



Ayurveda

A brief introduction into an ancient health and healing system

1. History and Origin of Ayurveda



Ayurveda, meaning 'science of a **long and healthy life**,' is an ancient holistic medical system that originated in India over 5,000 years ago.

Rooted in the Vedic traditions, Ayurveda is based on the belief that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between mind, body, and spirit. In ancient times, Ayurveda served as the primary health care system in India,

addressing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It emphasized prevention and individualized care. The system is credited to the teachings found in ancient scriptures like the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, with further elaboration in the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita as well as Asthanga Hridaya. In modern times, Ayurveda remains significant as an alternative health system practiced worldwide. It plays a major role in integrative medicine, focusing on natural treatments, herbal remedies, and personalized care.



2. Philosophical Background and Relation to Yoga Philosophy

Ayurveda and yoga share common roots in ancient Indian philosophy, both being derived from the Vedic teachings. **Ayurveda** is based on the **Sankhya philosophy**, which explains the universe as composed of five great elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether). These elements manifest in the human body as the three Doshas, and Ayurveda focuses on keeping them balanced to maintain health. Health is viewed as the harmonious balance of the elements, Doshas, digestive fire (Agni), tissues (Dhatus), and waste (Malas).



Ayurveda's emphasis is largely on the physical and material aspects of life, dealing with the physiological balance in the body.

Yoga follows the Yoga Sutra philosophy developed by Patanjali, which lays out a path to control the mind and attain spiritual awakening through the Eightfold Path (Ashtanga Yoga). This path includes ethical disciplines (Yamas and Niyamas), physical postures (Asanas), breath control (Pranayama), concentration (Dharana), meditation (Dhyana), and the ultimate state of consciousness (Samadhi).

Yoga focuses more on mental and spiritual growth, seeking to transcend the limitations of the body and mind.

3. Five Element Theory

In Ayurveda, the universe and everything within it, including the human body, is believed to be composed of five fundamental elements (Pancha Mahabhutas): Earth (Prithvi), Water (Jala), Fire (Agni), Air (Vayu), and Ether or Space (Akasha). These elements interact with each other to form life and matter. The balance or imbalance of these elements within the body determines a person's physical and mental state. The five elements also form the basis for the three Doshas, which govern the biological functions of the body. Each Dosha is a combination of two elements, and the balance of these elements influences an individual's health.

4. The 3 Doshas and Their Relation to the Elements



The three Doshas—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—are vital energies or life forces that control various physiological and psychological functions in the body. They are influenced by the balance of the five elements:



- Vata (Air + Ether): Vata governs movement, communication, and circulation in the body. It is associated with the qualities of dryness, lightness, coldness, and mobility. Vata types are often energetic, creative, and quick, but prone to anxiety, dry skin, and digestive irregularities when imbalanced.
- Pitta (Fire + flowing property of Water): Pitta governs digestion, metabolism, and transformation. It is characterized by warmth, sharpness, and oiliness. Pitta types are typically strong-willed, competitive, and passionate but may suffer from inflammation, heartburn, or skin rashes or diseases when out of balance.
- Kapha (Earth + Water): Kapha governs structure, stability, and lubrication. It is heavy, slow, and cool. Kapha types are often calm, grounded, and nurturing but can experience lethargy, weight gain, and congestion if unbalanced.

Taken the 5 Element and 3 dosha theory together it is understandable that the Ayurvedic system of health and healing can be applied and/or adapted everywhere in the world.

5. The 6 Tastes and Their Relation to the Elements and Doshas

Ayurveda recognizes six tastes (Rasas), which are derived from the five elements. Each taste has specific effects on the Doshas and helps in maintaining balance:

1. Sweet (Madhura) - Earth + Water: Balances Vata and Pitta, increases Kapha.
Examples: rice, potatoes, milk, sugar.
2. Sour (Amla) - Earth + Fire: Balances Vata, increases Pitta and Kapha.
Examples: oranges, yogurt, fermented foods.



3. Salty (Lavana) - Water + Fire: Balances Vata, increases Pitta and Kapha.

Examples: sea salt, seafood, sea-fish,

4. Pungent or Spicy (Katu) - Fire + Air: Balances Kapha, increases Vata and Pitta. Examples: ginger, chili peppers, piri piri.

5. Bitter (Tikta) - Air + Ether: Balances Pitta and Kapha, increases Vata.

Examples: turmeric, bitter greens.

6. Astringent (Kashaya) - Earth + Air: Balances Pitta and Kapha, increases Vata. Examples: pomegranate, legumes, green and black tea.

As you see the tastes are related to the doshas and have also an influence on them. In the ayurvedic belief, a proper and satisfying meal should contain all these tastes. In that way a meal contributes to a balance of the doshas.

6. Examples of Common Diseases and Their Ayurvedic Perspective (simplified)



1. Digestive Disorders like Indigestion or Bloating: From an Ayurvedic perspective, digestive disorders are often caused by an imbalance in the Agni (digestive fire), particularly excess Vata. Treatment focuses on calming Vata through warm, nourishing foods, spices like ginger and cumin, and oil massages.

2. Skin Inflammation, Acne, Eczema:

These conditions are typically associated with excess Pitta, leading to heat and inflammation in the body. Ayurvedic treatment involves cooling



herbs like neem and sandalwood and reducing hot, salty and spicy foods.

3. Respiratory Issues like Asthma or Bronchitis: Respiratory problems are often linked to an excess of Kapha, which causes mucus accumulation. Treatments aim at reducing Kapha by using warming spices like pepper, cumin and turmeric and performing steam inhalations.

7. Use of some Plants of the Alentejo in the Ayurvedic System (simplified)

The Alentejo region is rich in medicinal plants that can be integrated into the Ayurvedic system. These plants have different effects on the Doshas and Dhatus (tissues). Some examples include:

- Malva (*Malva sylvestris*) - Parts Used: Leaves and flowers. Effect: Reduces Pitta and Vata, increases Kapha. Beneficial for skin and respiratory issues.
- Louro (*Laurus nobilis* / Laurel) - Parts Used: Leaves and fruits. Effect: Reduces Vata and Kapha, increases Pitta. Supports digestion, respiratory health.
- Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*) - Parts Used: Leaves. Effect: Reduces Kapha and Vata, increases Pitta. Useful for respiratory issues, antiseptic properties.
- Cistus (*Cistus ladanifer* or *creticus* / Rockrose/port.; Steva) - Parts Used: Leaves and resin. Effect: Balances Kapha and Vata, increases Pitta. Detoxifying, antimicrobial.



- Wild Lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) - Parts Used: Flowers. Effect: Reduces Pitta and Vata, increases Kapha. Calming, supports relaxation and sleep, can also be used for respiratory issues.

Also, only a few examples are listed, the above mentioned plants may also be used for other symptoms or diseases, always considering the effect on the doshas and the tissues as defined by the ayurveda (dhatus).