

Managing a Pitta 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 Pitta

"Pittam sasneha tikshnoshnam laghu visram, saram dravam"

Pitta is oily, sharp, hot, light, fleshy-smelling, spreading, and liquid.—
Ashtanga Hridayam: Sutrasthana I:11

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

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The main qualities of pitta are oily, sharp, hot, light, fleshy smelling, spreading, and liquid. So, having a pitta-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 oily quality allows for softness of skin but, in excess, can manifest as oily skin, acne or perhaps the quality of being a "snake oil salesman"; manipulating situations to your advantage.
- The sharp quality may manifest as a sharp, bright intellect or, in excess, as a sharp tongue.
- "Hotness" can manifest as a warm, rosy complexion, warm body temperature, strong metabolism and appetite or, in excess, as ulcers, heartburn, or a hot temper.
- The light quality may lead you to have a slender body or to get light-headed if you miss a meal.
- The "fleshy-smelling" quality may manifest as a strong body odor.
- The spreading quality may manifest as a tendency to spread your name or influence or opinion around the local or global neighborhood. This quality can also manifest as a spreading rash.
- The liquid quality may manifest as excess sweating; when it's combined with the hot quality it can present as excess stomach acid.

Decreasing or Balancing Pitta

Like Increases Like

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

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For example, because pitta is inherently hot—hot weather, hot foods, the hot seasons and times of day, and even hot emotions can increase pitta. Likewise humid environments will increase the liquid quality and thereby increase pitta.

Example: You are a pitta individual. Pitta is hot in nature. You visit the equator for a vacation and you sunbathe for six hours daily and enjoy hot, spicy food daily for one week. At the end of the week you suffer from an acute rash and terrible heartburn and find yourself in an awful temper. Ayurveda would say that your heat-increasing indulgences increased the natural heat in your pitta constitution and lead to hot conditions "erupting" in your body and emotions. This is an extreme example to illustrate a point.

Tastes That Increase and Decrease Pitta

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

Pungent, sour, and salty tastes increase pitta, by increasing its hot quality. An example of the pungent taste is chili pepper; of sour: pickles and of salty: salt.

Sweet, bitter, and astringent tastes will decrease pitta by providing the opposite qualities to those of pitta. An example of naturally sweet taste is wheat; of bitter and astringent (which are often coupled): many leafy greens and 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 the best. For example, if your dominant dosha is pitta, you may be intellectually bright, due to the hot and sharp qualities of pitta. However, this very quality that is inherent in pitta may eventually aggravate it and create mental or physical "burn out."

Medicines are substances, which decrease the excess dosha by providing the opposite qualities to it. For example, if excess mental wrestling has resulted in "burn out," a comfortable, soft couch and a cool mind can be medicines. If it has increased due to excess heat, coolness can be the medicine. Too much moisture? Use dryness.

One of the wonderfully 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 pitta are those that are dry, soft, cool, heavy, sweet smelling, and contained. It is therefore best for pitta individuals to seek out physical and emotional environments, routines, and foods that possess these opposite qualities.

Opposites in Diet as Medicine

A pitta individual does well to have fresh, cooling foods. They have difficulty skipping meals because they tend to have strong appetites. Because they also have strong digestive systems, they tend to tolerate raw foods better than the other doshas but they must be careful to avoid hot foods, alcohol, caffeine, irritability, high aggression, and anger because these will create too much pitta and weaken the digestive system.

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Because the sweet, bitter, and astringent tastes decrease pitta, these tastes should be predominant in your diet. Note that this is not necessarily a green light to eat refined sugary foods and drinks. The naturally sweet taste that is found in many grains, squashes, natural sweeteners and fruits is most appropriate and can help balance pitta.

Herbal Support for a Pitta Constitution

Using herbs to manage your constitution compliments the changes you make in your diet and lifestyle. Brahmi, Bhringaraj and Guduchi are three of the primary herbs used to remove excess pitta from the body and maintain balance.

Opposites in Climate and Lifestyle as Medicine

The ideal environment for a pitta individual is cool and dry. Cold weather sports like skiing and ice-skating or early morning exercise is best. Sweet scents, melodic music, and sweet emotions are also good "medicines" for pitta. A daily, 10–20 minute, gentle self massage with warm sunflower oil will cool the heat of pitta and support you to surrender and "go with the flow" rather than using your will to force the flow.

It is easy for the pitta individual to feel that, if he just works long and hard enough, he can control everything. It is this quality, on a global scale, that allows human beings to think nothing of controlling or manipulating nature to bend to our idea of what is best. This works well if it is a balanced approach, enabling us to predict nasty weather and thereby prepare for it or to diagnose certain illnesses and thereby enable us to treat them better. An extreme example of this outlook, is manipulating genetic material without regard to problematic future ramifications. An incredibly extreme example of this outlook gone out of control would be that of a dictator attempting genocide in an attempt to align global reality with his personal view of how things should be.

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On a more personal scale, this tendency may lead us to strive for control and personal domination in our relationships or career, or we may allow our rampant personal ambition to drive us into eventual mental or physical "burnout."

One of the best medicines for pitta is surrender. If you can develop a gentle faith in—or relationship with—a divine power or natural force that you believe can do a fine job of orchestrating personal and universal life, then you can give your will a rest and take off some pressure. For this reason, it is beneficial for a pitta individual to enjoy regular meditation. (And really enjoy it; not just do it as if it is another task they need to master).

Yoga for Pitta Types

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

Famous Pitta Examples

Madonna: Sharp businesswoman. World-famous. Ambitious. Moderate build.

Bill Gates. Sharply intelligent. His fame has spread everywhere, even beyond his own professional sphere. Ambitious. Balding.

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.

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The next step is to determine your current condition.



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PITTA PACIFYING DAILY ROUTINE

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.



PITTA PACIFYING DIET

Pitta is balanced by a diet of fresh, whole foods (both cooked and raw) that are cooling, hearty, energizing, comparatively dry, and high in carbohydrates. These foods calm pitta by decreasing internal heat, preventing inflammation, balancing the digestive fire, grounding the body...

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PITTA PACIFYING FOODS

Pitta is oily, sharp, hot, light, spreading, and liquid, so eating foods that neutralize these qualities – foods that are dry, mild, cooling, grounding, stabilizing, and dense – serve to balance excess pitta.

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.



