

Calming your Vata Do?as this Fall - Healing Tips from Ayurveda

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What is Ayurveda? *Ayurveda*, the traditional medicinal system from ancient India, has been healing humanity through lifestyle modifications and herbal medicine for over 6000 years. *Ayur-veda*, meaning the knowledge of life, suggests that our lifestyle be examined before taking medicine. These lifestyle modifications are simple things that your own grandmother might have told you, especially if she were from India! We will examine some of these simple home remedies that will help promote calmness during the fall season.

3 Do?as - 4 Seasons In Ayurveda, there are 3 primary energies or do?as: Vata (Cold Air-Ether), Pitta (Hot Fire-Water), and Kapha (Cold Water-Earth). Just as every person and every time of day has a do?a, that predominates, every season is also dominated by one of the 3 do?as. Fall is ruled by Vata, winter by Kapha, spring by Kapha-Pitta, and summer by Pitta.

Calming your Vata this Fall No matter what your prakrti (natural constitution), you are always affected by the changes in your environment including the seasonal ones. When the dry, cool fall winds start to blow, it is important to adjust your lifestyle to balance the Vata predominant in nature. If you have a Vata constitution (ectomorph, thin, tight body type), these tips are even more important as you will be doubly affected by the Vata season. Kaphas (endomorphs, large, round body types) and Pittas (mesomorphs, medium, muscular body types) are more affected by winter and summer, respectively.

Daily Lifestyle Routines The word routine is death to Vatas, but that is exactly what they need to calm their over stimulated nervous systems. Ideally, going to bed before 10 pm and getting up before 6am (or sunrise ? later in winter) is the suggested sleep pattern for all prakrtis, especially during the fall. Another important routine is that of eating. Regular eating times, a light breakfast, a heavier lunch, as well as a light dinner by 7pm, all aid digestion and

calm Vata imbalances. Since both of these ideals are difficult to achieve in our 24-7 society, do the best you can to at least establish a regular routine, no matter what it is. Getting up early one day and sleeping in the next or eating at 6pm one day and at 10pm the next, all promote Vata imbalance and poor digestion-elimination.

Body Oil Massage Another important way of balancing Vata is through massaging the body, joints, and even the head with oil. Sesame oil is the generic anti-Vata oil for back/neck pain, sore joints, dry feet, dry skin, and anxiety, all Vata imbalances. Heat the oil slightly before applying and try to leave on at least one hour before showering it off. You can also try putting some on your feet, knees, belly, back, neck, etc. before bed and showering it off in the morning. I also find applying oil before entering a hot bath and sitting in it for 30 minutes works well and is less messy.

Warm, Moist, Oily Food Adding some oil rich in omega 3's to your favorite stir fry, dhal, oatmeal or soup just before eating it, will also help calm your Vata do?a this fall. Spicy pumpkin, acorn, or carrot soups will ward off the dry, cool winds from your bones and calm the nervous system. They will help keep your digestive fires burning brightly. Holiday favorites at a typical Thanksgiving meal all decrease Vata while promoting Pitta and Kapha. Be careful of caffeinated teas which promote Vata though chai is more balanced with its warming spices.

Yoga Therapy for Balancing Vata Yoga Therapy, *Yoga Cikitsa*, has its historical roots in both classical Ayurveda and Patanjali's 8-limbed system of Yoga. For calming Vata do?a, the breath should be made long and smooth through the correct application of primarily forward bends, which massage the colon, Vata's home in the body. Twists can also be beneficially if constipation (a Vata imbalance) exists, caused by weak digestion: weak agni (Pitta do?a) ? weak fire in belly/small intestine ? weak digestive enzymes. In addition, restorative back bends like setubandha sarvang?sana can help stretch out the colon, promoting circulation and relaxation. All restorative poses, meditation, and ?av?sana (relaxation/corpse pose) in fact will be very helpful for reducing Vata do?a, as they relax the mind and promote ojas production (positive Kapha do?a/immunity/vitality/the flower of great health). Try restorative poses after applying warm oil to the body (or even just the feet) ? use old clothes and towels!

Gratitude During this season of harvest, by giving thanks for all that we have, the Vata predominance of the fall season is balanced and nourished by the more Kapha emotions of love and gratitude. Make gratitude part of your daily routine including in your Yoga practice. Changes made at the mind-heart level have a more fundamental effect on our healing than any other lifestyle modifications we may make.

As we move into the fall season of freshly harvested food, pumpkin pies, and spiced teas, keep warm and nourished inside and out through these simple lifestyle modifications.

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