

## **AYURVEDA – A NEW LOOK AT AN ANCIENT TRADITION, PART 2**

**Joel B. Klein, M. D.**

In Part 1, we looked at how Ayurveda, the ancient system of natural health from India, views health as a balance of basic natural energies, or doshas, called Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Each of us has our own individual makeup of these energies and when they are out of balance, toxins accumulate in the system as a result of incomplete digestion and metabolism of our food leading to illness and disease.

Vata, consisting of space and air, is imbalanced by insufficient sleep, staying up at night, fear, worry, grief, excessive mental or physical work, irregularity of daily routine including skipping meals, cold and/or dry foods and cold, dry, windy climates, especially with thin air (Colorado!). Our hectic American lifestyles with all their hustle, bustle and mental activity are very Vata aggravating. Some of the symptoms of Vata imbalance are constipation, irregular digestion, dry skin, tension headaches, degenerative arthritis, palpitations, fatigue, and menstrual problems. Initial treatments for Vata imbalance include eating warm freshly cooked foods especially those with good quality fat, never skipping meals, meditative practices, rhythmic exercises like yoga, swimming tennis, and golf, going to bed by 10 PM, warm sesame oil massage in the morning and the use of more heating spices such as ginger, pepper, and fenugreek. Sweet is balancing for Vata but one has to be careful to not overdo it as sweet is the heaviest taste and can easily produce an overcompensated Kapha imbalance as noted below.

Pitta, being the fire dosha, is imbalanced by excessive heat, sun, or exertion, hot, spicy, sour or salty foods, the fiery emotions of anger, jealousy, and hatred, alcohol, and smoking. Environmental toxins tend to be “Pitta-charged” and these exposures combined with our angry, overly competitive culture frequently result in Pitta imbalances. Some of the symptoms of Pitta imbalance are stomach acid problems like heartburn, reflux, and ulcers, inflammatory conditions involving the skin or other organs such as the GI tract, diarrhea, excessive body heat and sweating, and emotional irritability. Treatment involves correcting the offending cause as well as the use of cooling dietary and lifestyle strategies like eating sweet juicy fruits and summer squashes, using cooling spices such as coriander and fennel, and using coconut oil for massage. Cooling yoga postures like the “Child pose” and less strenuous exercises are helpful for Pitta but these should be balanced with the need that Pitta people tend to have for goal-oriented activities. Using rose petal jam, available from some Ayurvedic product sources, in warm milk at night is particularly balancing for Pitta.

Kapha, the earth and water dosha, is imbalanced by insufficient mental and physical activity, excessive sleep, and excessive food intake. This is particularly so for sweet, heavy, cold, and oily foods or “dead” foods like leftovers and foods with preservatives and other artificial ingredients. These tend to accumulate in the body in the form of ama, a toxic residue that cannot be found on lab tests but can be felt in nuances in the pulse by someone trained in pulse diagnosis. In Chinese medicine, it is referred to as phlegm. Since Kapha is responsible for structure, cohesion, and lubrication, this excess in the form of ama presents with symptoms relating to excess mass and mucous such as sinusitis, asthma, obesity, diabetes, slow digestion, and benign tumors like cysts. Malignant tumors involve imbalances of all three doshas. Since Kapha is the heaviest and slowest moving dosha, it takes the longest time to become unbalanced and also takes the longest to correct. One of the main treatments is to get the Kapha to MOVE! Kaphas are the only people for whom vigorous, as

opposed to moderate, exercise is indicated and should get up early in the morning. They are, unfortunately, the ones least inclined to do so. Since Kapha is cold, the same heating spices that help Vata are helpful here but with Kapha being heavy, lighter foods are preferred. Fasting, either with water or juice, is most likely to be beneficial for Kapha imbalances but should be undertaken with the supervision of someone who is knowledgeable in this field.

Ayurveda has an incredible storehouse of herbal knowledge used to assist the correcting of imbalances and removal of ama from the system. Only recently have products become available in this country of the quality that has been used in India for several thousand years. These are now available from companies such as Maharishi Ayurveda and Ayush Herbs. Some may be ordered directly from the company whereas others, usually the more potent formulations, need to be obtained through a health professional.

This has been a very superficial look at what is an incredibly intricate and elegant system for viewing human health. Although it is ancient, there is much wisdom here that we can benefit from today. If you are interested in learning more, I recommend visiting with an Ayurvedically oriented practitioner. Other resources include Deepak Chopra's book Perfect Health or Maharishi Ayurveda's web site at [www.mapi.com](http://www.mapi.com).