

Managing a Kapha Constitution



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Nearly everywhere we look in nature, there are creatures engaging in some sort of consistent daily routine. The natural world at large is deeply influenced by the rhythms of nature – the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the seasons, and the underlying impulses directing the broader community of life.

The Qualities of Kapha

"Snigdha shita gururmandah shlakshno mritsnah sthirah kaphah"

Kapha is unctuous, cool, heavy, slow, smooth, soft, and static. — Ashtanga Hridayam: Sutrasthana I:12

This Sanskrit line lists the main qualities of kapha and provides a key to understanding what it means to have a predominantly kapha prakriti.

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The main qualities of kapha are unctuous, cool, heavy, slow, smooth, soft, and stable. It is also dense, cloudy, and viscous. So, having a kapha-predominant prakriti means that these qualities express themselves generously throughout your mental, emotional, and physical make up. You may find them reflected in your strengths and weaknesses.

- The unctuous quality can allow for smooth joint function but, if pronounced, can lead to excess mucous.
- The cool quality may manifest as cool skin and a laid-back, cool temperament.
- Heaviness may manifest as a large, sturdy, grounded physical and emotional constitution and, in excess, as being overweight or experiencing a subjective feeling of heaviness in the mind.
- Slowness may manifest as a slow gait or a slow, steady pace that you can maintain. In excess, you may get stuck in a pattern that may not be the best for you.
- Softness can manifest as a soft heart that is easily empathic. Another manifestation of this quality is having soft skin.
- Stability can be an asset that friends, family, and colleagues probably recognize and perhaps lean on, but in excess could become stubbornness or sluggishness. You could become so stable that you are disinclined toward any physical activity.
- Density can manifest as good stamina and strong, well-formed muscles and bones. This enables the kapha constitution to withstand vigorous exercise. This quality is also responsible for dense, luxurious hair.

Decreasing or Balancing Kapha

Like Increases Like

A basic tenet of Ayurveda is "like increases like." Therefore, increasing the inherent qualities of kapha will increase kapha in your body, mind, and spirit.

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For example, because kapha is inherently cool, heavy, and wet—cold weather, heavy foods, or wet seasons tend to increase kapha. Knowing this can help identify which lifestyle choices, foods, or environments will bring balance to your constitution.

Example: You are a kapha individual. Kapha is heavy, dense, wet, cold, and static. If you eat a large bowl of ice cream (heavy, dense, wet, and cold,) at night (cold) in winter in Vermont (cold, wet), you can be sure that kapha will increase in your system. The next morning you may find yourself with a cold, having gained a pound or two (the increase of heavy and dense), and less likely to move than ever (static).

Tastes That Increase and Decrease Kapha

Along with the main qualities of kapha, it is also helpful to know those tastes that increase or decrease kapha.

Sweet, sour, sour and salty tastes increase kapha by increasing bulk and moisture in the body and mind, and by perpetuating the qualities of kapha. An example of the naturally sweet taste is wheat; of sour: a pickle; of salty: salt.

The pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes traditionally decrease kapha by drying the body and providing the opposite qualities to those of kapha. An example of the pungent taste is chili pepper; of bitter and astringent (which are often coupled): many leafy greens and many herbs.

Opposites as Medicine

Each of us has a unique proportion of the three doshas in our prakritis. Ayurveda teaches us that if a dosha increases beyond its original, natural proportion for us, it fosters an environment where disease can flourish.

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It is common for our predominant dosha (vata, pitta, or kapha) to increase more quickly than other doshas because we tend to perpetuate what we know best. For example, if your dominant dosha is kapha, due to the slow quality of kapha you may be naturally inclined toward calming activities. In excess, this quality may lead to stagnation.

If a dosha increases in our bodies, Ayurveda suggests that we will want to decrease it in order to restore a healthy balance to our constitution.

Medicines are substances that decrease the excess dosha by providing the opposite qualities to it. For example, if kapha has increased due to excess stagnation in your life, activity can be a medicine. If it has increased due to excess coolness, you can use heat as a medicine. Too much heaviness? Use lightness.

One of the practical aspects of Ayurveda is that anything can be used as a medicine because everything that exists has a quality. This includes but is not limited to: herbs, foods, drinks, environments, colors, smells, and lifestyles.

Qualities opposite to kapha are predominantly warm, dry, light, and active. It is therefore best for kapha individuals to seek out physical and emotional environments, routines, and foods that possess these opposite qualities.

Opposites in Diet as Medicine

A kapha individual does well to have a moderate amount of warming, light, freshly cooked foods to maintain balance.

Because pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes decrease kapha, these tastes should be predominant in your diet.

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Herbal Support for a Kapha Constitution

A kapha individual does well to have a moderate amount of warming, light, freshly cooked foods to maintain balance.

Using herbs to manage your constitution compliments the changes you make in your diet and lifestyle. Bibhitakai, Chitrak and Punarnava are three of the primary herbs used to remove excess kapha from the body and maintain balance.

Opposites in Climate and Lifestyle as Medicine

Although kapha may be able to tolerate a wide variety of temperatures, the ideal environment is a warm and dry one. Active sports like jogging, hiking, biking, or competitive sports, especially in the morning, are best. Aromatic, invigorating, or heating scents, and light and lively music are also good "medicines" for kapha. A vigorous, daily, 10–20 minute self massage with warm sesame oil will help keep kapha from becoming stagnant.

One of the best medicines for kapha is activity. It is well worth the effort for the kapha individual to find that golden key to what motivates them. For example, if you have a difficult time motivating yourself to exercise regularly, you could enter yourself in a local bike race. This may give you just that extra push and you may be surprised by how much you enjoy yourself.

Yoga for Kapha Types

Visit the kapha pacifying yoga section on our website for information on how to customize your yoga practice to help balance kapha.

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Famous Kapha Examples

Oprah Winfrey: Large, luminescent eyes and frame. Compassionate. Generous.

Luciano Pavarotti: Deep, resonant voice. Large frame.

Now What?

Knowing our Prakriti is useful because it increases awareness of our natural strengths and challenges. This is a positive first step towards understanding health.

The second step is to understand if and how we have strayed from our natural, healthy constitution. In Ayurveda, we determine this by comparing our Prakriti (natural constitution) with our Vikriti, our current condition.

The next step is to determine your current condition.



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KAPHA PACIFYING DAILY ROUTINE

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KAPHA PACIFYING DIET

Kapha is balanced by a diet of freshly cooked, whole foods that are light, dry, warming, well spiced, and relatively easy to digest – ideally served warm or hot. These foods calm kapha by balancing mucous production, regulating moisture levels, maintaining adequate heat, and by supporting proper digestion and elimination.

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Okra



Black Beans



Berries



Sprouts



Wild Rice



Peppers



Pumpkin Seeds



Lemon & Lime



Cherries



Spinach

KAPHA PACIFYING FOODS

Kapha is heavy, cool, oily, and smooth, so eating foods that neutralize these qualities – foods that are light, warm, dry, and rough – can help to balance excess kapha.

DISCLAIMER

The above Prakriti test and results are intended as a convenient tool to provide practical information on your Ayurvedic constitutional type. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. In addition, it should be noted that while this information should be considered highly useful it is not meant to replace the skilled constitutional analysis of a professionally trained Ayurvedic Physician.

