

What is Ayurveda?

Ayurveda is a traditional healing system and science from India dating back at least 5,000 years. This living body of wisdom uses many different modalities for healing, including using food as medicine, lifestyle changes including daily and seasonal routines, herbal remedies, bodywork and extensive detoxification practices. In India, Ayurveda is still practiced as a complete medical system with its own hospitals, treatment centers, and pharmacies that dispense herbal medicine. Here in the United States, Ayurveda is better known for its emphasis on preventative health, promoting a holistic lifestyle, and being a sister science to Yoga. Ayurveda's emphasis on cultivating a balanced state for mind, body and spirit through diet and lifestyle changes makes it an accessible science for anyone wanting to improve their life.

Ayurveda is based on a traditional philosophy called Sankhya that also influences yoga. There are three ancient texts that provide the foundations and philosophy of Ayurveda. Ayurveda's three main texts called the *Brhat Tryai* are all written in Sanskrit. They are named the *Ashtanga Hridayam*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Sushruta Samhita*. Though there are many additional texts that are integral to the understanding of Ayurveda, most of our foundational knowledge comes from these texts. Here in the West, we rely on the translations by scholars to help us understand Ayurveda from their original sources. However, in Ayurvedic education in India, knowing Sanskrit is necessary to studying Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is best known for its theory of the doshas—sometimes translated as constitutions or humors. Each of us has a unique combination of the three doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—which makes up our individual constitution, or *prakruti*, that stays with us throughout our lives. The doshas teach us about our individual nature, physical body and mental personality. However, we may experience imbalances in these doshas based on many factors, such as diet, environment, lifestyle and stress known as *vikruti* or our current state of imbalance. Through learning more about the doshas, we are able to understand the needs of our individual constitution. We better understand who we are when we feel healthy and balanced. By following the patterns of the doshas like a roadmap, we can bring ourselves back to balance, making informed and educated decisions about our diet, lifestyle, herbal remedies and mental state.

Ayurveda's emphasis on holistic nutrition teaches us to use food as medicine—eating correctly for our dosha and for the season at hand. Ayurveda believes that agni, or the digestive fire, is the foundation for the health of our entire mind and body. Current research on the microbiome continues to prove the importance of the gut-brain connection and to demonstrate the link between healthy digestion and the functioning of many other systems in the body.

Ayurveda utilizes dinacharya, or daily routines, which follow a circadian rhythm, to maintain our mental and physical well-being. The practice of dinacharya is an age-old and time-tested way of bringing care and mindfulness to each decision we make throughout the day. Creating a morning routine to support the awakening of the body and establishing mindfulness practices like meditation and yoga as the foundation for our day creates a greater sense of presence and well-being. Learning to eat meals with mindful intention, at the right time of day, brings our digestive system into greater alignment and balance.

Though Ayurveda is an age-old wisdom, it is constantly evolving and adapting to fit the needs of the times. Ayurveda helps us understand the mind-body connection. Ayurveda helps us understand why food affects our mood. Ayurveda helps us understand the impact our decisions make on our hormones, immunity, emotional state and overall well-being. Ayurveda sees the individual as a mind, body and spirit. It empowers us to find healing in our daily lives so we have more clarity, wisdom and resilience.

Who is Ayurveda for?

Ayurveda is a low-cost, accessible, common-sense system of medicine that is as important now as ever. In a time where stress, disease and over-medication are rampant, alongside increasing rates of loneliness, depression, and unhappiness, Ayurveda can bring relief, mindfulness, care, and education to many. Ayurveda connects us back to the way of the natural world. By learning about our deeper nature, and the nature around us, we learn to reconnect to the parts of us that move slower, think deeper, and care for our bodies and minds. Many of us are suffering from burnout due to unsustainable lifestyle habits that plague our society. Ayurveda teaches us to slow down, come back inside, listen to a time-honored system, and reconnect to ourselves.

Ayurveda is for anyone open to learning about a holistic, mind-body, ancient way of healing. It is for any gender, age, race, orientation or socioeconomic background. What Ayurveda asks is that you are open, patient, and willing to put your well-being first. Studying Ayurveda and changing your life requires patient dedication. If it were easy to make these daily changes, we would have already. Ayurveda is for anyone who is ready to make change in their life and seeks a mindful way of living.

The Doshas

Vata



Elements: Air + Space

Qualities: Cold, Rough, Dry, Mobile, Light

-Responsible for all Movement. Inspiration, Creativity, Broad Thinking

-In excess, the dry and rough qualities may manifest themselves as dry or brittle skin, lips, hair, nails or bones (e.g. osteoporosis), as constipation, or as feeling "dry" emotionally.

-The "light" quality may manifest itself as giving you a lanky physique but excess lightness may manifest as being underweight, having muscle wasting, light bones, insomnia or feeling "spacey" or insecure.

-The cold quality of Vata may lead you to feel cold more easily than others around you. You may have cold hands and feet and crave warmth.

-The mobile quality may lead to a healthy ability to "multi-task" or, in excess, to scattered attention, a fidgety tendency, tremors, and nervousness. It may manifest as extremes; as in being very tall or very short or being drastically different weights at different times in your life.



Pitta

Elements: Fire + Water

Qualities: Hot, Sharp, Oily, Spreading, Light

-Responsible for all Transformation. Motivation and Digestion.

-The oily quality allows for softness of skin but, in excess, can manifest as oily skin, acne.

- The sharp quality may manifest as a sharp, bright intellect or, in excess, as a sharp tongue.
- "Hotness" can manifest as a warm, rosy complexion, warm body temperature, strong metabolism and appetite or, in excess, as ulcers, heartburn or a hot temper.
- The light quality may lead you to have a slender body or to get light-headed if you miss a meal.
- The liquid quality may manifest as excess sweating; when it's combined with the hot quality it can present as excess stomach acid.

Kapha



Elements: Earth + Water

Qualities: Cold, Slow, Heavy, Dull, Sticky, Soft

- Builds and support all structures and tissues of the body.
- The cool quality may manifest as cool skin and a laid-back, cool temperament.
- Heaviness may manifest as a large, sturdy, grounded physical and emotional constitution and, in excess, as being overweight or experiencing a subjective feeling of heaviness in the mind.
- Slowness may manifest as a slow, steady pace that you can maintain. In excess, you may get stuck in a pattern that may not be the best for you.
- Softness can manifest as a soft heart that is easily empathic. Another manifestation of this quality is having soft skin.
- Stability can be an asset that friends, family and colleagues probably recognize and perhaps lean on, but in excess could become stubbornness or sluggishness. You could become so stable that you are disinclined toward any physical activity.
- Density can manifest as good stamina and strong, well-formed muscles and bones. This enables the Kapha constitution to withstand vigorous exercise. This quality is also responsible for dense, luxurious hair.

How The Dosha's Respond To Stress

The Routes Each Dosha Can Take

Vata dosha, a combination of air and space, gives rise to a route that can be somewhat

erratic; imagine difficult to make left-hand turns, suddenly slamming on the breaks and then speeding up quickly, rushing across town in rush hour through side streets, ignoring stop signs, and trying to find the speediest but often most tumultuous route.

Pitta dosha, a combination of fire and water, is similar to a route with no speed limits which allows you to go as fast and as far as you can until you hit burn-out. Pushing to the limit without stop, fueled by adrenaline (maybe road rage!), and a burning desire to get to the destination is a very pitta-like approach to this route.

Kapha dosha, a combination of earth and water, is akin to the stuck-in-rush-hour commuter route. There isn't much space to move in the slow, stop-and-go traffic as you inch along for the arduous trek, feeling defeated by the journey ahead.

“If our starting point is unhealthy, we can’t trust our cravings. We need some rules or guidelines to follow until we return to a state of health (or achieve it for the first time in our lives) and learn or relearn what it feels like to be healthy in body and mind. After experiencing this for a while, our cravings start to become healthier because health becomes our new status quo. Once we reach our optimal health, and adjust to it, we can begin to trust our cravings. Until then, it takes effort and commitment to change our dietary and lifestyle habits.” -Dr. Claudia Welch

Cyclical Nature

Throughout each day, year, and lifespan the Doshas travel in a cyclical pattern of kapha, pitta and vata. Times of the day, seasons of the year, and age in life are governed by the Dosha that is ruling that time frame. The cyclical nature of this tri-doshic pattern is inherent to life in all ways. At birth through puberty, we are governed by the structure building qualities of Kapha. Throughout the middle of our live from puberty through menopause (or the equivalent time) we are ruled by the strong transformational energy of Pitta. As we transition into our later years of aging, Vata becomes the major player governing our mind and bodies. Ayurveda offers a wealth of practices to help us maintain health as we transition through these cycles.

Resources

Books:

- Living Ayurveda: Nourishing Body and Mind through Seasonal Recipes, Rituals, and Yoga by Claire Ragozzino
- The Ayurvedic Self-Care Handbook: Holistic Healing Rituals for Every Day and Season by Sarah Kucera
- Ayurveda: The Science of Self Healing: A Practical Guide Paperback – by Vasant Lad
- Prakruti by Dr. Robert Svoboda
- In Your Elements by Monica Bloom
- Balance Your Hormones, Balance Your Life - Dr. Claudia Welch

Podcasts & Talks:

- https://www.ted.com/talks/satchin_panda_how_optimizing_circadian_rhythms_can_increase_healthy_years_to_our_lives
- <https://hubermanlab.com/dr-justin-sonnenburg-how-to-build-maintain-and-repair-gut-health/>
- <https://vitalveda.com.au/learn/podcasts/>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/elements-of-ayurveda-podcast/id1268442696>
- <https://podtail.com/podcast/the-beauty-of-ayurveda/the-ages-stages-of-life-with-dr-claudia-welch/>