

Abundant Energy

Unlocking Your Natural Vitality with the Wisdom of Ayurveda



energy. The ability to be active: the physical or mental strength that allows you to do things; natural enthusiasm and effort.¹

vitality. A lively or energetic quality; the power or ability of something to continue to live, be successful.²

— Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary

Most of us would gladly welcome an improvement in energy and vitality. If increasing our energy levels were as simple as waving a magic wand, who among us wouldn’t readily give it a flick of the wrist? Unfortunately, most of us have been conditioned by very misguided representations of what it means to have a lot of energy, and as a result, are deeply confused about what true, increased vitality looks like. The above definitions say a great deal about these forces in our lives; energy should be a “natural” source of enthusiasm and effort, and vitality should not only energize our lives, but also empower us to “be successful.”



For better or worse, we live in a society that places a tremendous amount of value on a very active, mobile, and productive type of energy, which leads to a rather endless cultivation of personal and societal busy-ness. When it comes right down to it, this way of being can be quite unhealthy, but most of us perceive it to be utterly normal—desirable even. So often, when we think of what our lives would look like if we had more “energy,” the life we imagine wouldn’t necessarily serve to improve our sense of well-being at all. In fact, in many cases, living our imagined high-energy lifestyle would actually increase stress, foster anxiety, deplete *ojas* (the subtle essence of strength, vigor, and vitality) and leave us feeling rather ragged. Clearly, not all forms of energy are equal, so let’s start at the beginning—by clarifying what exactly we mean when we talk about unlocking our natural vitality.

Two Lifestyle Models

Sometimes—especially when we are talking about subtle, esoteric ideas like energy and vitality—a bit of context can go a long way toward fostering deeper understanding. So let’s imagine for a moment two fundamentally different ways of experiencing an abundance of energy in our lives. These examples are meant to help distinguish true energy and vitality from what they are not, despite widespread cultural confusion.

- 1. The Way of the Go-Getters.** First, there is a lifestyle that we’ll call the “way of the go-getters.” This way of life is a reflection of those among us with a seemingly endless capacity for doing. The go-getters are up at the crack of dawn and they don’t stop—even for a moment—until well after the sun sets. Their days are absolutely packed: a full day’s work, extracurricular activities with the kids, an enviable exercise routine, and somehow, they still have time left over for volunteering, personal hobbies, and plenty of social engagements. By golly, these folks know how to get things done! And most of us, at some point, wish that we had that kind of stamina and focus. Our culture is undoubtedly quite enamored with this “high-energy” lifestyle.
- 2. The Way of the Quiet Masters.** Second, there is a lifestyle that we’ll call the “way of the quiet masters.” This way of life is a reflection of those among us who have a more subtle mastery of their energy and life-force. The quiet masters approach their days in a carefully paced, intentional manner and they typically exhibit a strong commitment to self-care and nourishment. Their lives are full of purpose and meaning, but they do not seem especially *busy*. In fact, they don’t seem to waste any of their precious energy on trivial concerns, but are very careful about where they place their focus and attention. They exude presence, groundedness, awareness, and clarity. They are often also highly spiritually attuned, insightful, and inspiring to be around.

The difference between the two is striking, isn’t it? Sadly, our mainstream cultural narrative is that to “have a lot of energy” is to hang with the go-getters, and very few of us strive to emulate the quiet masters. In fact, there is an unspoken expectation that should we, by chance, *acquire* more energy, we would naturally choose to *expend* it almost immediately. Why not take on just one more activity, or do whatever we are already doing *even better*? We are taught to measure ourselves against the go-getters on a regular basis; so naturally, this is the way of life that feels “normal” to most of us. And if we can’t keep up, we immediately assume that something is wrong with us—that we need fixing. We reach for caffeine, an energy drink, more exercise, the perfect supplement, or... (insert your fix here), and we set off in search of that elusive abundance of energy that we all know *must* be out there for us somewhere.



A Confused Desire

The problem is that, even if we do somehow manage to achieve the high-energy, go-getter lifestyle that we're after, chances are good that living it will actually deplete our reserves of strength and health quite rapidly. Defining "energy" in this hyper-mobile, frenetic way actually tends to send us running in the opposite direction of health, and can have substantial long-term consequences. All too often, when we strive for a life of uninterrupted doing, sooner or later, our bodies quietly (or not so quietly) become exhausted, depleted, feeble, and fragile.

What if your own lack of energy was actually a message from your body? Is it possible that your body is trying to tell you something? Maybe it's saying, "hey, this all-out sprint that you're up to isn't actually working for me" or "you know, I'm pretty tired... how about balancing your insanely active lifestyle with some solid rest and relaxation?" But finding someone who is heeding these gentle appeals from the body is surprisingly rare. Most of us are not listening all that carefully, and more often than not, we miss these subtle messages altogether. Instead, we typically wait until our bodies are in crisis, and only then do we think about slowing down (usually quite reluctantly).

A More Balanced Approach

The good news is that we can choose a healthier approach. It is possible to nurture a more balanced relationship with energy, and there are any number of life-affirming paths toward improved vitality in our bodies—ones that will actually serve our long-term health.

But let us be exceedingly clear about our intentions here. This article is not about magnifying our capacity to exhaust and deplete our systems. It is about honing a natural sense of inner alignment so that we can feel more vibrantly alive and inspired. It is about honoring our bodies while listening to, trusting, and following our hearts. It is about learning to refine our diets, our practices, our very way of life, to more fully support the whole of who we are. It is about living in harmony with the seasons, and the broader cycles of nature. Yes, realizing these intentions will naturally increase your capacity to be active and to *do things*. But the journey may also surprise you. You may find yourself wanting to be more intentional about where you spend your newfound energy; you may even find that you want nothing more than to conserve it—for yourself, for the future, for the sake of a more sane and enjoyable existence.

If we are being completely honest, the truth is that choosing a path that fosters true, natural vitality is a most courageous act. It means becoming a quiet master of your own energy, your life-force. And despite the natural appeal and charisma of the masters who have gone before us, there is really surprisingly little cultural support for this way of being in the world. Learning how to do it requires us to actively rebel, to go against the grain, to swim upstream. And we must recognize that there will be regular temptations to relinquish the extra effort, to turn around and allow ourselves to simply be carried by the current directing the masses. Therefore, creating a support system for yourself can be invaluable. Have a designated team in place so that, when the going gets tough, they can remind you of your intentions—and that they are good ones. Thankfully, blazing your own trail gets easier with time, and the rewards are great, which generally helps to reinforce one's resolve to stick with it.



Energy, Vitality, and Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, there are four key principles that are direct physiological manifestations of energy and vitality. In theory, if we can learn to care for each of these four aspects of our mind-body ecology, we will naturally invite an improved sense of health and vitality into our lives. As a bonus, getting to know these Ayurvedic concepts tends to shed a great deal of light on the process of mastering of our life-force energy. These four principles are:

1. Agni.

Agni is the sacred metabolic fire that provides energy to the body and mind—on both gross and subtle levels.

2. Ojas.

Ojas is the super-fine essence of kapha dosha and of all seven bodily tissues; it is the primary source of vitality, strength, and immunity in the body.

3. Tejas.

Tejas is the super-fine essence of agni and of pitta dosha that transforms matter into energy and consciousness.

4. Prana.

Prana is the vital breath, or life-force energy that animates each of us with life; it is also the super-fine essence of vata dosha.

Remember, Ayurveda views the body, mind, and spirit as integrated parts of a single, unified whole, so improving any one of these aspects of our lives inevitably has a positive impact on all of the others. As you read more about agni, ojas, tejas, and prana below, pay attention to where you are most inspired (and also to where you feel any resistance or aversion); these are likely powerful clues as to where it would best serve you to begin working with improving your own energy and vitality.

Understanding Agni

Agni, the fire element, which manifests within each of us as the sacred metabolic fire, is said to be the gateway to optimal health. Agni is absolutely essential to life. Not only is it responsible for the digestion, absorption, and assimilation (of foods, thoughts, emotions, and experiences), it also governs all transformative processes in the body, ignites the light of awareness and intelligence in our consciousness, and serves as a bridge between matter and energy. Ayurveda insists that, ultimately, every imbalance and disease can be traced back to impaired agni. Agni is also closely related to pitta dosha, which is composed primarily of the fire and water elements. By nature, agni is hot, sharp, dry, light, spreading, subtle, luminous, and clear, and is generally supported by substances and experiences that are rich in these qualities. On the other hand, excesses in the cold, dull, oily, heavy, stable, gross, or cloudy qualities can stifle agni.

The connection between agni and our overall vitality is relatively clear: agni transforms matter into energy, nutrients into tissue, and food into consciousness. Without it, we would perish. For a more in-depth exploration of agni, its central importance in the Ayurvedic tradition, and for practical guidance on how to care for yours, please see our health guide, [The Importance of Healthy Digestion](#).



Tending to Agni

Because agni plays such a central role in our overall vitality, kindling and protecting your agni is a sure-fire means of improving your energy levels—from the inside out. The following strategies can help to protect, balance, and strengthen agni.

Kindle Agni With A Supportive Diet

In Ayurveda, eating is considered a sacred act, an act of love. Ideally, it is done in a calm, peaceful atmosphere and it is given our full, undivided attention. It is best to avoid eating on the go, or while distracted by intense conversations, television, or multi-tasking. It is equally important to eat slowly, chew thoroughly, and to fully appreciate the textures and flavors of your food. Try to actively cultivate gratitude for your food, and receive what you are eating as a healthy and nourishing gift to your body. Taking the time to resonate with your meal in this way can have a profound impact on your ability to digest it—even if what you are eating isn't the healthiest choice. Listen to your body in order to avoid overeating; in fact, try to stop *before* you feel full. Ideally, we would also eat only when hungry, leave adequate space between meals to ensure proper digestion, make lunch our main meal whenever possible, and avoid preparing or eating food when there is intense emotional disturbance.



In general, it is best to favor simple, whole, organic foods that are in season and freshly prepared. [Proper food combining](#) can also be a powerful support to agni. Your [constitution and your current state of balance](#) may also indicate a more specific dosha-balancing diet. After taking our [Ayurvedic Profile™](#) quiz, you can refer to our [vata](#), [pitta](#), and [kapha](#) pacifying diet pages for further guidance. Keep in mind that an Ayurvedic diet is not about giving up everything you love. Moderation is a great first step in restoring balance. Thankfully, as your health improves, cravings for foods that are detrimental will begin to subside and more healthy cravings will start to emerge. This occurs because, as toxicity is eliminated, the body is better able to recognize healthy, life-affirming foods and will increasingly reject dietary choices that compromise optimal health. This process takes time, but each step you take is a step toward improved wellness and vitality, and you will feel the benefits immediately.

Consider A Cleanse

A dietary cleanse is a powerful way to kindle and reset agni. The basic premise of a cleanse is that our bodies are inherently intelligent. When we provide a break from the barrage of potentially harmful inputs, they immediately allocate the extra energy to repairing the system for optimal performance. Doing a cleanse gives the physiology a chance to detox and rejuvenate the tissues while supporting agni throughout the body. Cleanses can be as simple as a half or full day fast, a short juice cleanse, or a longer monodiet of something like kitchari. Ayurveda offers a number of effective cleansing techniques. If you are intrigued, several cleansing techniques are outlined in our [Introduction to Ayurvedic Cleansing](#). Some are short and simple. Others are longer, more complex, have a deeper impact, and should only be done under the guidance of a trained practitioner.



Prioritize Appropriate Exercise

When engaged appropriately, exercise can be a panacea for improved health and vitality. Proper exercise helps to improve circulation, release accumulated tension, and move stagnant mental and emotional energy. It also kindles agni, improves digestion, bolsters the body's detoxification mechanisms, encourages proper elimination, promotes relaxation, protects ojas, and encourages sound sleep—all of which, of course, serve to improve energy and vitality.

Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that the type, duration, and intensity of exercise that is most supportive for each of us depends largely on who we are as individuals. If you do not know much about your personal characteristics, our [Ayurvedic Profile](#) quiz can help you determine your constitution and current state of balance. After you know which of your doshas needs the most attention, our [Daily Routine Department](#) can guide you in establishing an appropriate exercise regimen. In general, Ayurveda suggests that we exercise to only about fifty percent of our capacity—until we break a mild sweat on the forehead, under the arms, and along the spine, or until the first signs of dryness in the mouth.³ If you are not currently exercising regularly, keep in mind that a supportive exercise program does not have to be complex or time-intensive; a daily twenty-minute walk can do wonders for the entire system.

Eliminate Ama

Ama is a raw, undigested, toxic, disease-causing material that accumulates in the body when foods, herbs, emotions, and experiences are not fully processed, digested, and assimilated. As the absolute antithesis of agni, ama can be either the cause or the result of an impaired digestive fire, and in either case, threatens our health. Ama may be a factor in your imbalances if you regularly experience fatigue, brain fog, poor memory, lack of motivation, unhealthy cravings, symptoms of stagnation in the body, or dramatic mood swings. If you would like to know more about ama and how to clear it from your system, please see our resource, [Ama: The Antithesis of Agni](#).

Other Resources

Weight imbalances are usually a reflection of impaired agni. So if you struggle with your weight—whether you are looking to lose weight or gain a few pounds—you may find our resource [Achieving Your Optimal Weight](#) especially supportive.

Similarly, there is a natural connection between the strength of agni and the quality of our elimination. If you struggle with imbalances in elimination, our [Guide to Healthy Elimination](#) is a fantastic guide to restoring balance in the digestive channels.

Understanding Ojas

Ojas is a very elusive and mysterious substance in the body, but like agni, it is absolutely essential to life. In fact, the words ojas and vitality are nearly synonymous, though ojas also holds a much deeper meaning. Ojas is the subtle essence of both kapha dosha and of all the bodily tissues—the end product of perfect digestion—and it



is said to be responsible for one's strength, vigor, vitality, and immunity. Interestingly, because ojas is the final product in the process of tissue nutrition, it is directly linked to the quality of agni and will be either positively or negatively impacted by the state of one's agni. But ojas can also be nourished or depleted by our quality of life. It is dried up by trauma, stress, unhealthy relationships, and poor lifestyle choices. On the other hand, ojas is buoyed by nourishing life experiences, happiness, joy, healthy relationships, wholesome lifestyle choices, living in the present moment, and cultivating purposeful awareness whenever possible. Ayurveda identifies two types of ojas in the body; one of them is stable, superfine, and resides entirely within the heart, and the other circulates throughout the body. Ojas is intimately connected to kapha dosha, agni, the process of tissue nutrition, and the heart, so each of these things wields a meaningful influence on our vitality.

Protecting Ojas

As the end product of digestion and tissue nutrition, the quality of ojas is directly linked to the quality of agni, making all of the above recommendations for *agni* relevant to the health of ojas as well. In addition, consider the following strategies:

Prioritize a Balanced Sleep Routine

Balanced sleep is critical to protecting the quality of ojas, and the quality of our sleep can have a huge impact on our overall vitality. Sleep has considerable restorative functions and plays an important role in the repair and rejuvenation of tissues (both in the brain and throughout the body), but it also allows for the more efficient removal of metabolic wastes and natural toxins.⁴ If sleep is an area that you struggle with—whether you get too much sleep or too little—check out our [Guide to Balanced Sleep](#).

Consider a Period of Rejuvenation

Ayurveda has a rich tradition of *rasayana*, otherwise known as a period of rejuvenation, which can be a wonderful way to build and protect ojas. In essence, the idea is to nourish yourself deeply—on all levels—for a designated period of time. This rejuvenation process allows the body to repair, regenerate, and revitalize all of the organs, tissues, and systems, benefitting the whole of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. Ayurvedic rejuvenation therapies typically follow a period of cleansing and can include dietary changes, specific lifestyle choices, the use of rejuvenative herbs, or a combination of all three. If you would like to learn more about the practice of *rasayana*, please see our [Rejuvenation Department](#), which covers specific therapies for different constitutions and imbalances.

Support Ojas By Tending to Your Immune Health

Ojas and immunity are intimately connected, so building and protecting ojas fosters a strong immune system. Our health guide, [Building A Healthy Immune System](#) provides a contextual understanding of the relationship between ojas and immunity, and also offers practical guidance on how to strengthen ojas and bolster immune health.



Support the Heart Center

The most refined form of ojas resides exclusively within the heart, so supporting the heart center can serve to nourish and protect ojas, as well. Our health guide, [Vibrant Heart](#) explores the critical connection between ojas, the mind, the heart, and the subtle channels of the energetic body. It can be an insightful resource for improving vitality by tending to the heart center.

Understanding Tejas

Tejas is the expression of solar energy in the body. It is the positive subtle essence of both agni and pitta dosha, and it governs intelligence, discernment, enthusiasm, as well as digestion and transformation. Tejas also works closely with prana and ojas to maintain the essential energies needed to support life.

Enlivening Tejas

Because tejas is the subtle essence of agni, kindling and protecting agni will generally support tejas. Please see the recommendations for [tending to agni](#), above.

Understanding Prana

The words “energy” and “prana” are nearly synonymous, but the Sanskrit word, prana, is richly meaningful. Prana is the vital life force within each of us. It is carried on and stimulated by the breath, but it is not the breath. The foods we eat and the water we drink also contain prana, and serve to replenish our own.⁵ In this way, ingesting foods and drinks that are healthy, fresh, and full of prana themselves serves to nourish this vital force within our bodies—as does purposeful, mindful breathing. The channel system that moves prana through the body (*prana vaha srotas*) is rooted in the heart so, as with ojas, tending to the heart center also supports prana.



Nourishing Prana

As the subtle essence of vata, prana likes to move. In fact, it nourishes our vitality best when it remains fluid and unobstructed. As a result, prana is greatly supported by practices that help to eliminate and protect against stagnation, many of which also serve to enrich the tissues with an influx of fresh prana. The following practices are especially adept at supporting the fluid movement of prana throughout the body:

Yoga

Yoga positively impacts both the mind and the body; it moves prana, helps to dissipate tension, clears stagnation, and encourages fluidity throughout the tissues, the subtle body, and the mind. Yoga also stimulates circulation, serves as a balanced form of exercise, and helps to balance agni. Depending on your current state of balance, you can practice [vata, pitta, or kapha](#) pacifying yoga, and practice flows such as [sun salutations](#) (which are heating) and [moon salutations](#) (which are cooling). Use our [Ayurvedic Profile](#) quiz to guide you to the appropriate practice.

Pranayama

The practice of specific *pranayamas* (yogic breathing exercises) can be quite a potent means of balancing the movement of prana throughout the system. In general, pranayama helps to restore fluidity and vitality to the subtle energy channels of the body, releases accumulated tension, and offers deep support to the mind and the nervous system. Pranayama also activates and balances many of the most significant subtle channels influencing the mind, including *mano vaha srotas* (the channel of the mind), *prana vaha srotas* (the prana-carrying channel), *ida nadi* (the lunar, feminine channel), *pingala nadi* (the solar, masculine channel), and *sushumna nadi* (the central channel). Therefore, pranayama is a powerful means of accessing and resetting longstanding psycho-spiritual patterns. For a more detailed exploration of these subtle channels and their significance in the broader landscape of the body, please see the following resources: [The Channel of the Mind: Ayurveda and the Mind-Body Connection](#), and [Vibrant Heart: An Ayurvedic Guide to Heart Health](#).

If you are new to pranayama, start with [full yogic breath](#) to ensure that you are breathing correctly. Once you feel comfortable, consider working with [nadi shodhana pranayama](#) (alternate nostril breathing) to more specifically promote balance in prana vaha srotas. Start with just five to ten minutes each day and notice what happens. If you prefer a guided practice, consider Dr. Claudia Welch's [Prana CD](#), which includes a beautiful, hands-free version of alternate nostril breathing.

Meditation or Prayer

Both meditation and prayer tap into the subtle channels of the mind and can help to re-pattern even our most habituated responses to challenging situations. These practices serve to clear and quiet the channels of the mind, support the flow of prana throughout the system, and encourage the proper digestion of food, thoughts, and emotions—all of which can help to improve energy and vitality. If you do not have an established practice, [So Hum Meditation](#) and [Empty Bowl Meditation](#) are both wonderful practices suitable to most anyone.



Broader Strokes

Balance the Doshas

When vata, pitta, or kapha are out of balance in our systems, they can wreak havoc on agni, prana, tejas, and ojas. Our [vikriti test](#) can help you determine which of your doshas (if any) need the most attention and will direct you to resources specifically geared toward helping you restore balance.

Reduce and Manage Stress

Chronic stress is not a supportive influence on the physiology. If stress plays a significant role in your day-to-day life, please see our [Ayurvedic Guide to Stress Management](#), which explores a number of tools for reducing stress, and for changing one's relationship with challenging situations.

Follow a Daily Routine

A daily routine is one of the most fundamental aspects of an Ayurvedic lifestyle. If the concept of a daily routine is new to you, or if you would like support refining yours, please see our [Introduction to a Daily Routine](#) as well as our [Daily Routine Department](#) for guidance on employing supportive practices.

Implement Seasonal Routines

Ayurveda also recommends that our routines stay in sync with the changing seasons. For more support adapting your lifestyle to align with the current season, please see our [Seasonal Guides](#).

Herbal Support

7-Herb Energy

Balancing the demands of work, family, and a healthy, active lifestyle can be challenging, even for those of us who strive to follow the principles of Ayurveda. [7-Herb Energy](#) was formulated to support the Banyan team through those inevitable times of fatigue and stress. It nourishes prana and offers a natural source of balanced energy and alertness without caffeine. Instead, this formula relies on the powerful herbal allies of the Ayurvedic tradition alongside two different forms of Ginseng to foster a boost of natural energy.

Ashwagandha

As a highly regarded adaptogen, [Ashwagandha](#) encourages quality energy throughout the day and sound sleep at night, promoting natural vitality. Ashwagandha has long been celebrated for its ability to support the body in coping with stress and anxiety, while calming the mind. [Ashwagandha tablets](#) and [liquid extract](#) are also available.

Chyavanprash

Chyavanprash is a traditional Ayurvedic herbal jam made in a base of amalaki fruit. This balancing formula is highly rejuvenative, kindles agni without aggravating pitta, and actually helps to clear excess heat from the system. A daily dose of this nutritive jam can support improved emotional stability, energy, vitality, and overall well-being. Take one to two teaspoons daily, or use as directed by your health practitioner.

Addressing Chronic Energy Concerns

For those of you who struggle with chronic shortcomings in energy and vitality, rest assured that the above therapeutic strategies are very likely to support your healing process. That said, we now know that there are a number of influencing factors that can contribute to an overall lack of energy (as well as to general fatigue and malaise). Ayurveda offers a very individualized approach to health and healing, and so contextualizing your approach to more directly address the concerns unique to your system can be deeply clarifying and supportive. This is why working with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner is often so helpful, and why doing so typically serves to expedite one's healing process.

Learning to Trust Your Inner Guidance

Because our vitality is intimately tied to the health of agni, ojas, tejas, and prana, each of us naturally tends to have a very personal relationship with it. The path toward improved vitality is similarly unique. Your journey will be unlike any other because you are, in fact, unlike any other. Follow your heart. Trust your gut. Embrace your wholeness. Listen closely to your inner truth. This process is about honoring the very depths of who you are in order to unlock the wellspring of vitality that lives within you. It is an opportunity to celebrate diversity, honor your own needs, and respect your timing. Remember, not only will your efforts positively impact your own life, they will also ripple out to touch those around you, as well as the broader community. As you forge your path, we hope that we can continue to support you in cultivating optimal energy and vitality and in mastering your life-force so that it can best serve your dreams.



References

¹ Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. “energy,” accessed August 23, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/energy>.

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³ Claudia Welch, *Dinacharya: Changing Lives Through Daily Living* (Self-published, 2007), PDF e-book, 11, <http://drclaudiawelch.com/estore/books-ebooks>; Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 56-64.

⁴ “Why Do We Sleep, Anyway?” *Healthy Sleep*, Harvard Medical School: Division of Sleep Medicine, December 18, 2007, <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters/benefits-of-sleep/why-do-we-sleep>; “Sleep: Functions,” Wikipedia, July 15, 2014, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep#Functions>.

⁵ Robert E. Svoboda, *Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution*, 2nd ed. (Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 1998), 113-4.

