

LIVE THE AYURVEDA WAY

Spices, sleep and meditation are at the heart of this ancient Indian healing system. It's all about finding your equilibrium, says Karen Evennett

Have you ever wondered why you're plagued with so many seemingly unrelated health niggles? If so, Ayurveda may have the answers you're looking for. This traditional Indian medical system has been practised for more than 5,000 years. 'Not only should it explain why

your health issues may not be as random as you thought, but it puts you in control of your health,' says Dr Prasanna Kerur, Ayurvedic physician at the Ayush Wellness Spa in Jersey.

Although relatively new to the UK – but now adopted by some GPs – Ayurveda (which roughly translates as 'science of life') is rooted in the belief that to be our healthiest selves we need to be perfectly balanced. In Ayurveda you're aspiring to attain this balance with three constitutional types known as doshas: pitta, vata and kapha. Each dosha has its own physical and psychological traits linked to five elements in nature. Vata (air and space) is known as the airy dosha; pitta (fire and water) is typically fiery; and kapha (water and earth) is down to earth.

We all have a mix of the three doshas, but one dosha will tend to dominate, and stress – whether psychological or physical – can cause this dominant dosha to spiral out of control, with repercussions on our health, says Dr Kerur. 'To keep your doshas in balance, Ayurveda focuses on three pillars of wellbeing – food and nutrition, sleep and brahmacharya (self-regulation – using yoga and meditation to develop self-awareness).

'Avoid processed foods and overeating,' says Dr Kerur. 'For better metabolism, Ayurvedic doctors recommend two meals a day or four small meals if you're a vata and need to eat more often. All three doshas will be balanced by getting sufficient sleep and learning to love the inner you – this is the authentic you, rather than the role player that you display to others.'

LIVE THE AYURVEDA WAY ...continued

“If imbalance occurs and our dominant dosha spirals out of control, it will have repercussions on our health”



to avoid the risk of stagnation, you may need to force yourself to try new experiences. Keep warm and dry, try to do some form of exercise every day and watch what you eat. ‘A sweet tooth can bring out too much kapha, increasing blood sugar issues, warns Dr Mathew. ‘Other typical health problems include sluggish digestion, blocked sinuses and fluid retention.

‘Start your day with a glass of warm water to boost metabolism and eat more pulses, vegetables and lean-protein casseroles, seasoned with fenugreek and black pepper. Cut out wheat and dairy and eat your evening meal at least four hours before you go to bed.’

Which dosha are you?

Rate the following statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Your dominant dosha is the section with the highest score.



PITTA

- I'm very efficient.
- I hate to be too hot.
- I don't cope well with missed or late meals.
- I'm fond of cold foods and drinks.
- I tend to be very precise and orderly.
- People often think I'm stubborn.



VATA

- I'm a fast worker.
- I'm slim and don't gain weight easily.
- My eating and sleeping habits tend to be erratic.
- I'm often anxious or worried.
- I feel the cold more than other people.
- I'm prone to mood swings and can be very emotional.



KAPHA

- I gain weight easily and I'm slow to lose it.
- It doesn't impact me too much if I miss a meal.
- I sleep deeply and I'm slow to get up in the morning.
- I have smooth, soft skin and a pale complexion.
- I walk quite slowly and steadily.
- I don't like cool, damp weather.

Three is the magic number

Recognising your dominant dosha and learning to balance it will restore mental and physical equilibrium.

HAVE YOU GOT THE PITTA PATTERN?

Pitta is what keeps your metabolism going and is the dosha associated with heat. Pittas are prone to sweaty palms and flushing, with skin that is sensitive to the sun. Too much pitta can make you susceptible to digestive problems such as IBS and inflammatory conditions.

Pittas do well when they spend time around nature and also benefit from cooling their inherent heat by sleeping in a cool room and eating cool foods. ‘The natural antidotes to fiery pitta are cooling leafy salads, coconut, cucumber, coriander and fennel,’ says Dr Shijoe Mathew, the UK medical consultant for the Ananda Spa in the Himalayas. ‘Avoid too much chilli, coffee, alcohol and red meat as they can exacerbate inflammation.’

ARE YOU VERY VATA?

Quick-thinking, fast-talking, and bubbling with nervous energy, vatas pick up information quickly, but they forget it quickly, too. As a vata you're naturally cheerful, bubbly

and enthusiastic, but your ebullient nature can be brought down by health worries such as headaches, backache, insomnia, menstrual cramps and eczema as well as periods of low mood.

Speedy vata needs to be balanced with plenty of rest from sleep and meditation. You also need to stay warm, and, because vata is associated with dryness, you should make sure your room has enough humidity in it.

‘A morning massage with sesame or coconut oil can help moisten your naturally dry skin and stimulate circulation,’ says Dr Mathew. ‘Keep your diet rich in ghee and olive and coconut oils, and make sure you don't stint on water – vatas need to fight harder to keep hydrated.’

OR ARE YOU KIND OF KAPHA?

Slow and steady, plodding and patient; these are the classic kapha characteristics. If you're a natural kapha, you're likely to be gentle-mannered and undemanding. You probably think things through very carefully and deliberately, but this tendency can stray into procrastination. Kaphas love hearth and home but,

Add a little spice...
Ayurvedic doctors recognise the importance of a healthy gut and they may recommend you use the following gut-friendly spices.



TURMERIC

(*Curcuma longa*)

aids digestion, eases inflammation and boosts overall energy.



FENUGREEK

(*Trigonella foenum*)

soothes the stomach and can help relieve indigestion and heartburn.



ASAFOETIDA

(*Ferula assa-foetida*)

reduces bloating and gas.



HARITAKI

(*Terminalia chebula*)

helps maintain an alkaline gut.



BIBHITAKI

(*Terminalia belerica*)

stimulates digestive enzymes. ‘Both Haritaki and Bibhitaki regulate bowel movements and digestion,’ says Dr Kerur. 15