



Foundations
of
Ayurveda

by

Cindy von Miller

Copyright 2018

www.Yoga-and-Health.org



Ayurveda is the oldest system of mind-body medicine known to humanity. The origins date back at least 5,000 years to the spiritual texts of ancient India known as the Vedas and go back deep in both time and in consciousness. The word comes from Sanskrit – the mother of all languages. *Ayur* refers to life as the union of mind, body, senses, and soul which contains energy and vitality, and is considered to be eternal. *Veda* refers to a living wisdom which was heard, rather than remembered, by the ancient sages. It aligns closely with the spiritual science of Yoga and developed parallel to it both historically and in terms of its prime concepts.

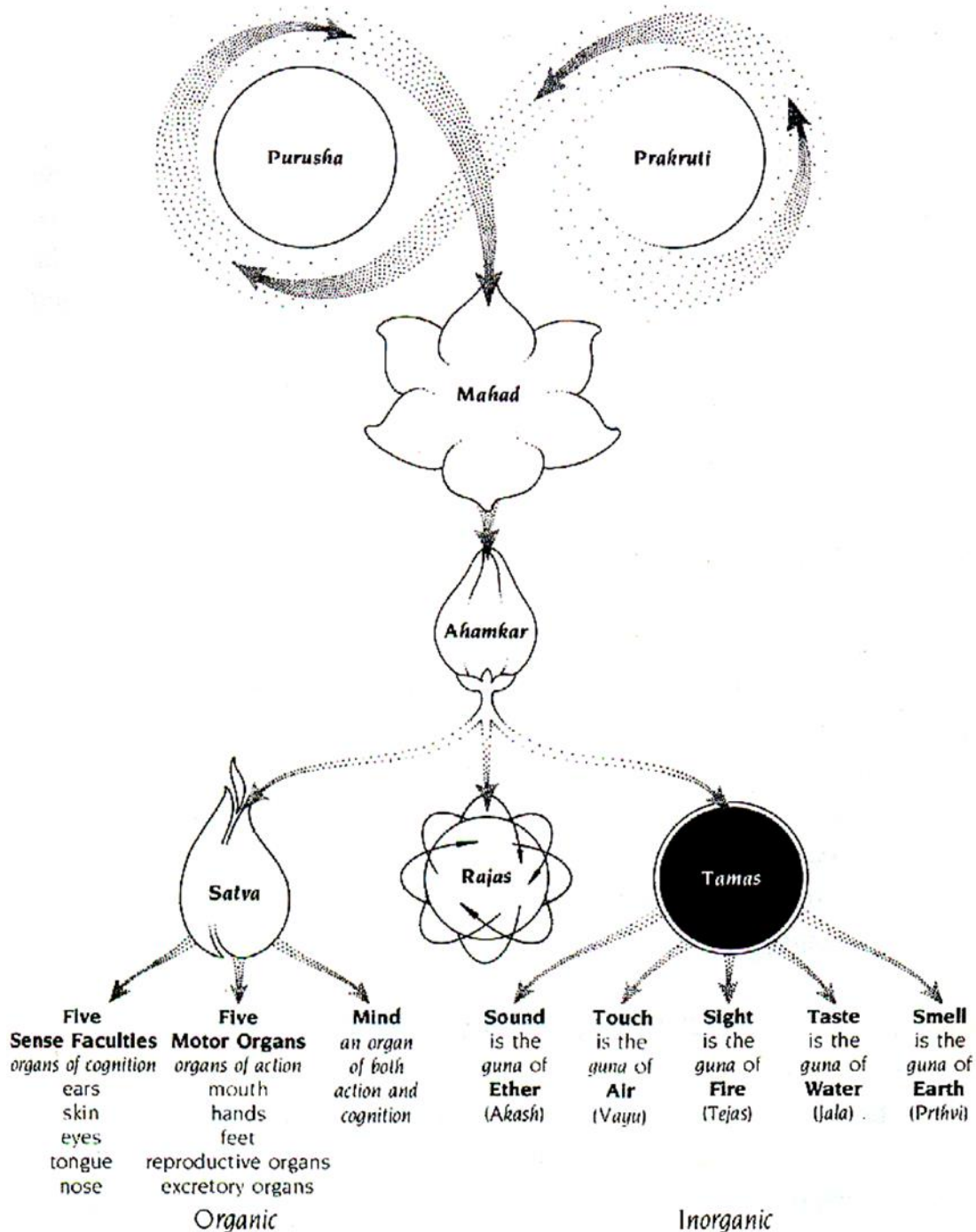
This system of health and healing deals with the nature, scope and purpose of life and includes metaphysical and physical aspects of health and disease, happiness and sorrow, pain and pleasure. This ancient body of wisdom brings into view the nature of life through the wisdom of Mother Nature herself. It teaches how to live in harmony with the basic laws of nature and offers a holistic guidebook for awakening our healing potential. The underlying prescription is to recognize the power of self-healing within. Health is a continuous and participatory process that embraces all aspects of life: physical, mental, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, familial, social and universal. Achieving balance on all levels of being is the true measure of vibrant health. Every individual is one-of-a-kind with an equally unique blueprint for health. Ayurveda provides universal framework for understanding these blueprints and teaches us to honor and support our true individual natures.

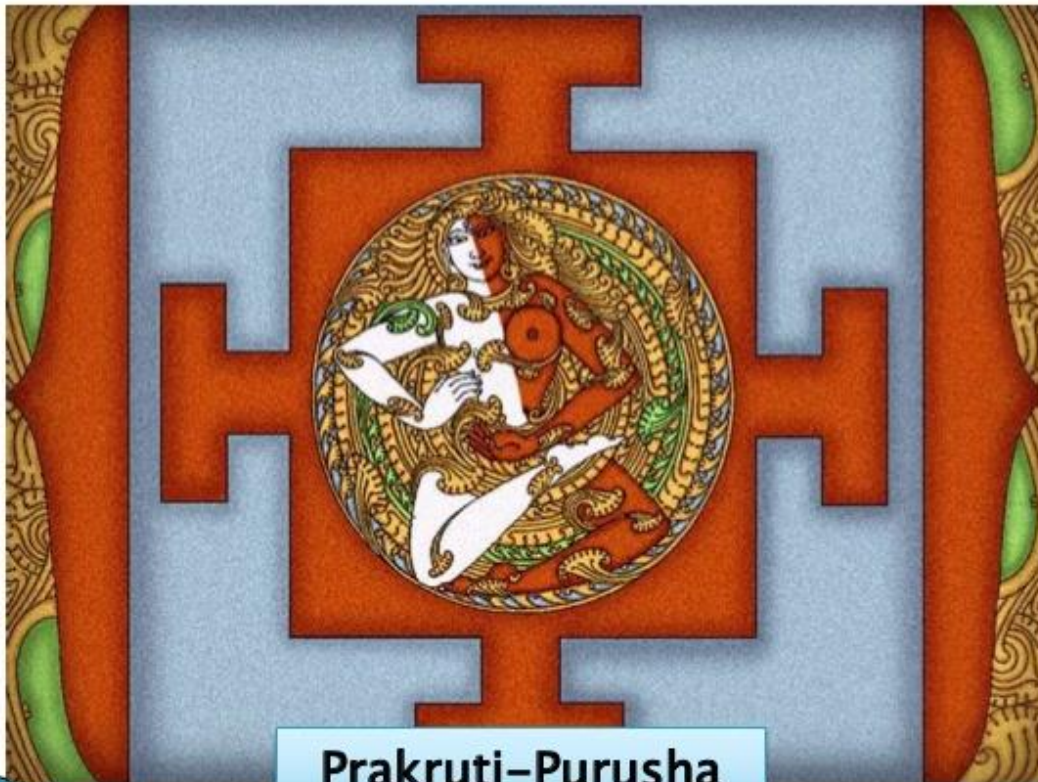
Stiles (2007) points out the fact that both Yoga and Ayurveda developed during a cultural period of India's history that was broad in its perspective in regard to the significance of human existence. According to the teachings of Classical India, called the Sanatana Dharma, there are four avenues which must be fulfilled in order to live a full life: dharma (the basis for all actions and the vehicle that can prepare one for knowledge of the Self); kama (sensual pleasures); artha (material prosperity); and moksha (self-liberation). If one performs duties in a virtuous manner, maintains health and vitality necessary to fulfill desires, acquires and possesses the material wealth necessary for social position, and pursues peace of mind and spiritual liberation an authentic and actualized life will be realized. (p.2-3)

The goal of Ayurveda is to balance the subtle elements (doshas) so that health may be maintained or restored. For Classical Yoga, the goal is to promote the spiritual progress through deepening practice of the Eightfold Path.

Samkhya Philosophy of Creation

Purusha is unmanifested, formless, passive, beyond attributes, beyond cause and effect, space and time. **Purusha** is Pure Existence. **Prakruti** is the creative force of action, the source of form, manifestation, attributes and nature. **Mahad** is the Cosmic Intelligence or **Buddhi**. **Ahamkar** is ego, the sense of "I am." **Satva** is stability, pure aspect, awakening, essence and light. **Rajas** is dynamic movement. **Tamas** is static. It is potential energy, inertia, darkness, ignorance and matter.





Samkhya is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy which informs both Yoga and Ayurveda. Many of the concepts contained within this philosophical system show up in both the Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. You do not need to understand this philosophical system in order to benefit from the practical wisdom of Ayurveda. I include it here for those who seek a deeper understanding.

Samkhya describes a consistent dualism of matter (prakriti) and the eternal spirit (purusha). The two are originally separate, but in the course of evolution purusha (spirit) identifies itself with aspects of prakriti (matter).

Purusha is ubiquitous, all-conscious, all-pervasive, motionless, unchangeable, immaterial, and without desire.

Prakriti is the fundamental substrate from which all matter in the universe arises.

The ancient seers of India perceived this dual principle behind existence: Spirit (Purusha) and Nature (Prakriti). The swirling and twirling together of Spirit and Matter produces everything. Together they are consciousness and creativity.

The Mahat (the Great One) or Cosmic Intelligence is the first reality to emerge from Prakriti, when sattva is predominant. It has a universal aspect as the source of the world and contains within it

the seeds and laws of nature. It also contains a physical aspect as intelligence or buddhi in living beings. It is responsible for rationality and discriminating awareness.

From Buddhi, Ahamkara or the feeling of individuality evolves as rajas predominates. Ahamkara is responsible for ego, or the principle of division which gives rise to the experience of being divided from the unity of all creation.

From Sattva, arise the five sense faculties (panchendriyas), the five organs of action (karmendriyas) and the physical aspects of mind (manas).

From Tamas, the five gross elements (mahabhutas) and the five subtle elements (tanmatras) arise.

The Three Gunas

All matter in the universe arises from the fundamental substrate called Prakriti. From this ethereal Prakriti the three primary gunas (qualities) emerge creating the essential aspects of all nature—energy, matter and consciousness.

Nature consists of 3 basic qualities:

Sattva is pure essence of the light of consciousness, vast clear space, potential energy. In terms of perception, the knower; the observer.

Rajas is movement, turbulence, change, excitability, kinetic energy. In terms of perception, the process of attention and knowing, observing.

Tamas is inertia, darkness, confusion. In terms of perception, the known or the object to be observed.

Sattva is the quality of purity. If out of balance, Rajas and Tamas become impurities that weaken perception. When Sattva dominates, we uncover our capacities for truth, honesty, humility and interest in the good of the whole. A predominance of Rajas generates value for power, prestige, authority and control. Tamas traps us in fear, servility, ignorance, and the forces of decay.

The three Gunas give rise to the five gross elements (mahabhutas) – ether, air, fire, water and earth. From Sattva comes ether; from Rajas fire and from Tamas earth. Air arises between Sattva and Rajas. Water arises between Rajas and Tamas.

The Three Doshas

The entire cosmos is an interplay of the energies of the five elements. The three doshas – Vata, Pitta and Kapha are combinations of the five elements that manifest as patterns in all creation. The doshas bind the five elements into living flesh. They are agents of DNA which form the blueprint for the physiology of the organism.

Each individual is born with a unique ratio of Vata, Pitta and Kapha which is called one's **constitution or individual prakriti**. Constitutional type or individual prakriti is the concept in Ayurveda, which defines physical, physiological, and psychological traits of an individual and is the template for individualized diet, lifestyle counseling, and treatment.

Another primary concept is **vikriti** which reveals the present state of the three doshas. If the present state of the doshas is the same as prakriti, that person is balanced and likely in perfect health – physically, mentally and emotionally. Most often there is some difference between prakriti and vikriti that manifests as dis-stress or dis-ease. Vikriti reflects any aspect of diet and lifestyle that is out of balance with one's prakriti or individual constitution.

Ayurveda, among other things, is a system of holistic health and self-healing which provides tools for self-evaluation and suggestions for lifestyle modification. By understanding your own unique nature or constitution, you can begin to understand how interactions with your environment – both internal and external create imbalances and make choices that will lead you toward greater health.

Vata dosha is comprised of ether and air – it is light, cool, dry and mobile. It is the subtle energy associated with movement which governs breathing, blinking, muscle and tissue movement, the pulsation of the heart, and all the movement in the cytoplasm and cell membranes. In balance it promotes creativity and flexibility. Out of balance it produces fear, anxiety and abnormal movements.

Pitta dosha is comprised of fire and water. It is the energy of transformation and is expressed in the body's metabolic system – digestion, absorption, assimilation, metabolism and body temperature. In balance it promotes understanding and intelligence. Out of balance arouses anger, hatred, jealousy and inflammatory disorders.

Kapha dosha is comprised of water and earth. It is the energy that provides the body's structure and provides the cohesion that holds the cell's together. It supplies the water for all body parts and systems, provides moisture to skin, lubrication to joints, and maintains immunity. In balance, expresses itself as love, calmness, forgiveness. Out of balance, it leads to attachment, greed possessiveness and congestive disorders.

DETERMINING YOUR CONSTITUTION OR INDIVIDUAL PRAKRITI

(Adapted from the Ayurvedic Institute)

Instructions: To determine your constitution, it is best to fill out the chart several times. First base your answers on what is most consistent over the course of your lifetime. This most closely reflects your prakriti. Then fill it out basing answers on how you have been feeling more recently. This may reflect your vikriti or imbalances. Finally, have a close friend provide objective feedback as you work through the chart a third time.

To score the chart simply add up the check marks for each column V P and K noting the ratio for both prakriti and vikriti.

Remember that prakriti is your unique constitution and is reflective of who you are in the core of your being – your unique blueprint. Vikriti reflects imbalances created by interaction with the world around and within you.

In making lifestyle choices you will consider both prakriti and vikriti. More about this in a little while.

OBSERVATIONS	V	P	K	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Body size				Slim	Medium	Large
Body weight				Low	Medium	Overweight
Chin				Thin, angular	Tapering	Rounded, double
Cheeks				Wrinkled, sunken	Smooth, flat	Rounded, plump
Eyes				Small, sunken, dry, active, black, brown nervous	Sharp, bright, gray, green, yellow/red, sensitive to light	Big, beautiful, blue, calm, loving
Nose				Uneven shape, deviated septum	Long pointed, red nose-tip	Short rounded, button nose
Lips				Dry, cracked, black/brown tinge	Red, inflamed, yellowish	Smooth, oily, pale whitish
Teeth				Stick out, big, roomy, thin gums	Medium, soft, tender gums	Healthy, white, strong gums
Skin				Thin, dry, cold, rough, dark	Smooth, oily, warm, rosy	Thick, oily, cool, white, pale
Hair				Dry, brown, black, knotted, brittle, scarce	Straight, oily, blond, gray, red, bald	Thick, curly, oily, wavy, luxuriant
Nails				Dry, rough, brittle, break easily	Sharp, flexible, pink, lustrous	Thick, oily, smooth, polished
Neck				Thin, tall	Medium	Big, folded
Chest				Flat, sunken	Moderate	Expanded, round
Belly				Thin, flat, sunken	Moderate	Big, pot bellied
Belly-button				Small, irregular, herniated	Oval, superficial	Big, deep, round, stretched
Hips				Slender, thin	Moderate	Heavy, big
Joints				Cold, cracking	Moderate	Large, lubricated
Appetite				Irregular, scanty	Strong, unbearable	Slow but steady

OBSERVATIONS	V	P	K	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Digestion				Irregular, forms gas	Quick, causes burning	Prolonged, forms mucous
Taste				Sweet, sour, salty	Sweet, bitter, astringent	Bitter, pungent, astringent
Thirst				Changeable	Surplus	Sparse
Elimination				Constipation	Loose	Thick, oily, sluggish
Physical Activity				Hyperactive	Moderate	Slow
Mental Activity				Hyperactive	Moderate	Dull, slow
Emotions				Anxiety, fear, uncertainty	Anger, hate, jealousy	Calm, greedy, attachment
Faith				Variable	Extremist	Consistent
Intellect				Quick but faulty response	Accurate response	Slow, exact
Recollection				Recent good, remote poor	Distinct	Slow and sustained
Dreams				Quick, active, many, fearful	Fiery, war, violence	Lakes, snow, romantic
Sleep				Scanty, broken up, sleeplessness	Little but sound	Deep, prolonged
Speech				Rapid, unclear	Sharp, penetrating	Slow, monotonous
Financial				Poor, spends on trifles	Spends money on luxuries	Rich, good money preserver
Total						

Vata Dosha

Symptoms of imbalance

- ❖ Mental: worry, anxiety, depression, overactive mind, impatience, loss of mental focus, short attention span
- ❖ Behavioral: insomnia, fatigue, inability to relax, restlessness, low appetite, impulsiveness
- ❖ Physical: constipation, dry or rough skin, chapped lips, low stamina, loss of energy, intestinal gas, flatulence, low back pain, menstrual cramps, irritable bowel syndrome, aching joints, weight loss, muscle spasms

Lifestyle modifications to promote balance:

- ❖ Keep warm ~ Vata needs warmth on all levels from the environment to their friendships to their food
- ❖ Choose warming foods and spices
- ❖ Avoid extreme cold, and cold or frozen foods and drinks ~ Cold causes Vata to constrict and tighten up and restricts the free flow of movement so vital to wellbeing
- ❖ Keep to a regular routine
- ❖ Create as safe, calm and secure an environment for yourself as you can
- ❖ Avoid drugs including caffeine, alcohol and tobacco
- ❖ Avoid refined sugar
- ❖ Massage your skin with warm sesame oil
- ❖ Drink plenty of warm beverages
- ❖ Vata needs quiet ~ avoid loud noises and over stimulation
- ❖ Plan frequent rest periods during your day to meditate, listen to soothing music, practice deep breathing or have a massage

Vata pacifying diet:

Suggested daily intake: 5-6 servings of whole grains, 1-2 servings high quality protein, 2-3 servings fresh cooked vegetables, 1 serving fresh fruit or more.

Choose:

- ❖ Cooked, warm, soupy, light, foods
- ❖ Plenty of healthy oils (sesame, sunflower and olive oil, ghee (clarified butter), nut butters and essential fatty acids.
- ❖ Natural and healthy sweet, sour and salty tastes and flavorful sauces
- ❖ Carminative spices such as basil, oregano, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, pippali, coriander, dill
- ❖ Protein-rich diet of animal products which do not take the life of the animal: ghee, warm milk, yogurt, cooked cheese, buttermilk, kefir, eggs ~ high protein grains such as quinoa, corn, basmati rice, easily digest nuts (blanched almonds) and sesame seeds
- ❖ Best fruits and juices: tomato, pomegranate, carrot, fresh squeezed orange and grapefruit, apricot, peach, strawberry, raspberry and vegetable juices
- ❖ Lots of fresh cooked veggies: pumpkin, carrots, beets, green leafy, avocado, broccoli, baked potato, winter squash, tomatoes

Avoid:

- ❖ Caffeine, white sugar, and soda pop
- ❖ Excessive use of beans (except tofu) and heavy grains. Prepare with ghee and spices
- ❖ Dry foods taken alone
- ❖ Taking foods and drinks colder than room temperature
- ❖ Red meat

Pitta Dosha

Symptoms of imbalance

- ❖ Mental: anger and hostility, self-criticism, irritability and impatience, resentment
- ❖ Behavioral: temper outbursts, argumentative stance, tyrannical behavior, criticism of others, intolerance of delays
- ❖ Physical: skin inflammation, boils, rashes, acne, excessive hunger or thirst, bad breath, hot flashes, heartburn, acid stomach, ulcers, sour body odors, rectal burning, hemorrhoids

Lifestyle modifications to promote balance:

- ❖ Keep cool. Avoid excess heat, steam and humidity
- ❖ Oil your skin with coconut oil
- ❖ Rinse with cool water after showering or bathing
- ❖ Observe moderation being sure not to push too hard
- ❖ Balance intensity and activity with rest and relaxation
- ❖ Spend time in a beautiful natural setting ~ get plenty of fresh air
- ❖ Trust your feelings and express them in ways that support you and those around you
- ❖ Avoid excess stimulation and stimulants of any type

Pitta pacifying diet:

Suggested daily intake: 4-5 servings of whole grains, 1 ½ - 2 servings of high-quality protein, 3-4 servings fresh vegetables, 1-1 ½ servings fresh fruit, 1 – 1 ½ servings fresh fruit or more.

Choose:

- ❖ Astringent, bitter, and sweet tastes
- ❖ Cool or warm refreshing food
- ❖ Olive oil, coconut oil and ghee in moderate amounts
- ❖ Spices: cumin, coriander, fennel, anise, and cardamom.
- ❖ Organic milk, cottage cheese
- ❖ Basmati rice, barley, millet, quinoa
- ❖ Cucumber, lettuce, winter squash, yams, tofu, avocado
- ❖ Sweet fruits (figs, grapes, raisins, dates, blueberries, red raspberries, babcock peaches, apples, pears, mango and coconut.
- ❖ Bitter and astringent herbal teas
- ❖ Whole grains

Avoid:

- ❖ Excessive sour, oily, salty, and fried foods
- ❖ Red meat, shellfish
- ❖ Alcohol, caffeine and soda pop
- ❖ Excessively hot spices, such as cloves, mustard, onion, garlic, chilis, radish and cayenne
- ❖ Frequent use of acidic fruits, juices and vegetables: tomatoes, beets, eggplant, corn, carrots, hot leafy greens, papayas, pineapple, citrus (except limes), vinegar

Kapha Dosha

Symptoms of imbalance:

- ❖ Mental: dullness, mental inertia, lassitude, stupor, depression, overattachment
- ❖ Behavioral: procrastination, inability to accept change, greed, oversleeping, drowsiness, slow movements, possessiveness
- ❖ Physical: intolerance of cold and damp. Sinus congestion, runny nose, fluid retention in tissues, bloating, chest congestion, skin pallor, loose or aching joints, high cholesterol, heaviness in limbs, frequent colds, weight gain, allergies, asthma, phlegm cough, sore throat, cysts and other growths, diabetes.

Lifestyle modifications to promote balance:

- ❖ Get plenty of physical activity everyday
- ❖ Allow excitement, stimulation, challenge and change in your life
- ❖ Control your weight; do not overeat; reduce sweets
- ❖ Seek variety in life and new experiences
- ❖ Stay warm and dry.
- ❖ Dry massage of skin to promote circulation
- ❖ Be honest with yourself when you are sick and take time to rest and recuperate
- ❖ Irrigate nasal passages using a neti pot (available at local health food stores or at Banyan botanicals)
- ❖ Drink warm fluids during the day in moderation

Kapha pacifying diet:

Suggested daily intake: 3 – 4 servings of whole grains, 2 servings high quality low-fat protein, 4-5 servings fresh vegetable, 1 serving fresh fruit

Choose:

- ❖ Warming, drying, activating foods (hot, light, spicy food, lots of vegetables, well cooked beans, hot peppers, ginger, soy, well spiced tea)
- ❖ Pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes
- ❖ Honey and hot herbal teas but limit fluid intake to 4 cups per day
- ❖ Vegetarian, low fat diet
- ❖ Sesame oil, flax and sunflower oil can be used minimally
- ❖ One salad per day
- ❖ Whole grain crackers and toasted breads of millet, quinoa, and corn
- ❖ Pungent spices: cinnamon, ginger, black pepper, mustard, cloves, celery seed, dill, radish
- ❖ Spiced cooked fruits
- ❖ Cranberry, pomegranate, carrot, grapefruit, and spinach juices in moderation

Avoid:

- ❖ Cold, wet, bland foods
- ❖ Excessive use of oils, sour and salty tastes
- ❖ Too many dairy products
- ❖ White sugar or too many sweets
- ❖ Wheat, oatmeal
- ❖ Too many cooling fruits such as bananas, dates, mangoes, apples and apples juice especially in winter

GUIDELINES FOR OPTIMAL DIGESTION AND HEALTH

1. Do not eat anything you cannot digest. Respect your body's attempts to communicate that it cannot handle a particular substance: gas, belching, hyper acidity, diarrhea, constipation, feelings of heaviness and lethargy.
2. Avoid iced drinks (including ice water) and ice cream, which lower the digestive fire, except in the daytime on very hot days and well away from mealtimes. Let refrigerated foods come to room temperature before eating them.
3. Do not take milk or cream cold or within three hours of eating other foods (except sweets, grains, and sweet fruits which may accompany milk).
4. Do not mix undigested food with partially digested food in your stomach, which confuses the digestive process, making it more difficult for your body to correctly separate what should be excreted from what should be absorbed. This creates digestive toxins, which can lay the foundation for many chronic disease. After eating solid food, wait at least three hours before eating solid food again. You may take healthy beverages in between meals.
5. Avoid overly processed foods and food additives, and dairy products and eggs which are not organic. Drink and cook with filtered water.
6. Avoid red meat altogether, and eat chicken and fish sparingly or not at all. We may like the taste of meat because we have been brought up to eat it, but it has more health detriments than benefits and inflict needless fear, pain, and suffering on the animal who, in modern societies is killed to satisfy momentary desires rather to meet any real dietary need. Try to buy dairy products and eggs from humane farms.
7. Although coffee provides a morning steam for many of us, caffeine is an addictive and harmful substance, which robs your body and nervous system of long-term stability, health and energy in order to supply the kick of the moment.
8. Do not boil, bake, or cook honey. Sucanat, maple syrup, barley malt or other sweeteners can be used in its place. Adding honey to warm tea is O.K.
9. Use appropriate spices in cooking to render your food more digestible.
10. Take a short walk after lunch and dinner to help digest the meal
11. Don't force yourself to eat when you are not hungry. Don't skimp on lunch. Don't overeat.
12. Fast one day per week on liquids of your choice from after dinner one night until dinner the next night. This rests the digestion.
13. Do your best to avoid stressful situations, and if you cannot avoid such situations, see your practitioner or therapist for help in managing the stress generated.

*Copied from **Structuring Life and Diet to Maintain Optimal Digestion and Health** by Sarasvati Buhrman, Ph. D., Ayurvedic Medicine and Classical Yoga Therapy*