

What is Ayurveda?

The Science of Life

Ayurveda, which literally means "the knowledge of life," is the traditional healing system of India. It is a lifestyle approach, and a system of medicine designed to restore balance to the body, mind, and spirit in order to transform samskaras into more positive patterns.

Ayurveda goes beyond symptoms, to the root cause of an imbalance, and understands that only a deep connection to Nature will bring about the balance and healing that our organism desires.

Ayurveda's practices are profoundly effective because they spark our own innate healing wisdom, resulting in restoration, vitality, and improved wellbeing.

Wholistic Healing

Ayurveda encompasses a complete approach to the well-being of body-mind-spirit; in fact, complete health relies on the inseparable relationship of these three aspects of the organism: To heal the body, we must heal the mind; and to heal the mind, we must never forget our true nature as Spirit.

The health of the physical body is affected by our mental-emotional state just as much as the health of the mind is influenced by the physical body.

History and Origins

Ayurveda and yoga have parallel origins on the Vedic timeline; both first arose with the earliest civilization in northwest India. It is believed that this knowledge has always existed in the collective subconscious. It was subsequently passed down from Lord Brahman, deity of Supreme Knowledge, to Lord Indra, the protector of humanity against all evil.

During the Vedic period, this knowledge made its way to the rishis, the sages (or learned saints). They had been witnessing a lot of suffering among humanity and when they expressed this concern, Indra assured them that he would teach them how to avoid suffering through a **Right Way of Living**.

- Ayurveda originated over 5,000 years ago and is believed to be the longest continually practiced form of medicine on Earth.
- The ancients were concerned with the suffering among Humanity, and wanted to provide a "Right Way of Living".
- Ayurveda aims to prolong life and reduce suffering so that each person can attain the highest goal: Realization of the Self.
- Ayurveda uses simple techniques to bring the body and mind into balance.
- Together Ayurveda and Yoga allow for a healthy body and peaceful mind, and this paves the way for us to be reminded of the calm perfection that resides undisturbed at the center of our being.

According to Samkhya:

**Reality =
Purusha (pure
consciousness) +
Prakriti (primordial
nature)**

It is the sum total of all that exists and all that has potential to exist.

Samkhya recognizes Nature as the source of Creation.

Samkhya

During the Classical Era, Samkhya philosophy becomes the foundation for Ayurvedic knowledge, which by this time had been experiencing a big surge not just in India but beyond. Meaning “Theory of Numbers”, Samkhya provided a mathematical breakdown of the constituents of the cosmos. It was also the first text to identify the ultimate goal of all beings: liberation from sorrow.

Samkhya describes the emanation of the cosmos as arising from 25 cosmic principles, known as the *Tattvas*, which form the building blocks of creation. The *Tattvas* provide a metaphysical map of everything that is manifest and unmanifest, and how ultimately everything within the cosmos is embedded with three states of energy (*Gunas*). The *Gunas* are the vehicles for transformation, or release from pain and sorrow.

25 Tattvas

1. Purusha – Spirit
2. Prakriti - Nature
3. Mahat/buddhi
4. Ahamkara
5. Manas
- 6-10. The five panchendriyas, sense organs
- 11-15. The five karmendriyas, active senses
- 16-20. The five tanmatras, subtle elements
- 21-25. The five Mahabhutas, gross elements



“*Yat Pinde Tat Brahmande*” (found in the Yajurveda)

So is there in the body as is in the universe.

Cycles of Nature

Cycles of Nature

According to Ayurveda, optimal health begins with the prevention of disease. This happens by making choices that support a balanced lifestyle.

A balanced lifestyle respects and follows the laws of nature, existing in harmony with daily and seasonal cyclical rhythms, as well as the cycle of life itself. By aligning our rhythms with the rhythms of nature, we unlock our deepest potential.

The difficulty lies in our current culture, which is disconnected from nature's rhythms. We eat foods imported from around the world. The luxury of electricity ensures that we can have artificial light anytime we want it. And on-demand entertainment ensures us an endless stream of enticing distraction from more healthful pursuits.

Eating foods that are in season—along with rising and going to bed with the sun—aligns us with supportive biorhythms. This is such a simple yet profound way to stay in harmony with nature.

The Role of the Senses

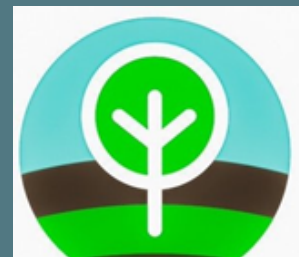
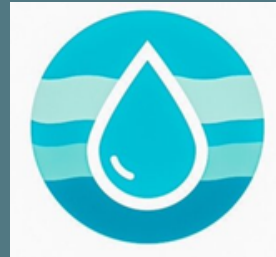
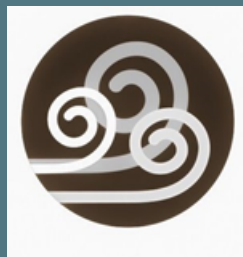
We can also develop greater harmony with ourselves and our environment through the use of all five senses (taste, touch, smell, sight, sound). Paying attention to the world around us— and how we feel in response—is potent medicine.

We create our state of health every day based upon how we interact with the world around us. Our beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings ultimately determine our actions. Simply believing that you can change your health for the better creates an environment where that more easily happens.

Building Blocks for Health

According to Ayurveda, the key to health is maintaining homeostasis between the qualities of the five elements. The five elements are the building blocks of all organic and inorganic matter in the cosmos.

- ETHER is emptiness, a container for all the objects in the Universe.
- AIR initiates and directs movement.
- FIRE provides heat and light, and is responsible for transformation and purification.
- WATER moistens and binds things together. It helps us flow through life
- EARTH solidifies and stabilizes; it provides a sense of security and safety.



The Qualities of the Elements

The five elements can be identified by understanding ten pairs of qualities (the 20 Gunas).

These ten pairs of qualities are more than simply polar opposites. Each aspect of these pairs of qualities fades out while the other fades in, much in the same way as the yin-yang symbol shows that some yin exists within yang and vice-versa.

The 20 Gunas are potential energy because they eventually turn into an action (alchemy); they define the interdependency of everything in the cosmos.

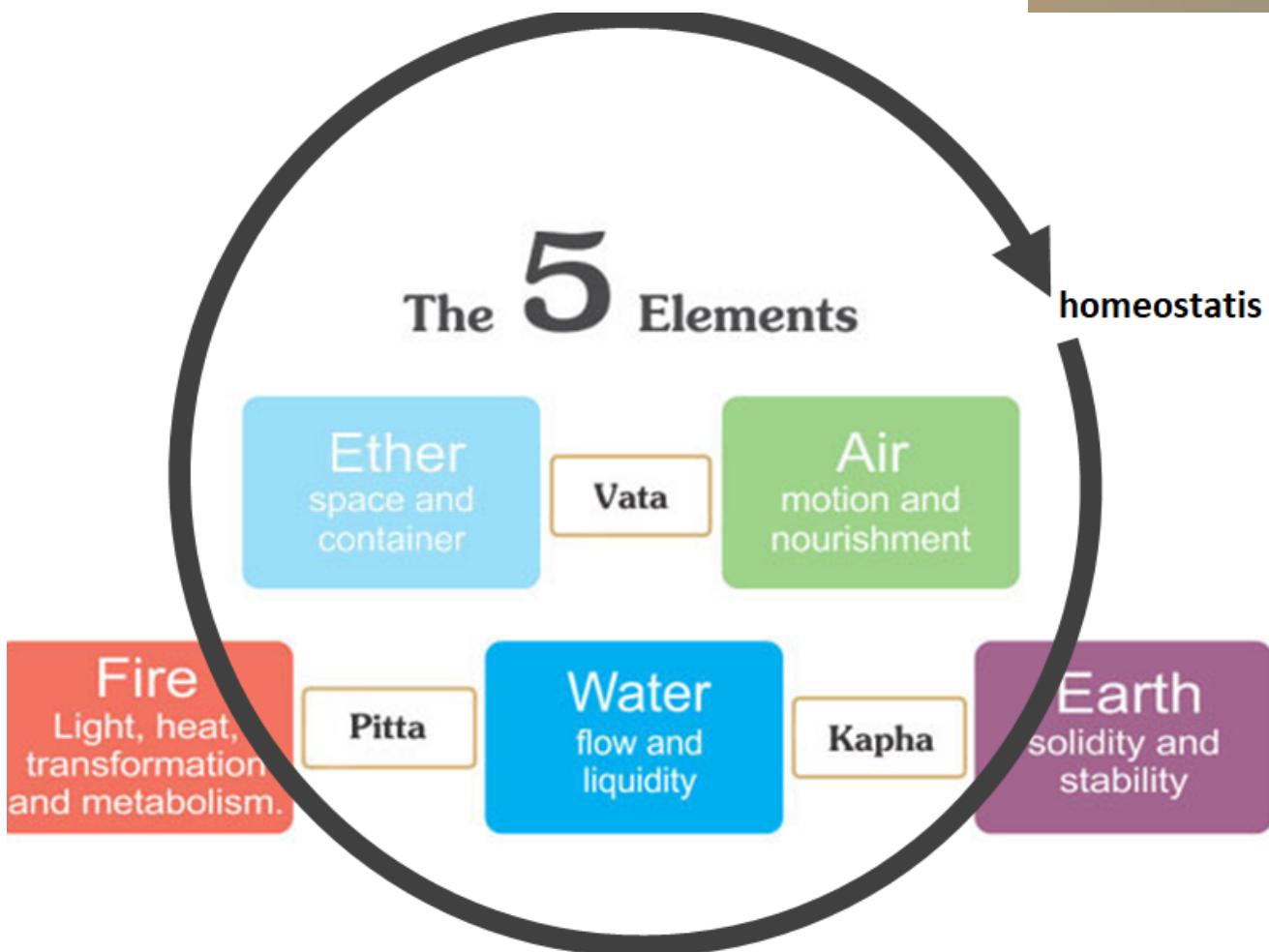
The 20 Attributes (Gunas)	
Heavy (guru)	Light (laghu)
Slow-Dull (manda)	Sharp (tīkshna)
Cold (shīta/hima)	Hot (ushna)
Oily (snigdha)	Dry (rūksha)
Smooth (shlakshna)	Rough (khāra)
Dense (sāndra)	Liquid (drava)
Hard (kathina)	Soft (mṛdu)
Static (sthira)	Mobile (cala/sara)
Subtle (sūkshma)	Gross (sthūla)
Cloudy (āvila)	Clear (vishada)

Tridosha Theory

The elements are further classified into three bio-energies called *doshas*; they govern all physical and mental processes and provide every living being with an individual blueprint for health and wellbeing throughout the lifecycle.

The doshas ensure that all 5 elements are held together and exert their functions in synergism for the optimum function of the human body (i.e. they support homeostasis).. They are the basis for analyzing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual patterns (samskaras) and determining life-long tendencies.

- The word "dosha" translates to "impurity"; but actually these energies function together to **sustain** health.
- Each of the doshas contain unique combinations of the 5 elements, though they each have 2 prominent elements that define their tendencies.
- In this way, doshas are templates of nature.



Prakriti - True Nature

We are not trying to change the natural characteristics of these body types, but simply to keep any excesses in check and allow for the positive, unique expression of balance to come to the fore.

Constitution

Your constitution is a unique blueprint for determining how you react to everything you take in through the senses and the mind: sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, emotions, thoughts, Understanding your constitution will help you understand the kinds of things/actions that will help restore harmony. Harmony is the state of all doshas being in their state of truth, Prakriti.

Knowing your constitution or body type is like having a roadmap that guides you in the correct direction of being your best self, allowing you to more easily fulfill your potential and experience more joy.

VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Elements that make up the dosha		
Air + Ether	Fire + Water	Earth + Water
because of those elements, each dosha has specific qualities:		
cold, dry, light, mobile, variable	hot, oily, sharp, light	Cool, wet, stable, heavy
too much of a good thing causes the doshas to become unbalanced:		
<i>excessive travel, lack of routine, fear, anxiety, too much change</i> ... too much movement, variety, cold, and/or dryness increase Vata, tipping the apple cart over	<i>heat, intensity, overwork, spicy foods, alcohol, coffee, competitiveness</i> ... too much heat, work, intensity, and/or focus increase Pitta, causing inflammation all around	<i>being stuck, lack of motivation, excess sleep, too little change</i> ... too much of the same old-same old increases Kapha, digging those ruts ever deeper
when there is too much of a dosha, it looks like this:		
<i>worry, anxiety, overwhelm, constipation, confusion</i> ... thinking too much, obsessing about stuff, "monkey mind," being indecisive, having one or more days where you don't go poop	<i>anger, critical, judgemental, diarrhea, indigestion, inflammation</i> ... irritated skin situations, difficulty digesting a meal, hangry, crabbiness, nothing is "good enough," having too much poop	<i>nausea, depression, overweight, congestion, attachment</i> ... hay fever and springtime allergies, feeling blue, wanting (and having) *all* of the stuff, a roly-poly body, wanting a nap
so, what is this dosha good for?		
finding inspiration in the most unlikely places; inspiring others; channelling tremendous creativity; having <i>great</i> enthusiasm	getting stuff done; being efficient; creating order out of chaos; knowing where everything is; having <i>great</i> musculature	maintaining stability; being calm, cool, and collected; making sure everyone is all right; nurturing others; having <i>great</i> skin and hair

Vikriti - Pathology

The current state of disharmony of the doshas; according to Ayurveda, this is the state of dis-ease.

Also known as "Morbidity", Vikriti is the proportion of the Doshas in you as you currently are.

The state of the doshas is dynamic; they are in a constant state of flux. By tuning in to the changes that this flux provokes, we can support the body and mind into balance. Understanding which quality is out of balance, and using an opposing quality to balance it, supports the innate wisdom of homeostasis within the organism.

The fundamental principles of Ayurveda are so simple, easy, and profound. If you only remember the qualities (20 Gunas) of the elements and of the doshas, it is relatively easy to stay in balance and to maintain your health and wellness. According to Samkhya, the Theory of Causation tells us that **"Like increases like, opposites oppose"**; therefore opposite qualities heal.

Key to balancing Vata: REGULARITY
Key to balancing Pitta: MODERATION
Key to balancing Kapha: STIMULATION

How to maintain harmony of all doshas?

- Follow the rhythms of nature: daily, seasonal, age....
- *Dinacharya / Sadhana*
- Appropriate Lifestyle
- Cultivate *sattva*
- *Yamas / Niyamas*
- 8-Limbed Path
- Honor Prakriti

Agni, the cornerstone of health

Digestive Fire

The intelligence of the metabolism, which includes the preparation, breaking down, assimilation, and elimination of food is referred to as Agni. This "digestive fire" is responsible for making this complex process optimal, and when operating the right conditions, can contribute to overall happiness and wellbeing.

When Agni is not functioning properly, food is not digested properly and causes an impairment of the metabolism. The result of impaired metabolism is toxic waste, which results in clogging of channels and ultimately leads to dis-ease.

If agni is not proper, food has no value to the body (i.e. body cannot absorb).

Agni transforms matter into energy, nutrients into tissue, and food into consciousness

Metabolic Waste

Any food that is undigested becomes a toxic substance called Ama; putrefied food molecules get stuck on the tissues of the body and cause obstruction of the mind and body. Ayurveda believes that Ama is the root cause of all disharmony and disease in the organism. Vikriti is the presence of Ama in the doshas.

Ama leaves the body through our waste products, malas, mainly stool, sweat, and urine.

Some common symptoms of Ama

- Tiredness/fatigue/lethargy
- Heaviness
- Low immunity
- Unable to digest certain food/sensitivities
- Unclear thinking
- Chronic pain, aches
- Bloating, gas
- Skin blemishes
- Coating on tongue

Agni is responsible for maintaining all major physiological functions; it is governed by the thalamus -- the same part of the brain that governs the circadian rhythm.

1. digestion + absorption + assimilation = Nutrition, Knowledge, Understanding
2. visual perception
3. normal body temperature
4. color, complexion
5. confidence, courage, fearlessness
6. joy, contentment, laughter
7. mental clarity
8. affection, enthusiasm
9. nutrition of dhattus
10. Ojas (i.e. immunity)
11. cellular metabolic activity
12. Production of prana
13. Reasoning capacity of the mind; logical thinking
14. Flow of cellular activity
15. Strength + vitality

The journey of food

The Essence of Our Positive Vitality

During the digestive process, the metabolism (Agni), is responsible for the proper nourishment of our tissues. In Ayurveda, there are seven tissue layers, called *dhattus*, which originate from the essence of the food we eat. The *dhattus* are arranged in a hierarchy, such that the proper nourishment of the level below is dependent on the proper nourishment of the level above.

Thus, it is imperative to maintain Agni so that proper nourishment at all levels is supported. The journey of the food we eat takes 35 days total (5 days per each of the 7 layers) until the most refined essence of food, **ojas**, marks the end of this very complex refinement process.

The lifestyle practices and rituals of Ayurveda and Yoga are designed to support our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing so that this process is optimal and correct.

Ojas is our innate immunity; our natural ability to fight off disease. It is responsible for physical and mental strength, inner and outer beauty, a powerful immune system and strong energy reserves of the body.

Ojas refers to the factors of the body and mind that maintain homeostasis (balance), support innate intelligence (the inner wisdom of the body) and builds the health of the immune system.

Three Key Tips to Build Ojas

1. Improve your digestion. Pay attention to your digestion and you'll notice what improves it and what causes bloating, gas, cramping, etc. Make sure that the food you take in is of the highest quality - organic, fresh, processed as little as possible, and correct for your current state (vikruti).
2. Listen Within: Reduce distractions, cultivate quietude and take time to check in. Meditation is ideal for this but try to live life as a form of meditation. Stay connected to your higher Self at all times.
3. Follow Your Heart: Listening within always leads to the heart. The heart is the place that truly "knows". It is the home of the higher Self. It will not only guide you to make healthy choices, it will guide you to unconditional love.