

# what's your dosha?

Sunita Passi, experienced Ayurvedic massage therapist and founder of Tri-Dosha, explains the diagnostic thinking behind the Indian art of Ayurveda. Sunita shares her insights on why it's a system that still works today.

Combating stress is one of the great 21st century challenges. Many of us associate stress with aspects of life which, when we think about it, are generally out of our control: facing new situations or dealing with emotional challenges such as losing a job, the end of a relationship or financial concerns. However, most of us fail to realise that we often create stress for ourselves, both with our thoughts, and by what we put into our bodies. We can, inadvertently, cause ourselves additional stress at a deeper, more cellular, level.

Ayurveda has a unique and workable way of looking at a person's individual body type, or 'dosha' as is the classical Ayurvedic terminology.

## understanding ayurveda

Ayurveda recognises that there are five basic elements that everything we know comprises of. They are: space, air, fire, water, and earth. Each one of us is a combination of these five elements.

There are also three general body/mind types formed from these five elements. They are Vata (space and air/wind), which governs movement, Pitta (fire and water/bile), which governs transformation, and Kapha (water and earth/mucous), which governs structure. Like a grand cosmic recipe, we are all a combination of each general body/mind type.

Our basic, original body/mind type remains unaltered throughout our life and is called 'prakriti', pronounced 'pra-krooti'. It is determined the moment the father's sperm meets the mother's egg. After that point, we acquire 'vikruti' – disorder or departure from order, or more commonly known as imbalance. Vikruti frequently occurs in the junction between seasons or during stressful times.

## why is this useful?

We live in an age in which most people are time-poor and tend to suffer from lack of self-confidence and esteem. Understanding Ayurveda's elements and body/mind types helps you determine the best path for your self-care. It also gives you profound insights and analysis into your own unique body type.

Your lifestyle choices may change based on seasonal routines. Therefore, you may want to make food choices appropriate for the climate, season and body/mind type or change the times you choose to eat and sleep. Other suggestions involve herbs, gem therapy, yoga, and self-massage.

## the history of ayurveda

My first journey into the history of Ayurveda started with reading a book in my grandfather's clinic in India. I was seven years old! The book suggested that Ayurveda, as a well-being system,

originated in India more than 4000 years ago, making it one of the oldest healing systems known to man. It is based on a philosophy of health and happiness that treats the whole person, not just the symptoms, which is why it makes sense today. It might be ancient knowledge, but in fact it's got real modern values. Ayurveda includes combining nutrition, herbal remedies, yoga and massage to heal and nourish the body and spirit.

My real journey began in the clinics and retreats of India, as I started to see how the practice was being used today. I found that, though Ayurveda is a therapeutic form of health science, it is also used as a transformative and curative procedure in a number of ways. A traditional vaidya (Ayurvedic herbalist) showed me how therapeutic herbs are made into a decoction (made concentrated by boiling down) to create a medicinal oil blend. This was then used to massage clients with certain ailments.

## The seven body types (doshas) are:

- Single: Vata, Pitta, Kapha,
- Duo: Vata/Pitta, Pitta/Kapha, Kapha/Vata
- Tri-Doshic: Vata/Pitta/Kapha

### Basic characteristics:

<b>Being Vata:</b>	meaning 'what moves' in Sanskrit
Elements:	ether (space) and air
When balanced:	vibrant, enthusiastic, imaginative
When out of balance:	restless, anxious, underweight
<b>Being Pitta:</b>	meaning 'what cooks' in Sanskrit
Elements:	fire and water
When balanced:	articulate, courageous, sharp intellect
When out of balance:	irritable, demanding, hot-headed, skin problems
<b>Being Kapha:</b>	meaning 'what sticks' in Sanskrit
Elements:	water and earth
When balanced:	affectionate, compassionate, forgiving
When out of balance:	complacent, lethargic, overweight

## your ayurvedic dosha

### Vata

**Massage:** daily self 'oil massage', early in the morning. Have a professional treatment once a month, with a sattvic (light and harmonising touch) which will calm the Vata dosha.

**Vyayama (exercise):** swimming will ground Vata, and practice yoga asanas (postures) that stretch the pelvic muscles, such as forward bend, back bend and spinal twist.

**Nutrition:** establish a regular routine for mealtimes. Sweet, sour, salty, warm, heavy, strengthening food nourishes the Vata

dosha. Tea should be warming ginger or nutmeg. Eat in a calm environment.

**Oils to burn:** rose, orange, geranium, basil

### Pitta

**Massage:** daily coconut oil massage to the scalp and feet is the classical way to cool the Pitta fire. Then book professional abhyanga (full body oil massage) once a month, delivered with a rajasic (medium) touch.

**Vyayama (exercise):** swim lengths, and practice yoga asanas (postures) that stretch the back muscles and improve digestion, such as boat, half locust and bow, and fish for physical well-being and emotional balance.

**Nutrition:** avoid hot and spicy food. Limit your intake of alcohol, black tea, meat, eggs and salt. Favour sweet, bitter and astringent tastes which are cooling and refreshing. Eat regular meals and take frequent breaks from work.

**Oils to burn:** lavender, jasmine, ylang ylang

### Kapha

**Massage:** get into the habit of scrubbing your body daily with a body brush, and book a deep (tomatic) massage once a month delivered with a stimulating natural ayurvedic body oil.

**Vyayama (exercise):** take regular exercise, and do yoga asanas (postures) that stretch the chest, such as shoulder stand and plough, cat and dog stretch, chair and bow. The latter two also energise the entire body.

**Nutrition:** favour spicy hot food, light soups, apples, pears, grains and have food that is easy to digest. Keep away from sweets, dairy products and fatty food. Drink ginger tea, and avoid over eating and sleeping in the day time.

**Oils to burn:** lavender, sandalwood, frankincense, fennel

## ayurveda for life

As I have learned more, I have evolved over the years and, so too has my understanding of how we see ourselves. If we limit who we can be or the way we see ourselves, it can also limit our experience of life and therefore our own growth. By stepping outside of the box, and introducing the Ayurvedic system of doshas into our lives, we can be surprised by the number of ways we can help ourselves. Even just dipping your toe into this wonderful world of ancient knowledge may increase your creativity in all areas of your life. The rewards will be plentiful!

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