

## Ayurveda: What is Your Constitution?

More and more, people come up to me on the street and ask me "what is my constitution<sup>i[1]</sup>?" Other times, they ask "what is my dosha?" They mean the same thing. According to Ayurveda<sup>i[2]</sup>, the traditional medicine from India, a person's constitution is the balance of the three doshas (biological forces that govern the body) inherent within an individual.

A person's constitution determines what a person is naturally attracted to and what causes a person to become out of balance, sick and diseased. Depending upon a person's constitution, they may thrive as a vegetarian or need meat; they may thrive on spicy foods or get burning indigestion. Our constitution determines how we relate to the environment. The wise individual, with this knowledge, creates an environment that is supportive to who they are as a unique individual. Ayurveda teaches that where there is harmony with our environment there is health, where there is disharmony there is disease. The environment consists of anything we experience through our five senses. So, while many people agree that we are what we eat, Ayurveda takes this a step further and teaches that we are what we eat, smell, touch, hear and see. Thus, a Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist (C.A.S.), trained at the California College of Ayurveda, helps people to understand their constitution and how to create a harmonious environment.

There are three basic constitutional types. However, everyone is a unique mix of them. For each type, a different diet is recommended as well as different forms of aroma, color, sound and massage therapies. The three types are called Vata, Pitta and Kapha.

People of vata nature have a predominance of the qualities cold, light, dry and mobile. They tend to become cold easily and often prefer to wear a sweater or shawl even when others are not cold. They are usually the last to turn on the air conditioning and first to complain when a room is too cold. They like to sleep with extra blankets. They are often of lower body weight and this is reflected in their long narrow bones. Many fashion models have a vata type of body with long legs, long necks and long tapered fingers. People of vata nature often experience dry skin, dry eyes and a dry colon which causes a tendency toward constipation and gas. Their mobile nature is seen in their fast speech patterns and chatty nature. It can also be seen in their tendency to become scattered and more easily overwhelmed. People of vata nature often have a fragile, nervous disposition. Their challenges often revolve around staying focused.

People of pitta nature are most often hot. They are likely to be the first people to want to put on the air conditioner and they are likely to kick off the covers on a warm night. Because they have a greater amount of internal heat, it is not unusual to see them wearing shorts in the cool fall or spring weather while others are wearing a light sweater. Heat often builds up in the intestines and leads to softer and looser stools or diarrhea. Pitta people usually have moderate body builds, not very heavy or very thin with good muscular development. Their skin may be prone to red rashes or acne and is often oily. People of pitta nature often have a clear but sharp way of communicating. Their focused and direct language and actions may irritate other people but they can be counted on to get the job done. They most often have a passionate and intense disposition. Their challenge revolves around a lack of patience for those who are not as focused and directed as they are.

People of kapha nature are most often heavy, cool, slow and moist. Because of their heavy nature, they have a stocky body build. This is not to say that people of kapha nature are overweight. No, their natural body type is denser than others. Their bones are shorter and thicker. Often their neck appears to be sitting close to their shoulders and their fingers are short and thick. What really identifies a person of kapha nature is their slower, easy going nature. These people speak and move slowly and are not likely to get upset. They often have a sweet and gentle disposition. Their challenge however revolves around getting motivated and lacking spontaneity. Hence, once a person of kapha nature has made up their mind they are not likely to change it.

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So, what if a vata person lives with a pitta person? Basically, the pitta person kicks the covers off while the vata person is pulling them on and they may argue over the temperature to set the thermostat. The pitta usually wins as a person of pitta nature has a stronger more dominating personality. There may also be challenges about being on time. People of pitta nature really like to be on time and get irritable when they are late. People of vata nature may want to be on time but because they get distracted just can't seem to make it.

If a person of vata nature lives with a person of kapha nature, the person with a kapha nature will usually watch the person of vata nature move around fast in a nervous sort of way and wonder what all the fuss is about. Meanwhile the person of vata nature, who is easily excited, will wonder why their partner is not as excited about life as they are. Neither one of them is likely to fuss about time very much as vata may be late because they get distracted and kapha tends to be late because they move slowly. Both really annoy pitta.

If a person of pitta nature lives with an either a person of vata or kapha nature, they are likely to be somewhat critical of their partner for not being more like them. They may try to convince their partner that something is wrong with them and that they know what it is. People of pitta nature are sure they are right.

If it seems like no matter what constitution you are you have some physical and personality challenges, it's true. We all do. I've yet to meet the perfectly, enlightened being of perfect health and peace of mind. Ayurveda teaches that we are all growing, learning and evolving, and that by understanding our nature, we can evolve faster and learn to appreciate ourselves and others - for each of us is unique. Self love, non-judgment, compassion and unconditional love are the foundation of all spiritual growth.

It's nice to know that each constitutional type has its unique gifts. People of vata nature have the capacity for divine enthusiasm and inspiration. They are often creative and in touch with the subtle world in ways pitta and kapha can only imagine. People of pitta nature have the capacity for clarity of mind that allows them to become great leaders and teachers of humanity. People of kapha nature can be a deep well of love, gentle kindness and nurturance.

Indeed, we are all unique, and while there are three basic energies, we are all a unique combination, and no two people have ever been created alike. By understanding our constitution we can choose proper foods to support us and colors, aromas and sounds to surround ourselves with. Ayurveda teaches that each person has the capacity for perfect health and peace of mind. The journey to accomplish this is one that begins with self understanding. With this knowledge and the support of a teacher or practitioner, each person can begin to create a lifestyle that creates harmony within.

Health is our natural state and is the end result of living in harmony. Disease is the natural end result of living out of harmony. Ayurveda is the path of re-establishing harmony so that health can re-emerge. While people with all kinds of conditions seek and are benefited by ayurvedic health care, it must always be remembered, that it is nature that heals and not the practitioner. It is the Clinical Ayurvedic Specialists job to simply support nature as it works from within the patient.

Before deciding what your constitution is and changing your diet or lifestyle, it is always best to consult with an Ayurvedic health professional. A Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist will help you determine what your constitution is, help you understand the nature of any imbalances, and establish a plan to help you get back into balance. Most importantly, a good practitioner will coach you toward success in establishing your new, stress -free lifestyle.

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[1] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/15>

[2] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/10>