

Ayurvedic Guide to Healthy Relationships

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"One who sees equally the entire universe in his own self and his own self in the entire universe is in possession of true knowledge" - Charaka Samhita 5.6

Everything is Relationship.

Relationship can be challenging, whether it is with ourselves, the world around us and those closest to us, but they provide a mirror for us and present an opportunity for self-enquiry, inner perception and understanding. To maintain harmonious, fulfilling, happy and healthy relationships takes understanding, insight, commitment and work, and Ayurveda provides us with an array of tools to help us in profound ways.

At the heart of Ayurveda lies the understanding that everything is one, everything exists in relation not in isolation. We are constantly interacting with and affected by the environment we live in and the people around us and vice versa. Body effects mind and mind effects body, thoughts and feelings affect our physiological functioning while the way we feel physically affects our mental and emotional wellbeing and that of those around us. Mental and emotional health is a state of sensory, mental, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing and is the key to maintaining healthy relationships.

*"The same stream of life that runs through my vein
Runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measure.
It is the same life that shoots in joy
through the dust of the earth into numberless blades of grass,
and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.
It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle
of birth and death, in ebb and in flow.
My limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life;
and my pride is from the life throb of ages
dancing in my blood this moment". **Tagore***

Ayurveda has a highly developed system to help us understand the different natures and temperaments of people, and a sophisticated range of treatments to bring these into balance and harmony. With knowledge and understanding of the three *doshas*, how they affect us and those with whom we interact mentally and emotionally, we can choose the right lifestyle, diet and herbal remedies for each person. This can be enormously helpful and take much of the mystery, pain and frustration out of relationships.

It would be easy to suppose that certain *doshic* types thrive better in relationship than others, but actually anyone with awareness and understanding and when in a state of balance and harmony, can make a successful relationship with anyone else. Once we know and understand our *doshic* types and those of the people we are in relationship with, we may be able to pre-empt challenges that might arise and deal with them with compassion and even humour.

The Three Doshas and the Heart and Mind

Vata governs the movement of the mind, thoughts, feelings and sensory perception; it could be correlated with the brain's neuro-electrical activity. It gives us inspiration and enthusiasm, creative ideas, and a healthy appetite for new and exciting experiences, interests, spiritual practices, friends and travel.

People with a predominance of *vata* are lively, playful, inventive, adaptable, expressive and gregarious. They are quick to learn, quick to react and quick to forget and everything about

them tends to be erratic. If they do too much, don't rest or sleep enough, eat irregularly, scatter their energy, talk too much and get overstimulated, they can get out of balance and become spaced out and scattered, restless, unreliable, forgetful, anxious, fearful, fragile, and easily overwhelmed. They can have a tendency to feel insecure, lonely, and suffer from insomnia and nightmares.

If you have a relationship with someone with high *vata*, and see this pattern begin to emerge, you can suggest calming and grounding activities to slow them down and help them to relax and rest. They love massage which is very good for them, as is walking in nature, doing yoga and practicing meditation. Help them to look at their lifestyle which is normally overfull as they like to do lots of different things and can spread themselves too thinly and help them to recover their enthusiasm, energy and zest for life.

Pitta

Our mental and emotional health is very much affected by the *pitta* in the heart and mind. It governs neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin. When in balance *pitta* gives us energy, self-confidence, passion, motivation and a feeling of fulfilment.

Those with a predominance of *pitta* tend to be fiery, idealistic, high achieving and competitive. They like to work hard and do things properly....they can be perfectionists. They love fun, challenge, burning the candle at both ends and being the life and soul of the party. They are highly intelligent, quick witted, even brilliant with good powers of judgment and analysis and often reach the top of their profession. They are articulate, insightful, organised and efficient. They have a desire to be respected and loved, a craving for intensity of experience and excitement, strong will-power and self-discipline, enthusiasm and courage.

Doing too much, working too hard, drinking and partying too much can increase *pitta*, as can excess heat, sunlight, and too much rich and spicy food. An excess of *pitta* can cause excessive drive, overthinking and analyzing and insomnia. *Pitta* types can be judgmental and self-critical, and can suffer from low self-esteem, mood swings, feeling aggressive, over-ambitious, over-competitive and jealous. They can be obsessive, controlling and sharp-tongued which can be hurtful to those close to them. A partner will often be the target of their wrath. They have a low boredom threshold and a tendency to moodiness, resentment, irritability, anger and temper tantrums which can be hard to live with. With their fear of failure, they may be worse at times of pressure such as before exams, board meetings, presentations, interviews, and competitions. They have a tendency to suppress their emotions until the point that their anger explodes. Crying and expressing emotions is important for releasing tension and stress and keeping *pitta* in balance.

Pitta people can be easily hurt and suffer from feelings of hopelessness and a sense of failure, which may lead to depression which is not to be taken lightly; it can be deep and long lasting. If left untreated, it can lead to problems such as suicidal tendencies, bipolar disease, self-destructive behaviour, abuse of and addiction to drugs or alcohol, which only serve to exacerbate their depression.

One of the best things to do for an overheated, fiery *pitta* person is to provide cooling food such as salads, juices, coconut water, rose, mint, lemongrass and chamomile tea. Give them plenty of space and don't get drawn into arguments with them...they are invariably right! Mental and physical rest, meditation, counselling, and being outside in nature, especially near water, or in the cool evening air, can all help to cool and calm.

Kapha

Found in the brain, the heart and the cerebrospinal fluid, *kapha* provides nutrition, strength, protection and lubrication to the nerves.

Those with a predominance of *kapha* tend to be calm and content, laid back, strong,

resilient and less emotionally reactive. When balanced, they are loving, nurturing, supportive, compassionate, patient, steady, reliable, methodical, thorough and friendly. They are loyal and maintain strong ties to family and friends and their relationships tend to be long and stable as they like to maintain the status quo. They are easy to be with as they are easy going and congenial. They tend to think and move slowly but once they have absorbed information and experience they tend not to forget.

Lack of activity or sensory stimulation, sleeping too much and not taking enough exercise can set the stage for *kapha* imbalance. Eating too much, doing the same thing, and not going outside their comfort zone, contributes to further stasis. They can become lethargic, withdrawn, and feel heavy, overweight, tired and unmotivated. They become immobile, stubborn, and can be close-minded, conservative, complacent, dull and emotionally blocked.

Possessiveness, over-attachment to people or things, and being sentimental is also a sign of imbalance of *kapha*. They can hold onto resentments or traumatic experiences in a way that blocks them from letting go and moving on. A tendency to comfort-eating may be a strategy to soothe stress and uncomfortable emotions.

If a friend or partner observes these tendencies, they need to provide motivation, change and stimulation and get them moving! Adventures, physical activity, diversity in daily activities and meals will help to offset the heaviness and lethargy that weighs them down. Make sure they do more and sleep less even if they say they are tired!

Balancing the Doshas

Keeping relationships healthy and balanced means taking care of oneself and others. The more in balance we are, the more harmonious we are in relationship. We all know that when we don't take care of ourselves first, everything suffers: our health, energy, joie de vivre, self-confidence, friendships, partnerships, domestic life and general quality of life.

We need to make sure that we schedule into our busy lives time for ourselves as well as those we are relationship with, partners, family and friends. On our to-do list we need all the things we have to do each week as well as the ones we want to do...exercise, meditate, eat delicious nourishing food, spend time with loved ones, have fun, spend time in beautiful places, rest and relax, pamper ourselves, experience bliss!

Vata:

"The garden will either grow, or not grow, worry is not good fertiliser" - Pema Chodron

- Relaxation and rest, reducing activity/moving/travelling.
- Being outdoors when the sun is rising and breathing deeply opens the channels, enhances digestion and elimination, and helps to clear any *ama* accumulated from the previous day.
- Structure, routine and regularity.
- Increase sweet, sour and salty tastes and reduce pungent, bitter and astringent tastes.
- Increase foods that are nourishing, heavy and oily that support the nervous system and the mind including walnuts, almonds, coconut and sweet, juicy, seasonal fruit.
- Don't resist natural urges as this can imbalance *vata* and contribute to anxiety and emotional imbalance.
- Give yourself a daily *abhyanga* (oil massage). Sesame oil is best. Touch helps balance *vata* and calm anxiety and stress. Follow with a warm bath or shower so the oils penetrate deeply to detoxify and nourish the tissues.
- Yoga *asanas* enhance digestion, cleanse toxins from the channels and cells of the body that contribute to mental *ama* and improve overall health.

- Inhalations of aromatic oils including jatamamsi, vetiver, vacha, frankincense, jasmine, rose and sandalwood can balance, ground, and uplift the mind.
- Meditation calms and stabilises *vata*. Mindfulness meditation and walking meditation are recommended.
- *Pranayama* enhances the flow of *vata*. Alternate nostril breath and *brahmari* breath are calming and balancing.
- Quiet time, contemplation, prayer or mantra, and spending time in nature is calming and uplifting
- Nasya (nasal administration of oil) is useful for psychological problems.eg. mahanaryan oil, vacha oil.
- Avoid stimulants like caffeine; have herbal teas such as fennel, rose and licorice instead. Warm milk with ashwagandha and a pinch of nutmeg before bed can be helpful for sleep.

Herbs: ashwagandha, shatavari, rose, calamus, jatamamsi, licorice, shankapushpi, bhringaraj, brahmi, bala, gokshura, guduchi, castor oil plant root, saffron, nutmeg, black cumin, kapikachu, tagarah, garlic. Carminative herbs particularly aimed at balancing *apana vata*.

Pitta:

"Holding on to resentment and anger is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die" – Anonymous

- Avoid over-exertion, both mental and physical. Listen to soothing, relaxing music, or the sounds of nature, let go and relax.
- Spend time outside in a beautiful place especially in early morning or evening.
- Daily massage with a cooling, relaxing oil such as coconut oil, brahmi or bringaraj oil with essential oils of rose, chamomile, sandalwood, coriander or lemongrass.
- Go to bed before 10 pm; falling asleep during the *kapha* time of night generates a deep, restful sleep that refreshes mind and body.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine especially coffee; drink plenty of rose or chamomile tea.
- Exercise helps process and release emotions.
- Pranayama: *brahmari* and alternate nostril breath are recommended. *Sheetali* breath is also cooling.
- Meditation and mantra help to release suppressed emotions/anger. Counselling, talking, relaxing in cool areas, eg by water, soft words/music, uncompetitive activities are also helpful,
- Increase sweet, bitter and astringent foods and herbs. Reduce pungent, sour and salty foods.
- Medicines prepared in ghee which nourishes the brain and nerves.
- Gentle laxatives such as dandelion root or triphala to reduce excess *pachaka pitta*.

Herbs: coriander, cumin, sandalwood, aloe vera, amalaki, turmeric, shatavari, guduchi, punarnava, manjishta, neem, chamomile, rose, bhringaraj, sariva, gotu kola, bacopa, jatamamsi, shankapushpi, safrton, licorice.

Kapha:

*"Let life in
Let it touch you
Let the beliefs fall away"* - Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel

- Wake up with the rising sun. Waking after 6 am causes the *srotas* to be clogged with *ama*, leading to lethargy, dullness and low moods. Avoid sleeping in the daytime.
- Take more exercise, vigorous activity, do different things, try to be open minded.
- Less sweet, sour and salty foods. More bitter, pungent and astringent herbs and foods that are light, cleansing and drying, hot drinks and foods. Plenty of fresh ginger and spices in your diet.
- Inhalation of oil/steam, application of heat. Nasya (nasal administration of oils) including eucalyptus and vacha oil helps clear and enliven the mind.
- Pranayama: *kapala bhati* is invigorating.
- Mindfulness meditation, walking meditation and mantras
- Vaman: vomiting/ therapeutic or expectorant herbs

Herbs: punarnava, turmeric, ginger, pippali, asafoetida, haritaki, guduchi, tulsi, rose, calamus, gotu kola, bacopa, frankincense, shankapushpi, saffron, thyme, elecampane

Love After Love

*"The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,*

*and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you*

*all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,*

*the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life".* Derek Walcott