

Seasonal Routine for Autumn

Bringing Balance to Vata Dosha



According to Ayurveda, one must look to nature to understand the workings of our bodies. Since we are influenced by the same forces as the rest of nature, by understanding the laws of nature one is able to understand one's self.

During the autumn months, the accumulated heat of summer leads to dryness in the world around us. Winds often blow, which increases the dryness. The earth cools. Leaves wither and drop from the trees. The qualities of roughness, lightness, dryness, mobility and coolness pervades the atmosphere, and thus, our selves. All of these qualities provoke *vata dosha*. And, since vata is the force that moves the other doshas, if vata goes out of balance, the other doshas are more likely to go out of balance as well.

In our fast-paced society, many (if not most) of us frequently experience symptoms of vata imbalance, such as dry skin, constipation, insomnia, and a racing mind. During this season of dryness and mobility, these symptoms are even more likely to occur. In order to prevent this, the laws of nature are once again brought into play. To bring balance to dryness, one applies moisture. To balance mobility, one must slow down. To balance coolness, warmth is required. In many regards, Ayurveda is as simple as these simple concepts. And yet, the effects are deep and profound.

So - in simplest terms, to stay balanced during this lovely season of falling leaves and crisp blowing winds:

- **Stay moist! Nourish your skin with healing oils (abhyanga), cook with appropriate oils (sesame, almond, ghee are ideal), apply oil to your nasal passages (nasya oil)**
- **Choose warm, moist, unctuous foods**
- **Establish regular routines of eating and sleeping (this is very calming to an agitated mind)**
- **Keep yourself comfortably warm, avoiding becoming chilled**
- **Perform slow, grounding yoga poses**

What to know more? OK, let's explore this a bit further:

- **Choose warm, moist, unctuous foods** to balance the cold, light, dryness in the atmosphere. An ideal breakfast is oatmeal or cream of rice, or warm stewed apples prepared with cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom or clove. For lunch, steamed vegetables with rice and ghee (clarified butter) is ideal. For dinner, a bowl of warm, hearty soup. Suggested snacks include dates, fresh fruit, or warm milk with

ground almonds. Before bed, a cup of warm milk with a pinch of nutmeg and honey is recommended for sound sleep.

- **Warm drinks** such as hot milk or decaf chai tea are also balancing. Other choices include teas of cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, licorice. Coffee and other caffeinated drinks can be drying and overly stimulating and should be avoided.
- **Choose Foods of the Season.** It is always best to look to nature for food recommendations that are seasonally appropriate and balancing. Now is the season for root vegetables and winter squash. Try carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, acorn, butternut squash. Grains that are grounding include basmati rice, brown rice, quinoa, wheat berries. Whole wheat pasta is a good choice, served with ghee or oils such as almond or sesame to combat the dryness of the season and aid in internal oleation. It is best to avoid cold, dry foods such as salads, dry cereals and popcorn at this time of year.
- **Establish routine times for eating and sleeping** in order to pacify vata and bring calmness to the agitated vata mind. Irregular routines are highly unbalancing to vata, leaving a vata person feeling ungrounded. It is best to arise before sunrise, and be in bed by 10:00 pm. Following this schedule also aids in promoting restful sleep, a common area of concern for vata individuals. Eat breakfast soon after arising, lunch at midday, and dinner by no later than 7:00 pm. These are the times that we are most able to digest and assimilate the foods. Harmony is achieved by aligning our rhythms with the patterns of nature!
- **Yoga poses that are best for vata** are those that compress the pelvis and in doing so flex the lower back, such as forward bends. All asana (poses) should be practiced slowly with attention to focus and detail. Also, choose poses that emphasize a connection to the earth to bring grounding to the light, airiness of vata.
- **Oils have been used for thousands of years** by Ayurvedic doctors and practitioners to keep the body moist, “juicy,” nourished. Think of the fresh new leaves that make their appearance in spring – they are moist, supple. As time goes by, they dry out, lose their fresh suppleness, and eventually become brittle and fall from the trees. In many regards, losing moisture defines the aging process. Ayurveda combats this drying out by the use of appropriate oils. Oils replenish, nourish, moisten, heal. They restore our “juiciness.” Apply high quality oils to the skin such as sesame, almond, sunflower, or coconut to keep it moist and supple (oils prepared with herbs are even more beneficial, which we make by hand at Shanti Ayurveda). Place 3 to 5 drops of *nasya oil* to the nasal passages to calm the mind, soothe the membranes of the nasal passages, and help to prevent infection. Massage the gums with sesame oil to help prevent receding gums.
- **Bliss Therapies.** This is the ideal season to experience Ayurvedic “Bliss Therapies,” such as *abhyanga*, *shirodhara*, *nasya*. Cleansing and rejuvenation therapies (*pancha karma*) are also highly beneficial at this time to help reduce the likelihood of colds and flu during the winter season.
- **Colors** that calm vata are orange, yellow, green, gold, brown and purple ~ wear these colors, decorate with them, surround yourself with them at this time
- **Aromas** that are soothing to vata include rose, sandalwood, lavender, camphor and basil

Most importantly, remember to bring a sense of conscious awareness to each moment, moving slowly and thoughtfully through each day, taking the time to “admire the fall colors,” keeping your mind calm, centered and at peace...