

LIVING AYURVEDA



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO AYURVEDIC NUTRITION
& DEEPLY NOURISHING YOUR BODY & MIND.

BY NADIA MARSHALL

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BY NADIA MARSHALL

EDITED BY KESTER MARSHALL

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The general approaches recommended in the Course should not be seen as, nor replace, specific medical advice. If you have any concerns about your health before beginning the Course or while following its recommendations, please consult your doctor, Ayurvedic Practitioner or other healthcare professional immediately.

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Welcome

Introduction

When I was studying Ayurveda I tended to bang on about it a lot, which got people interested. Friends and family asked me all the time if I could recommend a simple, practical introductory book that would help them understand what it was all about. So I went looking for one.

But after reading dozens of books on Ayurveda, I discovered I couldn't actually recommend any of them! Some of them were brilliant, but they were generally far too complicated for what the average person was after...

I found they didn't explain the fundamental principles simply enough or the 'whys' and 'hows' of the general Ayurvedic dietary and lifestyle recommendations in enough detail. They didn't answer all of the questions that come with being a Westerner with a suitcase full of nutrition baggage. And perhaps most importantly, they didn't explain how to LIVE Ayurveda simply, within the context of a modern life - they didn't empower the reader to try things out for themselves in an easy, sustainable, do-able way.... if you know what I mean.

So after years of study, research and personal experience, I decided to write my own book and this is it! Why me? I'm not Indian, a Doctor or an Ayurvedic Scholar. I only understand a bit of Sanskrit (and can't pronounce it very well). I'm not even a hippy! What I am is a practical, down-to-earth, problem-solving Taurean and a researcher and writer by trade. I'm also a young Australian woman who has grown up in the modern world and has suffered from a fair bit of confusion and stress over food. I spent most of my life living in a very conservative city, went to a snobby private girls school, studied science and commerce at a 'sandstone' University, worked as a Marketing Manager of big law firm and as a speechwriter for a University Vice Chancellor. Talk about straight! I come from a world of Western scientific, conservative thought and yet.... this ancient, beautiful system of medicine makes absolute sense to me. It answers so many of my questions about life. I believe in it completely! So, I know that if someone like me can understand the basics and have them change my life and my health completely, any Westener can!

I want you to LIVE Ayurveda WELL - to understand it, embrace it and embody it to the point where it feels completely natural... like you're not really 'doing' anything at all. To achieve this, I have broken up the fundamental concepts of Ayurveda (that you absolutely need to understand), explained each of the food and lifestyle practices relating to these concepts in detail and finally, given you a little homework to test them out for yourself at the end of each Module.

But don't worry, this isn't a boring workbook or textbook. It is much more fun than that! I initially wrote it in 2008, about 6 years into my Ayurvedic journey and not long after I had completed my formal studies. I was still very fresh, very inspired and very aware of what a challenge it had been for me to make all of these changes in my own life. So as you are reading, you will stumble upon one or two rants or soap-boxes... but you'll also find snippets of my shared experience along the way - little stories about the things I found particularly interesting, empowering or difficult in my own attempt to live Ayurveda well.

If you are interested in the nutritional aspect of things, you won't be disappointed because when you get down to it, it is all about the food. There is a famous Ayurvedic proverb that says, "When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need". This Course is all about what 'correct diet' actually means from an Ayurvedic perspective.

You are going to learn about your digestive fire (Agni) and how to keep it strong and balanced, about undigested food toxins (Ama) and how to decrease or avoid their formation, about the doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and how to keep them balanced without freaking yourself out, about your immune system (Ojas) and how to nourish it and finally, how to cultivate a peaceful mind (Sattva)... all through what you choose to eat.

It sounds complicated... but by the end of this Course, you will understand what all of that means AND how to do it. Pretty cool hey?!

This knowledge will help you to:

- ~ achieve and maintain an appropriate weight for your constitution
- ~ have more energy (without the aid of artificial stimulants or superfoods!)
- ~ enjoy a clear, glowing complexion
- ~ suffer from fewer seasonal illnesses and health problems
- ~ reduce symptoms of indigestion (bloating, gas, reflux, heaviness etc)
- ~ feel good about yourself and your body
- ~ enjoy and celebrate food!

Perhaps most importantly, you'll be introduced to a way of eating that is so holistic, it will help put to rest the confusion you feel over all of the constantly changing and evolving dietary information out there that we are all bombarded with. You'll no longer be seduced by fad diets and their reductionist ideas... and if you are, I'll be there to give you the Ayurvedic perspective on them and reassure you that you're already on the right path!

This Course was conceived in-part through my attendance at my hubby Kester's Ayurvedic Nutrition talks over the years and listening to the questions that came up repeatedly... and his answers. In this way, he is very much a co-author.

This Course is for anyone who has an interest in Ayurveda (especially the dietary and lifestyle aspects) and would like to incorporate it into their lives without having to travel to India and study for ten years... it is for anyone who is confused (and a little stressed) about what they should eat and how they should live to 'be healthy'... AND it is for anyone who wants to understand themselves in a way that just makes good sense!

You're going to love the journey... and when you're finished, you can get cracking on all of those awesome, more complicated books (which you will now be able to understand). I've included a list of recommendations at the end! ENJOY!!



Ayurveda and Yoga are sister sciences... so for those of you who practice Yoga (or are thinking about it), I've included Yoga-specific comments throughout, highlighted by this little icon...

About Ayurveda

The Sanskrit term, 'Ayurveda' translates literally as 'the science of life'. More than 5000 years old, it is the oldest, most comprehensive medical system in the world and has eight main branches that range from internal medicine and psychology through to paediatrics and surgery.

It has evolved alongside its sister science, Yoga, and is informed by Buddhist philosophy so places great emphasis on the importance of our mental and spiritual health.

This ancient knowledge is as relevant today as ever and is the source of many modern approaches to healthcare. It is the national system of healthcare in India and has been widely practiced in Europe and America for many years.

Unlike Western science and medicine, Ayurveda is based on the fundamental laws of nature. These laws never change. This is why the principles and practices of Ayurveda have changed very little in so many thousands of years. It is why current students of Ayurveda still study directly from ancient texts in an ancient language... and why its relevance to us as humans, as a part of nature, living in nature, never changes.

In Ayurveda it is understood that on a physical level, all disease actually begin in the digestive tract. Therefore, in many ways, this timeless 'science of life' is a science of metabolic fitness - of cultivating awareness and practices that improve digestion and metabolism, reduce the accumulation of undigested or poorly digested food toxins in the body, balance the body's physiology, improve the immune system and calm the mind.

Ayurveda does not focus on body weight the way that we do in the West. The science is more concerned with promoting our inner or natural beauty through practices that restore balance to our inherent physiologies and promote their most positive features. Ayurveda teaches that we are all born with a particular constitution, or 'Prakriti' which determines both our physical and mental propensities. When we follow Ayurvedic principles, we will naturally return to the shape we were born to be, to the perfection of our initial design, without even really trying.

The food and lifestyle approaches taught by Ayurveda have the potential to free our minds from food confusion, issues or obsessions that we may be carrying around or simply from limiting ideas about food. They can teach us to appreciate and honour our food for what it gives us... which is nothing less than life itself! Importantly, they can also teach us to be more kind and gentle with ourselves and to feel truly, deeply nourished in every way.

My Story

I am not a candidate for Today Tonight or Oprah. I have never been extremely overweight nor terrifyingly underweight. My issues have never been quite so externally obvious. However, that hasn't made them any less real or difficult to me or any less common out there in the world. I imagine there are many people who will read my story and relate to it in some way, which is why I've included it - warts and all!

I grew up in a family somewhat focused on beauty. My mother was a model as a teenager and, despite still being very beautiful, has always been rather insecure about her body and her looks. As I was growing up she, like most women, went through periods of grueling diet and exercise regimes. My father (who is also rather attractive) has been prone to discriminating against those not so fortunate in the genetic lottery.

I also grew up in the era of THE supermodel - of Naomi, Christy, Elle, Cindy, Linda and Claudia. In the magazines, on TV, in the schoolyard and at home I learned that to be tall, impossibly thin, fit and beautiful was to be lovable and successful. I also learned that no matter how tall, thin, fit and beautiful I became, that that was no real reason to actually love or accept myself. As a result of these influences, combined with the tendencies of my constitution, I developed a life approach of perfectionism and self-punishment.

I didn't go on my first diet until I was 15. I was blessed with good bone structure, reasonable height and a love of exercise. I could eat whatever I wanted and never put on a scrap of weight... until I stopped growing. The first diet I went on (which I really didn't need to go on) was a very low calorie two-week program that my Mum, sister and I did together. It was a bonding experience. I lost 5kgs in two weeks and I was hooked. I totally loved the control!

I began learning the calorie value of every food item I put in my mouth and by 16 was pretty obsessive. My two-week diet became a 12 month diet and I never ate more than 750 calories a day! I went from a reasonably slim and healthy weight at 15 to a very skinny and unhealthy weight at 16. If I didn't want my period I'd just eat a little less the week before and it wouldn't come. I was on the swimming, tennis and basketball teams and went to the gym nearly everyday - an obsessive exerciser as well. I had photos of my favourite stick-thin supermodels stuck up in my wardrobe for inspiration and spent far too much time in front of the mirror negatively scrutinising myself.

At the same time I was getting more attention than I'd ever received before. The general feedback from my peers was that I looked great and was 'so disciplined' - my friends were always coming to me for calorie values and advice. I became self-righteous and began to look down on 'gluttons' who couldn't control their food intake. I thought they were weaker human beings, disgusting even. If I happened to eat 'too much' one day, I'd think the same horrible thoughts about myself. I felt cold and angry inside.

I had an extremely restricted diet consisting of dry cereal, apples and carrots, rice cakes, low-fat cuppa soups, noodles and the odd stir-fry or frozen low-fat meal. I was deeply, deeply hungry! My sleep became disturbed, my physical development was halted in its tracks and eventually friends at school started hassling me to eat more. But their comments only strengthened my resolve to be more disciplined!

My wake up call didn't come until the day I attempted to 'splash out' and eat a salad roll for lunch. My stomach, not used to such things, reacted violently and I was rushed to the school dispensary in the afternoon. I didn't stop vomiting for two days.

As I lay delirious in my bed on one of those days, my Mum came into my room and said, "Nadia, perhaps this is your body's way of telling you that you need to eat more". This was the first time she had really said anything about my severely restricted eating... and her timing was perfect. I was finally ready to hear it and I knew she was right.

And so began the next chapter of my unhealthy relationship with food. For the next ten years that followed, I tried to NOT obsess about food. Although my diet was a relatively 'healthy' Western diet, I gained 20kgs. I carried it comfortably, but not much about how I felt inside was comfortable. I would judge myself after each meal and spend an unreasonable amount of time wondering what the next meal might be. I thought about food and about my body ALL THE TIME but never actually enjoyed either.

I desperately wanted to be rid of this preoccupation, to free my mind for more important endeavours. I tried various diets over the years which all worked for a short period of time but I found they were difficult to maintain or encouraged further obsessions and my weight continued to yo-yo. I knew that I had severely damaged my metabolism and my mind and wanted to find a way to heal them both.

It was in 2002, when I was 27 that I first discovered Ayurveda. I had begun studying Naturopathy and one of my subjects was Traditional Medicine Philosophies. I did my assignment on Ayurvedic Medicine and shortly afterwards transferred to the Australasian Institute of Ayurvedic Studies (A.I.A.S) to study Ayurveda instead, with Dr Ajit part-time. As luck (or fate) would have it, I also met my husband, Kester, around this time. Kester was a Naturopath and Herbalist and had been studying Ayurveda for many years, including spending a year in India. He helped to guide me through my studies, taught me how to cook and encouraged my transformation to a more Ayurvedic way of life. He was living with his best mate (also a Naturopath, Herbalist and amazing Chef) at the time so we both learnt a lot about cooking from him.

Throughout the A.I.A.S course our assignments encouraged an experiential approach to Ayurvedic principles. The course, plus all of my additional reading slowly blew my mind. It completely changed the way I viewed food and the way I viewed myself and the environment. I changed my eating habits slowly, gently over a period of time, testing concepts and approaches until I genuinely believed them to be true. Throughout this time I also became a super dedicated student of Yoga, practicing 3-5 times a week for several years and then dabbling in a little teaching.

I have been living and studying Ayurveda for many years now and it has completely changed my life. I look back at my story and can't even fathom feeling the way I used to. In those years, I have felt my metabolism being restored and strengthened. My general health, particularly my mental health, has also been completely transformed. For the most part, the food itself has taken care of this!

I have also maintained a healthy, comfortable weight (which my body has chosen) for over a decade without thought or deprivation. I have no idea how many calories, 'points' or grams of fat I eat each day but I imagine my 16 year old self would be positively horrified and in total disbelief if she added them up.

I have no guilt or confusion about what I eat. In fact, I only ever have really good thoughts about food and much warmer, kinder thoughts about myself and my body. I feel really in tune with myself and I feel deeply, deeply nourished... which has given me a lovely foundation of overall contentment. There are still ups and downs but they're generally not too dramatic! But perhaps most importantly, I've freed up a lot of space in my mind to concentrate on all the things I want to study and learn about!

Thanks to Ayurveda, I've also, partly by accident, learned how to cook... and I'm pretty good at it! I never imagined that I would co-write a cookbook, make cooking videos and run cooking classes and yet, that is exactly what I've done (and continue to do)!

So that is my story. I have been overweight for my constitution. I have been underweight for my constitution. I have been troubled by food and body issues and I have overcome them... or rather, they have settled down. My health has suffered from my strict starvation but also from my ignorant indulgences. But thanks to Ayurveda I have found a simple, practical path to food freedom, self-acceptance and self-understanding. After living it for many years, I wish to share my interpretation and distillation of it with others in an easy-to-follow, approachable way.

You might have a similar story, or yours might be completely different... Whatever it is that brought you here, I hope this knowledge helps you as much as it has helped me!

Love
Nadia xx

Don't Be In A Hurry

People are always in a hurry when embarking on any program of change. We are always in a hurry to lose weight, to get fit, to get healthy, to get flexible, to change this, to do that. The truth is, if we change anything too quickly, there is every chance we'll just as quickly return to our 'old' way of doing things.

Consider how long it has taken you to become the person you are today. It has taken a long time for your body and your mind to adjust to this current version of yourself. If you see yourself as a particular type of person and identify with that image of yourself, it will take both your body and your mind time to change... to come to terms with a new vision of yourself.

It takes time to change things. It takes time for new practices to become habits. It takes even longer for them to become a part of you and your life. It takes time to change tolerances for food and experiences. It also takes time for your mind/body metabolism to recover from years of neglect or abuse.

So, please don't be in a hurry....

When making changes in your life, if things don't happen for you straight away, don't lose heart. You are not alone in facing obstacles or set-backs. You are not alone in making quick progress initially and then facing a plateau. Any plateaus you experience are usually a matter of your body and mind adjusting to a new ideal. Don't see them as a lack of success or progress, see them as days-of-rest in the recreation of yourself.

This Course encourages you to take a long-term view. It presents a new way of living and eating and of relating to your food and lifestyle that, over time, will lead to a change in your body shape, your mindset, your daily habits, your health and perhaps even your outlook on life.

So, please don't be in a hurry....

You are recreating yourself. You are nourishing a new you. Give your body and mind time to adjust. If you are feeling impatient, try to enjoy the idea that every day, every meal, every action, every moment, you are not only enjoying delicious food and feeling nourished, you are also giving something to yourself – you are nurturing yourself and your health, helping your body and mind to fulfill their greatest potential.... to return to the ideal of your first creation.

So, please don't be in a hurry.... and come back to this page to re-read it any time you feel you are getting impatient!

Avoiding Black & White Thinking

In our society, thinking tends to be very black and white – things are either all good or they are all bad... they are all right or they are all wrong. But the goals posts rarely stay the same. One day something might be ‘bad’... the next day, new evidence or a new experience reveals that it is actually ‘good’....

This type of thinking lends itself to extremes of behaviour. We might get really excited about trying something new – a new friend, a new practice, a new purchase of some sort. When we begin our experience of this new thing, our enthusiasm helps us to believe that it is all good. A few days/weeks/months later, however, when the initial enthusiasm has waned a little, we begin to see the flaws, the faults, the difficulties, the obstacles, the challenges that go hand-in-hand with this new thing and our mind, incapable of distinguishing shades of grey, starts to see it as less than all good, as maybe all bad. So we stop, we give up, we walk away and we masterfully justify our change of tune with the greatest of ease in our black and white minds. We’ve all been there. We’ve all done it! We even have this attitude towards ourselves a lot of the time, particularly those of us who have suffered from any obsession/disorder or addiction – black and white judgement towards ourselves can be very self-destructive.

In each Module of this Course, I will ask you to do/try/experience a variety of food and lifestyle practices. I will also ask you to maintain the practices from the previous Modules, where appropriate. At the end of the Course, there are two pages that summarise all of these recommendations into “Food Practices” and “Lifestyle practices”. I’m writing about black and white thinking because when things get difficult in this Course, when you’re sick of following your new rules and practices, please don’t start thinking it’s all bad or too difficult. Don’t stop doing everything because doing everything is too difficult. Instead, just loosen the leash a little. Be kind to yourself. Stop doing some of the things and just keep up the ideas and practices you can do, that you can handle, you can fit in, you can afford... especially the ones you enjoy the most!

There are a lot of recommendations in this Course. If you can do all of them, that is great. However, if you do just some of them, that is so much the better than doing nothing at all; than going back to your old ways and habits. Know your limitations and make the changes that you can incorporate into your life in a sustainable way. If you overdo it, you risk dropping the whole bundle!

Finally, I ask that you don’t use your own personal limitations to write-off Ayurveda. Don’t be one of those people who says, “Oh yeah, I’ve ‘done’ the Ayurvedic thing. It didn’t work”. If you apply the practices and recommendations in this Course sincerely, then they will work (afterall, they have been working on billions of people for thousands of years). If you do not apply them correctly/consistently or with this attitude, then they may not... but that isn’t because they don’t work, it is because you, for whatever reason, are currently unable to work with them. That is fine too – maybe it just isn’t your time or maybe you’re just not all that in to each other!

So don’t forget... just do the best you can and be patient with yourself and with the practices.

How To Use The Course

If you like you can read the whole Course in one go... but then please come back to the first Module. Read it again and then give yourself at least one week to carry out the practices, preferably two weeks.

Then move onto the next Module. Read it carefully and then give yourself another week or two to do the practices. How long you give yourself for each Module is kind of up to you but one week is the recommended minimum.

If you like to take things slowly and steadily, give yourself a month for each Module. If you're super enthusiastic and feeling inspired, give yourself a week. You can even adjust it as you go along - one week for one Module, three weeks for another.

The idea is to really give yourself time to experience and feel into the practices - to convince yourself that the theory is making sense. This is critical for pacifying our inner skeptic! Without this convincing, there will be no longevity to what we're doing. With this convincing however, we will always come back to this knowledge. Even if we stray well off the path, we will always come back because we know it makes sense, we know it works and we know it feels good. It becomes our safe haven.

So... one Module at a time, in order, please people! Then at the end, stick your food and lifestyle practice cards on the fridge to continue to remind yourself what you're doing.

For support, you need a copy of "WARMTH: The Ayurvedic Cookbook" which you can access for free as an ebook via our website or you can purchase it as a printed book, also from our website. WARMTH is like a bridging book from a Western diet to a more Ayurvedic diet. We then have a second cookbook, "The Ayurvedic Kitchen", which is a little more strictly Ayurvedic (and a little more Indian).

We also have a range of cooking VIDEOS on the website as well as in-depth ARTICLES on Ayurveda and Ayurvedic nutrition that I'll refer to throughout the Course. If you're feeling attracted to a Western nutrition idea or fad diet and are feeling confused, go to the website to see if I've written an article about it. If I haven't, email me on nadia@muditaInstitute.com and I will.

My BLOG can also be found on the site where you can read ongoing rants from me to maintain your interest and inspiration. I also have a 'Feature Food' section where I look at a variety of foods in-depth from both an Ayurvedic and Western perspective.

So... you have all the support materials you need as well as a thriving Facebook community for asking questions and staying in touch (www.facebook.com/muditaInstitute).

I look forward to hearing from you and wish you luck!!

www.muditaInstitute.com

1: Elements & Qualities

Introduction

Welcome to the first Module! In each Module throughout the Course, we will explore some different ways of viewing and understanding your body and mind and also your interaction with all aspects of the environment. Because these ideas are based on the philosophies and principles of an Eastern medical science, they may be a little foreign and will take some time to really sink in. Even if you think you get them straight away (which you may), it will just take time for them to become a part of the way that you think and feel. This is perfectly natural and normal. There is theoretical understanding and then there is experiential understanding – in my experience, these two are very different. This Course is designed to help develop both.

The most important thing you can do when reading the Modules is to keep an open mind. For a moment, suspend your ingrained Western skepticism and disbelief and let the ideas be absorbed. Then, use that skepticism to motivate you to test them for yourself. Become your own little ‘scientist’. This is what I did. It is important not to just take stuff on board at face value – you have to convince yourself. But, convince yourself from a place of openness rather than being closed and failing before you even begin. Give it a chance because if you’re anything like me, other approaches have not been working for you...that is why you are here.

You will notice that the style of the Modules is relatively casual and informal. I have taken this approach quite deliberately – to make the material less intimidating and hopefully more approachable. Oh, and so you don’t fall asleep. I refer to ‘you’ a lot so you know that I’m writing to YOU. This is a very personal Course. I’ve also used a lot of examples and my own experience to bring some of the ideas to life. In my writing, I wanted to be true to myself and my own understanding rather than attempting to live up to the knowledge and writing skills of far more learned scholars. At the end of the Course, I will recommend a range of incredible books on the subject should you wish to explore your own studies further. Also, I mentioned before that I am Taurean – so you may notice a certain ‘bull in a China shop’ vibe to some of my rants... I apologise in advance for this tendency of mine and for any potential offence it may cause. It is certainly not intended! A softer approach is something I’m still working on....

In this first Module you will learn about some of the fundamental principles that will inform each of the subsequent Modules. I think it is very important and empowering to understand exactly WHY you are doing something, rather than just doing it because someone tells you to. For me, the beauty of the Ayurvedic food and lifestyle principles taught in this Course is they just make sense – in my mind and in my body. They are practical, flexible, not particularly complicated and have nothing to do with deprivation. They are therefore sustainable and deliciously enjoyable. I can have my cake and eat it too! Literally. I hope you have the same experience.

So without further ado, lets get to it!

The Five Elements

The first concept to grasp is the idea of 'The Five Elements'. Most other philosophies that you will learn about in the coming weeks and months will be based on this idea. For a Western mind, this is an unusual way of thinking about things to begin with. However, you will see over time that it is actually a relatively easy way to view ourselves and can have quite a profound impact on our interaction with our environment. I think it is also much more practical than thinking about ourselves in terms of detailed anatomical structures and physiological processes. No one can relate to that easily. In the wider view of creation and our place in nature, this concept actually makes perfect sense.

Ayurveda and many other traditional medical sciences believe that everything in existence is composed of the five elements – Ether (or space), Air, Fire, Water and Earth. They also believe that all five elements can be found in every single substance that exists, to varying degrees. One or more elements will be predominant but ALL elements will be present.

Water is a great example of this idea. You might think that water would just contain the Water element. However, when you apply heat or Fire to water, it evaporates and turns to gas, demonstrating some of the qualities of Air and Ether. When you apply extreme cold to water, it becomes solid, demonstrating some of the qualities of Earth. However, its predominant element is indeed Water. Lets use the human body as another example.

Ether: In relation to the human body, Ether (or space) relates to the spaces in our bodies – our hollow bones and bone cavities, our hollow blood vessels and lymph channels and our hollow organs such as the stomach, lungs, bladder and intestines.

Air: The human body also contains the Air element – Air moves into our lungs and is circulated throughout the body via the blood. More subtly, the Air element relates to all movement and communication in our body, from nervous impulses to muscle movements and the movement of nutrients through cell walls to the influence of hormones etc.

Fire: Fire is found throughout our physical body in the form of metabolism or transformation - from the obviously acidic and burning digestive juices through to our temperature regulation mechanism right down to every single chemical reaction that takes place in the body to create something new.

Water: As we have all been told since we were little, our bodies are about 75-80% water when we're babies and 50-65% when we're adults. The Water element contributes to the juiciness or moistness of our tissues, our blood, lymph, joint lubrication, mucous secretions and all other things liquid and juicy. It contributes to lubrication but also to structure (just as water in a balloon gives it its shape).

Earth: Finally, the expression of the Earth element in our bodies is an obvious one. It relates to all things relatively solid, including our muscle, bone and bone marrow, which are predominant in the Earth element.

Each of us has a different amount of the five elements in our bodies – some of us are more ethereal, some more airy, some more moist and others more solid, with more earth... but we ALL must contain ALL of the elements or we would not go on living. I'll use capitals when referring to the elements from now on, so you know when I'm talking about them.

The Ten Qualities

Each of the five elements in nature can be described using certain qualities. This is a very important idea to grasp as it is at the very centre of the Course.

Ayurveda speaks about ten opposing qualities that can be used to describe all substances, beings and experiences in the world. They are:

1. **Heavy – Light**
2. **Cold – Hot**
3. **Dry – Oily**
4. **Dull – Sharp**
5. **Rough – Smooth**
6. **Dense – Liquid**
7. **Hard – Soft**
8. **Static – Mobile**
9. **Gross – Subtle**
10. **Sticky - Clear**

Lets use a rock as an example. We could describe a rock as being heavy, dry, dense, hard and gross. How about roses? They could be described as light, oily, smooth, soft and static. How about a leather couch? It could be described as heavy, cold, oily, dense, soft, static, gross and can be sticky in hot weather! You get the idea. Emotions can also be described in terms of qualities. Love is warm and soft. Stress is light, dry, rough and mobile. Anger is hot and sharp.

The five elements can, of course, also be described in terms of qualities. The table below shows you which qualities relate to each of the elements:

ETHER	AIR	FIRE	WATER	EARTH
Clear	Mobile	Hot	Cold	Heavy
Light	Dry	Sharp	Liquid	Dull
Subtle	Light	Light	Smooth	Static
Soft	Cold	Dry	Dull	Dense
	Rough	Subtle	Soft	Hard
	Subtle		Oily	Gross

Like Increases Like

You may now be wondering why the concept of elements and qualities is so important and what it has to do with nutrition and metabolism. Well, the idea of elements is important because it will help us to understand the Ayurvedic view of constitution (and therefore metabolic tendencies), which we'll talk about next.

The idea of qualities is so important because in Ayurveda it is believed that exposure to certain qualities will increase those qualities in your own body and mind – the concept of 'Like Increases Like'. Understanding this concept can provide you with a very simple and powerful tool for influencing the qualities of your own mind and body.

You may know this concept to be true deep down but lets use some very basic examples to illustrate the point:

- ~ Hang up your washing on a warm, dry, breezy day and it will soon dry very quickly – like increases like.
- ~ Your dogs, horses or even children will get ‘frisky’ or more excited and unpredictable on cool, windy, unpredictable days – like increases like.
- ~ Spend time in a very cold environment (like the snow) and your body will soon get very cold too – like increases like.
- ~ Spend time in a dry, hot, windy environment and your skin will quickly dry out – like increases like.
- ~ Spend time in a moist, heavy tropical environment and there is no need for moisturiser – like increases like.
- ~ In winter, when the skies are heavy, dark and dull, you may tend to feel heavy, dark and dull too, finding it more difficult to get out of bed in the morning and being prone to bouts of feeling down – like increases like.
- ~ Eat a very hot little red chilli by itself and you will break out in a sweat all over and feel like your mouth is on fire – like increases like.
- ~ When you drink a cold, heavy, dense, sticky milkshake, you will notice an increase in mucous in your mouth that is also cold, thick, heavy and milky in colour – like increases like.
- ~ Watch a light, inspirational, uplifting movie and you will tend to feel happy, light and inspired – like increases like.
- ~ If you hang around an angry, moody person for any length of time, you will tend to become more angry and moody too, even if you express it in a slightly different way – like increases like.

These are just some simple examples that you will hopefully agree with. The ‘Like Increases Like’ idea relates to everything we experience in our lives – the climate and environment we live in, what we eat and the way we feel. It also relates to all of our sensory inputs – what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell will all have an influence on the qualities of our body and mind.

Over the coming Modules, we will test this concept so that you experience it for yourself and understand how profound this simple idea can be.

Obviously this Course will predominantly be looking at the qualities of the food you eat. However, we will also consider your broader environment and lifestyle and the effect of this on your metabolism. But next, lets look at the qualities of the elements and how they help to define genetic expression - how they help to influence who we are, what we look like, how we think and how we behave.

Constitution Or Prakriti

One of the things that Ayurveda is best known for is its idea of 'Constitution', or 'Prakriti' in Sanskrit. I think people love this concept so much because it can be such a useful and positive tool for self-understanding.

The literal meaning of Prakriti is 'first creation'. It is the unique psychological, physiological and mental pre-disposition or make-up of an individual. It is determined by our parents' constitutions and imbalances at the time of our conception as well as our mother's diet, lifestyle, sensory inputs and imbalances during pregnancy. Our Prakriti can be any one of seven possible combinations, but within these, infinite expressions of the elements exist within the body - Prakriti is just a guide.

Constitution is looked at in terms of a predominance of the five elements in the body. However rather than having pure 'Air' or 'Earth' types etc, the elements are grouped together and given another name. Why? Because no element exists in the body in isolation, it always needs to combine with another element in order to remain in the body in a functional way. But you don't need to understand that to understand the different constitutions described in Ayurveda so let's get into them straight away!

A quick note - when you're reading about the various constitutions, you will naturally try and associate with them and think, 'oh, that's me' ... 'that's not me' etc. Try to avoid this to some extent at this stage as determining your Prakriti can be quite a challenging exercise. Some people are very obvious and can be worked out immediately. Others can take months to determine. Even a trained Ayurvedic Practitioner may find some people particularly difficult.

You will go through a detailed chart at the end of this Module that will help you to identify your constitution. It is best to go through the chart with an open mind (so that you don't doctor the results by already believing you are a particular constitution). It might also be good to go through it with a good friend to gain a more accurate and honest picture of your 'first creation'. The best idea, however, is to see a trained Ayurvedic Practitioner as they can usually tell through your pulse, if not your physical and mental characteristics.

Throughout this section and subsequent Modules, I will use the terms 'Constitution' and 'Prakriti' interchangeably so just remember that and try not to get confused.

1) VATA – AIR & ETHER

The Vata person has a strong predominance of the elements Air and Ether. The predominant qualities of Vata are cold, dry, light, rough, subtle, mobile and clear. However, when you think of Vata, above all things, think COLD, DRY and IRREGULAR, like air moving through space.

Physically, Vata folk are ethereal and irregular. They are either very tall or very short with very long limbs or very short ones. They tend to have slight, light frames as if they might blow away in the wind and usually find it difficult to put on weight (although even Vata people can become overweight). Their limbs are usually well defined with the bones protruding from the rest of the limb and they are generally quite flat-chested. They have more irregular facial features – maybe a weak chin or an unusually large one; a large or very small, irregular nose and sunken eyes. They tend to have a dull/matt or brownish complexion with dry or rough skin and small, brittle fingernails. Vata teeth are usually small, crooked or irregular. Vata eyes are clear, black, brown, grey, violet or slate blue with thin eyelashes. Vata hair is thin, dry and brittle. Their ears are either very small with no lobes or large and irregular, but not fleshy. They have variable digestion (strong one minute, weak the next), are prone to gas formation and bloating, and are more likely to suffer from dry stools or constipation or very loose stools (usually due to nervousness). Vata folk are very light sleepers and often suffer from insomnia. They tend towards poor circulation, pain and cracking in the joints and dislike the cold more than any other constitution. They have light, high voices and tend to speak very quickly and erratically.

Mentally, Vata people are spatial in their intelligence. They tend to be very creative, highly adaptable and have an excellent ability to grasp new ideas or concepts. However, they have terrible memories and will quickly forget any concepts they've previously understood – making them quite successful in 'cram for exam' situations! On the downside, they are the constitution that is most prone to suffering from insecurity, anxiety, panic attacks, nervous disorders and high stress. They also have the least robust constitutions and weakest immune systems.

Vata folk have a tendency towards a low sex drive or a very changeable one – high one moment, non-existent the next. Their energy levels are very changeable and they expend energy with great enthusiasm. The minute they have some, they'll spend it in a flurry of activity and then collapse in a heap. It is a similar situation with their finances - they make money quickly but spend it equally quickly. Very little remains with them... things flow through them like the wind.

When you think of a pure Vata person, think of the ethereal, awkward or irregular looking person who is never quite 'present'. They lack intensity, drive and groundedness. They seem as if they might just float away, mentally and physically! Pure Vata people are dreamers, creators... always a little unstable, shy, shifty or 'off with the fairies'.

You might have gathered that our society is somewhat in love with the 'Vata' look. We worship models that are stick thin, we put them in positions that emphasise their boniness and put eye shadow and blush on them to increase the sunken eye and protruding cheekbone look... and yet we are always amazed to hear that they suffer from insecurity and anxiety. Rest assured there is an upside and a downside to every constitution!

The following is perhaps a superficial way of illustrating Prakritis but it is also one that will interest most, given our society's obsession with celebrity. It will demonstrate the fact that people of all constitutions are gorgeous in their own way. Here are a couple of the best examples of Vata constitutions that I can think of:



Photo from: www.hyenaproductions.com

Adrien Brody is definitely a predominantly Vata man – very tall and slim with a dark, matt complexion. He has long limbs and long, elegant fingers (perfect for ‘The Pianist’). He also has strangely irregular facial features... a big crooked nose; thin lips; protruding cheek bones; brown, uneven eyes and slightly crooked teeth. I just love him!



Photo by Corinne Day, from: www.dailymail.co.uk

Kate Moss is a predominantly Vata woman – the queen of model heroin-chic in the nineties, she is tall, thin and flat-chested with sunken eyes and protruding cheekbones. The upward movement of the tip of her nose is also quite Vata. Her eyes are widely set with uneven pupils, giving her a rather spacey, ethereal look. She also has small, crooked teeth (perhaps this is why you rarely see her smiling).

2) PITTA – FIRE & WATER

The Pitta person has a strong predominance of the elements Fire and Water. The predominant qualities of Pitta are hot, sharp, liquid, mobile and oily. However, when you think of Pitta, above all things, think **HOT, OILY, INTENSE** and **IRRITABLE**, like oil on fire.

Physically, Pitta folk can best be described as moderate. They are usually an average height and an average weight with good muscle development and reasonable limb definition. Women will have moderate breasts and moderate hips.

They tend to have more regular and symmetrical facial features, but often these will be quite sharp and angular. The very manly, angular chins you see on soap stars are very Pitta. They tend to be hot-blooded and have blood near their skin giving their complexion a pinkish or ruddy-red hue. They also have more moles and freckles than other constitutions and soft, warm, slightly oily skin that will burn easily. Pitta nails are moderate and usually soft and pink; teeth are moderate in size and relatively straight but with a yellowish tinge and sometimes sharp. Pitta eyes are hazel, green, pale blue and often intense in their gaze. Their speech is usually also quite intense and deliberate. Pitta folk will have medium thickness hair that is prone to oiliness and premature greying. The classic natural redhead is usually predominantly Pitta. They have strong digestion and keen appetites but are prone to heartburn and loose stools (due to their liquid qualities). They sleep well but are hot sleepers. Their circulation is good and they have a tendency towards profuse sweating. Pitta people cannot bear the heat – they are so hot-blooded already, they far prefer cooler climates.

Pitta people are blessed mentally. They have sharp intelligences, reasonable memories and are highly organised. They are motivated, ambitious, passionate and courageous and make excellent leaders due to their ability to manifest ideas into reality. They enjoy control and taking centre stage. On the downside, they are the constitution that is most prone to suffering from anger, jealousy, frustration, irritability and all of those other fiery emotions! Other tendencies include being overly judgmental, perfectionistic, arrogant and even violent.

As passionate folk, Pitta people usually have a moderate sex drive and think they are great lovers (although this may not always be the case!) – as with everything else, they are intense in bed. They have good energy generally and use it wisely, rarely running out. It is a similar situation with their finances – they are good at making money and good at saving it. They have reasonable strength and good immunity but have a tendency towards poor eyesight, inflammation (skin, joint etc), skin eruptions, acidity problems and heart attacks.

When you think of a pure Pitta person, think of a strong, determined, intense and ambitious person who is dedicated to achieving. They are the person prone to grumpiness or regularly erupting with anger or frustration. Pitta people are always on a mission, working on a project of some sort or solving a problem...

Most of our leaders and politicians are predominantly Pitta people (this might explain the level of violence in the world today?!). Most of our favourite Hollywood actors are also Pitta boys and some of the ladies are purely Pitta girls. Here are a couple of examples:



Photo from: www.fan-sites.org

Julianne Moore is Pitta gorgeous – fabulous red hair, balanced, symmetrical features, peaches and cream freckled skin and green eyes. Notice the intensity in her gaze vs the Vata examples.



Photo from: www.splendor.com

Bond, James Bond. **Daniel Craig** is an excellent example of a predominantly Pitta man. He has the ruddy, freckled skin, the piercing blue eyes and the very chiselled jaw (and body). Everything about him is moderate, angular (and HOT?!).

3) KAPHA – EARTH & WATER

The Kapha person has a strong predominance of the elements Earth and Water. The predominant qualities of Kapha are heavy, static or immobile, slow, dull, cold, oily, liquid, slimy/smooth, dense, soft, sticky and gross. However, when you think of Kapha, think COLD, WET and STABLE, like Earth in Water. Rather than ‘mud’, think Mother Earth.

Physically, Kapha folk can best be described as solid, stable and attractive. When in balance, they can maintain a moderate weight but they are the constitution most inclined to gain weight with ease, especially in the lower parts of the body. They have broad, strong frames with dense bones (they literally have heavier bones and denser tissues than Vata or Pitta people!). They are usually considered the most robust and attractive constitution with dark, thick, lustrous, wavy hair; large, full lips; big, white, straight teeth; large doe-like dark eyes with long, thick lashes; thick, strong nails; and pale, soft, slightly oily and slightly thick skin (which tans easily and evenly).

Their appetites are moderate and stable, their digestion is slow but reasonable and their elimination tends to be regular with well-formed stools. They generally sleep easily and heavily but have a tendency to want to sleep more than they should as they enjoy conserving energy (the opposite of Vata folk who love to spend it!). In terms of temperature preferences, they are stable enough to not be overly affected by either extreme. Their circulation is good and perspiration is moderate. Their voices are usually deep and delicious – many famous singers have a strong Kaphic influence in their constitutions (think Pavarotti).

Mentally, Kapha people grasp concepts slowly but remember them forever. In line with the Mother Earth analogy, they tend to be emotionally calm and stable, loving, compassionate and nurturing, when in balance. They have excellent stamina and are very fertile – they make the best mothers and lovers. Don't you just wish you were Kapha?!!

When out of balance, their more negative emotional tendencies include possessiveness, rigidity, coldness, cloudiness of thought, depression, laziness and attachment. They are also particularly prone to emotional eating and therefore gaining weight. Kapha people have excellent strength and the best immunity out of all single constitutions but do have a tendency towards oedema (swelling) and obesity.

When you think of a pure Kapha person, think of someone who is so grounded and earthy that just being around them makes you feel more stable. They are warm, loving, caring and incredibly patient. They are never in a hurry, always seem to be chilled out, make great listeners and give the best hugs in the world...

Some of our best cooks, singers and mothers are Kapha people. Here are a couple of examples of famous predominant Kaphas:



Photo from: www.telegraph.co.uk, Photo: Charles Birchmore/BBC

Nigella Lawson –She is the earth mother personified – the thick, wavy hair, the dark eyes, the voluptuous body. There might be a little Pitta there but she is definitely predominantly Kapha.



Photo from: www.theinsider.com

Oprah Winfrey – the most famous woman in the world... Oprah is Kapha gorgeous. Again, she must have a little Pitta to give her the drive and ambition she demonstrates but she is predominantly Kapha.

DUAL CONSTITUTIONS

We've discussed predominant Vata, Pitta and Kapha constitutions. However, the reality for most of us is we have a dual constitution and therefore a mixture of the physical and mental tendencies described above. The exact expression of that mixture is different for each and every one of us. The other four possible constitutions, to make up the total of seven are:

4) Vata/Pitta or Pitta/Vata

Vata/Pitta or Pitta/Vata people are more moderate and robust than Vata people but more irregular and fragile than Pitta people. They have LIGHTNESS and INTENSITY as their common qualities.

If they're lucky, they can combine Vata's creativity with Pitta's capacity to get things done. If they're not quite so lucky, they can combine Vata's insecurity with Pitta's ambition or obsession, making them quite prone to stress disorders (and also eating disorders, particularly of the anorexic kind). The one element they are missing is EARTH, therefore they are prone to instability and excess movement.

Vata/Pitta people have more Vata than Pitta in their constitutions while Pitta/Vata people have more Pitta than Vata in their constitutions.

Vata/Pitta celebrities: Cameron Diaz, Nicole Kidman, Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes, Ioan Gruffudd, Orlando Bloom, Anthony Edwards, Colin Firth.

Pitta/Vata celebrities: Julia Roberts, Jennifer Connolly, Hilary Swank, Kate Hudson, Owen Wilson, Tom Cruise.

5) Pitta/Kapha or Kapha/Pitta

Apart from Tridoshic constitutions, Pitta/Kapha or Kapha/Pitta constitutions probably enjoy the best combination of any constitution. I'm always jealous of Pitta/Kaphas. They have the strength and stability of Kapha combined with Pitta drive and determination; which helps to antidote Kapha laziness. They have moderate, strong bodies with excellent immunity and seem to get away with all manner of sins. The great downfall of Pitta/Kapha's therefore tends to be pushing the limits of their minds and bodies far too much which can lead to dramatic collapses in later life.

Out of balance, Pitta ambition and arrogance can combine with Kapha greed to create a not-so-pleasant combination. The quality they have in common is OILINESS so any form of criticism in this state will tend to slide right off of them too!

Pitta/Kapha people have more Pitta than Kapha in their constitutions while Kapha/Pitta people have more Kapha than Pitta in their constitutions.

Pitta/Kapha celebrities: Drew Barrymore, Scarlett Johansson, Kate Winslet, Jennifer Lopez, Aishwarya Rai, George Clooney, John Corbett.

Kapha/Pitta celebrities: Kathy Bates, Queen Latifah, Rosie O'Donnell, Brendan Gleeson.

6) Kapha/Vata or Vata Kapha

Kapha/Vata or Vata Kapha people have COLD as their common quality so have an extreme intolerance of cold. Physically they may have tiny, ethereal frames with Kapha boobs and facial features (Vata/Kapha); they may have large, solid frames with irregular Vata facial features (Kapha/Vata) or they may have a mixture of the two.

If they're lucky they will get Vata's ability to grasp concepts easily combined with Kapha's awesome memory. If not so lucky, they may get Kapha's mental slowness combined with Vata's hopeless memory (which may explain why some Vata/Kapha models don't have a great reputation for intelligence). The one element they are missing is FIRE so above all, they need to introduce greater warmth into their lives.

Kapha/Vata people have more Kapha than Vata in their constitutions while Vata/Kapha people have more Vata than Kapha in their constitutions.

Vata/Kapha celebrities: Angelina Jolie, Liv Tyler, Jessica Alba, Lili Simmons, Dougray Scott, Zach Braff, most swimwear models.

Kapha/Vata celebrities: Magda Szubanski, Jack Black.

7) Vata/Pitta/Kapha

Very few people are lucky enough to be blessed with a Vata/Pitta/Kapha constitution. These exceptional folk are not deficient or excess in any elements and so are naturally inclined towards balance and health. If you find a true example of one, please let me know! I think I know of just one....

Me As An Example



What is my constitution? Well, I am quite tall (Vata), have well defined limbs (Vata), a moderate build (Pitta) and moderate muscle development (Pitta). I am flat-chested (Vata), flat-tummied (Vata) and have strangely long, thin fingers and feet (Vata). I have small, pointy ears (Vata/Pitta) and a rather long, angular nose (Vata/Pitta). My eyes are sunken, blue, intense and short-sighted (Vata/Pitta). My lips are pink, moderate and pointy (Pitta), my teeth are moderate and quite sharp (Pitta) and my finger nails are also moderate, soft and pink (Pitta). My jaw is quite angular (Pitta) and my face is

reasonably symmetrical/regular (Pitta). My hair is oily at the roots, wavy and brittle at the ends, and greying prematurely (Vata/Pitta).

My skin has a pinkish hue and although I tan easily (Vata) I do get loads of freckles on my face after a day in the sun (Pitta). I have a total intolerance to the cold (Vata) but even more so to the heat and sweat like a maniac on hot days (Pitta). I have a strong metabolism and reasonable digestion and (now) maintain my moderate weight easily (Pitta). I have reasonable energy (Pitta), but use it up with great enthusiasm (Vata). I am athletic and okay at sport (Pitta) but also a bit uncoordinated, tending to bump into things (Vata).

I am well organised and relatively ambitious (Pitta) and when fired up, can be prone to irritability, judgement and perfectionism. I understand things easily and have a sharp intellect (Pitta) but have a completely hopeless memory (Vata) and also have a tendency towards insecurity and anxiety (Vata). I am smart (Pitta) but can also be somewhat ditsy on occasion and I am quite creative (Vata). Overall my constitution is Pitta/Vata. By starving myself and predominantly eating Vata-genic foods for a large proportion of my life, particularly during puberty, and by enduring quite a few traumatic events, the expression of Vata has probably been increased in my body and mind.

The most important things to look at when considering your original constitution are those things that do not change easily – your personality, intellect, expenditure of energy, teeth, eyes, bone structure, build and ears. Things like complexion, oiliness of hair, colour of your lips, your weight, digestion, menstruation etc are more changeable, depending on the influences in your life. For example, you know that if you're exposed to lots of wind, your skin and lips can become quite dry and cracked in a short period of time.

Unless we lead a very balanced life, the changeable aspects of our bodies and minds can be more of a reflection of our imbalanced selves rather than our original constitution...

Imbalanced States or Vikriti

Just when it was all coming together in your mind, I'm going to throw in a curve ball to do with imbalances. The constitutions we are born with can be considered in both a balanced (Prakriti) and an imbalanced state (Vikriti). We can experience imbalanced states that deviate from our 'first creation' when we expose ourselves to an excess of certain qualities in our lives. Let me explain with an extreme example... Remember the concept of 'Like Increases Like'? Well, say we have a Vata (Ether/Air) constitution but live a life with predominantly Kapha (Earth/Water) qualities and inputs. If we go on like this, we may increase the Kapha in our bodies to such an extent that we might be difficult to recognise as a Vata person. So let's look at what the symptoms of EXCESS Vata, Pitta or Kapha are in our bodies and minds and what some of the causes may be.

VATA IMBALANCES

Vata imbalances are very, very common in Western society due to the way we live our lives – an excess of mobility and irregularity is the main problem. If we expose ourselves to an excess of cold, dry, mobile and irregular qualities, we will create an excess of these same qualities in our body and mind. A Vata or Ether/Air imbalance can be reflected in the body/mind in any of the following ways:

- ~ excessively dry/rough skin and lips, brittle hair and nails, dry stools or constipation, dry joints (cracking, pain in joints)
- ~ excessively cold hands and feet (poor circulation), feeling cold all the time, weight loss/depletion
- ~ weight gain caused by overeating to try and satisfy the deep hunger caused by feeling ungrounded (most obesity these days is actually Vata-type obesity)
- ~ common indigestion with gas, bloating, burping or pain
- ~ talking quickly all the time, a restless mind, always moving, twitching eyelids, dizziness, fatigue or variable energy
- ~ regular trouble sleeping (insomnia), changeable moods, inability to concentrate, poor memory/memory loss.
- ~ an excessive tendency towards fear, stress, anxiety or 'contracting' around experience.

From a Buddhist perspective, a mind affected by excess Vata is too restless. It suffers from Greed; an almost well-meaning greed that is attracted to quickly having or experiencing more. I see this all the time (in myself and others) - the constant Vata grasping at new answers or solutions to perceived problems. Greed is one of the 'three poisons' that keeps our mind in a cycle of dissatisfaction.

Over time, these initial symptoms may manifest into more Vata-type problems and diseases. Vata has a strong association with the nervous, endocrine and excretory systems (as they are related to communication and movement) so excess Vata is most inclined to affect these.

Causes of Vata imbalances include: eating excessively cold, dry, rough, bitter, astringent or pungent foods (including an excess of raw foods); irregular schedules or meal times; excessive travelling; constant multitasking and rushing around; high stress or high anxiety jobs or situations; lack of sound sleep; excessively cold or dry environments; a physically or mentally traumatic event; extreme grief, change or shock; taking drugs; and excessive stimulation and movement like watching commercial TV, playing computer games, too much time on computers and listening to commercial radio.

Vata is also imbalanced by the regular suppression of any of the 13 natural urges including: urination, defecation, ejaculation, yawning, sneezing, vomiting, hunger, thirst, breathing, crying, sleep, passing gas and burping! See why Vata imbalances are so common?!

PITTA IMBALANCES

Pitta imbalances are also pretty common due to the fiery, ambitious, progress-focussed and intense nature of Western society. If we expose ourselves to an excess of hot, sharp, oily, intense, irritable qualities, we will create an excess of these same qualities in our body and mind. A Pitta or Fire/Water imbalance can be reflected in the body/mind in any of the following ways:

- ~ excessively oily skin with blemishes, inflamed skin rashes, acne
- ~ common indigestion with burning reflux or burning pain
- ~ predominantly loose stools or diarrhoea, burning urination, burning/bleeding hemorrhoids
- ~ excessive sweating (with a sour smell), bleeding disorders, inflammatory conditions (anything with -itis at the end), burning eyes or poor eyesight, hot flushes
- ~ a tendency towards excessive frustration, irritability and anger.

A mind affected by excess Pitta is too intense. It suffers from Aversion; an aggressive desire to get rid of what it judges to be unsuitable in its own climb towards perfection. I am also familiar with this one - tending towards sharp discrimination rather than its softer counterpart, discernment. Aversion is the second of the 'three poisons' in Buddhism.

Over time, these initial fiery symptoms may manifest into more Pitta-type problems and diseases. Pitta has a strong association with the blood and circulatory system (especially the liver and spleen), the eyes and the skin so excess Pitta is most inclined to affect these systems/organs.

Causes of Pitta imbalances include: eating excessively heating, fried, stimulating, pungent, sour or salty foods and drinks (including fermented foods, alcohol, coffee, chilli, acidic foods); exposure to excessively hot or humid environments; regular sunburn; not eating when hungry; living with highly irritating situations; excessively heating exercise; excessively hot showers; excessive exposure to anger, violence, conflict and highly competitive situations.

KAPHA IMBALANCES

If we expose ourselves to an excess of heavy, dull, slow, cold and oily qualities, we will create an excess of these same qualities in our body and mind. A Kapha or Earth/Water imbalance can be reflected in the body/mind in any of the following ways (but is usually accompanied by weight gain):

- ~ low appetite, excess mucus, feeling cold all the time
- ~ increased oiliness of the hair and skin (without increased heat)
- ~ thickening of the body and skin, retaining water (oedema), lymphatic congestion, regular colds and flu (with lots of mucus), sneezing
- ~ feeling 'heavy', lethargic and lazy generally
- ~ dullness in the mind, a tendency towards 'heavy' moods, melancholy or depression.

A mind affected by excess Kapha is too dull. It suffers from Delusion or unawareness; the Kapha tendency to veil over things and be unresponsive. I've also been here and have seen it in friends and family... a 'head stuck in the sand' kind of feeling, convincing oneself that everything is okay when it really isn't. Delusion is the third of the 'three poisons' in Buddhism.

Over time, these initial symptoms may then manifest into more Kapha-type problems and diseases. Kapha has a strong association with the lymphatic and respiratory systems so excess Kapha is inclined to affect these systems/organs.

Causes of Kapha imbalances include: eating excessively heavy, cold, fatty, fried, sweet, salty or sour foods and drinks (including alcohol); too much sleeping (especially day sleep); a lack of movement or exercise; exposure to excessively cold, dark, heavy environments; and working in super-cold conditions. Laziness and excessive indulgence will always increase Kapha!

The idea in Ayurveda is **to move back towards our Prakriti**, our first creation, by decreasing any imbalances we might have introduced into our being through our food, lifestyle, environment and thoughts. Our Prakriti (whatever it may be), in balance, will provide us with the best platform for health and happiness! This Course is designed to begin you on that journey - this is what living Ayurveda is all about!

A Word On 'Healthy Eating' Approaches

The West's obsession and promotion of all things super thin (i.e. Vata) is downright disrespectful to the huge virtues of all of the other possible constitutions described previously. It is also unhealthy.

Why is it that some people look natural and stunning when they are thin while others look scary and concerning? As we have learned, it is because the naturally thin are most likely Vata people and their shape genuinely comes naturally. With this shape, however, come the many other positive and negative tendencies of their constitution. The people who look unnaturally thin at a similar weight probably don't have a Vata constitution and are actually out of balance. By introducing an excess of Vata-promoting (Air/Ether) qualities into their life they have increased Vata in their bodies and thinned down to a shadow of what they should be. They don't really look beautiful, they just look hungry...

Increasing Vata in the body is a very common Western weight loss and 'healthy eating' approach (although we don't know we're doing it). However, from an Ayurvedic perspective, it is considered quite unhealthy and ultimately unsuccessful. Through this Course, you will begin to understand why that is...

So, what should we be doing to be really healthy? What should we be doing to maintain a healthy weight? Well, this is what this Course is about – promoting healthy tissues, immunity and a healthy mental state by working directly with your digestion and metabolism... and letting everything else fall into place around that.

Practices For Module 1

This week/fortnight I'd like you to do the following:

1. Write down your goals / what you'd like to achieve through the Course. For example, you may want to address your current weight or other niggling health complaints such as indigestion, low energy, trouble sleeping, anxiety etc. You may want to stop stressing out about food. Or you may just want to learn more about yourself from an Ayurvedic perspective.
2. Begin to observe yourself and your physical, emotional and mental tendencies (too restless, too intense, too dull?) in the context of your new understanding of Prakriti.
3. Fill out the following **Constitution Chart** to determine what your Prakriti might be.
4. Fill out the **Food Diary** each day for at least a week. You don't need to give this to anyone. The idea of the food diary is to bring your attention and awareness to exactly **WHAT** you are eating and how it makes you **FEEL**. That is all. If you have a particularly unusual food week, you may want to do it for two weeks – I've included enough pages just in case. In the 'How does it feel' column, indicate whether it felt 'heavy' or 'light', whether or not you over-ate or under-ate and if you suffered from any symptoms of indigestion.

2: Agni & Ama

Introduction

Welcome to Module 2! In the last Module, we covered a lot of information about the Ayurvedic view of the body, particularly looking at your constitution or Prakriti. This time we will learn a few more concepts relating to the physiological processes of the body and will apply the concept of 'Like Increases Like' to your digestion and metabolism.

Throughout the Module, I will introduce and then continue to use a couple of Sanskrit words. I do this to make them a part of your vocabulary but mainly because there isn't an exact English translation.

*"Creation, sustenance, and transformation at the cellular, systematic and organ levels are all governed by bodily Agni."
- Dr Vasant Lad*

Agni

WHAT IS AGNI?

Agni (pronounced ugg-knee) is the Ayurvedic understanding of metabolism. It is the central idea of this Course so is probably the most important to understand and accept. Agni means 'that which ignites' and it is responsible for all transformation and metabolism in the body including physical and mental digestion – from digesting foods to digesting experiences in our lives.

There are 52 Agnis in the body but the most important one, and the one we will focus on is 'Jathara Agni', or the fire of the gastrointestinal tract. This Agni is responsible for the digestion, absorption and assimilation of the food that we eat, as well as governing our appetite. It is important to note that if we look after this Agni all other Agnis in the body will also become more balanced.

So, when you read the word 'Agni' you can picture a fire in your stomach that is there to cook your food. This is a simplified way of thinking about it but is easy, I think, for everyone to envisage.

TYPES OF AGNI

Like everything else in our being, our digestive fire is influenced by the Qualities and Elements we are exposed to. Imagine a fire. If we apply Wind to a fire it can either get bigger and bigger or it may be blown out. If we apply enough Water or Earth to a fire, it will be put out. If we apply Fire to fire we will, of course, get more fire!

Keep this in mind as we explore the four types of Agni that exist....

1) Irregular Agni



When the qualities of Ether, Air or both are increased too much in the body, the digestive fire will become irregular, like a candle flame in the wind. It produces irregular appetite (sometimes strong, sometimes weak) and variable digestion (sometimes okay, sometimes not). When you have Irregular Agni, you will be prone to wind/gas following meals – burping, farting or distention and abdominal bloating. You may also experience gurgling in the intestines and abdominal pain and will be prone to dry constipation.

Trying to digest food when you have Irregular Agni is like trying to cook a meal on a stove with the window open on a windy day. The flame flutters and blows about and not much happens in the pan – you're left with an uncooked meal which the body is unable to absorb appropriately.

People with Vata constitutions or Vata imbalances are prone to Irregular Agni. Vata-type emotions that can contribute to Irregular Agni in any constitution include excitement, fear, anxiety, worry and stress. Vata-type sensory inputs that can contribute to Irregular Agni in any constitution include excessively cold, dry, rough and irregular environments and activities.

2) Sharp Agni



When the qualities of Fire or Fire/Water combined are increased too much in the body, the digestive fire will become sharp or hypermetabolic. It will become like a fire that has had more and more wood added so it is an intense, sharp, hungry fire. It tends to be too hot and will cook the food in your stomach too much, too quickly. When your Agni is in this state, you have a very strong appetite and as a result tend to overeat. After eating you will tend to experience reflux, heartburn, hot flashes and other signs of acid indigestion – a symptom of the excess heat in your digestive tract.

Trying to digest food when you have Sharp Agni is like trying to cook a meal on a high flame when it should be on a low simmer – it will burn to charcoal every time and your body will be robbed of potential nutrients and left with 'over-cooked' food.

People with Pitta constitutions or Pitta imbalances are prone to Sharp Agni. Pitta-type emotions that can contribute to Sharp Agni in any constitution include anger, frustration, jealousy and other fiery emotions. Pitta-type sensory inputs that can contribute to Sharp Agni in any constitution include excessively heating, intense or irritating environments and activities.

3) Dull Agni



When the qualities of Earth, Water or both are increased too much in the body, the digestive fire will become dull or hypometabolic/slow metabolism. We all know when we're camping that to put out our little cooking fire, we can use either water, soil or sand. The same is true for our digestion. Someone with this type of metabolism is never very hungry, cannot digest anything well and yet, will very easily gain weight. There will also be a general feeling of heaviness, lethargy, weakness, laziness and dullness both physically and mentally. Often when we gain weight, Dull Agni is the problem, but not always. Trying to digest food when you have

Dull Agni is like trying to cook a meal with no flame at all (or a very tiny one) – there is no cooking and once again, your body is robbed of potential nutrients.

People with Kapha constitutions or Kapha imbalances are prone to Dull Agni. Kapha-type emotions that can contribute to Dull Agni include greed, attachment, possessiveness and depression. Kapha-type sensory inputs that can contribute to Dull Agni in any constitution include excessively cold, dull, wet and heavy environments and activities.

It is important to note that: long-term Irregular Agni can become Dull Agni, when excess wind blows out the fire and long-term Sharp Agni can also become Dull Agni, like pouring hot liquid on a fire.

4) Balanced Agni



Yep, you guessed it, this is what we're after – this is a state of perfect health! When your Agni is balanced your appetite is reasonable and you can digest your food without any symptoms of indigestion or disturbance. Digestion, absorption and assimilation are all normal and all of your tissues, your immune system and your life force are appropriately nourished (providing you are feeding them good quality food!).

This is what we're working towards. Trying to digest food when you have Balanced Agni is like cooking on the perfect stove! It is important to realize that anyone, no matter what your constitution, can work towards achieving Balanced Agni.

My Experience

Because I have a Pitta/Vata constitution, when I get a little imbalanced, I am most inclined towards having either Irregular Agni (which manifests as belching for me) or Sharp Agni (which manifests as reflux). However, there have also been times in my life when I have had Dull Agni with a low appetite and not a great ability to digest anything. So, although your Prakriti strongly influences your natural digestive tendencies, your diet, lifestyle and emotional state and the imbalances they create also have a HUGE impact on your Agni. These days my Agni is mostly Balanced. When it isn't, it is usually something to do with my mental and emotional state and usually involves having Irregular Agni as a result of stressful or anxious situations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCED AGNI

Why is Balanced Agni so important? Ayurveda teaches us that all sickness, ill health and disease begins, at a physical level, in the digestive tract due to imbalanced Agni (I'll explain this in more detail later). Therefore, from a preventative medicine approach, Balanced Agni is actually the basis of good health.

You will also understand the importance of working towards balanced Agni when you see what it is responsible for in the body. In Ayurveda it is believed that there are 18 key functions of Agni (keeping in mind that 'Agni' refers to ALL transformation and metabolism in the body and there are 52 Agnis altogether). These key functions are (1):

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Digestion of food and sensory perception | 10. Maintains normal body temperature |
| 2. Visual perception | 11. Maintains normal complexion |
| 3. Clarity, purity and comprehension | 12. Nutrition of all of the tissues |
| 4. Affection, interest, enthusiasm | 13. Cellular metabolic activity |
| 5. Bravery, courage or fearlessness | 14. Cellular communication and intelligence |
| 6. Joy, happiness, contentment and cheerfulness | 15. Respiration and cellular breathing |
| 7. Patience, stability, confidence | 16. Reasoning capacity of the mind, logical thinking, discrimination |
| 8. Creates glow and luster | 17. Immune strength |
| 9. Provides strength and vitality | 18. Maintenance of the normal lifespan |

Without balanced Agni, we do not have or cannot maintain any of the above functions at an optimum level. Number 18 is rather important when it comes to preventative health and one of the most important in relation to body weight is number 12. If the Agni that creates our fat tissue is not functioning properly, it can lead to the inappropriate production of fat tissue. To maintain a healthy weight, we need to restore our digestive fire first which, in turn, will restore our fat tissue metabolism.

LIKE INCREASES LIKE

So, how does one move towards a state of Balanced Agni, no matter what their constitution? You will remember in the last Module that we learned about the 20 qualities and the concept of 'Like Increases Like'

Luckily, Balanced Agni has qualities too! Its main qualities are Warm, Light and Slightly Oily. So, to move towards a state of more Balanced Agni, we should consume foods and introduce activities with these similar qualities - the qualities of WARM, LIGHT and SLIGHTLY OILY.

(1) 'Textbook of Ayurveda' by Dr Vasant Lad

WARM, LIGHT & SLIGHTLY OILY FOOD

To explain what this all means – what is warm food, what is light food, what is slightly oily food and how do I choose, cook or prepare food with these qualities – you will have a Module on each quality and go into some detail on how you make these choices and decisions... but here is a quick overview:

WARM food is food that is neither hot nor cold but somewhere in between. This relates predominantly to the temperature of the food but also the post-digestive heating/cooling effect of the food. Warm food is chosen because it is acceptable to all constitutions and will not cause any imbalances. It is almost easier to say what warm food is not, rather than what it is. Icecream, ice, cold water, iced drinks, cold milk and cold cheese are not warm. Chilli is not warm. However, spices like cumin, cinnamon, turmeric, garlic and ginger are all warm.

LIGHT food is food that feels light in your stomach when you've eaten it – it is less dense than 'Heavy' foods. Most vegetables, fruits, herbs, spices, pulses and some grains (like basmati rice) are light. Meat products, eggs, dairy products, root veggies and wheat are heavy. However, all foods can be cooked/prepared in a way that makes them lighter and therefore easier to digest.

SLIGHTLY OILY food is exactly that – food that is slightly oily. The gastrointestinal tract is lined with mucous that protect the membranes from being burned by the digestive secretions. Slightly oily food slides through the GI tract with greater ease than dry food and also helps to pacify the dry qualities of Vata imbalances which are very common in our society. Cooking with a small quantity of a good quality oil (appropriate for your constitution) actually helps to improve your Agni – it will slim you down, not fatten you up, as we have been told.

So, those three qualities – WARM, LIGHT and SLIGHTLY OILY – summarise the approach to eating that we will explore in great detail for the rest of the Course. Sound simple? Well, it is!

Why Most Diets Harm Our Metabolism and Health!

Most Western weight-loss approaches involve diet foods that are cold, dry and rough in quality and exercise approaches that are grueling and excessively mobile. All of these qualities contribute to an increase in Vata (Air/Ether), an increase of these same qualities in our minds and bodies.

By increasing all of these qualities together, we may lighten and deplete our bodies initially, but we will also detrimentally affect our metabolisms, encouraging Irregular Agni. Long-term Irregular Agni leads to Dull Agni. This damaged metabolism is why so many of us have ended up on the diet merry-go-round – losing weight, gaining weight, losing weight, gaining weight!

With this approach, we will also dry out our tissues and channels and will starve our immune system of nourishment, removing the very 'juiciness' of life from our bodies. At the same time, we will increase Vata-type emotions such as anxiety, stress and worry (the opposite of contentment and happiness)! From a long-term perspective, Vata-aggravating diets and activities will also increase our risk of developing a variety of aggravated Vata symptoms and diseases later in life. There is a better way...

AGNI CYCLES - DAY, SEASON, LIFE

Our bodies are a reflection of our environment. No matter how much we attempt to remove ourselves from our natural environment, our bodies still reflect the cycles of nature – cycles of the day, cycles of the season and the cycles of life.

Our Agni goes through cycles TOO. The daily movement of the sun relates most directly to our digestive fire, given its similar qualities of Fire. As a result, our Agni is at its strongest in the middle of the day, when the sun is highest in the sky.

It is also strongest from the ages of about 14 to 55 or from puberty until menopause. This is the Pitta (Fire/Water) time of life which are the predominantly metabolic and ambitious, productive years. From birth to about 14 is the Kapha (Water/Earth) time of life, relating to anabolism or growth. Our digestive fires are more dull and less sharp during these years. From about 55 to death is the Vata time of life, when the predominant actions in the body are catabolic and the body begins to deteriorate. During this time of life, our digestive fires are more Irregular. However, no matter what our age or time of life, we can work towards promoting more Balanced Agni.

In summer/hotter months we tend to be less hungry because our Agni slows down a little to help cool our bodies. In winter/colder months, we tend to have a stronger appetite because our Agni naturally increases and becomes more centralised to help keep our bodies warmer. And at the change of seasons, Agni tends to be more Irregular (any sort of change increases Vata).

The climate we live in and the extremes of seasons we experience as a result will have quite a strong influence on our Agni.... and everyone will experience each climate slightly differently, according to their constitution and specific imbalances at the time!

It is good to keep these cycles in mind and just observe your appetite and digestion over a day, season, year and even a lifetime to see how it changes!



Yoga practice can be used to help balance your Agni. An energizing vinyasa with standing yoga postures (especially the warrior poses) will strengthen Agni. Yoga can also help enormously with specific digestive complaints. If you are suffering from constipation, diarrhoea, gas, bloating etc, talk to your Yoga teacher and ask which asanas and pranayama should be applied for your individual case. Like Ayurveda, Yoga is a science as well as an art form and can be applied medicinally/therapeutically. Never be afraid to ask questions of your teacher!

Now, lets talk about Ama...

Ama

WHAT IS AMA?

Now onto your next Sanskrit word. When Agni is imbalanced (Irregular, Sharp or Dull), the food we eat is not cooked/digested properly in our bodies and some of it becomes 'Ama'. Ama is a Sanskrit word referring to undigested or poorly digested food toxins. Ama is not an imaginary substance. It is real and tangible. You can see it, feel it and smell it in your body. It is a thick, heavy, sticky, stinky substance... a little like old mucous or fermented Clag glue. This charming substance accumulates in our digestive tract and is usually burnt up by our digestive fire. But when our digestion is imbalanced or we've put it under undue stress for any length of time our Ama load can become too much to handle. Rather than staying in the digestive tract, it can overflow into the channels and tissues of the body, hampering cellular nutrition and waste disposal and causing blockages and inflammation. Ayurveda teaches that this accumulation and movement of Ama is the root cause of all disease, from the common cold to cancer. It is also the main cause of weight gain.

Ama also refers to accumulated toxins taken in from the environment and waste materials in the body that have not been properly removed or eliminated. When we improve our Agni, moving towards a more balanced state, we decrease the production of Ama and also help our body to naturally flush it out. However, there are additional things we can do to decrease our Ama more directly.

SYMPTOMS OF AMA

You're probably thinking of Ama as something quite gross by now? You'd be right. You're probably also wondering if you have Ama in your body... you most likely do. The symptoms of Ama in the body are many, but they include:

- ~ a thick coating on your tongue
- ~ loss of taste
- ~ indigestion
- ~ bad breath
- ~ loss of strength
- ~ heaviness
- ~ lethargy (trouble getting out of bed in the morning despite ample sleep)
- ~ bad body odor
- ~ bad odor of urine and/or faeces
- ~ lack of attention
- ~ depression
- ~ irritability.

However, the best measure is probably the coating on your tongue first thing in the morning. If there is a coating, there is some Ama in your system. The position of the coating on your tongue can give an indication of where it resides in the body (which organs) and the exact colour of the coating can indicate what type of imbalance you have. If there is a thick coating on your tongue, it indicates there is quite a bit of Ama in your system.

My Experience

In my experience, the amount of Ama in my system varies every day, depending on many factors, but predominantly depending on my digestion and food/lifestyle choices from the day before.

Even though I've developed good, strong, balanced Agni overall, I have some days when I've gone a bit overboard with my meals, made some bad choices, overeaten, had to eat late, eaten whilst feeling frustrated or anxious etc. When this occurs, Ama can be formed and this is reflected as a thin coating on my tongue. It is a good daily reflection of my state of health and a reminder to look after myself...

I also tend to notice more Ama on my tongue during the change of the seasons. As mentioned in the "Agni Cycles", when the seasons change our Agni tends to be more Irregular (any 'change' in life can aggravate Air/Ether leading to Irregular Agni) which can increase our Ama load.

In late 2009, Kester and I travelled to India and did a four week Panchakarma, Ayurveda's renowned purification and rejuvenation procedure. It is designed to draw out any Ama residing in your tissues, return it to your digestive tract and then expel it from your body in as gentle and supportive a way possible. It was a remarkable experience to witness over three decades of accumulated Ama coming out of my body... I will say no more!

Balancing Agni & Reducing Ama

SPITTING & TONGUE SCRAPING

When we are sleeping, our bodies are busy on 'janitor duty'. The metabolic processes taking place are all to do with mopping up the tissues and getting the wastes ready for disposal. It is for this reason that we usually do our number twos in the morning (although some of us do them in the afternoon... or both – both Vata or 'movement' times of the day)!

Another form of waste disposal is occurring on our tongues and in our mouths. 'Morning breath' is created by the Ama that is collected in the body and disposed on our tongues as a tongue coating and in our saliva – the first saliva of the morning. To help the body in its removal of Ama, it is advised in Ayurveda to not swallow the contents in your mouth upon waking but rather to spit out your first mouthful.

If you're not convinced this is a good idea, try this little experiment and you will do it, without fail, for the rest of your life... trust me!

- ~ Spit the morning contents of your mouth into a little plastic container and pop a lid on it
- ~ Leave it for 1-2 hours
- ~ Remove the lid and have a whiff – this is your Ama.

This procedure is actually a diagnostic tool in Ayurvedic Medicine. I had to do this as part of my Ayurvedic course, but we had to smell 20 pots of other people's Ama! It was without a doubt one of the most disgusting (and also one of the funniest) experiences of my life!

After spitting the contents of your mouth out and then rinsing it with water, you should then gently scrape off the Ama coating on your tongue with a tongue scraper. If you don't have one, you should get one. A copper scraper is preferable, but stainless steel will do. Do not be tempted to use the supposed 'tongue scraper' on new toothbrushes – they do not work. And do not brush your tongue with your toothbrush – this aggravates your organs (your tongue has points on it that relate to all of your organs which is why it is such a powerful diagnostic tool) and you will also brush the Ama back into the membranes of your tongue. After tongue scraping, brush your teeth.

GINGER, HONEY & LEMON TEA

Every morning, after you've spat, scraped your tongue and brushed your teeth, and before eating or drinking anything else, you should make this Ama-cleansing/ Agni-balancing drink.

Add boiling water to 1/4 a teaspoon of finely grated ginger root. Then, add a squeeze of lemon juice and 1 teaspoon of honey.

The ginger should preferably come from a fresh ginger root but if that is not available, dried is okay (it is slightly more pungent/heating). The honey needs to be good honey that hasn't been heat-treated (not the honey you buy in the supermarket, but raw honey that Fruit and Veggie Shops sell in buckets) and the lemon juice needs to be from an actual lemon, not from those bottles of lemon juice you can buy. If you don't have any lemons, just go with the ginger and honey.

This tea is the equivalent of a tongue scraper for your digestive tract. It will help to eliminate Ama and stimulate digestion, ready for your first meal of the day. Ginger is a brilliant spice that enkindles Agni, reduces Ama and works specifically on any digestive upsets. Honey has a very subtle scarifying action that helps to cleanse all of the channels of the body. Lemon also helps to enkindle Agni and cleanse the channels. Even though it is citrus, it is not acidic – it has a unique post-digestive cooling effect that helps to balance the warming effects of the honey and ginger.

SHOWERING

This is a simple Ayurvedic tip for contributing to more balanced Agni, but it is very important...

Never shower/bath after a meal.... always shower/bath BEFORE your meals.

Why? Well, this is an easy one. When you have a warm/hot shower, the blood in your body moves to your peripheries, close to the skin (demonstrated by the fact your skin goes pink after a shower/bath). If you shower after a meal, the blood that should be in your digestive system providing the energy you need to carry out digestion moves to other parts of your body and appropriate digestion does not occur.

I think this is an important one for Mums too. All the Mums I know tend to bath their kids directly after their dinner and just before bed. I have been told this is because it calms them down and makes them sleepy... and cleans them up after a messy feeding session. But it is partly making them sleep by creating Dull Agni, causing heaviness and lethargy. This practice tends to hamper their digestion and compromise their Agni.

If at all possible, it is best to shower/bath yourself and your children either before breakfast or just before dinner. Or, if you do wish to bath them after dinner, leave a reasonable gap between eating and bathing of at least 1-1½ hours.

Also when showering, try not to put your head under super hot water. This practice is disruptive to the nervous system (and therefore digestion). Instead, turn the hot water down a little when washing your hair.

EXERCISE & THE POST-MEAL STROLL

Like showering (and for the same reasons) you should also always AVOID exercising vigorously AFTER eating. It is best to exercise vigorously BEFORE eating. It tends to help work up an appetite, rather than making you feel sick! This is why we were always taught when we were little to not go swimming directly after eating – because we might get cramp and drown. Why would we get cramp? Because a large portion of our blood supply is busy providing energy to our digestion rather than our muscle movements.

In Ayurveda, it is recommended that although we should never exercise vigorously after a meal, it is actually beneficial for our digestion to go for a very gentle, light walk after eating – just for 3-5 minutes. We're talking a light stroll down the street, in the garden or even around the office or house. This slight movement will aid the movement of digestion without compromising it.

EAT AT A SIMILAR TIME EACH DAY

One of the best ways to balance Agni is to eat every meal at a similar and reasonable time each day – for example, breakfast between 7am and 8am (after sunrise); lunch between 12 and 1.30pm (when the sun is at its highest in the sky) and dinner between 6 and 7.30pm (around sunset, depending on the time of the year).

This simple, yet surprisingly difficult, principle helps encourage our digestion to be more balanced, regular and in line with the cycles of the sun. Our body begins to develop a rhythm based on the structure we have provided for it and actually starts to expect food at certain times of the day – and our Agni is stronger at those times as a result. This practice is also quite grounding and settling for the mind and helps to pacify Vata.

You should also definitely avoid overeating at dinner time. Sleeping on a full stomach tends to cause Dull Agni, morning sluggishness, tiredness and stiffness, which can establish a cycle of low energy, dull thinking and poor food choices throughout the following day to make up for the way we feel! You should also avoid eating your next meal before the previous meal has been digested – allowing several hours between meals is best.

MARMA MASSAGE

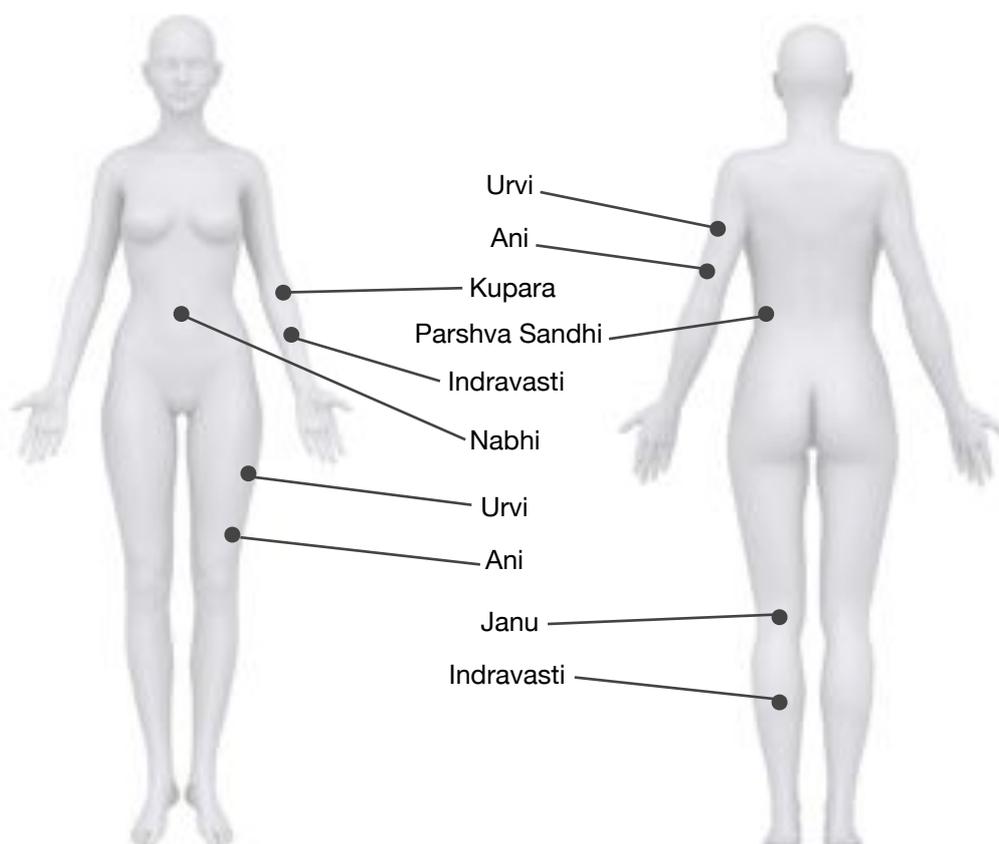
Like Traditional Chinese Medicine, Reflexology and Shiatsu, Ayurveda has a system of pressure points on the body relating to various physiological systems and organs. These points are called 'Marmas' and can be understood as junctions or meeting places of the ligaments, vessels, muscles, bones and joints. By making a gentle circular movement with your finger or thumb on a Marma point, toxins (Ama) can be released and eliminated by the body and specific organs or channels can be stimulated.

The Marmas relating most directly to Agni and the digestive channel are 'Indravasti' and 'Nabhi'. Indravasti is found in the centre of each forearm muscle and in the centre of each calf muscle (see the picture below). You know you've found it when you find a slight depression in the muscle that is particularly sensitive. Nabhi is found on the naval. Ani, Urvi, Parshva Sandhi, Kupara and Janu also relate to digestion through their action on fat and fluid metabolism and the liver (1).

To help stimulate your Agni and release Ama from your digestive tract, you can slowly massage Indravasti on you arms and legs as part of any daily exercise warm-up (a bit easier to massage than Nabhi).



A number of Yoga asanas directly stimulate the Indravasti and/or Nabhi marmas including dog pose, forward bends, most twists, garudasana (eagle pose), pavana muktasana (wind removing pose), salabhasana (locust posture), bhujangasana (cobra pose) and especially mayurasana (peacock pose). Many pranayama techniques also directly stimulate Nabhi, including Agnisar, Nauli Kriya, Uddiyana Banda and Kapalabhati. Of course these should only be practiced as part of a balanced asana practice and under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher - ask your Yoga teacher for more details.



Practices for Module 2

This fortnight I'd like you to do the following practices:

1. Spit out the contents of your mouth first thing in the morning, do not swallow (if you're intrigued, please carry out the gross exercise described)
2. Scrape your tongue every morning before brushing your teeth
3. Have a ginger, honey and lemon tea before breakfast
4. Shower BEFORE eating. Exercise BEFORE eating
5. Go for a gentle 3-5 min stroll after each meal (where possible)
6. Eat at a similar, reasonable time for each meal, everyday and don't overeat at night
7. Massage your Indravasti Marma regularly as part of any exercise routine.

There is a little chart on the next page that you can use to help keep track of your practices. Just put a little tick in the box next to the relevant day when you've completed the practice.

This is not to keep tabs on you, rather it is to help you remember the recommendations and to establish your new daily lifestyle habits – perhaps stick it on the fridge.