



## AYURVEDA 101

### The Lenses of Ayurveda

As a starting place, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of some of the lenses through which Ayurveda views the universe. These are foundational tools for understanding the laws of nature, identifying various states of health or imbalance, and for charting a course toward improved well-being.

#### THE FIVE ELEMENTS

Ayurveda recognizes five elements as the fundamental building blocks of nature—earth, water, fire, air, and ether (space). Every substance, every cell, contains all five of these elements. That said, in a given substance, one or two elements are typically predominant over the others.

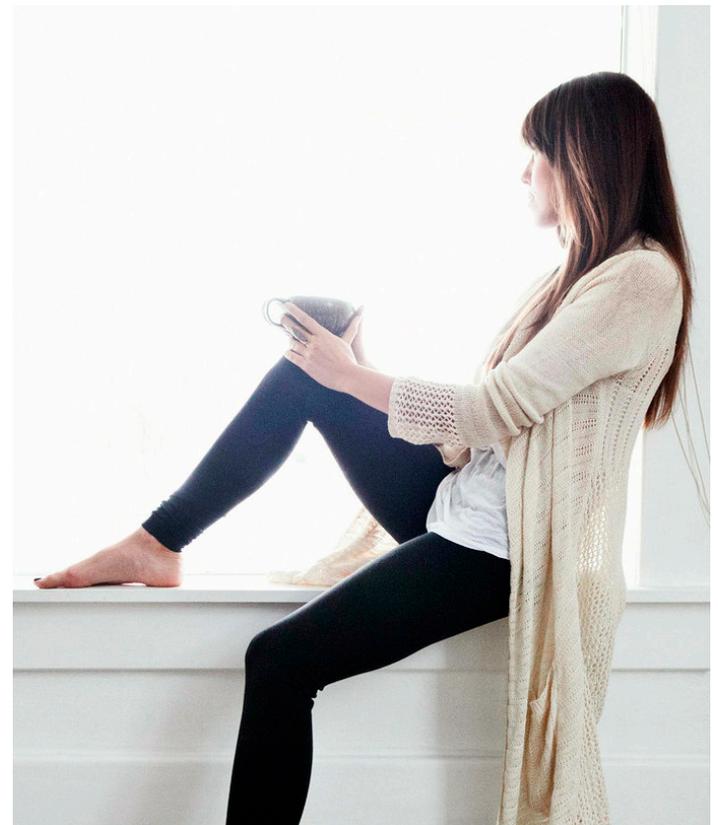
#### THE TWENTY QUALITIES

Ayurveda also identifies twenty qualities (the *gunas*) that can be used to describe every substance or experience. These qualities are organized into the following ten pairs of opposites:

Heavy	Light
Slow (Dull)	Sharp (Penetrating)
Cold	Hot
Oily	Dry
Smooth	Rough
Dense	Liquid
Soft	Hard
Stable	Mobile
Gross	Subtle
Cloudy (Sticky)	Clear

The *gunas* are essential to understanding the Ayurvedic principle that like increases like and that opposites balance. For example, a person who is particularly cold natured, living in a cold climate, in the middle of winter, is likely to be experiencing an aggravation of the cold quality. The remedy? Heat—in the form of warming foods, hot drinks, heating spices, soothing baths, snugly warm clothes, and if possible, an abundance of heart-warming experiences.

At the heart of the Ayurvedic approach to wellness is the idea that like increases like and that opposites balance. So whether we are attempting to mitigate the effects of certain innate vulnerabilities, or trying to correct an active imbalance, we can apply the energy of opposites in order to steer our bodies in the right direction. The twenty qualities provide the most straight-forward illustration of how the concept works, and their grouping into ten pairs of opposites makes for a fairly intuitive grasp of how this wisdom can be applied in practical terms.



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