

## The Yoga of Eating, Sleeping and Day-to-Day Living: Ayurveda

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Sources estimate as many as 20 million Americans were practicing yoga in 2011. However, yoga as many Americans have come to know it – a physical practice of postures (*asana*), breathwork/energy-balancing (*pranayama*), and meditation – has been separated from a twin sister – *Ayurveda*.

In Sanskrit, the words *āyus*, meaning "longevity", and *veda*, meaning "knowledge" or "science" are combined to define this system of traditional medicine native to India. In tandem with the practice of yoga, many people can benefit from knowing about Ayurveda—the science of longevity.

Ayurvedic physician, author and founder of the Ayurvedic Institute, Dr. Vasant Lad defines this traditional healing system as “moment-to-moment living.” Ayurveda provides recommendations for what, when and how to eat, drink, sleep, cleanse your body and even how to adhere to a spiritual path that is meaningful for you. Unlike many systems of medicine, it does not prescribe blanket “cures” for an individual’s symptoms. Rather, it posits that every body, mind and spirit is unique and recommends specific lifestyle choices that will optimize the individual’s health.

In Ayurveda, everything in the Universe (including a human being) is composed of five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. In order to produce personalized recommendations for their clients, Ayurvedic practitioners rely on their readings of three primary “doshas” or “bio-energies” that comprise these elements within each person.

### Attributes and Elements of the Three Doshas

Vata – ether and air	Pitta – fire and water	Kapha – water and earth
Dry Light Cold Rough Subtle Mobile Clear	Oily Penetrating Hot Light Mobile Liquid	Heavy Slow Cold Smooth Dense Soft Stable Sticky Oily

Ayurveda's mission is to bring these doshas/energies into balance with the state they were in at a person's birth. This is done through determination of **Vikriti** -- a Sanskrit word loosely translated as a "changed condition of body, mind and consciousness." **Vikriti** is used to describe a person's current state of health and is always determined after defining his or her **Prakriti**, or "natural state." While **Prakriti** encompasses life-long characteristics like eye color and general height, **Vikriti** fluctuates. An individual's inability to adapt to these fluctuations causes imbalance and is at the root of illness and disease.

Many external factors can bring the doshas out of balance from day to day: the season, the weather outside, the time of day, the last thing you saw on TV, or how you greeted your spouse in the morning. Ayurveda recommends daily practices of relaxation, rejuvenation and cleansing to counter these effects.

For example, **vata**, which often becomes imbalanced in cold and windy environments and by too much time spent with fast-paced technology (smart phones, computers etc.) can be soothed by choosing to drink and savor warm beverages and also by taking breaks from technology to breathe deeply and stretch the body in slow, gentle and rhythmic ways.

When you have fallen short of making daily decisions that are beneficial to your long-term health, Ayurvedic practitioners offer special treatments that can holistically treat a wide range of imbalances.

### **Descriptions of Traditional Ayurvedic Treatments**

**Abhyanga:** full-body, warm oil massage using long, soft strokes. Enhances circulation throughout the body, improving digestion and releasing toxins in the skin.

**Shirodhara:** a steady, rhythmic pouring of oil on the forehead. Induces a deeply relaxing state of consciousness, which can help relieve pain, eliminate anxiety and fear, mitigate migraines and headaches, and strengthen hair growth.

**Nasya karma:** administration of nasal medication, which removes toxins through the nose and mouth. Highly-effective in treating a number of conditions, including chronic allergies, sinusitis, headaches, asthma, and eye-strain. Also cleanses the body of environmental irritants, pollutants and excess sensory stimulation.

**Karna Purna:** Several drops of warmed oil are applied to each ear. Common benefits are a reduction of ringing in the ears (tinnitus), insomnia, restlessness, nervousness, and vertigo.

**Kati Vasti:** Medicated oil treatment applied to the lower back, where it is left for a period of time. Effective in treating lower back pain, sciatica, slipped discs and



neurological diseases of lower back and lower limbs. It also relieves numbness, and stimulates and nourishes nerves.

**Swedana:** A traditional steam therapy designed to open tissues so that deep-seated toxins can be released through the pores of the skin, thereby reducing inflammation, improving circulation, and promoting healing and restoration.

While treatments are extremely beneficial, most Ayurvedic practitioners administer them in the context of adopting long-term lifestyle changes.

It's important to remember that Ayurveda doesn't look for an overnight change. It's about your day-to-day decisions and transforming the way you approach life. Ayurveda gives you the authority to be more proactive about maintaining your health and rediscovering your natural balance.