



AYURVEDIC NUTRITION FOR BEGINNERS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BALANCING YOUR DIGESTION
& DEEPLY NOURISHING YOUR BODY & MIND.

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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!

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 (although bone is also closely related to the Air element as it is hollow).

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 into what is called 'Doshas' 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 lets 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 enthusiasm for celebrities (please note I have not taken their pulses so cannot confirm 100% that I've got them correct). 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 I can think of:



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!

Calista Flockhart (aka Ali McBeal) is a predominantly Vata woman – she is petite, very thin and flat-chested with sunken eyes and protruding cheekbones. She has thin, wispy hair and her eyes are brown and widely set, giving her a rather spacey, ethereal look. She has thin lips, an unusual nose, quite small teeth and surprising large, irregular ears which make her look distinctly like an elf. So cute!

Looking at a people's gaze tends to be a bit of a giveaway of their predominant Prakriti. Vata people tend to have a soft, spacey look in their eye and quite often have one iris that is just ever so slightly off-centre; expressing the irregularity of Vata. Their eyes usually move around a lot or they look down in their attempts to not meet your gaze (or if they do meet it, it may be uncomfortably long due to them spacing out!). When looking into the eyes of a Vata, you're often wondering where they are...

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.

It should be noted that if a Pitta person has more Water and less Fire being expressed, they can be confused with Kapha due to their soft features but if they are still mostly moderate they are most likely Pitta, not Kapha.

Pittas 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 state. On the downside, they are the constitution that is most prone to suffering from anger, jealousy, frustration, irritability and all of those other firey emotions! Other tendencies include being overly judgmental, perfectionistic, arrogant or 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 great examples:



Julianne Moore is Pitta gorgeous – fabulous red hair, balanced, symmetrical features, peaches and cream freckled skin and green eyes. She has a moderate body, bust and muscle development and a fabulous angled jaw. But she also expresses the lovely softness of the water element aspect of Pitta.

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 chiseled jaw (and body). Everything about him is moderate, angular (and HOT?!) but even he shows a little watery softness through his ears and nose.

Once again, look at their eyes... Pittas have a level of intensity to their gaze that is immediately recognizable! They also tend to hold their gaze with you in a commanding, sometimes dominating kind of way. When a Pitta person looks at you, you will feel like the centre of their attention. You may feel quite captivated... or possibly just scared!

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).

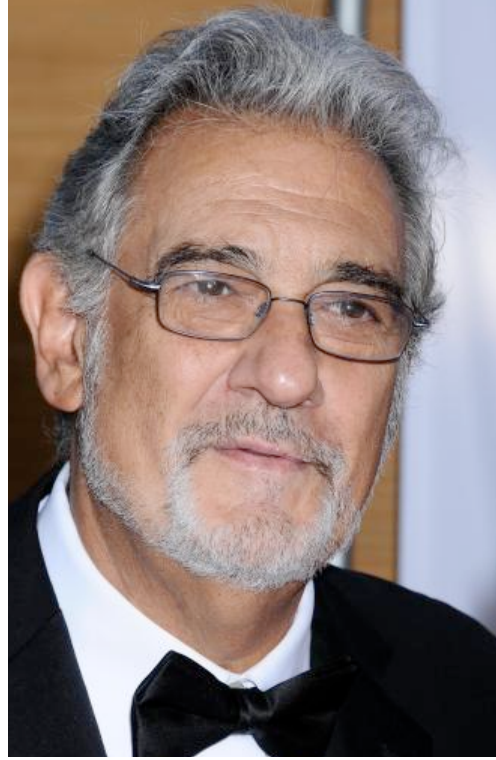
Their appetites are moderate and stable, their digestion is slow but reasonable and their elimination tends to be regular with well-formed stools. They generally sleep easily and heavily but have a tendency to want to sleep more than they should as they enjoy conserving energy (the opposite of Vata folk 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.

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:



Oprah Winfrey – the most famous woman in the world... Oprah is Kapha gorgeous! She is so strong, robust, has seemingly endless energy and is a total Kapha powerhouse. Her maternal nature knows no bounds. She must have a touch of Pitta to give her the drive and ambition she demonstrates but she is definitely predominantly Kapha.

Placido Domingo - it is very difficult to find a famous predominantly Kapha male. The most obvious place to look? Opera singers! Placido is even more Kapha than Pavarotti. He is a giant of a man and all of his features are so soft. Look at that thick, wavy hair, those large, fleshy ears, his lovely soft nose...

But once again, the eyes are a real giveaway... look how soft and gentle the Kapha gaze is compared to the Pittas and how grounded and earthy compared with the Vatas! When a Kapha person looks at you, you may feel like you're being seen for the first time. You feel their presence... and you feel safe, held and loved. Ahhhh Kaphas!

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)... yep, that's me! 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.

Examples of possible Vata/Pitta celebrities: Julia Roberts, Nicole Kidman, Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes, Ioan Gruffudd, Orlando Bloom, Anthony Edwards, Colin Firth.

Examples of possible Pitta/Vata celebrities: Cameron Diaz, 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.

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

Examples of possible Kapha/Pitta celebrities: Kathy Bates, Queen Latifah, Rosie O'Donnell, Tom Hanks, 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.

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

Examples of possible Kapha/Vata celebrities: Magda Szubanski, Jack Black, James Corden.

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 and I have one iris slightly off-centre (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 cheekbones protrude

a bit (Vata) and my jaw is quite angular (Pitta) but I have a weak chin (Vata) and my face is rather unsymmetrical (Vata). My hair is oily at the roots, wavy and brittle at the ends, and has gone grey super prematurely (Vata/Pitta).

My skin has a pinkish hue and although I tan easily (Vata) I 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 relatively 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'm quite creative (Vata). Overall my constitution is Vata/Pitta but they're pretty close.

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 hot or humid environments; regular sunburn; not eating when hungry; living with highly irritating situations; excessively heating or intense 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.

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.

DAY 3

WHAT YOU ATE & HOW MUCH	HOW IT FELT
Breakfast	
Snacks	
Lunch	
Snacks	
Dinner	

DAY 4

WHAT YOU ATE & HOW MUCH	HOW IT FELT
Breakfast	
Snacks	
Lunch	
Snacks	
Dinner	

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 excessive intensity, 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.