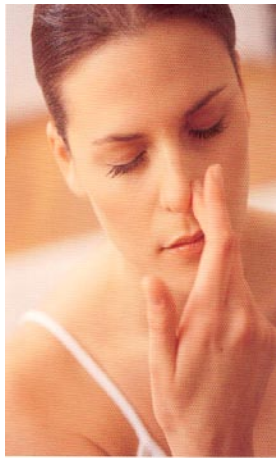


Chapter 5

Practical therapies & advice

~ keeping the body healthy & balanced ~



The secret of making something work in your lives is,
first of all, the deep desire to make it work.
Then the faith and belief that it can work.
Then hold that clear definite vision in your consciousness,
and see it working out step by step
without one thought of doubt or disbelief.

~ Eileen Caddy ~

Nasya home treatment

Nasya is the nasal administration of medicinal herbs, decoctions and oils to alleviate complaints that occur above the clavicle. This therapy is most commonly indicated for dry nasal passages, hoarseness of voice, stiffness in the head, neck and jaw area, headaches and certain eye and ear problems. It relieves mental and emotional stress, anxiety, fear and negativity.

The nose is the doorway to the brain, mind and consciousness. Prana, the vital life force, enters our bodies through the breath. Lubrication of the nasal passages with medicated oil provides subtle moisture to the air we breathe and affects the higher cerebral faculties and sensory organs. It promotes clarity of perception, intuition and stimulates memory. It also enhances cerebral circulation and restores prana or life energy to the senses.

This self-treatment can be undertaken weekly (from one to three days duration) if you frequently suffer from mild headaches, congestion or blocked sinuses. However, it is contra-indicated during colds/flu, high fever, pregnancy and menstruation and should only be used under medical supervision if highly congested.

You will need: MP16 (nasal oil)*
MA634 or eucalyptus oil (inhalation oils)*
Sesame oil*
Box of large tissues
Salt water
Hot water bottle
Steam bowl
Boiling water
Bath towel
Hand towel x 2
1 dropper (for applying oil into nose)

* available form MAP (see resources section)

Instructions:

1. Vigorously massage the head with warm sesame oil for 5 minutes.
2. Fill a large bowl with hot water and add 1-2 drops of eucalyptus or MP634 oil.
3. Place a towel over the head and bowl to keep the steam in and gently inhale the steam.
4. Continue for 5-10 minutes - add more hot water and/or inhalation oil if required.
5. Fill a large bowl hot water. Fold a hand towel four times (lengthways) and place in boiling hot water – make sure the ends are not placed in water. Hold the ends of the towel and wring out the hot water.
6. Open up the towel and shake briefly to cool it down to a comfortable temperature for placing on the skin.
7. Fold in half, lengthways. Lie down on bed and wrap the hot towel around the head, avoiding the eyes.
8. Repeat two more times.
9. Remove the towel and dry the face thoroughly.
10. Lie on a bed with the head hanging over the end and apply one drop (from dropper) of MP16 or ‘Shakti’ (see recipe below) into each nostril.
11. Pinch both nostrils, start to inhale and immediately remove fingers to allow for a deep inhalation – repeat several times to allow substance to penetrate sinus cavities.
12. Massage the forehead, above and below the eyebrows, on the sides of the nose and under the cheekbones.
13. Cough up and spit out any mucus that forms in the throat – blow your nose if necessary and do not suppress sneezing (have your tissues handy).

14. If there is a burning sensation in the throat gargle with salt water and tilt head further back next time you insert the nasya substance.
15. Repeat steps 10 – 13 but with two drops of oil. You may increase to three, four and eventually five drops if this feels comfortable (or until there is some mucus discharge).
16. Never continue if the nose becomes completely blocked, a headache develops or you experience other unpleasant effects.
17. Finish by gargling with salt water and then keep head warm and dry for rest of the day.

Alternative nasya treatments:

If you do not have the time do the full Nasya therapy you may simply lie on the bed with your head tilted back and follow the instructions for inserting the nasya drops. This is obviously less effective but still very beneficial. This may be done daily when there is congestion and weekly as a preventative measure.

Another method of administration of nasya oil, when lying down is not convenient, is to simply place a drop of nasya oil on the little finger and gently insert it into the nostril and inhale fairly forcefully. Next, gently massage the inner walls of the nasal passage. Alternate left and right nostrils until each nostril has received a total of three applications of oil. The lubrication and gentle massage helps to alleviate stress and release any tension in the tissues. This may be done daily as a preventative treatment.

It is not recommended to use nasya oil immediately following the neti pot wash, especially if these therapies are new to you – alternate days may be better. By taking just five minutes a day to incorporate this simple treatment into your daily ayurvedic regime, you can enjoy the many healing benefits of the full nasya therapy.

Recipe for Shakti:

On a low heat slowly warm 15mls of sesame oil in a small pan with ¼ level tsp ground ginger, ¼ level tsp ground black pepper and ¼ level tsp ground clove. Remove from heat before it starts to smoke (about one minute) – cool for 30secs – reapply to heat for 10 secs – cool again for 30 seconds – heat again for 10 seconds and then allow to cool to body temperature. If the oil starts to smoke or burn at any stage throw the mixture away and start again. Strain the mixture through a muslin cloth, allow to cool and then place in a small glass bottle (with dropper top). The bottle and mixture can be warmed slightly (to body temperature) in hot water just before use.

Skin brushing, tongue scraping & sinus cleansing

The following procedures are also important as part of a daily detox – skin brushing helps detoxify, tone and improve the skin, tongue scraping helps detoxify the body in general and a nasal wash cleans the sinus and helps prevent colds and congestion.

Skin Brushing (for Kapha): Skin brushes can be purchased from most chemists. Each morning, either before or after bathing/showering, brush the skin for 2-5 minutes. Brush upwards towards the heart and use circular motions on the joints and long strokes on the arms and legs. Work up the body starting with the feet and legs. The hands and arms come next followed by the back and sides. The back can be best scrubbed using a long-handled brush (use circular motions on the lower back). Now massage the abdomen using slow circular motions and up and down motions on the sternum. When you first begin skin brushing the bristles may feel very rough – the body soon gets used to this and after a few days you'll really begin to enjoy this pleasant invigorating experience. The bristles naturally soften after a few massage sessions but you can run the brush under hot water if you really want a softer feel.

Tongue Scraping: Use a stainless steel or silver scraper and gently remove the white coating from the tongue each morning before you clean your teeth. This white coating is 'ama' or undigested food and it often the cause of bad breath. Once these toxic substances have been removed the breath improves and feels fresher, the taste buds come to life and the digestion benefits from not having to cope with as much bacterial/toxic waste.

Gargling: Gargling with a small amount of sesame oil and coating the inside of the nostrils with a smear of oil with your little finger helps prevent viruses and bacteria from entering the body. It is a great preventative measure against colds and flu.

Nasal cleansing: Regular use of a Neti Pot cleanses the sinuses of old congested mucus and dirt and enables the breath to flow more freely through both nostrils. It is therefore an invaluable aid to yoga, pranayama and meditation and also in helping prevent allergies, asthma, colds and flu. To use, mix ¼ tsp of non-iodized salt with lukewarm water in your Neti Pot. Bring the spout to your nose, bend forward over the sink or bath with the head tilted to one side and slightly forward. As water begins to flow through into the upper nostril, make slight adjustments to the head and Neti Pot position until water flows out of the other nostril. If the water enters your throat, instead of out of the other nostril, simply make further alterations to the position of your head and Neti pot until it flows properly. Repeat for the other nostril. It helps to start by cleansing the nostril on the side that feels freer and less blocked with mucus.

After cleansing the nostrils blow the nose freely through both nostrils to clear the nose of excess water and mucus. Don't close off one nostril when doing this as this may allow water to enter the ear channels. This is unlikely to happen but should this or any other problems occur during this process, kneel down and bring your forehead to the floor. Raise the hips above the level of the head and blow freely through both nostrils as before - it may help to turn the head to either side when doing this.

A second technique to try, once proficiency is gained in the above method, is to direct water from the nose and out through the mouth. As in the previous method, make slight adjustments with the head and Neti pot until water flows into the mouth – then spit it out.

Benefits of nasal rinse:

- Removes mucus and pollution from nasal passages and sinuses
- Daily use relieves allergies, colds and sinusitis
- Cooling and soothing to the mind
- Helps prevent respiratory tract diseases
- Beneficial in the treatment of headaches and migraines
- Alleviates anxiety, anger and depression
- Removes drowsiness, making the head and sense organs feel light and smooth



Meir Schneider and the 'Bates Method'

Meir Schneider was born with cataracts and by the time his eyes were operated on, at the age of four, his brain had lost the opportunity to develop the ability to see. He had already developed nystagmus, which is involuntary movement of the eyes, glaucoma, which is high pressure in the eyeball, and cross-eyes. The surgery, and the four operations that were done later, scarred his lenses to the extent that light could hardly penetrate through them. By the age of 7 he was declared legally blind for life, and for the next ten years did all his reading in Braille. Today he can even read the small print on his unrestricted driver's licence. Meir broke boundaries and proved that eyes cannot only get worse, as is the common belief, but can also improve.

At the age of 17 Meir was introduced to vision improvement exercises, a method developed by Dr. William Bates over 100 years ago. In his studies of visual function, Bates observed how people behaved visually when they see perfectly and based on these observations, he developed a series of exercises to mimic optimal visual behaviour. He also learned how people create refractive errors - nearsightedness (myopia) far-sightedness (hyperopia), middle-age farsightedness (presbyopia), and astigmatism. In every case of refractive error he found "a strain of the mind" that was held in the body, the face, and especially the eyes. This anxiety, he found, was relived and relayed continuously along the body's neural pathways. To relieve chronic tension in the eyes, as in the rest of the body, Bates hypothesized, one must learn to use them properly and to relax them often; every Bates exercise is a relaxation technique.

Probably Bates' greatest gift was his ability to view medicine in a different light. Organs that could be seen as mechanical objects: the eye as a camera or the heart as a pump, could also be viewed holistically, as parts of an interdependent system. The body could be seen as intrinsically passive, and so requiring health care (drugs, surgery, corrective lenses) or as living tissue, with a built-in consciousness and a capacity for learning. Bates favoured the latter view.

It was already known in Bates' time that the tissue of the retina, the back of the eye where light falls on photosensitive cells, is brain tissue. The parts of the brain associated with vision are as much a part of the visual apparatus as the eyes are. In fact the brain is the dominant part of the visual system and Bates reasoned that seeing is psychological behaviour, which can be done well or done poorly. "We see very largely with the mind," he wrote, "and only partly with the eyes". Vision depends on the mind's interpretation of the impression on the retina. What we see is not that retinal impression but our own interpretation of it. But when, as a coping response that has become habitual, the mind refuses to let the eye see properly, a deliberate act of imagination can help.

Thus, Bates would invite patients to appreciate and visualize the forms and blackness of letters on an eye chart until the patients would at last give themselves permission to relax and see the letters. With the help of a retinoscope, which allows the user to determine the degree of visual clarity and nature of the subject's refractive error, Bates checked hundreds of thousands of eyes and the results surprised him. He found that normal 20/20 vision wasn't constant and none of the eyes he examined had perfect vision around the clock. Normally sighted eyes drifted off to moments of farsightedness, nearsightedness, and astigmatism, and then picked up again to 20/20. Bad vision got worse, got a little better, and even had flashes of perfect vision. Temporary anxieties often produced refractive error.

Bates had been taught that in daytime, full colour vision is sharpest in a small area in the centre of the retina called the macula, especially in the tiny centre of the macula, the fovea. The macula is sculpted into a parabolic receiver - like an antenna dish, but for light - with the fovea at the pit. Vision at the fovea is 20/20; 10 degrees off centre, it is 20/4000, within the realm of legal blindness. The correctly functioning eye sees the small detail it is focusing on best - a characteristic called central fixation. To see many details equally well, a correctly functioning eye will flit rapidly from one sharply realized detail to another; Bates called it shifting. Good daytime vision is passive and effortless, consisting of automatic and continual central fixation and shifting. The poorly functioning eye overstrains and then numbs the macula until it has lost central fixation.

The exercises that he devised release the tension from over-strained eyes and help regain central fixation ability.

There are now Meir Schneider centres teaching 'The Bates Technique' all around the world.

Eye exercises

Sleep in the dark: Curtains should shut out streetlights; the eyes get full rest only in darkness.

Palming: Rub your hands together, close your eyes and gently cover them with your hands so you block out all light but without pressing on the eye. Breathe easily and picture a black object – imagine this object on a black background and then paint the world black. Do this whenever the eyes need relaxing.

Peripheral vision: Take a black piece of paper four inches square and stick it between your eyebrows so you can't see in front of you. Sit in a dark room and rapidly move two flashlights out to either side of you while looking straight ahead. As your peripheral vision improves, increase the challenge by moving the flashlights further back. Alternatively you may do this exercise in normal light and substitute wagging movements of the fingers for the movement of the flashlights. This exercise will improve your peripheral vision and train both eyes to work together.

Shifting: Look at a picture on the wall in a relaxed way and move your attention from one small detail to another. Then close your eyes and visualize what you have just seen. Repeat. The same brain cells work for visualizing as for seeing and this exercise helps retrain them and strengthens the macula.

Blinking: Sit easily, breathing gently and blink rapidly one hundred times - then close the eyes and visualize blinking a hundred times. Repeat. This massages and cleanses the eyes. In times of stress, just when blinking and relaxed breathing would be most useful, we are most likely to suspend these essential functions.

Focusing: Place the index finger 6 inches in front of the eyes and, for approx 30 seconds, alternate your focus from your finger to an object on the horizon. This should be simple and smooth with no strain or discomfort. The speed of alternating may increase as strength of eye muscles improve.

Far-Reading: Place some reading material on a wall, relax, breathe easily and read from a distance that is comfortable – increase the distance gradually each day (read for 30 seconds).

Near-Reading: Relax, breathe gently and place reading material at the nearest distance that is comfortable to read from. Decrease distance very gradually each day (read for 30 seconds).

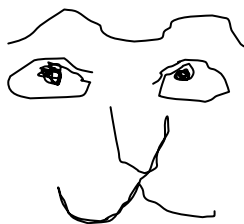
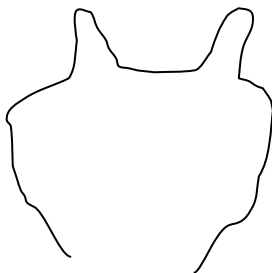
Colours: With eyes CLOSED look towards sun (or full spectrum light) for 30 seconds and then turn away. Watch the colours in a relaxed and gentle way – massage eyes – watch colours again (for as long as is comfortable). Repeat.

Eye positioning: Hold eyes in a relaxed fashion for 30 seconds in each direction - look up-left; look down-left; look up-right; look down-right; look through third eye/centre of eyebrows; focus on tip of nose; imagine looking at tongue. Do not strain and look for as long as is comfortable. Increase time each day if comfortable (30 secs max.).

Tramlines: Draw a circle with tramlines and place on a wall in front of you. Now circle the eyes clockwise round the train-line for 30 seconds. Repeat in an anti-clockwise direction.

Dotting: Draw a circle and randomly place a few dots within the circle. Place the paper on a wall in front of you. Now allow the eyes to randomly follow the dots in no particular sequence as in dot-to-dot. Now do this with the eyes closed.

The cat: Bring the face of the cat and the body of the cat together by altering focus – go half cross eyes but while looking at cat in a relaxed fashion. Don't try too hard or strain – be relaxed and breath normally – this may take time to master.



Caring for the eyes

Netra program

This program can be undertaken two or three times each year. It is especially beneficial for Pitta types who are more prone to eye complaints and is indicated for eyes that are frequently tired, hot, achy or gritty. Outside of this program, the application of ghee to the eyes should not be practiced for more than two or three days consecutively, as this can allow the eyes to become lazy and may prevent them from producing their own lubrication.

Instructions:

Melt a small amount of ghee in your palms and apply to eye area (with eyes closed). Open eyes slowly and blink a few times so that ghee bathes the eyes.

Week one	Practice every night before bed
Week two	Practice every other night before bed (ie; three times during week)
Week three	Practice every third night before bed (ie; twice during week)
Week four	Practice four days after last application
Week five	Practice five days after last application
Week six	Practice six days after last application
Week seven	Practice seven days after last application

The idea is to gradually reduce the number of times each week that you practice this procedure. Thus, in the first week you are placing ghee in the eyes every night and by week seven you are only placing ghee in the eyes once during the week.

‘The Willis technique’

If your eyesight has become less focused when reading, or even if you use reading glasses for close up work, this simple exercise will help retrain your eyes to relax and focus again.

Practice ‘palming’ (see eye exercises).

Open a book with relatively large print.

Slowly and easily (without straining to see individual words) scan the page.

After a while the odd word may jump out and be clearly visible.

At this stage stop scanning and read the page.

If you get a headache stop reading, close your eyes and practice palming for a couple of minutes and then try again.

Don’t worry if words don’t jump out at first, just persevere with this daily practice each day and eventually they will. The key is patience and a relaxed mind.

Balancing the female cycle

Everyday women of all ages experience a need for relief from pre-menstrual, menstrual, pre-menopausal and menopausal symptoms. Conditions such as mood swings, cramps, excessive bleeding, irregular cycles, hot flashes, and seemingly insatiable cravings affect hundreds of thousands of women.

Ayurvedic therapy is not based purely on the removal of symptoms; rather, it empowers the body to heal itself. In this regard treatment identifies and addresses the initial cause of PMS. The root cause of most cases of PMS begins early in the lifestyle of a menstruating young woman.

Charaka and the other Ayurvedic authorities state that the suppression of natural urges, stress, excessive sex and excessive physical exercise, along with an improper diet and lifestyle, are major contributors to the cause of female reproductive disorders. There is a general consensus among Ayurvedic physicians as to why the excessive amount of female disorders plague the West and not the East, and it has much to do with honouring the cycle itself. In India, the menstrual cycle is a highly respected cycle that is an expression of the female connectedness to the cycles of the moon. This lunar cycle regulates the tides, migrations, mating times and the twenty-eight day cycle of menstruation.

Menses is a time when the female body provides extra energy to insure an effective and complete flushing of waste products. It is a natural time of cleansing and rejuvenation, traditionally accompanied by a time of rest or light duty. In traditional cultures there were extended families that supported women during their monthly cycle and through menstruation. Whilst, in the West, this is rarely the case it does not mean that the modern working women cannot respect this time of the month by reducing stress and opting for a lighter work load. Ignoring this cycle is often at the root of the premenstrual syndrome. If there is some desire to rest during menstruation and this is not provided, then symptoms of some sort are sure to come about. Ayurvedic doctors generally recognise that the menstrual cycle and monthly cleansing is one of the factors that lead to the generally longer life span of women compared to men.

The simple dietary and lifestyle adjustments recommended below can help offer relief from common premenstrual and menstrual syndromes, and facilitate a smooth transition into menopause. A healthy cycle will also naturally enhance fertility.

General recommendations:

- Maintain a proper balance of rest and activity throughout the month. Rest during the period and practice meditation, pranayama, yoga and exercise.
- Take 2 tbsp of pure aloe vera juice after meals twice a day, but not during or within 3 days of the end of the menstrual flow.
- Perform a daily self-massage with warm sesame oil followed by a hot bath or shower. Pitta types should use warm coconut oil followed by a warm shower.
- Each day for seven days before the period begins do a self-massage, followed by a hot bath. Massage the abdomen in a clockwise motion during the bath.
- On the seventh day before your period, follow your self-massage and bath with laxative therapy: On an empty stomach, take 30mls of castor oil mixed with ½ cup of apple or carrot juice. Do not eat until the majority of the laxative action has occurred (3 to 5 hours). Usually, this procedure results in 2 to 5 bowel movements. You may repeat this monthly for up to 6 months.
- Eliminate caffeine as this can have a dramatic effect in women with fibrocystic breast disease.
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol as this will reduce bloating and water retention in most women.

- If you have pitta or kapha symptoms cut back on salt, sour foods and dairy products as this will also help reduce bloating and water retention.
- Eat stewed apples if you wish to relieve constipation.
- Drink sweet ginger tea to help regulate disturbed or absent menses. Use raw honey or raw cane sugar.
- Add saffron to meals to help regulate the menstrual cycle, relieve dysmenorrhoea and PMS, and promote fertility. Saffron is also a digestive aid and also helps relieve respiratory congestion.
- Herbs that are known to reduce symptoms associated with premenstrual syndrome, infertility, menopause and irregular or painful menstrual cycles include: Ashoka which is astringent, sedative, haemostatic, and it is particularly good for those with an uncomfortably profuse menstrual flow; Shatavari which is a nutritive tonic and anti-spasmodic – it also contains glucosides which are a food precursor of estrogen. It helps bring on menses when one is experiencing amenorrhea (absence of periods); It is also commonly used for dysmenorrhoea (painful periods); Punarnava which rejuvenates the endometrium and enhances the tone of the uterus. It has been traditionally used for endometriosis and fibroid tumours.

Treatment of Vata Type PMS:

Symptoms of vata imbalance, as they manifest in relation to the menstrual cycle include: nervous tension, mood swings, anxiety/depression; insomnia; forgetfulness/confusion; constipation; light amount of flow; menstrual pain/cramps/backache; extended length of period with dark, clotted flow; irregularity of periods or flow.

- Follow a Vata pacifying diet.
- Chew fennel seeds after each meal to prevent gas and gallbladder congestion.
- Drink fennel and licorice tea to help relieve PMS and regulate menstruation.
- Take 1 tsp of castor oil every night for one month. Take less if there is a laxative effect.
- If you usually have a light amount of flow; menstrual pain/cramps/backache; extended length of period with dark, clotted flow; irregularity of periods or flow combine 2 parts shatavari, 2 parts musta, 1 part licorice, 1 part punarnava. Mix 1 tsp of this combination with sugar and ghee and take 3x a day.
- If you often have nervous tension, mood swings, anxiety/depression, insomnia, forgetfulness/confusion, and/or constipation, combine equal pts: brahmi, jatamamsi, ashwagandha, guduchi. Mix 1 tsp of this combination with water and take 3x a day.
- For pain experienced during the period, application of heat externally to the lower abdomen is advised. This may be accomplished by massaging warm ripened sesame oil on the abdomen followed by the application of a hot water bottle directly to the oiled skin.

Treatment of Pitta type PMS:

Symptoms of pitta imbalance, as they manifest in relation to the menstrual cycle include: irritability/anger; increased appetite; headache (especially migraine); excessive body heat or sweating; diarrhoea or increased bowel movements; skin rashes/acne; excessive menstrual bleeding; increased frequency of periods; bright red flow.

- Follow a Pitta-pacifying diet.
- Take 10mls ghee (clarified butter) with ten raisins daily.
- Drink fennel and/or coriander tea during the day.
- Take 2 parts shatavari, 1 part Ashoka, 1 part turmeric, 1 part brahmi. Take 1 tsp with water three times a day.

- To decrease pitta and vata, take manjistha (1-2g) three times a day after meals.
- Exercise moderately but avoid overheating.
- Apply coconut oil to the head and feet at bedtime for more restful sleep and headache prevention.
- Apply ghee to the nostrils for one week before the period.
- Avoid overheating, hot water on the head, and over-exposure to sunlight.
- When irritable or out of sorts it is important to ensure that you are getting adequate rest.
- Be sure not to take long hot showers or hot baths during your heavy flow days as these tend to increase flow. Take a short shower or sponge bath instead.

Treatment of Kapha type PMS:

Symptoms of Kapha imbalance as they manifest in relation to the menstrual cycle include: weight gain; fluid retention; breast enlargement; abdominal bloating; acne; menstrual stiffness in back and joints; pale, mucousy menstrual flow.

- Follow a Kapha-pacifying diet.
- Avoid overeating, especially at night and do not eat when you are not hungry.
- A primarily vegetarian diet is highly recommended.
- Include ginger in your daily diet: take a pinch of fresh ginger root with a few drops of lemon juice before each meal. Spice food with turmeric, ginger, black pepper, and cinnamon.
- Take a herbal mixture of equal parts: shatavari, ashwagandha, trikatu. Mix with honey into a paste and take 1 tsp three times a day. Also take 1 tsp Dashmula in 2 cups water and boil down to ½ cup; drink ½ cup two times a day. Dashmula is a Ayurvedic formula containing ten roots.
- If you are prone to sluggishness, prepare a calamus nasya: combine ½ teaspoon calamus with 1 ounce sesame oil. Place 10-15 drops into each nostril, three times a day.
- It is especially important to get daily exercise. A brisk walk for 30 minutes is the minimum exercise required. Perform deep nasal breathing during exercise.
- Do not sleep during the day unless illness or unusual circumstances cause exhaustion. Always try to avoid sleeping within 2 hours after a meal.

How to keep your joints healthy

To understand how to maintain proper health and function of the joints, we first need to look at their anatomy and physiology. Joints hold the bones together and are designed to provide movement within the skeletal system. The main function of bone is support, while the joints allow a certain amount of flexibility and to our structure. The synovial joints, where the ends of bone are connected by a joint cavity or capsule containing synovial fluid, allow freedom and fluidity in the articulation of our movements.

The supportive tissues; ligaments, tendons, and connective tissue, are kapha dosha, while the joint cavity or space where the bones meet is an element ruled by vata dosha. The joint capsule provides a container for the slippery synovial fluid, again a kapha substance that lubricates the ends of the bone surfaces and also accommodates a tough, protective covering into which the ligaments and tendons can insert themselves. It is through the ligaments that nerve impulses are transmitted to the muscles signalling movement, a function of vata dosha.

Healthy joint tissue and function are crucial to how we move and express ourselves through our bodies. According to ayurveda, vitiated or disturbed vata dosha can create imbalance within the joints resulting in pain and discomfort. Most commonly affected joints are knees, ankles, elbows, wrists, fingers and toes. When there is an imbalance in the joints, it is important to discern whether or not the imbalance exists with or without ama, a sticky toxic substance. A simple test can be done with organic sesame oil. Massage the oil into the joint. If the symptoms are aggravated, then there is ama present, a condition known as amavata. If the symptoms are alleviated by the oil massage, or stay the same, then the treatment will begin with the removal of the causative factors and balancing vata dosha.

The dryness of vata can deplete the lubricating qualities of kapha and joint surfaces can become rough and brittle. Common symptoms of vata imbalance in the joints are dryness, popping and cracking, and muscle tics and spasms. Some common causative factors are jogging, jumping, excessive exercise, injury, consuming too many dry foods, living in a cold, dry climate and irregular eating habits and lifestyle. Entering the vata season of life of fifty years and older will also increase vata dosha throughout the body. Particularly during the vata season of autumn and winter, when the temperature becomes cold and the wind begins to blow, symptoms may become aggravated. Ayurveda offers simple guidelines and herbal remedies for supporting healthy function of the joints.

A few lifestyle therapies for balancing excess vata in the joints are:

- Maintain a regular schedule, sleeping and waking at the same time each day.
- Abhyanga, self-oil massage every evening. Choose organic sesame or vata massage oil.
- Massage medicinal Mahanarayan oil locally into sore, stiff joints.
- Follow vata pacifying diet, taking meals at regular times each day.
- Practice gentle yoga.

In a condition of amavata, ama is carried by misdirected or vitiated vata into general circulation throughout the body. When it interacts with the kapha in the joint spaces, the synovial fluid loses its' highly viscous quality and changes into a sticky toxic substance. It can begin to block vital channels throughout the body that carry nutrients to the tissues and cause dysfunction within the joint. The immune system can begin to attack the ama stored in the joints causing an inflammation of the joint lining. Inflamed tissue can result in symptoms of excess heat, redness, pain, stiffness, and swelling. Acute inflammation, if left untreated, can cause damage or injury to the joint and bone tissue resulting in a chronic condition. Untreated chronic inflammation can lead to degenerative disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis. Ama can be clotted together with dead cells which the immune system sweeps up. Because it can also be so deeply embedded within healthy tissue, the immune cells can become confused by the similarity to that which it has been scavenging, unable to properly identify the toxic invader from the healthy tissue; an "autoimmune" reaction.

The primary causes for accumulation of ama are improper diet, excessive exercise, exhaustion due to overwork, extreme worry, and the use of alcohol. It commonly occurs in cold, damp climates. For the condition of amavata, removing the causative factors and eliminating ama from the body are paramount. Treatment to balance the doshas and rejuvenate the joint and bone tissue ensues.

Here are some additional lifestyle guidelines to help reduce ama and restore balance:

- Favour warm, nourishing, easy to digest meals such as Kichari (rice and lentil soup).
- Include ghee or flax seed oil in your diet as both are nourishing and anti-inflammatory.
- Avoid white sugar and alcohol.
- Use unprocessed, raw honey (uncooked) to help gently scrape away ama.
- Avoid dairy, particularly ice cream and cheese.
- Apply castor oil to sore joints and then apply a heating pad to help reduce inflammation and scrape ama.
- Keep the colon clean and empty bowels regularly each day.
- Sip hot water and tea made from dry ginger root (or ginger tea bags).
- Practice deep, abdominal breathing exercises (pranayama) to gently help to move toxins from the body.
- Meditate daily for clarity.
- Address any psychological disturbances or unresolved emotions.

Herbs traditionally used to help increase the body's digestive fire and enable cleansing and expulsion of ama, while reducing inflammation and rejuvenating the joints include:

- Guggulu – an anti-inflammatory with strong purifying and rejuvenating properties. Indicated for arthritis, rheumatism, gout, lumbago, disorders of the nervous, respiratory, digestive and circulatory systems.
- Guduchi - a broad spectrum pitta-reducing herb that destroys toxins and strengthens immunity.
- Triphala - Amalaki, Bibhitaki, and Haritaki - the three fruits for detoxifying and tonifying the body.
- Vidanga - a powerful herb which destroys ama (toxins).
- Ashwagandha - an adaptogenic rejuvenative herb with anti-inflammatory properties.
- Gokshura - an anti-inflammatory and rejuvenative.
- Turmeric - an anti-bacterial and powerful blood purifier with anti-inflammatory properties.
- Trikatu (ginger, black pepper and pippali) – a powerful digestive aids that increases agni (digestive fire), helps burn ama and promotes circulation.

How to cope with allergies

Allergies, whether from food, pollen, dust, mould, or dander, are typically a form of hypersensitivity reaction. The underlying causes of allergic symptoms are rarely from the allergens themselves, making proper Ayurvedic diagnosis essential. A main causative factor of allergies is a by-product of improperly digested food. This toxic substance, called ama, is manufactured in the digestive system and is absorbed into the circulatory system. Once systemic, ama can block and clog the channels of circulation.

The removal of ama in the circulatory system will often play a primary role in the management of immediate allergic hypersensitivity. Depending on body type, the underlying cause of allergic hypersensitivities will vary. It should be understood that mental and emotional stresses are also common contributing factors in a hypersensitive allergic response.

Ayurveda compares the body to a field and allergens to seeds; if the land is not fertile, then any seeds that are sown will not sprout. The fertilizer is a toxic residue called ama - a sticky substance formed in the digestive system from food that has been incompletely processed. It lowers natural immunity and increases receptivity to allergens. This toxic by-product migrates to the body's points of weakness, creating a vicious cycle by lowering resistance even more.

Allergies to pollen and other plant materials also involve an imbalance of the Kapha dosha, which controls the lungs, sinuses, and fluid balance in the body. When Kapha is out of balance, exposure to allergens stimulates symptoms like watery eyes, sneezing, coughing and fatigue.

Kapha's strongest influence is during peak allergy season, March-June. The presence of ama can weaken the thymus gland or spleen; both of which contribute to the body's immune system and trigger allergic reactions. However, eating more of certain foods and herbs can help remove ama, bring balance to Kapha, and thus hold allergies at bay.

The first step is to minimize chilled foods and high-fat dishes (such as cheese, yogurt and meat) and replace them with warm, freshly cooked foods, including plenty of asparagus and broccoli, both of which support the immune system. Then integrate the herbs turmeric and tulsi (or holy basil) into your diet.

Turmeric activates the liver and strengthens the blood to help remove ama, and research shows that turmeric's active ingredient, curcumin, has an anti-allergic effect. You can sprinkle a mixture of ground turmeric, cumin, coriander, bay leaf, and cinnamon in your food. You can also bring a cup of milk to the boil, remove it from the heat, add a bay leaf and a pinch each of turmeric and cinnamon and then drink it warm.

Holy basil strengthens the immune system, reduces ama, and helps remove environmental pollution from the body. For an effective anti-allergy tea, bring a pint of water to a boil, remove from the heat, and for five minutes steep five holy basil leaves, two pinches licorice, one bay leaf, a pinch of cinnamon, and a pinch of cardamom.

You may also want to try this Ama-Reducing Program for one month:

- Sip plain hot water every half-hour
- Drink eight to ten glasses of warm lemon water each day
- Avoid dairy and wheat and favour fruits and vegetables
- Eat a big, relaxing meal at lunchtime and a lighter meal of soup for dinner
- Exercise for at least half an hour each day
- Retire to bed by 10:00 pm
- Waking up with the sun

If you are suffering from rhinitis or excess dryness, this is a Vata cause and would most likely respond well to the Vata treatments. If you are suffering from sinusitis, internal heat, or excessive irritability or anger, you may benefit from using the Pitta treatments. If you are suffering from congestion or fatigue, the best option may be to select Kapha treatments.

Vata causes: The vata body type is susceptible to various hypersensitivity reactions. In the case of allergic rhinitis, a vata imbalance will cause excessive dryness in the body. When this dryness finds its way to the respiratory system and sinuses, the protective mucous lining will dry up. This natural protection acts as a filter, temperature buffer, and first

line of allergic immunity. When this layer of mucous dries up, the airborne allergens of dust, pollen, and pollution act as irritants in the sinuses, evoking an immediate hypersensitivity response. The body's natural response to these irritants is to lay down mucous as a means of protection. The dryness alone will also trigger the body to produce mucous, making allergic symptoms a common vata condition. In this instance, allergic symptoms can be chronic and constant due to a deep mucosal dryness rather than a particular allergen. The vata body type is also particularly sensitive to lifestyle and daily routine. Most importantly with regard to allergens, the vata type must take the proper time to eat a large lunch in a relaxed atmosphere without the distractions of television, magazines, or phone calls. Such distractions aggravate the vata aspects of digestion, producing ama and hypersensitivity reactions.

Vata treatments:

- Nasya: sniff sesame oil deeply into both nostrils two to three times a day
- Triphala: take ½ teaspoon per day on an empty stomach
- Ginger root tea: take three to four cups per day; also; also chew small pieces as a lozenge

Pitta causes: The pitta type will be subject to an accumulation of heat in the body and blood. The heat is produced as a result of a physiological hyper-metabolic state needed to burn off the excess ama in the blood. This heat, as does all heat, will rise up in the body into the head and neck. When this heat rises up into the sinuses, the effect is one of dryness along with the accumulation of impurities (ama) in the blood. The result of the dryness aggravates vata as we mentioned previously, and the excess blood ama aggravates pitta. The sinuses respond by acting as organs of excretion rather than secretion producing an allergic response. The treatment for pitta-based allergic response is twofold. The blood must be purified with pitta-pacifying herbs and the dryness must be dealt with, as in the case of vata.

Pitta treatments:

- Take ½ teaspoon of cumin seed as a lozenge during the day
- Triphala: take ½ teaspoon twice a day on an empty stomach
- Nasya: sniff coconut oil deeply into both nostrils two to three times a day
- Turmeric powder: take ½ teaspoon with ¼ cup warm milk, three times a day after meals
- Neem leaf tea: drink 3-4 cups per day as a detoxifier

Kapha causes: The kapha body type is classically the most susceptible to allergies and kapha imbalances and is often mislabeled the causative factor in most allergic conditions. It is the nature of kapha to produce and hold onto more water, congestion and ama however, and the treatment of kapha in all allergies is a common mistake. The symptoms of most allergic responses are kapha in nature with the production of congestion, fatigue, and malaise; but the CAUSE of these kapha symptoms may be vata, pitta, or kapha. This diagnosis is crucial. It is, however, very common for the cause and symptoms of an allergic response to be kapha in nature. In this regard, the treatment is straightforward with the focus on pacifying kapha with bitter, astringent, and pungent herbs and spices, in order to remove excess mucous. Allergy treatments can become more complicated when multiple causes are present. Imbalances in vata and kapha, for example, can easily create chronic allergic symptoms. Treatment for each are opposite in nature, and care must be given to balance both kapha and vata at the same time.

Kapha treatments:

- Trikatu: take ¼ teaspoon with raw honey before each meal
- Sitopladi: take ½ teaspoon with raw honey three times a day on an empty stomach
- Licorice: take ½ teaspoon with warm water after meals
- Maintain a liquid diet one day per week, as ama-reducing therapy. This diet generally consists of eating vegetables and fruits which have been put through a blender and liquefied. Meals can be taken at room temperature, warm or hot. The liquid diet is normally part of an Ayurvedic cleansing program; putting foods through a blender prior to ingestion puts less strain on the digestive system.

Stress free vacations

(a few tips to help you enjoy holiday travel)

- Plan well ahead to avoid panicking and rushing about arranging last minute details.
- Consciously make an effort to enjoy the journey to your chosen destination and take pride in the preparations – preparations are a chance to find out about new places and new ways to travel while delays during travel are opportunities to meet new people and catch up on some reading.
- Leave yourself time to wind down from work before you go away – take time to pack and relax for a few days before you depart.
- Once you leave work, put the phone on answer, delegate and trust other people to make decisions and advance things on your behalf and, above all, don't be tempted to phone in to check on how things are going. Tell work colleagues not to ring you at home or on holiday – it's your rest and re-cooperation time.
- Make sure you've got enough foreign currency – get it before you go to avoid rushing about at the airport or trying to find somewhere to exchange money at your destination. Have your money, credit cards, passport, travel ticket, accommodation details and other crucial paperwork and telephone numbers somewhere together where you won't forget them.
- Rest, relax, exercise, eat healthily and meditate regularly during the week before you go away. You'll be able to settle into the vacation and enjoy it all the more if you're already rested and fully prepared before you go.
- Make sure your diet is as healthy as possible in the weeks before you go away – this ensures maximum immunity, settled digestion and loads of energy and vitality stored up to allow your holiday to be fully enjoyed. The most important thing is to avoid any processed or refined foods (very few nutrients and lots of toxins for the body to deal with). Avoid refined sugar (in most processed/refined/packaged foods), reduce salt (except Vata types), avoid white/brown bread and white pasta/rice (except basmati), avoid margarine (stick to butter, ghee or olive oil) and cut down on red meat and cold milk.
- Favour organic produce for maximum nutrition and energy (you'll eat less and they'll be more tasty). Favour fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains (rice, buckwheat, barley, millet, quinoa etc), homemade fruit/veg juices and small tasty salads. Reduce tea/coffee and alcohol and favour herbal teas and hot water with lemon or ginger.
- Maximize the use of 'superfoods' such as wheatgrass (fresh or powdered), spirulina, chlorella, kelp, milk thistle, ginseng, ground sunflower/ pumpkin/linseed and almonds.
- Set off for the airport with loads of time to spare. Take plenty of reading material to occupy your time if you are delayed in airports etc. Enjoy the delays and don't get angry or frustrated – use the time to your benefit – read, talk, eat early etc.
- Once on holiday drink plenty of water (not ice-cold as this destroys your power of digestion and can lead to stomach upsets). Eat only when hungry and avoid eating past the feeling of comfort – put less on your plate and wait five minutes before taking seconds – usually you don't need any after that.
- Pitta types should avoid too much sun and keep cool – plenty of water and a good sun cream. Coconut oil or ghee/aloe vera with lavender oil helps soothe and re-moisturise the skin.

Tips for air travel

Jet lag and travel sickness are due to a Vata imbalance caused by excess movement and can be reduced or avoided by following the recommendations below:

Before you fly:

- Ensure adequate rest and a good nights sleep the night before travel.
- Exercise, practice yoga, pranayama and meditation on the morning before travel.
- Take ginger pickle before main meals in the week preceding travel.
- Avoid cabbage, Brussels spouts, beans and other vata increasing foods for 24 hrs before you travel.
- Massage sesame oil into the nostrils immediately before the flight.
- Apply lavender or sandalwood essential oil to temples, ears and forehead.

During the flight:

- Sip hot water with ginger and lemon or peppermint.
- Meditate for twenty minutes soon after take off and then again after every two hours flight time.
- Apply lavender oil to handkerchief and sniff periodically.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic and cold drinks before and during travel.
- Read a light novel rather than taxing the brain with work-related or hard-to-follow literature.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Take 'No Jet Lag' tablets (www.wellness-shop.co.uk) and 'Jet Ease' tablets (www.garden.co.uk).

After the flight:

- Walk in nature and undertake some light exercise.
- Practice yoga, balanced breathing (pranayama) and meditate in the early evening.
- Have an early night.

During the holiday:

- Drink plenty of hot water (with lemon or fennel seeds) to maintain healthy, balanced digestion.
- Practice yoga, pranayama and meditation each morning and evening.
- Be sensible with the amount of time spent in the sun (cover up between 11am and 3pm).
- Apply coconut oil to enhance your tan, prevent burning and help keep the skin moisturised.
- Aloe Vera (or ghee) with a little lavender oil for sunburn.

Before the return flight: See 'before you fly'



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