

Managing a Vata Constitution



Managing a Vata Constitution



VATA PACIFYING DAILY ROUTINE

Nearly everywhere we look in nature, there are creatures engaging in some sort of consistent daily routine. The natural world at large is deeply influenced by the rhythms of nature – the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the seasons, and the underlying impulses directing the broader community of life.

The Qualities of Vata

"Tatra ruksho laghu sheetah, khara sukshmaschalo nilah"

The qualities of Vata are dry, light, cool, rough, subtle, and mobile. —
Ashtanga Hridayam: Sutrasthana I:11

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This Sanskrit line lists the main qualities of vata and provides a key to understanding what it means to have a predominantly vata prakriti. The main qualities of vata are dry, light, cool, rough, subtle, and mobile. So, having a vata-predominant prakriti means that these qualities express themselves generously throughout your mental, emotional, and physical make up. If you look back over the prakriti test, you can get a feel for how these qualities manifest themselves. A vata-predominant individual's strengths and weaknesses both reflect these qualities.

- In excess, the dry and rough qualities may manifest themselves as dry or brittle skin, lips, hair, nails, or bones (e.g. osteoporosis), as constipation, or as feeling "dry" emotionally.
- The "light" quality may manifest itself as giving you a lanky physique but excess lightness may manifest as being underweight, having muscle wasting, light bones, insomnia, or feeling "spacey" or insecure.
- The cold quality of vata may lead you to feel cold more easily than others around you, have cold hands and feet, and crave warmth.
- The subtle quality may express itself as being introverted, creative, and having an active fantasy life.
- The mobile quality may lead to a healthy ability to "multi-task" or, in excess, to scattered attention, a fidgety tendency, tremors, and nervousness. It may manifest as extremes; as in being very tall or very short or being drastically different weights at different times in your life.

Decreasing or Balancing Vata

Like Increases Like

A basic tenet of Ayurveda is "like increases like." Therefore, increasing the inherent qualities of vata will increase vata in your body, mind, and spirit.

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For example, because vata is inherently cool—cool weather, cool foods, the cool seasons and times of day, and even cool emotions can increase vata. Likewise, dry seasons, foods, environments, or emotions will increase the dry quality and thereby increase vata.

Example: You are a vata individual. One of the qualities of vata is dryness. You live in a dry climate, like a desert, and you regularly snack on dry crackers. This added dryness adds to the dry quality of vata, which you already have plenty of. This usually increases vata and can lead to dry conditions like constipation or dry skin. This is an extreme example to illustrate the point.

Tastes That Increase and Decrease Vata

Along with the main qualities of vata, it is also helpful to know those tastes that increase and decrease vata.

Pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes increase vata by increasing its drying and cooling qualities. An example of the pungent taste is chili peppers. Bitter and astringent tastes are common in most leafy greens and many herbs.

Sweet, sour, and salty tastes decrease vata by bringing moisture, bulk, and warmth to the body, which are opposite qualities to those of vata. An example of a naturally sweet taste is wheat; of sour: pickles; of salty: seaweed.

Opposites as Medicine

As said above, each of us has a unique proportion of the three doshas in our prakritis. Ayurveda teaches us that if a dosha increases beyond its original, natural proportion for us, it fosters an environment where disease can flourish.

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It is common for our predominant dosha (vata, pitta, or kapha) to increase more quickly than other doshas because we tend to perpetuate what we know best. For example, if your dominant dosha is vata, you will naturally incline towards a life filled with activity, due to the mobile quality of vata. However, if you are too active, you are likely to eventually aggravate vata and thereby exhaust the nervous system.

If a dosha increases in our bodies, Ayurveda suggests that we will want to decrease it in order to regain a healthy balance in our constitution.

Medicines are substances that decrease the excess dosha by providing the opposite qualities to it. For example, if vata has increased due to excess activity, a quiet, calm environment can be a medicine. If it has increased due to excess dryness, wetness can be the medicine. Too much cold? Use heat.

One of the wonderfully practical aspects of Ayurveda is that anything can be used as a medicine because everything that exists has a quality. This includes but is not limited to: herbs, foods, colors, drinks, environments, smells, and lifestyles.

Qualities opposite to vata are moist, grounding, warming, smooth, oily, and stabilizing. It is therefore best for vata individuals to seek out physical and emotional environments, routines, and foods that possess these opposite qualities.

Opposites in Diet as Medicine

A vata individual does well to have warming, freshly cooked, nourishing, mushy foods, like soups, stews, and one-pot-meals. Because of the inherent "light" quality in vata, you may think that heavy foods would nicely balance that quality but actually too much heavy food—or just too much food at a sitting—is too heavy for the lightness of the vata digestive system.

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Because the sweet, sour, and salty tastes decrease vata, these tastes should be predominant in your diet.

When selecting sweet foods, note that naturally sweet foods like many grains, squashes, and most fruits are appropriate, but processed foods high in refined sugars are not at all balancing for vata. Refined sugars merely offer a quick burst of energy, followed by a "crash," a pattern that is already a hallmark feature of vata, and one that the vata individual does well to avoid.

Herbal Support for a Vata Constitution

Using herbs to manage your constitution compliments the changes you make in your diet and lifestyle. Ashwagandha, Shatavari and Vidari Kanda are three of the primary herbs used to remove excess vata from the body and maintain balance.

Opposites in Climate and Lifestyle as Medicine

The ideal environment for a vata individual is warm and wet, like Hawaii. Sweet scents, sweet music, and sweet emotions are also good "medicines" for vata. A daily, 10–20 minute, gentle self-massage with warm sesame oil can positively change the life of a vata-type.

The mobile quality of vata can drive vata-types to do "1000" things at one time. This can lead to exhaustion of the nervous system, which in turn causes emotional and physical restlessness and eventual "dis-ease." While a routine can feel contrary to your nature, it can be extremely beneficial for you to incorporate into your life. For example, rising and going to bed at about the same time every day, giving regular time to meditation, gentle yoga or other strengthening exercise that is easy on the joints. Also try having regular meals, chewing them thoroughly and taking a breath before moving on to your next activity.

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In general, it is best to move through life as if you were a master. Ask yourself, "If a master were faced with this situation, how would she act?" Then enjoy playing that part.

Yoga for Vata Types

Visit the vata - pacifying yoga section on our website for information on how to customize your yoga practice to help balance vata.

Famous Vata Examples

Christy Turlington. Lanky. Moves around a lot. Very tall. Angular face.

Mick Jagger. Jumps around. Creative. Lanky. Disproportionate features.

Now What?

Knowing our Prakriti is useful because it increases awareness of our natural strengths and challenges. This is a positive first step towards understanding health.

The second step is to understand if and how we have strayed from our natural, healthy constitution. In Ayurveda, we determine this by comparing our Prakriti (natural constitution) with our Vikriti, our current condition.

The next step is to determine your current state.



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VATA PACIFYING DIET

Vata is balanced by a diet of freshly cooked, whole foods that are soft or mushy in texture, rich in protein and fat, seasoned with a variety of warming spices, and served warm or hot. These foods calm vata by lubricating and nourishing the tissues, preserving moisture, and maintaining warmth.

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Berries



Avocado



Sweet Potato



Pistachios



Red Lentils



Wild Rice



Beet



Watercress



Dates



Peach

VATA PACIFYING FOODS

Vata is cool, dry, rough and light, so eating foods that neutralize these qualities – foods that are warm, moist, oily, smooth, and nourishing – can help to balance excess vata.

DISCLAIMER

The above Prakriti test and results are intended as a convenient tool to provide practical information on your Ayurvedic constitutional type. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. In addition, it should be noted that while this information should be considered highly useful it is not meant to replace the skilled constitutional analysis of a professionally trained Ayurvedic Physician.

