bodily functions. Excess pitta manifests through inflammation, infection, and irritation.

## Asanas

Poses that promote coolness, ease, and lightness of being while releasing heat and stress in the small intestine, central abdomen, blood, and liver are optimal. All forms of standing forward bends and inversions reduce pitta. Sitting poses such as cobbler, hero pose, and yoga mudrasana, and sitting forward bends such as head-to-toe, half- and full-lotus forward bend, and tortoise are also recommended. Work the abdominal area with twists such as maricyasana. Other pitta-reducers include cobra, half-bow, and boat. Experiment with moon salutation; while sun salutation heats, this vinyasa has a cooling effect. Warrior, chair pose, headstands, armstands, and lion increase pitta; if you enjoy these poses, hold them briefly.

## Pranayama

Keep your breath cool, relaxed, and diffuse, exhaling through your mouth periodically to release

heat. Since ujjayi breathing is heating, consider simply using the yogic three-part breath. Sheetalī, which is designed to cool you off, and alternate-nostril breathing are also recommended. As for the breath of fire, if you are calm, clear, and cool, go ahead, but if you are already irascible, wait or warn your friends ahead of time!

### **Styles**

*Keywords: cooling, heart-opening, noncompetitive, slow.*

Approaching yoga as yet another mountain to climb or race to win, pitta's gravitate toward the more challenging styles. When choosing among styles, consider how heating or aggressive they are. Since Ashtanga Yoga builds heat, especially if you are doing a lot of sun salutations, add cooling poses such as twists, shoulder stands, or a long Savasana at the end of a session. Bikram Yoga can send a highly pitta person over the edge, so take great care with this style. Iyengar is a solid choice for pitta's. Classical Sivananda is also recommended; though it may test your patience, its slower approach can help you overcome the tendency to accomplish and push. Kripalu Yoga, which emphasizes compassion, can help you shift your focus from will to heart. Regardless of which style you choose, work at about 75 percent (rather than 150 percent) of your capacity.

### **Signs of Balance**

Less inflammation, acidity, irritation; more coolness, calmness, openness, patience, tolerance.

### **Kapha**

Meaning "that which sticks," kapha is related to the elements of earth and water. Physiologically, kapha binds the structure of the body, lubricates the joints and skin, and promotes tissue-building, immunity, and healing. It also provides stability, stamina, and strength. Kapha types tend to have a slow metabolism; heavy yet sturdy body; large, soft eyes; and thick, oily hair and skin. When in balance, they are the best friend a person could have—calm, devoted, consistent, tolerant, and patient. However, out of balance, they are their own worst enemy, being prone to mental sluggishness, procrastination, lethargy, weight gain, excessive sleep, and problems letting go. Their innate and formidable capacity to ground and persevere turns to inertia and lassitude. So, when it comes to practice, you have the tough job of kick-starting yourself. Since you flourish in relational contexts, recruit a buddy to practice or go to class with you. Remember Newton's First Law of Motion: a body at rest tends to remain at rest unless acted upon by some outside force.

### **Asanas**

The bodily seats of kapha are the lungs and the stomach/diaphragm area. Focus on asanas that open the chest and work the midsection. Headstand, handstand, and bow are premiere kapha-reducers. Back bends such as cobra, pigeon, camel, and locust will greatly serve your lungs. To build endurance, hold standing poses such as forward bend, triangle, revolved triangle, the warrior series, tree, and half moon a long time, and repeat, repeat, repeat. Other effective postures include shoulder stand, plow, lion, and spinal twists. Jumping to transition between

poses will give you a better workout. You should also come to love sun salutations more than life itself (and if you practice as a form of worship to the Divine, you actually will!). Finally, use a shorter Savasana (5–15 minutes) to conclude your practice.

### **Pranayama**

Because you need to open your lungs, you can benefit from the vigorous breathing practices of Kundalini Yoga. During asana practice, use the full yogic breath in conjunction with the heating ujjayi breath. Bhastrika, kapalabhati, and right-nostril breathing are also cleansing, energizing, and warming for you.

### **Styles**

*Keywords: vigorous, stimulating, challenging, assertive, warming.*

Unlike vatas, who need to soothe themselves and slow down, you need to move energetically. Sweating is de rigueur. Avoid falling into the comfortable groove of routine by shaking up your program: vary the asanas themselves, change the order in which you perform them, attend different types of classes, experiment with props.

Vigorous and challenging, Ashtanga Yoga is superb for kaphas. Aspire to master the first series so that you can go on to tackle the second series. Bikram Yoga provides the heat and workout you need, but consider adding other styles and poses to your practice so this 26-pose series doesn't become routine. Classical Sivananda Yoga is not a top pick, as it requires less exertion and emphasizes Savasana, which could easily lead to naptime. Jivamukti Yoga, which incorporates mantras and chants, gives you the opportunity to exercise your naturally strong devotional muscles.

### **Signs of Balance**

Weight normalization; elimination of excess congestion, mucus, and water; a greater sense of detachment.

### **How to Use Ayurveda**

- Create self-care routines for eating and exercise: daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally
- Treat clear signs of imbalance, such as anxiety (vata), irritability (pitta), cold/flu (kapha)
- Inquire into your yoga experience and practice
- Experiment with foods and recipes
- Deepen body care through treatments that balance the doshas
- Commit to a deep cleansing such as panchakarma.

## Understanding Doshas

Though it is important to know our "birth" constitution, or dosha, it can be difficult to evaluate by questionnaire alone and can confuse the newcomer to Ayurveda. What is often more practical for us in daily life is to understand when we are out of balance and to identify the dosha associated with the imbalance. By identifying the "wandering dosha" we can then gently lead it back to its proper home and alleviate the turmoil it causes when it begins to move from its natural site.

*There are many signs and symptoms associated with doshas being out of balance:*

- Vata dryness, coldness, constipation, insomnia, nervousness/anxiety/fear
- Pitta inflammation, acid indigestion/heartburn, skin problems, loose stools, anger/agitation/short temper
- Kapha weight gain, mucus build-up, lethargy, depression/lack of motivation.

## Balancing Doshas

*Once you have successfully recognized the culprit, you can begin the appropriate "pacifying" routine:*

- **Vata** warmth, moisture, daily oil massage, vata-balancing diet, establishing supportive routines, calming/quiet environment
- **Pitta** cool down, pitta-balancing diet, calming routines, daily introspection, cooling herbs and spices
- **Kapha** stimulation, exercise, vary routine, avoid napping, kapha-balancing diet, wake at sunrise.

**Deborah Knox** is an editor, writer, researcher, and consultant who specializes in natural health, personal and spiritual growth, environmental sustainability, and business.

## The Three Doshas

Everyone has a basic constitution, natural state or Prakriti, and a Vikriti or current state.

There are three basic doshas: Kapha, Pitta and Vata

### **Characteristics of Pitta**

Element: Fire

Definition: “that which digests”

Location: Pitta is mainly located in the middle portion of the body – the stomach, liver, spleen, gall bladder, pancreas, small intestine, skin and blood.

Role: Controls conversion processes such as digestion, metabolism and enzyme activity

Related sense: Sight

Related emotions: Anger, jealousy, courage

Qualities: Hot, sharp, acidic, intense, oily

### **Characteristics of Kapha**

Element: Earth and water

Definition: “that which binds”

Location: Kapha is mainly located in the upper part of the body – head, nose, throat, chest, lungs, joints, fatty tissue, connective tissues, ligaments, tendons, mouth.

Role: Provides moisture, connection and solidity

Related Senses: Taste and smell

Related emotions: Love, patience, forgiveness, greed, attachment and possessiveness

Qualities: Dense, heavy, firm, stable, slow, thick, sticky, wet, clear, cold

### **Characteristics of Vata**

Elements: Space and Air

Definition: “That which moves”

Location: Vata is mainly present in the lower part of the body—colon, rectum, bladder, urinary tract, spine, thighs and legs. It governs the neurohormonal system and nerve impulses, respiration, movement circulation of fluids, excretion, stimulation of digestive juices tract.

Role: Transportation of fluids, air and food within the body, movement

Related Senses: Hearing and touch

Related emotions: fear, tension, anxiety and impatience

Qualities: Rough, dry, light, mobile, cool and subtle

## Ayurveda Resources

### Books:

*Eat, Taste, Heal*, Thomas Yarema, M.D., Daniel Rhoda, D.A.S., Chef Johnny Brannigan

*Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution*, Dr. Robert E. Svoboda

*Yoga & Ayurveda: Self-Healing and Self-Realization*, David Frawley

*Yoga For Your Type: An Ayurvedic Approach to Your Asana Practice*, Dr. David Frawley, Sand Summerfield Kozak, M.S.

*Ayurveda: The Science of Self Healing: A Practical Guide*, Vasant Lad

*Perfect Health, The Complete Mind/Body Guide*, Deepak Chopra

### Dosha “Quizzes”:

Yoga International: <https://yogainternational.com/article/view/dosha-quiz>

Banyan Botanicals: <http://www.banyanbotanicals.com/constitutions/>

John Douillard’s Life Spa: <http://lifespas.com/health-quizzes/body-type-quiz/>

The Ayurvedic Institute: <http://www.ayurveda.com/pdf/constitution.pdf> (your constitution);  
<http://www.ayurveda.com/pdf/vikruti.pdf> (your present state)

### Online Resources:

Banyan Botanicals Organic Ayurvedic Herbs and Products: [BanyanBotanicals.com](http://BanyanBotanicals.com)

The Chopra Online Newsletter: [Chopra.com](http://Chopra.com)

[Ayurveda-MD.com](http://Ayurveda-MD.com)

The Ayurvedic Institute: [Ayurveda.com](http://Ayurveda.com)

Kripalu: [Kripalu.org](http://Kripalu.org)

National Ayurvedic Medical Association: [Ayurvedanama.org](http://Ayurvedanama.org)