

Not everyone can digest an apple, or cauliflower or a carrot, even if that food is of the highest organic quality. The body's metabolism and digestive system is unique to the individual and certain foods can cause certain conditions such as bloating, acid indigestion, or irregular bowel habits. This doesn't mean that a particular food needs to be completely eliminated from the diet. With the aid of spices or herbs, most foods can be tolerated by almost everyone.

The ancient wisdom of Ayurveda that dates back thousands of years, is a science of health and healing. The objective of this 'science' is to maintain health and to prevent ill health entirely by natural methods, and that means a diet geared toward the individual's own needs.

At the moment of conception the individual's unique body constitution, known as the *dosha*, is determined based on the five essential elements, ether, air, fire, water and earth.

The constitutions or *doshas* are known as *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*.

Vata is composed of air. Vata individuals tend to be flexible, quick, restless and always on the go. Vatas do everything quickly, walking, talking and even eating. Vatas tend to have a small thin body frame, light muscles and little fat on their body. The skin, hair and nails tend to be dry and the fingernails hard and brittle. Vatas dislike the cold weather and complain of cold hands and feet. When Vatas are in balance they are creative, happy and calm, out of balance they tend to be fearful, nervous, insecure, and indecisive. The air element tends toward gas, constipation and bloating.

A diet that consists of warm moist foods are best for Vatas. Oatmeal with cinnamon and raisins would be the ideal breakfast rather than cold dry cereal. All dry rough and gas producing foods should be avoided or limited as much as possible. Extra oil on a salad would counteract the dryness. Fruits such as apples or pears need to be baked or stewed and raisins soaked. Vatas do best avoiding all beans, unless they are soaked for a long period of time and cooked with spices that reduce gas and abdominal distention. Cooking with spices of cumin, mustard seed, fennel, ginger, asafoetida, cinnamon, or cardamom will prevent gas and bloating. The Ayurvedic herb Triphala aids in constipation and indigestion. Ashwagandha is an excellent herb for Vatas that can alleviate anxiety and stress, support the immune system and promotes sleep.

Pitta is composed of fire. As a result they have fiery personalities, dislike the heat and often suffer from skin rashes, acne and heartburn. Pittas normally are of medium build with strong muscular bodies, soft oily hair and skin and soft fingernails. Pittas usually experience early grayness or baldness. They have strong appetites and good digestive fire. When Pittas are in balance they are focused, intelligent, have sharp keen memories, and are goal oriented. When out of balance they can be overly competitive, impatient, and argumentative.

Pittas need to stay away from hot spicy foods, salt and acidic foods, like grapefruit and vinegar. They do best with cooling foods such as coconut, cherries, cucumbers, sweet potatoes and sweet peppers. Pittas can eat most legumes and vegetables.

The best cooking oil for Pitta is sunflower or olive oil. Spices for Pitta include basil, coriander, peppermint, cumin, fresh ginger and dill. Coconut oil for massage is cooling and healing to the skin. The Ayurvedic herb Neem helps Pittas with skin irritations and inflammations. Amalaki is an excellent Pitta herb for acid reflux complaints.

Kapha is composed of the element water. Kapha molecules tend to stick together to form a compact mass and give the body a chubby shape.

Kaphas tend to have large well-developed bodies, large heavy bones, and tend to be overweight. They have soft smooth skin that tends to be clammy, an abundance of lustrous hair, and large soft attractive eyes. Kaphas are slow moving, slow in speech and in all their mannerisms. They are slow to learn but once learned they do not forget. They eat slowly and digest their food slowly. They have a strong desire for sweets, which only increases their challenge with weight. When in balance Kaphas are affectionate, loyal, calm, slow to anger, sentimental, compassionate and kind. When out of balance they can be possessive and lethargic. Kaphas tend to respiratory ailments, colds and congestive disorders.

Kaphas need to avoid sweeteners of all types, especially the refined sugars and foods that increase water, such as watermelon. Since salt increases water, Kaphas need to steer clear of too many salty foods. Kaphas can eat just about every vegetable and almost all legumes. They do best with foods that dry rather than moisten. Except for salt, Kaphas can use most spices, dry ginger is especially beneficial as is cayenne and black pepper to get the digestive fire stimulated. The powerful heating quality of the Ayurvedic herb Trikatu helps reduce fat and reduce food cravings.

Susan 'Surya' Semerade is a certified Ayurvedic Consultant and Lifestyle Coach. Surya takes a holistic natural approach to maintain healing and well being. A private consultation will help to determine your body constitution and discover what diet and lifestyle works best for you. Email Surya at Livingayurveda@aol.com or call 516-381-3653.