

Intro to Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an ancient science of medicine in India. It literally means, 'The science of life'.

It is the world's oldest health care system. It is one of ancient India's greatest gift to the world. It is a science of health based on universal principles and profound insights into the connection between the body and mind and the laws of nature that structures all activities in life, it is heartening to see that this ancient Indian wisdom is again regaining its importance and becoming increasingly popular all over the world.

According to Ayurveda there are three substances or biological humors in the human body that governs all life processes of growth and decay. In Ayurveda these biological humors are known as Doshas. Dasha means that which darkens, spoils, causes things to decay or a fault. When out of balance, the doshas are causative forces in the disease process. Doshas are invisible. They govern the physical processes in the body without being quite physical themselves. They lie in the gap between energy and matter and are the connecting link between them. It is at this level that thought turns into matter. They are three in number. The doshas are Vata, Pitta and Kapha.

The Composition of the Doshas

The doshas are composed from five great elements. These five great elements are Space (ether), Air, Fire, Water and Earth. These elements are not exactly what is known to us as ether, air, fire, water and earth. These are subtle forces whose combination gives rise to what is known to us. A more detailed understanding of these five elements will be given later. By mixing different pairs of the five elements, one arrives at the three doshas:

- Vata is composed of space and air
- Pitta is composed of fire and water
- Kapha is composed of earth and water.

The Functions of the Doshas

Vata

This is the energy responsible for all movement in the physical body. Although it is the air principle it is not the air of the external environment but subtle energy that governs biological movement. Vata is prana in its gross aspect functioning in the physical body. It controls breathing, movement of muscles, movement of food through the digestive tract, and nerve impulses to and from the brain. Its etymological meaning is, 'that which moves things'. It also governs our sensory and mental balance and orientation and promotes mental adaptability and comprehension.

Pitta

This means, 'that which digest things'. It is the principle of fire, the energy of metabolism. It is responsible for all chemical and metabolic transformations in the body. It regulates digestion, absorption, assimilation and body temperature. It also governs our mental digestion, our capacity to perceive reality and understand things as they are.

Kapha

This means, 'that which holds things together'. It provides substance and gives support and provides the structural principle of our bodily tissues. It promotes anabolism, the creation and growth of new cells and also cell repair. It lubricates our joints, moisturizes the skin, helps to heal wounds and maintains immunity. Kapha provides strength, vigor and stability. It also provides our emotional support in life and governs such traits as love, compassion, patience and forgiveness.

Seat of the Doshas

Vata-colon

Pitta-small intestine

Kapha-chest

Doshas and the Gunas

A Guna is one of three "tendencies" or "mental states": *tamas*, *sattva*, and *rajas*. These categories have become a common means of categorizing behavior and natural phenomena in Hindu philosophy, and also in Ayurvedic medicine, as a system to assess conditions and diets.

Sattva (originally "being, existence, entity") has been translated to mean balance, order, or purity. This typically implies that a person with this quality has a positive or even orderly state of mind. Such a person is psychologically kind, calm, alert and thoughtful. *Sattva* can be translated as "lucidity".

Rajas (originally "atmosphere, air, firmament") has been translated to mean over activity or turmoil: "too active". A person with this mental state has a mind that is ever active, in turmoil, or in a chaotic state. That person is constantly seeking diversions and essentially has difficulty focusing their attention for long durations of time. Can be translated as "dynamism".

Tamas (originally "darkness", "obscurity") has been translated to mean "too inactive", negative, lethargic, dull, or slow. Usually it is associated with darkness, delusion, or ignorance. A *tamas* quality also can imply that a person has a self-destructive or entropic state of mind. That person is constantly pursuing destructive activities. Translates as "inertia".

Students of Ayurveda frequently ask whether there is a relationship between the three doshas and the three gunas. There is no direct correspondence. The gunas are the subtlest principles in all forms of energies. Every form of energy physical or mental will have the gunas in a particular ratio. The doshas are grosser energies that makes up the physical body. So each dosha will have all the three gunas in some proportion. Vata is approximately 75% *rajas*, 20% *sattva* and 5% *tamas*. Pitta is 50% or a bit more *sattva*, 45% *rajas* and 5% *tamas*. Kapha is 75% *tamas* 15% *sattva* and very little *rajas*. This is just an approximation not a fixed rule. The proportions can vary. Also it can be understood in this way. *Sattva* is present in vata as clarity, creativity and lightness; in pitta as knowledge, understanding; in kapha as love, compassion and forgiveness. *Rajas* is present in vata as hyperactivity, nervousness, fear, anxiety and ungroundedness; in pitta as aggressiveness, competitiveness, power and prestige; in kapha as attachment, greed and possessiveness. *Tamas* is present in vata as confusion, indecisiveness, sadness and grief; in pitta as anger, hatred, envy and jealousy; in kapha as depression and deep confusion.

The Qualities of the Doshas

Vata

The vata individuals have light, flexible bodies. They have light muscles and little fat. They tend to be slim or underweight. They may be too tall or too short. They sometimes appear under developed with flat chests and less strength and stamina. Their bodies need sweet, sour and salty tastes. Constipation is the most common ailment. Vatas walk quickly, eat quickly and always in a rush. Vatas are drawn to a lot of sexual activity but excess sex is one cause of aggravated vata. Vatas have clarity of mind, mental flexibility and creativity, good imagination and come up with new ideas.

Attributes

- Cold-Leading to cold hands and feet, dislike of cold climates, stiffness of muscles.
- Moving-Fast walking, talking doing many things at a time. Swinging moods and shaky faith. Hypertension, irregular heart rhythm, muscle spasms and backaches are related to excess vata.
- Quick-Leading to many related characteristic. The ability to pick up new information quickly, and also to forget quickly. Poor long term memory, good imagination but restless activity. Acting on impulses, mood swings. Racing scattered thoughts and fast speech.
- Dry-Leading to dry skin, hair, lips, dull eyes and scant sweat. Skin may chap and crack easily.

Pitta

The pitta body type is medium height and build. They seldom lose or gain much weight. They are stronger physically than vata. They often experience early graying or loss of hair, tending to be bald. Moles and freckles are common in pitta skin. Normal body temperature is slightly higher and hands and feet are usually sweaty. They perspire quite a lot. Pittas have strong appetite and good digestion.

Attributes

Hot-Leading to warm, flushed skin, any kind of inflammation or overactive metabolism. Hot sensations in stomach, liver, intestines. Pittas are generally fond of cold food and drinks, which offset their own heat.

Sharp-Leading to a sharp mind but also sharp speech. The same quality can turn into excess acidity in the body and over secretion of stomach acids. They have sharp memory but are irritable. They have strong feelings of anger and hate. They are fond of spreading name and fame.

Moist-Which may show up as profuse perspiration, hot sweaty palms are typically Pitta. Being hot and moist pittas have a natural aversion to hot humid summer.

Sour Smelling-Giving rise to bad breath, sour body odor or bad smelling urine and feces.

Kapha

They are blessed with a strong, healthy well developed body. They have strong muscles and heavy bones. They gain weight easily and cannot take it off easily. They have slow digestion. Their skin is soft, smooth and lustrous. Kaphas have sweet tooth and love candies, cookies and chocolate. Vigorous exercise is good for them but they prefer to sit, eat and do nothing. They are slow in everything, slow to eat, decide or act. They have a sweet loving disposition, caring and forgiving.

Attributes

Heavy-Heavy bones, muscles and large body frame. Any heavy disorder suggest kapha imbalance, whether it is obesity, heavy digestion or a heavy oppressive kind of depression. If sleep makes one feel groggy instead of refreshed it means kapha imbalance.

Sweet-Leading to weight gains or diabetes.

Steady-Which makes kapha types self-contained. Bodily processes do not swing to extremes. Their bodies remain unaffected by changes that would throw other body types out of balance.

Soft-Leading to a wide variety of characteristics such as soft skin and hair, soft manners, a soft look in the eyes and an undemanding approach to situations.

Slow-As expressed in the typically slow, fluid movements of kapha people along with slow speech and deliberate thinking.

Cold-Prone to chest congestion, blocks sinuses and other mucus problems.

Oily-Oily skin and hair. Joints and organs are well lubricated.

Active Periods of each Dosha

Kapha 6 a.m. - 10 a.m. & 6 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Pitta 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. & 10 p.m. - 2 a.m.

Vata 2 p.m. - 6 p.m. & 2 a.m. - 6 a.m.

Characteristics of Vata- Type

- Light, thin built. Finds difficulty in gaining weight, remains chronically underweight.
- Performs activity quickly, like walking or eating quickly.
- Irregular hunger and digestion. Irregular sleeping habits.
- Tendency to worry, rather compulsive worrying or thinking.
- Mental or physical energy comes in bursts.
- Tires easily, tendency to over exert.
- Tendency to forget easily.
- Frequent alteration in moods, unpredictable nature.
- Tendency towards constipation or gas formation.
- Under pressure they grow excited and anxious.
- Display bursts of emotion that are short lived and quickly forgotten.
- The basic nature of vata-type is changeability, unpredictability and variability.

Characteristics of Pitta-Type

- Medium built, strength and endurance.
- Sharp hunger and thirst, strong digestion, cannot skip meals.
- Sharp intellect, precise articulate speech, but often rude.
- Enterprising character , likes challenges.
- Tendency towards anger and irritability under stress.
- Ambition, sharp wit, out-spoken, argumentative.
- Orderly management of money, energy, time, actions.
- Adverse to long exposures to the sun, cannot do hard physical labor.
- Impatient , demanding and perfectionist.
- Baldness, thinning or receding hairline, tendency to gray prematurely.
- Skin is warm, soft and fair, often freckled and does not tan easily.
- The basic theme of Pitta-type is intensity in all actions.

Characteristics of Kapha-Type

- Solid, powerful build, great physical strength and endurance.
- Tendency to obesity because they convert calories to fat.
- Slow digestion, mild hunger. Tendency to over sleep.
- Steady energy, slow and graceful in action.
- Good retentive memory.
- Affectionate, tolerant, forgiving, but possessive.
- Calm, smooth, thick, pale skin, often oily.
- Procrastination.
- Take long time to arrive at a decision.
- Be happy to maintain the status quo.
- The basic theme of Kapha type is to be slow and relaxed.

Prakriti -Physical Constitution

A knowledge of our body-mind constitution is the key to find balance, healing and perfect health. Our constitution is formed from the doshas. At the time of conception each person's combination of vata, pitta and kapha is determined by the combination present in the parents. The unique combination at conception is called 'Prakriti'. This prakriti do not change during a person's life time. At the time of birth our constitution is made up of these doshas in a particular ratio. That ratio is more or less a fixed mold in which our constitution is shaped. That mold is fixed and does not change through out life. This mold differs from person to person and gives each personality his own inherent characteristics. Nature's purpose is to create variety, these different molds provides the variety. Each variety has its own beauty and charm and serve a good purpose in nature's plans. Although the mold remains fixed, the doshas that constitutes it are always in a state of flux, i.e. constantly changing. Sometimes they get aggravated and sometimes depleted. Our thoughts, emotions and activities constantly affect the doshas. Finding the right balance in life means to keep the doshas as close to the mold as possible neither allowing them to be aggravated nor depleted, and making the best use of the inherent qualities of the doshas.

People generally think that balancing the doshas means, having equal amounts of vata, pitta and kapha. This is wrong. One cannot change the ratio of the doshas with which one is born. That ratio is our prakriti our nature. We cannot push our doshas into a ratio that is better than the one we are born with. By trying to do so we only distance ourselves from our nature. This ratio is the ideal balance for the three doshas during the whole of one's life. Everything that we do, see, feel, taste or smell affects the doshas and changes the ratio. After the change the doshas must fall back

to the normal ideal balance. If this returning to the balance point is not achieved for a prolonged period then a state called vikriti is created. This means we have deviated from our nature or prakriti. This deviation will sooner or later manifest as a disease. Knowledge of our body-mind constitution or prakriti will help us to ensure that this deviation is kept to its minimum.

Vikriti

Vikriti is a Sanskrit word loosely translated as a "changed condition of body, mind and consciousness." In Ayurveda, it is most often used to describe your current state of health (or ill-health) in relation to your Prakriti, or "natural state."

While Prakriti, your natural constitution, remains stable throughout life and encompasses characteristics like eye color and height, Vikriti can fluctuate yearly, monthly, daily or even minute-to-minute. These fluctuations are a constant, healthy part of life. It is not the changes but our resistance or inability to make necessary adjustments to the changes that causes one or more doshas (vata, pitta or kapha) to become imbalanced.

Dhatus

Dhatu usually translates as 'body tissue', it is the tissues that make up the human body, they are retained by the body and always rejuvenated or replenished. They give the body its physical strength, structural integrity and function. There are seven dhatus which compose the structures and substances of the body.

1. Rasa-The nutrient fluid or plasma that forms the basis for blood
2. Rakta-Blood that governs oxygenation of all tissues and organs.
3. Mamsa-Muscle tissue that protects the vital organs, performs movement of joints.
4. Meda (fat)-Maintains the lubrication of the tissues and serves as insulating material to protect body heat.
5. Asthi-Bones and cartilage that gives support to the body's structure.
6. Majja -Bone marrow that fills up the bony spaces and nerve tissues carries motor and sensory impulses and facilitates communication among body cells and organs.
7. Shukra-The reproductive tissue of sperm and ovum.

The dhatus are listed in the above manner because they develop in the body in a fixed sequential manner one from the other. Each succeeding dhatu is a metabolic refinement of the previous dhatu and gets nourished by it. Rasa is the first dhatu to be formed and is the metabolic end product of the digestive processes. The metabolic processes that work on rasa dhatu then produce rakta. The next dhatu to develop is mamsa which gives rise to meda. From meda comes asthi and from asthi arises majja. Shukra is the last dhatu to be created and is the most refined.

The Channels--Srotas

Srotas, meaning channels or pores, are present throughout the visible body as well as at the "invisible" or subtle level of the cells, molecules, atoms, and subatomic strata. It is through these channels that nutrients and other substances are transported in and out of our physiologies. It is also through these channels that information and intelligence spontaneously flow. When the flow of appropriate nutrients and energies through these channels is unimpeded, there is health; when there is excess, deficiency, or blockage in these channels disease can take root. Some srotas have obvious correlates with western concepts (e.g. both Ayurveda and allopathy recognize the anna vaha srota, or gastrointestinal channel and the prana vaha srota, or respiratory passageways. Other

srotas have no western correlate: artava vaha srota or udaka vaha srota, carrying the monthly menstrum and the pure water in the body, respectively.

Together with knowledge of the doshic imbalances, the dhatus (tissues) involved, the state of the agni (digestive fire), and other diagnostic means, assessment of the srotas is one of the means in Ayurveda by which diseases can be distinguished. By knowing which srotas are affected and the nature and extent of their disturbance, one can understand a great deal about the disease process.

The Charaka Samhita (a major text on Ayurveda) describes thirteen srotas.

Three srotas connect the individual to the external environment, by bringing air, food, and water into and out of the body. Seven srotas are associated with the seven bodily tissues (sapta dhatus). Another three srotas direct wastes out of the body. That makes thirteen. However other ancient authorities recognize three additional srota relating to lactation, menstruation, and the flow of thoughts through the mind. This brings the total number of srotas to sixteen which is the accepted description.

The sixteen srotas of the human being.

Three srotas connect the individual to the external world:

- * Prana vaha srota--the channels carrying prana, the breath.
- * Anna vaha srota--the channels transporting solid and liquid foods
- * Udaka vaha srotas--the channels transporting water (no Western equivalent)

Seven srotas represent channels to and from the tissues (dhatus):

- * Rasa vaha srotas--the channels carrying plasma and lymph
- * Rakta vaha srotas--the channels carrying blood cells and specifically hemoglobin
- * Mamsa vaha srotas--the channels carrying muscle nutrients and wastes
- * Meda vaha srotas--the channels supplying the various adipose tissues of the body
- * Asthi vaha srotas--the channels bring nutrients to the bones and transporting wastes.
- * Majja vaha srotas--the channels supplying the bone marrow and nerves including the brain
- * Sukra vaha srota--the channels carrying the sperm and ova and supplying their nutrients

Three srotas regulate the elimination of metabolic waste products:

- * Purisha vaha srotas--the channels which carry the feces
- * Mutra vaha srotas--the channels which carry the urine
- * Sveda vaha srotas--the channels which carry perspiration

Two srotas are specific for women:

- * Artava vaha srotas--the channels which carry the menstrum
- * Stanya vaha srotas--the channels carrying the breast milk during lactation

One srota is associated with the mind (manas):

- * Mano vaha srota--the channels which carry thoughts, ideas, emotions, and impressions

Malas

The malas are those substances which the body eliminates in the process of creating and maintaining the dhatus. They are feces, urine, sweat, mucus, tears, saliva, menses and carbon dioxide. The action of the doshas separates the waste material from the dhatus at each stage of metabolism and then discharges them from the body.

Ama

When the doshas are aggravated because of poor diet, unhealthy lifestyle, negative emotions they first affect agni the body's biological fire that governs digestion and assimilation. When agni becomes weakened or disturbed, food is not properly digested. The undigested, unabsorbed food particles accumulate in the gastro-intestinal tract and turn into a toxic, sticky substance called ama. This ama clogs the intestines, overflows through other bodily channels such as blood vessels and cause diseases. The presence of ama can be felt as fatigue or a feeling of heaviness. It may induce constipation, indigestion, gas, bad breath, stiffness in the body or mental confusion.

Seasons

Ayurveda classifies seasons according to their predominant dosha.

Vata-The windy, cool, dry weather of autumn.

Kapha-The dark, heavy, damp, cloudy weather of winter.

Early spring is kapha but as late spring arrives the increased, warmth, light and brightness express Pitta qualities which manifests fully in summer.

Next Class:

5 Primary Vayus

Intro to Marma Points

Third Class:

Intro to Energetic Anatomy: Nadis, Kosha bodies, Chakras