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Yoga for balancing the doshas

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Abstract

The paramount theme of yoga at its core is the same as Ayurveda—to return to your true nature. As Yoga is Ayurveda's sister science, Yoga and Ayurveda share themes and principles. Yoga is fantastic for everyone because there are a variety of styles and poses that can be selected, adapted, and modified to complement anyone's mind-body constitution.

According to Ayurveda, the universal life force manifests as three different energies or Doshas, known as *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. We are all made up of a unique combination of these three forces. This unique combination, determined at the moment of conception, is our constitution or *prakruti*. The three doshas constantly fluctuate according to our environment, which includes our diet, the seasons, the climate, our age, and many more factors. The current state of these three doshas most commonly defines our imbalance, or *vikruti*. The three doshas are generally described in terms of the five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether. When determining the kind of yoga practice that is right for you, the most important factor is your vikruti, or imbalance. Your vikruti is, in fact, the single most important determinant of your entire regime. Once you have corrected your imbalance, you can stay in good health by choosing a yoga practice that balances your constitution or prakruti.

Keywords: Yoga and Ayurveda, Yoga Pradipika, Doshas, balancing, The Science of Life

Introduction

Yoga and Ayurveda are sister sciences from the ancient wellness tradition of India. Yoga and Ayurveda are two paths intertwined in such a close relationship that it is hard to imagine traveling down one of these paths without knowledge of the other. The word "yoga" means union, and the essence of Yoga is to unite with your true nature. Yoga is the ancient art and science of preparing the body and mind for the eventual liberation and enlightenment of the soul. Ayurveda means "The Science of Life" Ayurvedic knowledge originated in India more than 5,000 years ago and is often called the "Mother of All Healing." It stems from the ancient Vedic culture and was taught for many thousands of years in an oral tradition from accomplished masters to their disciples.

Yogic text Hatha Yoga Pradipika, talks about the Ayurvedic Doshas and highlights that some of its cleansing practices are only relevant if doshas are out of balance.

A dosha is one of three substances that are present in a person's body according to Ayurveda. Beginning with twentieth-century literature, there was an idea called "The Three-Dosha Theory". Authoritative Ayurvedic treatises describe how the quantity and quality of these three substances fluctuate in the body according to the seasons, time of day, diet, and several other factors. Ayurvedic doshas are markedly different from Latin humors.

The central concept of Ayurvedic medicine is the theory that health exists when there is a balance between the three fundamental bodily bio-elements or doshas called Vata, Pitta, and Kapha.

According to the philosophy, universal life force manifests as three different energies, or doshas, known as vata, pitta, and kapha. We're all made up of a unique combination of these three forces. Though everyone has some of each, most people tend to have an abundance of one or two of the doshas. This unique combination is determined at the moment of conception, and is your own personal blueprint, or *prakriti* (nature). As you move through life, the proportion of each of the three doshas constantly fluctuates according to your environment, your diet, the seasons, the climate, your age, and many other factors. As they move into and out of balance, the doshas can affect your health, energy level, and general mood.

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The Three Doshas

Vāta or Vata is characterized by the properties of dry, cold, light, minute, and movement. All movement in the body is due to properties of vata. Pain is the characteristic feature of deranged vata. Some of the diseases connected to unbalanced vata are flatulence, gout, rheumatism, etc. Vata is not to be interpreted as air.

5 types of Vata Dosha

- a) Prana Vata
- b) Udana Vata
- c) Samana Vata
- d) Apana Vata
- e) Vyana Vata

Pitta represents metabolism: It is characterized by heat, moistness, liquidity, and sharpness and sourness. Its chief quality is heat. It is the energy principle which uses bile to direct digestion and enhance metabolism. Unbalanced pitta is primarily characterized by body heat or a burning sensation and redness.

5 types of Pitta Dosha

- a) Pachaka Pitta
- b) Ranjaka Pitta
- c) Alochaka Pitta
- d) Sadhaka Pitta
- e) Bharajaka Pitta

Kapha is the watery element. It is characterized by heaviness, coldness, tenderness, softness, slowness, lubrication, and the carrier of nutrients. It is the nourishing element of the body. All soft organs are made by Kapha and it plays an important role in the perception of taste together with nourishment and lubrication.

5 types of Kapha Dosha

- a) Kledaka Kapha
- b) Avalambhaka Kapha
- c) Tarpaka Kapha
- d) Bodhaka Kapha
- e) Shleshaka Kapha

Asanas to Balance Doshas

Vata dosha

- The asanas which are most suitable for balancing vata are those that are calming and grounding by nature.
- Uttanasana is an excellent asana for Vata. The seated version of this asana, Paschimottanasana, will have similar value and may be easier if your back is sore.
- Balasana is another excellent asana for compressing the pelvis and the vata region. Compression asanas are excellent for constipation and for chronic gas.
- Supta Virasana is another good asana for vata. it creates a mild extension of the lower abdominal muscles and lower back. This action increases the pressure in the pelvis, again alleviating vata.
- Dhanurasana also extends the lower back and places pressure on the pelvis. This is essential for the maximum relief of vata.
- Virasana, Siddhasana and Padmasana are very calming poses which sedate Vata's agitated nature. These meditative poses are excellent for calming the nervous system, which aids in the healing of anxiety, nervousness, sciatica, and muscle spasm. The most calming pose of all

is, of course, the supine Savasana.

Pitta Dosha

- The best asanas for pitta are those that are calming and not overly heating. Asanas that help balance pitta are those that place pressure on the naval and solar plexus region, in the small intestine where pitta resides. These asanas directly affect the liver and spleen and help regulate the strength of the digestive fire.
- Ustrasana is very beneficial for pittas. This asana opens up the abdomen, solar plexus, and chest, allowing for freer movement of energy through these regions.
- Bhujangasana and Dhanurasana are also excellent solar plexus extension poses for pitta.

Kapha Dosha

- To balance the heavy, slow, cold, and sedated nature of kapha, practice asanas that are more stimulating and heating. Asanas best suited to individuals of kapha nature or imbalance are those that open up the chest. The stomach and chest are the areas where kapha accumulates. In the chest, kapha takes on the form of mucous. These asanas are excellent for the prevention and treatment of congestive conditions like bronchitis and pneumonia as well as constrictive conditions such as asthma and emphysema.
- Ustrasana and Setu Bandhasana are useful asanas for kaphas.
- These asanas also affect the flow of energy through the heart chakra, aiding the development of compassion and unconditional love.
- For those of kapha nature and imbalance, the calming and sedating effect of most asanas needs to be balanced by other asanas that are more stimulating and heating.
- Suryanamaskar is a very good aerobic exercise for kapha and helps in the treatment of obesity and depression, two common kapha conditions. The Sun Salutation is the ideal asana for kapha, as it is very active, creates heat, and opens the chest.

Pranayama to Balance Doshas

- **Nadi Shodhana Pranayama for Vata:** Vata is made of air and ether, wind and space. Its main qualities are dry, cold, light, rough, and mobile. One of the great techniques for balancing and harmonizing vata is the alternate nostril breath, known as Nadi Shodhana, which is very rhythmic, soothing, and grounding. Nadi Shodhana is excellent for not only releasing physical tension, but also for supporting a clear mind, enhanced tranquility, and stress reduction. It's perfect for the hectic holiday season (it can be done daily during this time of year), or anytime you're feeling anxious, nervous, stressed, depleted, or exhausted.
- **Sitali Pranayama for Pitta:** Pitta is made of fire and water. Its main qualities are hot, oily, light, and sharp. Cooling Sitali Breath has the opposite qualities, so it cools and calms the excess pitta. Sitali Breath is best for the summer season of pitta or anytime you're feeling irritated, angry, frustrated, or noticing a little acid indigestion.
- **Bhastrika Pranayama for Kapha:** Kapha is made of water and earth. Its main qualities are heavy, sticky, cool, and oily. Bhastrika (Bellows Breath) has the opposite qualities, to stimulate, warm, and lift the excess kapha.

Bhastrika helps increase the graceful flow of prana through the body's energy channels (nadis). It also helps to remove excess congestion in the lungs and brighten the mind. Bhastrika is best during springtime, or anytime you feel sluggish, lethargic, mildly congested, or unmotivated.

Conclusion

Yoga, practiced in harmony with each person's unique nature, is part of the Ayurvedic path toward balancing the doshas and enhancing sattva. Through this path each of us can reach our full potential. By including the study of Ayurvedic concepts, we can make our practice more meaningful and customize for our specific needs. Because the goal of both Yoga and Ayurveda, is to accept our true nature and live our life in harmony with it.

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