

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF
AYURVEDIC HOME REMEDIES

Vasant D. Lad, B.A.M.S., M.A.Sc.



Ayurveda Cooking for Self-Healing (with Usha Lad)

The Yoga of Herbs (with David Frawley)

Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing

Secrets of the Pulse



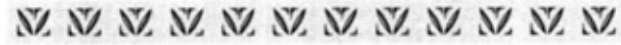
The Complete Book
—
of Ayurvedic
—
Home Remedies

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Illustrations by Vasant D. Lad



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Although the information contained in this book is based on Ayurvedic principles practiced for thousands of years, it should not be taken or construed as standard medical diagnosis or treatment. For any medical condition, always consult with a qualified physician.

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*This book is dedicated with all my heart to my most loving wife,
Usha, and my children, Aparna and Pranav.*

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The Need for Healing

Ayurveda is the art of daily living in harmony with the laws of nature. It is an ancient natural wisdom of health and healing, a science of life. The aims and objectives of this science are to maintain the health of a healthy person and to heal the disease of an unhealthy person. Both prevention (maintenance of good health) and healing are carried out by entirely natural means.

According to Ayurveda, health is a perfect state of balance among the body's three fundamental energies, or *doshas* (*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*) and an equally vital balance among body, mind, and the soul or consciousness.

Ayurveda is a profound science of living that encompasses the whole of life and relates the life of the individual to the life of the universe. It is a holistic system of healing in the truest sense. Body, mind, and consciousness are in constant interaction and relationship with other people and the environment. In working to create health, Ayurveda takes into consideration these different levels of life and their interconnectedness.

As a science of self-healing, Ayurveda encompasses diet and nutrition, lifestyle, exercise, rest and relaxation, meditation, breathing exercises, and medicinal herbs, along with cleansing and rejuvenation programs for healing body, mind, and spirit. Numerous adjunct therapies such as sound, color, and aromatherapy may also be employed. The purpose of this book is to acquaint you with these natural methods, so you can make the lifestyle choices and learn the self-healing modalities that are right for you in order to create, maintain, or restore health and balance.

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word that means "the science of life and longevity." According to this science, every individual is both a creation of cosmic energies and a unique phenomenon with a unique personality. Ayurveda teaches that we all have a constitution, which is our individual psychobiological makeup. From the moment of conception, this individual constitution is created by the universal energies of Space, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth.

These five elements combine into the three fundamental energies, or *doshas*. Ether and air constitute *vata*, which is the energy of movement; fire and water constitute *pitta*, the principle of digestion or metabolism, the transformation of matter into energy; and water and earth make up *kapha*, the energy of structure and lubrication. When the male sperm and the female egg join at the time of fertilization, the *vata*–*pitta*–*kapha* factors from the parents' bodies that are most active and predominant at the moment, due to the season, the time, the emotional state, and the quality of their relationship, form a new individual with a particular constellation of qualities.

In modern terms we speak of this blueprint of the individual as our inherited genetic code. From ancient times Ayurveda has called it our *prakruti* or individual constitution, a constant factor that does not change throughout life. It is our own unique pattern of energy, or combination of physical, mental, and emotional characteristics and predispositions.

Though the underlying structure of our *prakruti* remains a fixed reality, our home base of essential individuality, it is constantly bombarded by numerous forces. Changes in age and

our external environment, alternating heat and cold as the seasons pass, our endlessly shifting thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and the quality and quantity of the food we eat, all continuously affect us. Unhealthy diet, excess stress, insufficient rest or exercise, and repressed emotions all disturb our *doshic* balance. Depending on the type of changes and the individual's underlying constitution, various ailments may develop:

- Some individuals experience an increase or aggravation of kapha, leading to conditions such as colds, congestion, sneezing, and allergic manifestations, as well as attachment, greed, and possessiveness.
- A pitta individual may become highly critical, angry, or perfectionistic, or may develop physical symptoms such as acid indigestion, heartburn, diarrhea, dysentery, hives, rash, and acne.
- Vata imbalances may manifest as constipation, abdominal distention, sciatica, arthritis, and insomnia, along with psychological symptoms such as fear, anxiety, and insecurity.

All these illnesses and conditions, in addition to the countless others that lead to human suffering, are due to alterations in the body's inner ecology. These upset the individual's balance, creating subtle biochemical changes that ultimately lead to disease. This is why the Ayurvedic system of medicine speaks of the need for healing for every individual in every walk of life.

As the internal and external conditions of our lives change, if we are going to remain healthy we need to constantly adjust in order to maintain equilibrium. Some of this adjusting takes place automatically due to the beautiful wisdom and intelligence with which our bodies have been designed. But much demands conscious choice.

To maintain health and balance, we have to juggle with the three doshas, taking action to increase or decrease vata, pitta, or kapha as conditions demand. This requires moment-to-moment awareness, moment-to-moment consciousness, moment-to-moment healing.

Thus healing—healthy, balanced, conscious living in the fullness of the present moment—really a way of life. Ayurveda is not a passive form of therapy but rather asks each individual to take responsibility for his or her own daily living. Through our diet, our relationships, our job, our numerous responsibilities, and our daily life as a whole, we can take simple actions for prevention, self-healing, wholeness, and growth toward fulfillment.

According to Ayurveda, our life has a purpose. Simply stated, that purpose is to know and realize the Creator (Cosmic Consciousness) and to understand our relationship with That, which will entirely influence our daily living. This great purpose is to be achieved by balancing four fundamental aspects of life: *dharma*, which is duty or right action; *artha*, material success or wealth; *kama*, positive desire; and *moksha*, spiritual liberation. These are called the four *purusharthas*, the four great aims or achievements in the life of any individual.

The foundation of all these facets of life is health. To maintain *dharma* and carry out our duties and responsibilities to ourselves and others, we must be healthy. Likewise, in order to create affluence and achieve success in action, good health is indispensable. To have creative positive desire, we need a healthy mind and consciousness, a healthy body, and healthy perception. (Desire—*kama*—is sometimes translated as sex and refers to progeny and family life, but it is really the positive energy or force of desire that generates and propels all creative work.) And *moksha* or spiritual liberation is nothing but perfect harmony of body,

mind, and consciousness or soul. Thus the whole possibility of achievement and fulfillment life rests on good health.

In the quarter century that I have been practicing medicine, I have worked in surgery, gynecology, obstetrics, and pediatrics, as well as in general medicine, treating thousands of individuals in all stages and walks of life. I have repeatedly observed that lifestyle choices such as diet, exercise, and daily routine, can be a potent source of healing as well as a cause of disease. Many health problems seem intertwined with the stresses of daily life, family and relationship problems, and worries about job and money. Others are directly connected to eating the wrong kinds of food or getting too much or too little exercise.

I have also grown more and more aware that illness provides us with an invitation for self-transformation, an opportunity to change our way of thinking, feeling, eating, and in general caring for ourselves and our lives. It never ceases to amaze and delight me how quickly and powerfully life can be set on the right track and balance restored simply through a proper diet, herbal medicines, meditation, an appropriate exercise program, and other purely natural means.

The remedies in this book come from my own practical clinical experience, based on principles and practices developed over centuries. The tradition of Ayurveda extends back over more than five thousand years of continuous daily practice, from ancient times to the present day. It is not a recently developed system of “alternative healing” but an enduring science of life that has never lost its integrity and essential nature. You can imagine how much wisdom it contains and how much practical knowledge it has accumulated over a span of five millennia!

About three thousand years ago (around 900 B.C.), the long oral tradition of Ayurveda took new form when three great scholars—Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata—wrote down the principles of this ancient wisdom. Their textbooks are still used by students, practitioners, and teachers in Ayurvedic medical schools and colleges throughout India.

In a profound sense, Ayurveda is the mother of all healing systems. From its eight principal branches (pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, ophthalmology, geriatrics, otolaryngology, toxicology, general medicine, and surgery) have come the main branches of medicine as it is practiced today, as well as many modern healing modalities, including massage, diet and nutritional counseling, herbal remedies, plastic surgery, psychiatry, polarity therapy, kinesiology, shiatsu, acupressure and acupuncture, color and gem therapy, and meditation. All these have roots in Ayurvedic philosophy and practice.

The great sage-physician Charaka, one of the founders of Ayurvedic medicine, said, “A physician, though well versed in the knowledge and treatment of disease, who does not enter into the heart of the patient with the virtue of light and love, will not be able to heal the patient.” To the best of my ability, I have followed this advice all my life, and I would urge you to follow it in using this knowledge to help others and to heal yourself.

Love is the essence of our life. I have written this book with love, and I offer it to you, dear reader, with the hope that the suggestions offered here will become a vital part of your self-healing and continued well-being.



Part I



The Science of Life

Ayurveda: Body, Mind, and Soul

Like other great ancient civilizations, India never separated science from philosophy and religion. Rather, it viewed all knowledge as part of a whole designed to promote human happiness, health, and growth.

Philosophy is the love of truth. *Science* is the discovery of truth through experiment. *Religion* is the experience of truth and application of it in daily living.

Ayurveda, the science of life, is both systematized knowledge and practical wisdom, an art of healthy living that encompasses all phases of life, body, mind, and spirit. Like all sciences, it includes both a practical and a theoretical aspect. In order to make best use of the practical recommendations that come later in this book, it will help if you understand the essentials of Ayurvedic theory. This first chapter may seem a bit abstract, but please be patient and read carefully, as it forms the basis of all that is to follow.

The Universe and How We Are Connected

According to Ayurveda, the source of all existence is universal Cosmic Consciousness, which manifests as male and female energy. *Purusha*, often associated with the male energy, is choiceless, passive, pure awareness. *Prakruti*, the female energy, is active, choiceful, and conscious. Both *Purusha* and *Prakruti* are eternal, timeless, and immeasurable. These two energies are present in all living organisms, including every man and woman, as well as in inanimate objects.

Purusha is formless and beyond attributes. Unmanifested pure existence, beyond cause and effect, beyond space and time, *Purusha* takes no active part in creation but remains a silent witness.

Prakruti, which has form, color, and attributes, is the divine creative will that dances the dance of creation. *Prakruti* is the One that becomes many. *Purusha* is the lover, *Prakruti* the beloved. Creation of this universe happens through their love. All of nature is the child born from the womb of *Prakruti*, the Divine Mother.

In the manifestation of nature from *Prakruti*, the first expression is *Mahad* (or *Mahat*) intelligence or cosmic order. (In human beings, it is referred to as *Buddhi*, intellect.) Next is *Ahamkar* or ego, the sense of self-identity, the center in our consciousness from which we think, act, and react. *Ahamkar* expresses itself in three universal qualities:

Sattva is stability, purity, wakefulness, essence, clarity, and light.

Rajas is dynamic movement and causes sensations, feelings, and emotions.

Tamas is the tendency toward inertia, darkness, ignorance, and heaviness. *Tamas* is responsible for deep sleep and periods of confusion. It also leads to the creation of matter.

From the essence of *Sattva* are born the mind, the five sense faculties and their organs (ears to hear, skin to perceive touch, eyes to see, tongue to taste, nose to smell), and the five motor organs or organs of action: the mouth (for speech), the hands, feet, reproductive

organs, and organs of excretion.

Rajas is the active force behind the movement of both the sensory and motor organs.

Tamas gives rise to the five elements, which form the basis of material creation: space (ether), air, fire, water, and earth.

Man, a creation of Cosmic Consciousness, is considered to be a microcosm of the macrocosm that is the universe. Whatever is present in the cosmos, the same is present in human beings. Man is a miniature of nature.

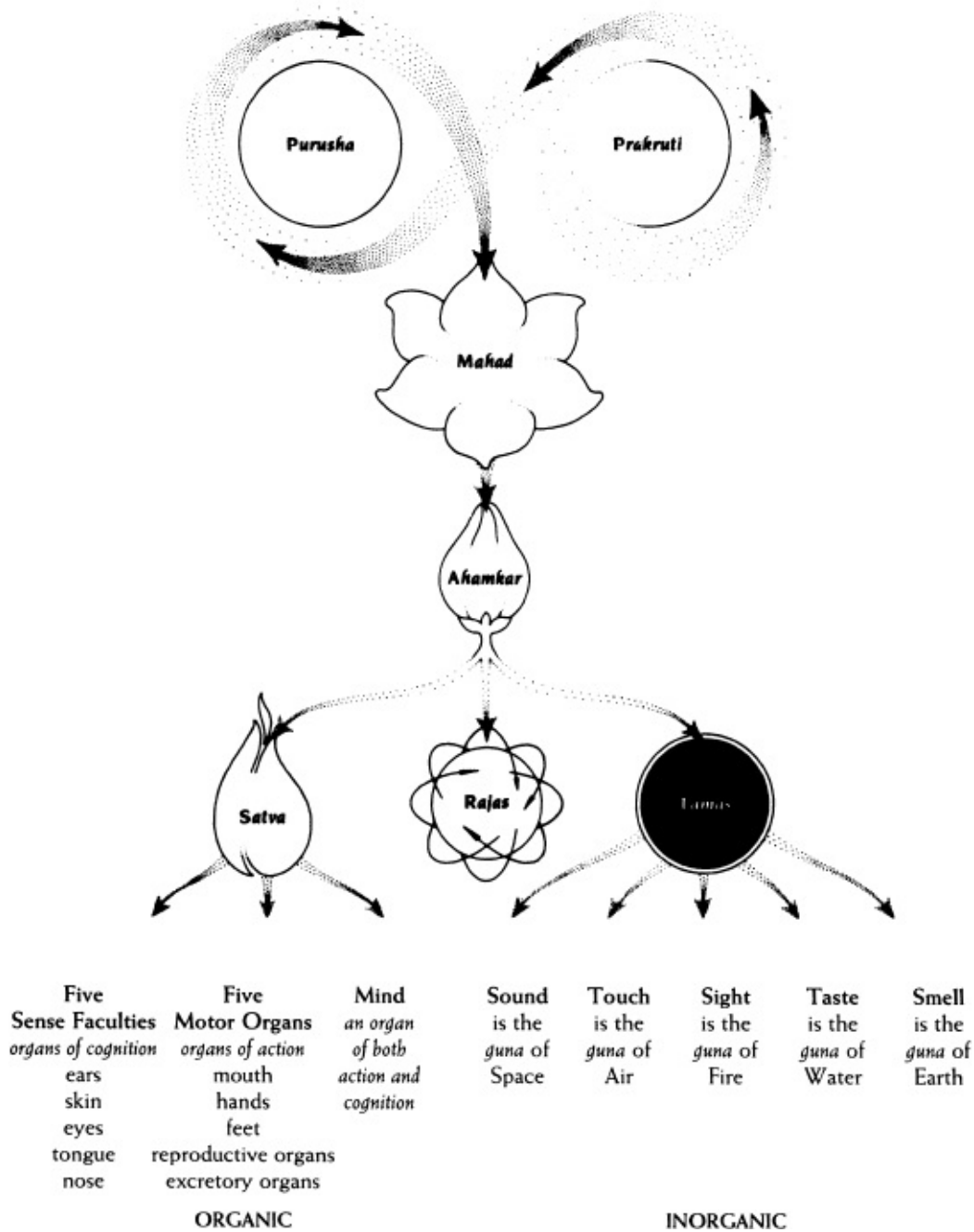
The Five Elements: Building Blocks of Nature

The concept of the five elements is one of the most fundamental in Ayurvedic science. The five elements (space, air, fire, water, and earth) exist in all matter, both organic and inorganic. As man is a microcosm of nature, the five elements also exist within each individual. Our psychological tendencies, as well as our five senses and the various aspects of our body's functioning, are all directly related to the five elements.

According to Ayurveda, the five elements manifest sequentially, beginning with space, from the pure, unified, unmanifested Cosmic Consciousness that is the source of all.

SPACE

Sometimes referred to as "ether," space is empty, light, subtle, all-pervading, omnipresent, and all-enclosing. It is universal, non-moving, and formless. Space is nuclear energy. It appears when the pure unmanifest consciousness begins to vibrate and is associated with sound and the sense of hearing. We need space in order to live, move, grow, and communicate. Spaces in the body include the mouth, nose, gastrointestinal tract, respiratory tract, abdomen, and thorax. Psychologically, space gives freedom, peace, and expansion of consciousness and is responsible for love and compassion as well as feelings of separation, isolation, emptiness, ungroundedness, insecurity, anxiety, and fear.



AIR

Air is dry, light, clear, and mobile. The second manifestation of consciousness, air moves through space. Air is electrical energy—the electron moves because of the air element. It is formless, but it can be perceived by touch, to which it is related. The principle of movement, air, expresses itself in the movements of the muscles, the pulsations of the heart, the expansion and contraction of the lungs. Sensory and neural impulses move to and from the brain under the influence of the air principle, which is also responsible for breathing, ingestion, the movement of the intestines, and elimination. The flow of thought, desire, and will are governed by the air principle, which gives us happiness, freshness, joy, and excitement. It is, along with space, also responsible for fear, anxiety, insecurity, and nervousness.

FIRE

Fire is hot, dry, sharp, penetrating, and luminous. When air begins to move, it produces friction, which generates heat or fire. Fire is radiant energy. On the atomic level, the atom radiates heat and light in the form of a quantum wave. Fire is active and changeable. In our solar system, the sun is the source of fire and light. In the body, our biological “fire” in the solar plexus regulates body temperature and metabolism: digestion, absorption, and assimilation. Fire is associated with light and with vision. Fire is intelligence. It is necessary for transformation, attention, comprehension, appreciation, recognition, and understanding. Fire is also responsible for anger, hatred, envy, criticism, ambition, and competitiveness.

WATER

The next manifestation of consciousness, water is fluid, heavy, soft, viscous, cold, dense, and cohesive. It brings molecules together. Water is chemical energy (it is the universal chemical solvent). Water is associated with the sense of taste; without moisture the tongue cannot taste anything. Water exists in the body as plasma, cytoplasm, serum, saliva, nasal secretions, cerebrospinal fluid, urine, and sweat. It is necessary for nutrition and to maintain life; without it, our cells could not survive. Water is contentment, love, and compassion. It creates thirst, edema, and obesity.

EARTH

Earth is heavy, hard, rough, firm, dense, slow-moving, and bulky—the most solid of the five elements. It is neither hot nor cold. Earth is mechanical or physical energy. According to Ayurveda, it is nothing but crystallized or solidified consciousness. It gives strength, structure, and stamina to the body. All the body’s solid structures (bones, cartilage, nails, teeth, hair, skin) are derived from the earth element. Earth is associated with the sense of smell. It promotes forgiveness, support, groundedness, and growth. It also creates attachment, greed, and depression, and its absence produces feelings of ungroundedness.

In our body, the electrical energy of the neuron becomes the physical energy of the movement of muscles, mediated through the neurotransmitter, which is chemical. Indeed, all the five elements are present on every level of our physiology, starting with a single cell. Within the cell, the cell membrane is earth, cellular vacuoles are space, cytoplasm is water, nucleic acid and other chemical components of the cell are fire, and movement of the cell is due to the air principle. Every single cell also has mind, intelligence, and consciousness through which it manifests selectivity and choice. From all the possible nutrients in its environment, every cell chooses its own food—that choice is intelligence at work.

Both in our outer environment and within us, the proportion and balance of these elements is forever shifting, changing with the seasons, the weather, the time of day, the stage of one’s life. For health, and often for sheer survival, we have to continuously accommodate ourselves to these changes, through what we eat, what we wear, where we live, and so on. This is a balancing act, playing elements against each other. We use solid earth to build homes, to protect ourselves against changes in air, heat (fire), and water. We use fire to prepare food

(made of water and earth).

The Three Doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha

These five great elements combine into three basic energies or functional principles, which are present, in varying degrees, in everything and everybody. Space (ether) and air constitute vata. Fire and water combine to make up pitta. Water and earth constitute kapha.

In our bodies, these three doshas or humors govern our psychobiological functioning. vata–pitta–kapha are present in every cell, tissue, and organ. When in balance, they create health. When out of balance, they are the cause of disease.

These three doshas are responsible for the huge variety of individual differences and preferences, and they influence all we are and all we do, from our choices of food to our modes of relating to others. They govern the biological and psychological processes of our body, mind, and consciousness. They regulate the creation, maintenance, and destruction of bodily tissue, and the elimination of waste products. They also govern our emotions. When in balance, they generate noble qualities such as understanding, compassion, and love. When their balance is disturbed by stress, improper diet, environmental conditions or other factors, they can give rise to negative emotions such as anger, fear, and greed.

In Ayurveda, vata is the bodily air principle. It is the energy of movement. Pitta is the principle of fire, the energy of digestion and metabolism. And kapha is the principle of water—the energy of lubrication and structure.

All people have all of these three doshas, but one of them is usually primary, one secondary, and the third least prominent. Thus, each person has a particular pattern of energy, an individual combination of physical, mental, and emotional characteristics that make up his or her constitution (*prakruti*). Just as everyone has an individual fingerprint that can be identified by a trained practitioner, so everyone has an energy print—a balance or proportion of vata, pitta, and kapha—that is uniquely his or her own.

Health depends on maintaining this proportion in balance. Balance is the natural order of things; imbalance provokes and reflects disorder. Within our bodies there is a constant interplay between order and disorder, which determines our state of health.

Health is order; disease is disorder. The internal environment of the body is ceaselessly reacting to the external environment. Disorder occurs when these two are out of harmony with each other. But since order is inherent within disorder, the wise person learns to be aware of the presence of disorder and sets about to reestablish order.

In [chapter 2](#) we will see how the three fundamental doshas combine to create the seven constitutional types of Ayurveda, and you will learn your own body type, the key to making lifestyle choices for self-healing and maximum well-being. For the moment, let us look a little more deeply into the characteristics of these three basic energies of life.

VATA

Vata is the energy of movement. Although it is the air *principle*, it is not considered the same as actual air in the external environment, but rather as the subtle energy that governs

biological movement.

Vata is intimately related to our vital life essence, known as *prana*. *Prana* is the pure essence of vata. It is the life-force, the play of intelligence. That flow of intelligence is necessary for communication between two cells, and it maintains the life function of both. On a cosmic level, *prana* is said to be the attraction between *Purusha* and *Prakruti*.

As the principle of mobility, vata regulates all activity in the body, both mental and physiological. It is responsible for breathing, the blinking of our eyes, the beating of our hearts, and all movement in the cytoplasm and cell membranes. All the impulses in the vast networks of our nervous system are governed by vata.

When vata is in balance, it promotes creativity and flexibility and evokes feelings of freshness, lightness, happiness, and joy. Out of balance, vata produces fear, nervousness, anxiety, even tremors and spasms.

Vata is dry, light, cold, subtle, clear, mobile, and dispersing. We shall soon see how these qualities are expressed in a person with a vata constitution.

PITTA

Pitta is translated as fire, but this is not meant literally. Rather, it is the *principle* of fire, the energy of heating or metabolism. Pitta governs all the biochemical changes that take place within our bodies, regulating digestion, absorption, assimilation, and body temperature. From the standpoint of modern biology, pitta comprises the enzymes and amino acids that play a major role in metabolism.

Pitta regulates body temperature through the chemical transformation of food. It promotes appetite and vitality.

Not only food is metabolized by us. Every impression coming in from the outside is also processed or “digested” and made a part of us. Thus pitta (when in balance) promotes intelligence and understanding and is crucial in learning. Out-of-balance pitta may arouse fiery emotions such as frustration, anger, hatred, criticism, and jealousy.

Pitta is hot, sharp, light, oily, liquid, pungent, sour, and spreading. These qualities occur in various ways in people of pitta constitution.

KAPHA

Kapha combines water and earth. It is the energy that forms the body’s structure, the glue that holds the cells together. Kapha also supplies the liquid needed for the life of our cells and bodily systems. It lubricates our joints, moisturizes the skin, helps to heal wounds, and maintains immunity. Kapha provides strength, vigor, and stability.

Psychologically, excess kapha is responsible for the emotions of attachment, greed, lust, and envy. When kapha is in balance it expresses itself in tendencies toward love, calmness, and forgiveness.

The qualities of kapha include heavy, slow, cool, oily, damp, smooth, soft, static, viscous, and sweet. Kapha individuals display these qualities in various ways.

Together, these three doshas govern all the body’s metabolic activities. Kapha promotes

anabolism, the process of building up the body, the growth and creation of new cells as well as cell repair. Pitta regulates metabolism, which is digestion and absorption. Vata triggers catabolism, the necessary deterioration process in which larger molecules are broken down into smaller ones.

Vata, the principle of movement, moves both pitta and kapha, which are immobile. Thus when vata is out of balance, it influences and disturbs the other doshas. The majority of illnesses have aggravated vata at their source.

The whole of life's journey is divided into three major milestones. From birth to age 16 is the kapha age. From 16 to 50 is the age of pitta, and from 50 to 100 the age of vata.

In childhood, kapha and the process of anabolism are predominant, as this is the time of greatest physical growth and the structuring of the body. Kapha disorders, such as lung congestion, cough, colds, and mucus secretions, are common at this time. In adulthood, the time of activity and vitality, pitta is most apparent. Vata and the catabolic processes of deterioration take over in old age, bringing vata disorders such as tremors, emaciation, breathlessness, arthritis, and loss of memory.

The Twenty Qualities: An Important Key to Healing

Now we come to another important aspect of Ayurvedic theory, which will help you to make intelligent choices for self-healing. Ayurveda delineates twenty fundamental qualities, which appear in ten pairs:

The Twenty Basic Attributes or Qualities

Heavy—Light

Oily—Dry

Stable—Mobile

Slimy—Rough

Gross—Subtle

Cold—Hot

Slow—Sharp

Soft—Hard

Dense—Liquid

Cloudy—Clear

These qualities are found both in the world around us and in our bodies. Today's weather may feel light or heavy, and it may be liquid or dry, mobile (windy) or stable, hot or cold, cloudy or clear. Food we eat can partake of any of these qualities. Ice cream, for example, is heavy, oily, cold, soft, and liquid. Our skin may be oily or dry, rough or smooth. Our mood, too, can be heavy or light, cloudy or clear; our thinking may be slow or sharp, our mind quiet and stable or mobile and hyperactive, clear or cloudy.

We are constantly affected by changes in these qualities. Cold, windy, clear, dry weather aggravates vata dosha and may lead to colds and any number of vata ailments such as insomnia, constipation, or arthritis. Hot, humid weather aggravates pitta and may lead to

outbreaks of irritation and anger as well as physical complaints like acne, eczema, or skin rashes. Cloudy, gray, humid or rainy weather can aggravate kapha, leading to colds and coughs, depression, lethargy, overeating and oversleeping, and weight gain.

Each of these paired qualities represents the extreme on a continuum. The two qualities of each pair influence or affect one another according to two fundamental principles of Ayurveda:

1. Like increases like.
2. Opposites decrease each other.

These principles are a key to healing with Ayurveda. When an imbalance has manifested, *successful treatment requires increasing opposite qualities*. For example, if there is too much heat (excess pitta), a cool drink, a swim, or some herbs with cooling properties will greatly help pacify pitta and reduce the heat. A person suffering from too much heat will not be helped by playing tennis in the sun, eating spicy foods, or taking a sauna. Similarly, if you are cold and shivering from exposure to cold windy weather, have a bowl of warm soup, wrap up in a blanket, or take a hot bath. These simple remedies immediately make sense when we hear them because they are so natural.

Ayurvedic physicians have carefully observed nature and located these qualities within all things, both organic and inorganic. Ayurvedic treatment consists to a great extent of identifying a person's disorder in terms of these qualities, and setting right any imbalances.

How is this done? Speaking in very general terms, excessive dryness in the body—constipation, dry skin, emaciation, and so on—is frequently associated with aggravated vata; excessive heat—burning urine, irritated eyes, fever, inflammation, anger, or a critical attitude—with aggravated pitta; and undue heaviness—lethargy, overweight, congestion, and excessive mucus—with unbalanced kapha. Whatever the symptoms may be, for self-treatment you need to understand them and then adjust your lifestyle—diet, exercise, and so on—to restore a state of balance and health.

The hundreds of remedies in [Part III](#) of this book will help you to do this, but essentially it is your own moment-to-moment awareness and self-observation, your sensitivity to your own constitution and your own unique requirements for health, and perhaps most importantly, your willingness to act on your knowledge, that will make all the difference between poor health and a vital, happy, healthy, long life.

Discover Your Mental and Physiological Type

This chapter will take you further on your journey toward radiant health as we begin to apply the principles from [chapter 1](#) to discover and understand your own unique constitution.

According to Ayurveda, there are seven main body types:

- Vata } Mono
- Pitta } types
- Kapha }
- Vata–Pitta } Dual
- Pitta–Kapha } types
- Kapha–Vata }
- Vata–Pitta–Kapha } Triple type

All three doshas are present in each individual at all times, but their proportion varies from person to person. Thus, ten vata individuals, or ten kapha-pitta individuals, will have ten different temperaments, ten unique sets of qualities and characteristics. Maintaining our individual qualitative and quantitative proportion of the doshas is our challenge if we are to remain healthy. When we maintain this proportion our health is good, but when the balance is upset, disease may result.

Prakruti and Vikruti

At the time of conception, each person's combination and proportion of vata, pitta, and kapha is determined according to the genetics, diet, lifestyle, and current emotions of the parents. As mentioned in the Introduction, the doshas predominant in the parents combine to form the constitution of the new life they are creating.

If, for example, the father is pitta predominant and the mother vata predominant, and the pitta factor is stronger than the vata, and the union is taking place on a hot summer night after eating a spicy meal, then the baby that is born will have a constitution that is pitta predominant. Or if both parents are kapha, and they have a kaphagenic diet and are making love in kapha season, then their child will have a predominance of kapha dosha.

A few fortunate individuals are born with a constitution in which all three doshas are equally present, which gives them the likelihood of exceptionally good health and a long lifespan, but most of us have one or two doshas predominant.

NOTE: When Ayurveda says health comes from balancing your doshas, this does not mean you should try to have equal amounts of vata, pitta, and kapha. Rather, it means *maintaining the balance with which you were conceived*.

The unique and specific combination of the three doshas at conception is called your *prakruti*, which means “nature.” It is your psychobiological temperament. *Prakruti* does not change during a person’s lifetime. Your *prakruti* may, for example, be predominantly pitta with vata secondary and a little kapha. (This can be written as $V_2P_3K_1$.) For you, maintaining balance means keeping this proportion. If your vata or kapha should increase, moving toward an equal proportion of the doshas, it would not be healthy for you.

As conditions change—due to weather, dietary choices, fatigue, stress, emotional state, exercise or lack of it—the balance of the doshas in our mind-body system also changes. This altered state of the doshas, reflecting the current state of our health, is called our *vikruti*. If your health is excellent, your current doshic status will be the same as your *prakruti*. But more likely there will be a discrepancy, and it is this difference between the two that gives us direction for healing. Your aim will be to reestablish the balance indicated by your *prakruti*.

I know you are eager to find out what your constitution is, so let’s move on to that. Afterward, we will look more deeply into the characteristics of each doshic type.

How to Determine Your Constitutional Type

The chart on [this page](#) to [this page](#) is a self-assessment that will enable you to determine your unique constitution according to Ayurveda.

Please remember that this can provide only a rough guideline. The subtleties of each person’s mental, emotional, and physical makeup are manifold and can be accurately assessed only by a physician thoroughly trained and experienced in Ayurvedic diagnosis. So please do not draw any absolute conclusions about yourself based on the self-assessment or the descriptions of the doshas; rather, use this information to help you grow in self-understanding, and as a guide to plan your diet, exercise regimen, and other aspects of your lifestyle for maximum health.

It is best to fill out the self-evaluation twice. (You might want to photocopy it, to have one available for others or for future use.) First, base your choices on what is most consistent with the true about your life as a whole, over many years. This indicates your *prakruti*. Then fill it out a second time, considering how you have been feeling recently, in the last month or two. This is your *vikruti* or present condition.

It often helps to have a spouse or good friend verify your answers, as they may have good insights and some objectivity to offer as you make your responses.

After filling out the chart, add up the number of marks under vata, pitta, and kapha to discover your own balance of the doshas in your *prakruti* and *vikruti*. Most people will have one dosha predominant, a few will have two doshas approximately equal, and even fewer will have all three doshas in equal proportion.

After adding up the numbers, make them into a ratio, with 3 as the highest number. For example, suppose you come out with $V = 10, P = 6, K = 3$. This would translate into $V_3P_2K_1$.

Once you have determined your predominant doshas, studying the following characteristics of vata, pitta, and kapha will help you gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding

Characteristics of the Vata Individual

Vata individuals have light, flexible bodies. Their frame is on the small side, with light muscles and little fat, so that they tend to be slim or even underweight. They often appear to be “too tall” or “too short,” or they may appear physically underdeveloped, with flat chests and less strength and stamina than the other types. Their veins and muscles are often quite prominent.

Vatas generally have dry skin tending toward roughness. Their circulation is poor, with the result that their hands and feet are often cold. Because vata dosha is cold, dry, light, and mobile and people with a vata constitution tend to lack insulating material (the fatty tissue under the skin), they are uncomfortable in cold weather, especially if it is dry and windy, and they much prefer spring and summer.

These individuals have a variable appetite and thirst and variable digestive strength. They are often attracted to astringent food such as salads and vegetables, but their bodies actually need sweet, sour, and salty tastes. (We will discuss the effect of tastes in [chapter 8](#).) Raw vegetables increase, rather than balance, vata. Vata individuals often experience digestive difficulties and problems with absorption of nutrients. They tend to produce scanty urine, and their feces are hard, dry, and small in size and quantity. Constipation is one of their most common ailments.

Vatas are the most likely of the body types to fast or to eat very little, but this actually increases vata and tends toward imbalance.

Other physical characteristics typical of vata types include small, recessed eyes, which are often quite lusterless; dry, thin hair, often curly or kinky; dry, rough skin and nails; crackling or popping joints; and teeth that may be irregular, broken, or protruding.

Vatas walk quickly and are always in a rush. Due to the mobile quality of vata, they do not like sitting idle but prefer constant activity. They also like to do a lot of traveling. Not doing anything is a punishment for them. They are attracted to jogging, jumping, and vigorous physical activity, but because they tend to have less stamina, they can easily get strained or overtired.

OBSERVATIONS	V	P	K	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Body size	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slim	Medium	Large
Body weight	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Low	Medium	Overweight
Skin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thin, Dry, Cold, Rough, Dark	Smooth, Oily, Warm, Rosy	Thick, Oily, Cool, White, Pale
Hair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dry Brown, Black, Knotted, Brittle, Thin	Straight, Oily, Blond, Gray, Red, Bald	Thick, Curly, Oily, Wavy, Luxuriant, All colors
Teeth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protruding, Big, Roomy, Thin gums	Medium, Soft, Tender gums	Healthy, White, Strong gums
Nose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uneven shape, Deviated septum	Long pointed, Red nose-tip	Short Rounded, Button nose
Eyes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small, Sunken, Dry, Active, Black, Brown, Nervous	Sharp, Bright, Gray, Green, Yellow/red, Sensitive to light	Big, Beautiful, Blue, Calm, Loving
Nails	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dry, Rough, Brittle, Break easily	Sharp, Flexible, Pink, Lustrous	Thick, Oily, Smooth, Polished,
Lips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dry, Cracked, Black/brown tinged	Red, Inflamed, Yellowish	Smooth, Oily, Pale, Whitish
Chin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thin, Angular	Tapering	Rounded, Double
Cheeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wrinkled, Sunken	Smooth Flat	Rounded, Plump
Neck	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thin, Tall	Medium	Big, Folded
Chest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Flat, Sunken	Moderate	Expanded, Round
Belly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thin, Flat, Sunken	Moderate	Big, Potbellied
Belly button	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Small, Irregular, Herniated	Oval, Superficial	Big, Deep, Round, Stretched
Hips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slender, Thin	Moderate	Heavy, Big
Joints	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cold, Cracking	Moderate	Large, Lubricated
Appetite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irregular, Scanty	Strong, Unbearable	Slow but steady

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