

Eat to Balance Your Mind-Body Type

Ayurveda teaches that all health-related measures—whether an exercise program, dietary plan or herbal supplement—must be based on an understanding of an individual’s mind-body type, known as a *dosha*. As you have explored, your dosha reflects your innate tendencies, including your temperament, metabolism, energy level, learning style, and many other aspects of your body, mind, and emotions. You can nurture your inherent well-being by making choices to balance your own mind-body type.

The types of foods that are optimal for you depend upon your individual dosha. The foods that keep one person in balance, energized, and at their ideal weight may not be the right choices for someone with a different dosha. The doshas explain why some people can eat a hot, spicy meal and feel fine, while others could eat the same meal and experience heartburn or indigestion. When you are eating according to your individual mind-body type, it is easier to keep your body in balance and stay healthy.

Vata

The predominant qualities of Vata are movement and change. If your primary dosha is Vata, you will tend to be always on the go, with an energetic and creative mind. Vatas are naturally thin, with a light frame and characteristic narrow shoulders and hips. They often have prominent joints, veins, and tendons. As long as Vata is in balance, you will be lively and enthusiastic. If excessive stress in your life leads to your Vata force becoming imbalanced, your activity will start to feel out of control. Your mind may race, contributing to anxiety and insomnia.

Irregularity is the hallmark of Vata eating behavior, especially when the dosha is out of balance. Vatas may resolve to follow a structured diet and suddenly become enthusiastic about learning as much as possible about the nutritional benefits of various foods. However, they may just as suddenly feel an extreme craving for something completely different, such as chocolate, cookies, or lasagna. They may also start skipping meals. This “all-or-nothing” behavior can create a sense that life is out of control. When Vatas get out of balance, they may find themselves snacking and popping things into their mouths all day long, which is another manifestation of general anxiety. On the other hand, when Vatas are in balance, they feel centered and experience their natural joy and enthusiasm for life.

Eating to balance Vata:

- The best tastes to pacify Vata are sweet, salty, and sour.
- Minimize foods that are pungent, bitter, or astringent since these tastes increase Vata.
- To counterbalance the light, dry, cool nature of the Vata dosha, Ayurveda traditionally recommends foods that are heavy, oily, or warm.

Pitta

If you had to choose one word to describe Pitta, it would be *intensity*. Pitta types enjoy a strong appetite and ability to digest food, information, and experiences. They tend to like challenges and have a sharp intellect and enterprising character. They have a muscular, medium build and are well proportioned. When the Pitta dosha becomes imbalanced, heat begins to rise in the body and mind. Heartburn, ulcers, hypertension, and inflammatory conditions reflect excessive accumulation of Pitta. Mentally, too much Pitta manifests as irritability, impatience, and anger.

As in every other area of their lives, Pitta eating is characterized by a need for predictability and order. Most Pitta types like to eat three meals a day and prefer to have those meals at the same time every day. They may feel ravenously hungry and grouchy if dinner is even half an hour late. When such disruptions occur, the anger that lies just beneath the surface of the Pitta personality is likely to ignite. Many out-of-balance Pittas overeat as an expression of rage; they are literally swallowing their anger. Without being consciously aware of it, they may see habitual overeating as an act of rebellion, an expression of defiance against the world's injustices. When Pittas are in balance, they enjoy vibrant energy and creativity. They are able to use their mental clarity and other gifts to create beauty, abundance, and well-being in the world and in their lives.

Eating to balance Pitta:

- The best foods to pacify Pitta are those with sweet, bitter, or astringent tastes.
- Foods that are pungent, salty, or sour aggravate Pitta and should be minimized.
- Since an excess of Pitta dosha overheats the mind and body, favor cool foods and liquids.

Kapha

People with a predominance of Kapha in their nature have a solid, powerful build and great physical strength and endurance. They are slow and graceful in action, with a tranquil, relaxed personality and strong retentive memory. When Kapha builds to excess, however, weight gain, fluid retention, and allergies are likely to manifest in the body. Excess Kapha in the mind manifests as resistance to change and stubbornness. People with an excess of Kapha tend to hold on to things, jobs, and relationships long after they are no longer nourishing or necessary.

Kapha types have an innate sensuality and love of eating. If they ignore or deny other sources of pleasure, they can easily become addicted to food. Combining aspects of the Vata binge eater with the Pitta's demand for three square meals a day, out-of-balance Kaphas can end up eating constantly—both at mealtimes and whenever they see something tempting. Kaphas have an inherent desire to avoid confrontation, both with other people and with emotional issues within themselves. They may use food to suppress their intense emotions, but since this only masks the feelings at their core, they may suffer from depression. They may then enter the vicious cycle

of trying to cope with depression by eating even more. On the positive side, when they are in balance, Kaphas are able to express their naturally loving nature and enjoy the gifts of stamina and grace.

Eating to balance Kapha:

- Foods with pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes are most beneficial for pacifying Kapha.
- Reduce foods with sweet, sour, or salty tastes as these increase Kapha.
- Since Kapha is heavy, oily, and cold, favor foods that are light, dry, or warm.

As you become more aware of your dosha and your basic tendencies, you can make better choices to support harmony and health in your bodymind.