

Tridosha: The Science Of Ayurveda

The ancient science of Ayurveda^[1] is the oldest known form of health care in the world. Often called the mother of all healing, it originated in India some 5000 or more years ago.

Recently Ayurveda has been having a profound impact upon the world of health care. Popular books by Deepak Chopra, M.D. and Andrew Weil, M.D. have called attention to the potential of this ancient healing system to bring healing to those suffering with chronic disease. In addition, Ayurveda promises to improve the health and longevity of just about everyone.

Ayurveda is a science of Self understanding. By understanding your own unique nature or constitution^[2] you can begin to understand how you interact with your environment and thus make choices that will lead you toward greater health.

Ayurveda defines disease as the natural end result of living out of harmony with one's constitution. Our constitution is the inherent balance of energies within our bodies and our minds. It describes who you are on the most fundamental level. This unique balance of energy determines everything from our bone structure to our predisposition toward certain health challenges. In fact, our constitution defines what we are naturally attracted to as well as what repels us. It defines what is in harmony with our nature and what will cause us to move out of balance and experience sickness and disease. Because we all have a different balance of energy, Ayurveda shows that the path to optimal health is different for each person depending upon their constitution.

The science of understanding our nature or our constitution is the science of Tridosha. Tridosha defines the three fundamental energies or principles which govern the function of our bodies on the physical and emotional level. The three energies are known as Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Each individual has a unique balance of all three of these energies. Some people will be predominant in one while others are a mixture of two or more. Let's look at each of these now.

Vata

The Vata dosha is said to be made up of the air and ether elements. This means that it has qualities which are similar to these elements. Vata is very much like the wind - it is light, cool, dry and mobile. In the body, those people with a Vata nature experience more of these qualities. Their bodies tend to be light, their bones thin, and their skin and hair dry. They often move and speak quickly. When out of balance, they may lose weight, become constipated and have weakness in their immune and nervous systems.

These qualities also reflect in their personality. Those with a Vata nature tend to be talkative, enthusiastic, creative, flexible and energetic. Yet, when out of balance they may also become easily confused and overwhelmed, have difficulty focusing and making decisions and have trouble sleeping. This becomes more apparent when they are under stress. Emotionally they are challenged by cool emotions like worry, fear and anxiety.

In order to bring balance to Vata, programs are designed which emphasize the opposing qualities of warmth, heaviness (nourishment), moistness and stability. In the diet, this is reflected in the consumption of cooked grains such as rice and cooked vegetables as well as the intake of warm milk with spices. Pungent herbs like ginger which increase internal heat and nourishing herbs like ashwagandha bring balance to Vata. Ayurvedic programs include not only herbs and diet but also color and aroma therapies, detoxification, yoga and meditation.

Pitta

The Pitta dosha is said to be made up of the fire and water elements. Fire is more predominant and

those people with a predominant Pitta nature have many of the qualities of fire within them. Pitta tends to hot, sharp and penetrating. It is also somewhat volatile and oily. The oily nature of Pitta is related to the secondary component of water. People with a Pitta nature reflect these qualities. They tend to feel warm, have somewhat oily skin, penetrating eyes and sharp features. They tend to have moderate weights and good musculature. When out of balance they tend toward diarrhea, infections, skin rashes and weakness in the liver, spleen and blood.

These qualities also reflect in their personalities. Pitta people tend to be highly focused, competitive, capable, courageous, energetic and clear communicators who get right to the point. They like to solve problems and when under stress they dig in their heels. They can however also become overly intense and speak with a sharp tongue. They make great friends but feared enemies. Emotionally they are challenged by the heated emotions of anger, resentment and jealousy.

In order to bring balance to Pitta, programs are designed to emphasize the opposing qualities of coolness, heaviness (nourishing) and dryness. Cool spices like fennel are recommended in the diet along with foods such as raw vegetables, cooked rice and wheat as well as most beans. Sweet herbs like shatavari are used to nourish the body while bitters like dandelion root temper the fire. A Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist puts together programs that not only include foods and herbs but also aromas, colors, massage, detoxification, yoga and meditation.

Kapha

Within the Kapha dosha there is a predominance of the water and earth elements. Like these elements Kapha tends to be cool, moist, stable and heavy. In the body these qualities manifest as dense, heavy bones, lustrous, supple skin, low metabolism, and large, stocky frames. In addition, those with a Kapha nature tend to feel cool. When out of balance, Kapha individuals are prone to gaining weight and tend to have weaknesses in their lungs and sinuses where there is an accumulation of mucous. Those of Kapha nature are also most prone to non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus.

The elements of water and earth also reflect in the personality. The heavy, stable nature of Kapha reflects in a stable personality which is not prone to quick fluctuations. Those with a Kapha nature handle stress very well, often not even noticing that it exists. They don't like change, are generally conservative and would prefer to keep things just the way they are. Those with a Kapha nature are also comfort seekers. This relates to the soft watery nature of Kapha. Too much comfort however can lead to a lack of motivation and feeling of becoming stuck. When Kapha is out of balance, the heavy emotions of depression and lethargy result.

In order to bring balance to a Kapha nature the opposing qualities of lightness, dryness and warmth are recommended. These qualities are integrated in dietary and herbal programs as well as aroma and color therapies, detoxification, yoga and meditation. Grains such as quinoa and amaranth are recommended as well as hot spices like cayenne pepper. Lots of vegetables and very little nuts or dairy are prescribed. Cleansing herbs like guggul and pungents like clove bring balance to Kapha.

We must remember that we are all a combination of the three doshic energies. On the most fundamental level, Pitta is our metabolism, Kapha our structure and Vata the mobility that brings action and life into creation. Without all three energies, we simply could not exist.

To determine a person's constitution, a Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist conducts a two hour consultation taking a look at every aspect of a person. This physical, emotional, and spiritual evaluation identifies the balance of energies in a person's body as well as areas of imbalance. Once the nature of the person and the imbalance are identified, the Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist can then put together a treatment program utilizing the appropriate diet and herbs, aromas, colors, yoga and meditation aimed at restoring or maintaining balance.

Optimal Health is achieved through Ayurvedic Medicine when we are living in complete harmony with our environment. In order to live in harmony we must first understand our own natures. Only then can we intelligently make choices which support us on our journey. Good luck on yours!

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