

Understanding Vata: the Wind Energy

According to Ayurveda, the ancient Indian medical system, Vata is the combination of Air and Space energies.

It's nature is cold, dry, rough, light, expansive, irregular, mobile, and clear.

Vata supports/creates all movement in the body and mind. It's most subtle form is "prana" or life energy.

When Vata is balanced, it supports good health: circulation, heart rhythm, agility, normal digestion and elimination, proper function of all organ systems, neural connections, intelligence and speed of understanding. Its upward nature creates cheerfulness, and increases creativity, expansiveness, and spiritual seeking.

This elemental energy increases in us with age - the analogy is that we start out as plump juicy grapes and turn into raisins by the end of life!

Vata also increases with stress, change, fall and winter seasons, and travel.

When Vata is imbalanced, it creates numerous problems - many of which are seen in humans as they age:

- anxiety and insomnia
- arthritis, joint stiffness
- decreased bone density, decreased muscle mass
- irregular bowel habits; constipation
- pain
- incontinence
- memory loss, senility

**DO NOT BE DEPRESSED ABOUT THIS!!
(and turn the page over)**

Balancing Vata

Knowing that Vata is likely to rise in us as time passes, we can be pro-active, and adopt lifestyle changes that help mitigate the negative effects of this shift. We can also maximize the benefits of this expansive, creative force.

Generally, elemental energies (doshas) are balanced by qualities that are different, or the opposite, of the ones inherent in that dosha. For instance, Vata is balanced by warmth, moisture, heaviness, and regularity - the qualities it lacks. Here are some suggestions with this idea in mind:

- Keep a regular schedule of sleep and wake.
- Regular meals are also helpful; supper before 7pm.
- Be mindful of hydration: drink 6-10 glasses of fluid a day.
- Oil your skin (food-grade oil is nourishing vs chemical-laden lotions)
- Warmth in general is good for Vata: warm food, drinks and adequate clothing help keep Vata comforted and grounded.
- Spend some time every day breathing deeply to calm and nourish the nervous system.
- Learn to meditate and/or practice mindfulness.
- Wind down before sleep; unplug at least an hour before bedtime.
- Consider taking herbs that nourish the nervous system (nervines) and adrenal glands (adaptogens). These are supportive tonics.
- Be mindful to not exhaust yourself: Aim to get 7-9 hours of sleep, don't overdo, rest when you need to (this sounds easy, but. . .).
- Nurture positive relationships; stay connected.