

The Ayurvedic Approach to Fitness

Supporting Optimal Health Through Exercise



The human body was designed to move, as evidenced by the three hundred and sixty joints in the human skeletal system, and we all know that exercise is critical to maintaining optimal health. When engaged appropriately, and according to one's individual needs, exercise can be a potent catalyst for improved health. Unfortunately, modern life requires more and more of us to lead extraordinarily sedentary lives, which makes movement and exercise more important than ever.



Benefits of Proper Exercise

Proper exercise gives the body a critically important outlet for movement, which in turn, helps to maintain fluidity in the tissues, alertness in the mind, and lubrication in the joints. Exercise also supports the body's pathways of detoxification—kindling *agni* (the metabolic fire) throughout the tissues, while improving digestion, circulation, elimination, and lymphatic flow. Beyond that, exercise activates natural pathways of rejuvenation by helping to release accumulated tension, clearing stagnant mental and emotional energy, improving our ability to relax, and supporting sound sleep. All of these benefits are understandably critical to our experience of optimal health. Ideally, our fitness routines are both grounding and energizing, and truly help us to feel our best—body, mind, and spirit.

Is There Such a Thing as Too Much?

However, we live in a culture that glorifies exercise, hard work, and pushing the limits in as many ways as possible. This worldview has undoubtedly infiltrated our perspective on exercise. How often do you hear phrases like these:

- No Pain, No Gain
- Push It
- Go Big or Go Home
- Just Do It
- Feel the Burn

As with many things, we have an obsessive relationship with exercise, and we're generally conditioned to think that more is *always* better, and that pushing ourselves to the limit is unquestionably preferable to taking it easy in our activities. But Ayurveda offers a different view entirely.

The Ayurvedic Perspective

One of the most elegant aspects of the Ayurvedic tradition is its incredible devotion to the individual. While there are aspects of the Ayurvedic lifestyle that are generally good for everyone, Ayurveda acknowledges that each of us is unique, and that what might be fantastically therapeutic for one person can be categorically harmful for another. The same is true of exercise. Ayurveda's fitness recommendations depend on one's **constitution**, **age**, **current state of balance**, the surrounding climate, and the **season**. By nature, exercise is qualitatively light, sharp, hot, mobile, clarifying, and drying. One of the foundational principles of Ayurveda is that like increases like and that opposites balance, which means that, ideally, we are mindful of how each of these qualities might interact with the energies already at play within our bodies, or with the broader context of our lives (as with the current climate or season).



At first glance, this perspective can feel a bit complicated, overwhelming, or overly limiting, but with a bit of education, the Ayurvedic approach is actually quite intuitive. More importantly, it celebrates your uniqueness and offers an approach to fitness that will best serve your specific situation. This tradition does not offer one path to peak performance, fitness, and overall well-being. Instead, there are many—each tailored to the unique needs of the individual. Ultimately, the Ayurvedic approach to fitness is about you, your path, and the practices that are best going to serve you, in particular, in your journey toward optimal health.



Principles to Live By

In general, Ayurveda recommends that we exercise at just 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 sign of dryness in the mouth.¹ You can help to ensure an appropriate amount of effort by breathing through your nostrils throughout your workout. This can feel challenging at first, but it definitely gets easier with time and practice. Most people find that they gradually develop a tolerance for more and more intensity, as their nostrils adapt to being the primary passageway for the breath during exercise.

Ayurveda also recommends that we exercise during the kapha time of day, from about 6–10 a.m. and p.m. These times of day are ruled by *kapha dosha* and are therefore infused with a sense of groundedness, stability, and strength that helps to counteract the inherent lightness and mobility of physical activity. And actually, because the qualities of exercise oppose the qualities of kapha, being active at these times of day can counteract any tendency toward sluggishness, heaviness, or mental fog that might otherwise dampen your sense of well-being.



If exercising during the kapha time of day is out of the question for you, find a time that works for you and your body, being especially mindful of any vata or pitta aggravation you may be experiencing. Exercise has far more in common with vata and pitta than kapha, so exercising during pitta times of day (10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 10 p.m.–2 a.m.) and vata times of day (2–6 a.m. and p.m.) can easily provoke these doshas.

Beyond these generalities, you can further improve the benefits of your fitness routine by tailoring it to pacify the specific dosha that needs the most support in your system.

How Do I Know Which Dosha to Support?

As a starting point, it is helpful to know your [constitution](#) and [current state of balance](#). If you are new to these concepts, our simple quizzes (links above) can help you determine yours. As a general rule, exercise to support your current state of balance, which is generally a reflection of all the various influences that may be affecting you at any given time—your constitutional tendencies, your age, the season, and your lifestyle. So if one or more of your doshas is aggravated, focus on pacifying whichever one is the most elevated. If you are relatively balanced, you can exercise to support your constitution, pacifying those doshas that are most predominant within your system—and yes, it is definitely possible to create an exercise routine that combines the needs of more than one dosha. When you find that you are relatively balanced for a long period of time, you may also choose to adapt your routine according to your [Stage of Life](#), and make slight refinements as the seasons change. [Vata Season](#) occurs during the fall and early winter, [Kapha Season](#) encompasses the winter and early spring, and [Pitta Season](#) is late spring through the summer.

Remember, when an imbalance is present (which is the case for most of us) one should focus on pacifying whichever dosha is most aggravated. The beauty of this system is that you can always refine your approach as your needs change.

In the resources below, you can learn how best to pacify each of the doshas—both in your exercise routine, and in the broader context of your life:

[A Vata-Pacifying Approach to Fitness](#)

[A Pitta-Pacifying Approach to Fitness](#)

[A Kapha-Pacifying Approach to Fitness](#)



References

¹ Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 60; Claudia Welch, *Dinacharya: Changing Lives Through Daily Living* (Self-published, 2007), PDF e-book, “Exercise,” 11; online version of article: <http://drclaudiawelch.com/resources/articles/dinacharya-changing-lives-through-daily-living/>.



A Vata-Pacifying Approach to Fitness



Vata is the most delicate of the doshas, the most easily aggravated, and also has the most limited reserves of stamina. Qualitatively, vata is light, cold, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear, which means that vata dosha has a great deal in common with exercise. If like increases like, this means that exercise is likely to aggravate vata—especially when one has a vata-predominant constitution or is experiencing a vata imbalance. So what’s a person to do? Stop exercising altogether? Absolutely not! With a lot of vata in our systems, we just need to be mindful of how to exercise in ways that help to ground and pacify vata, making exercise a win-win. This means learning to pay attention to the various qualities that we can bring into our fitness routines and into our lives—and learning to favor those that will promote balance.



Vata and Exercise: A Qualitative Comparison

Qualities of Vata	Qualities of Exercise	Balancing Qualities
Air + Ether	Air + Fire	Earth + Water
Dry	Dry	Oily
Light	Light	Heavy (Grounding)
Mobile	Mobile	Stable
Subtle	Subtle	Gross
Clear	Clear	Substantive
Cold	Hot	N/A
Rough	Depends	Smooth

How to Balance Vata with Exercise

In general, a vata-pacifying approach to physical activity should be gentle and stabilizing, and should guard against over-exertion. For vata, exercising during the kapha times of day (6-10 a.m. and p.m.) is especially important because the atmospheric kapha helps to buffer vata's delicate nature. Movements should be grounding, slow, intentional, and should emphasize stretching, strength-building, and fluidity (think smooth movements). Focus on bringing as many of the following influences into your workouts as possible:

Groundedness.

Make a conscious effort to develop a connection with the earth element. Because of its inherently grounding nature, the earth can be tremendously supportive as you exercise. Activities that help us to connect with the earth include:



- lying down—either on a firm floor or (when weather permits) outside, directly on the earth.
- placing the feet purposefully on the floor (or ground, when outdoors) and directing your full attention toward the connection between the feet and the earth.
- exercising outdoors and in nature, and specifically inviting your senses to fully receive the natural world around you.
- always practicing yoga bare-footed.
- embracing standing, balancing, and supine poses in your yoga practice to more purposefully connect with the earth, and closing your practice with a lengthy [Savasana \(Corpse Pose\)](#).

A Slow Sense of Purpose.

While vata certainly benefits from forms of exercise that are literally slow and filled with mindfulness (things like restorative yoga, tai chi, or chi gong), this energy can be cultivated in more physically intense activities as well. Simply be conscious of slowing your thoughts, choosing an intention, and inviting your workout to ground your physical body, release stress and anxiety, and bolster health, rejuvenation, and balance in every area of your life.

Fluidity.

Vata has a strong tendency to constrict or tighten. Bringing a smooth fluidity to your movements is far more supportive of vata tendencies than excessive tension, repetition, or pounding. For example, tai chi and swimming are far more fluid and vata-pacifying forms of exercise than long-distance running. In any activity, try using the breath to create a sense of freedom throughout the body, and explore alternative ways of moving that break your entrained patterns. The yoga pose [Cat-Cow](#) illustrates beautifully how this might be accomplished.

Flexibility.

Much like fluidity, cultivating flexibility can help to release unnecessary tension or constriction in the body. Be sure to stretch before and after your workouts in order to prevent undo tightening or contraction. And use the breath to encourage the release of any unnecessary tension.

Strength.

When vata is high, muscle tone and strength is easily diminished. Carving out time for strength-building activities (done in a vata-pacifying way) helps to counter vata's tendency toward depletion and preserve healthy muscle tissue.

Rest and Rejuvenation.

Vata is also deeply supported by balancing periods of activity with adequate rest and recovery. If you are a committed athlete, consider taking a day off between your more intense workouts, or at least alternating them with more gentle activities. Also, in conjunction with adapting *how* you exercise, be sure to offer your body plenty of vata-pacifying qualities outside of your exercise regimen.



Exceptionally Balancing Activities

Given the qualitative nature of vata-pacifying exercise, some activities are naturally more balancing than others. If you are unattached to a particular form of exercise, consider walking, tai chi, chi gong, swimming (be sure to avoid becoming chilled), gentle cycling, and [vata-pacifying yoga](#). If you are embarking on a new exercise routine, keep in mind that it need not be complex or time-intensive. Even a daily twenty-minute walk can be incredibly supportive for your entire being—body, mind, and spirit. On the other hand, if you are already in the habit of practicing a form of exercise that you love, do your best to do it in a vata-pacifying way. And if the activity tends to be inherently vata-aggravating, be sure to bring some additional support for vata into other areas of your life.



Additional Practices to Support Your Body

As you might imagine, the exercise itself isn't all that matters. Any regular influences that help to pacify vata systemically can help support your overall sense of balance and can even serve to counteract some of the more aggravating aspects of exercise, ensuring that you reap the full benefits of being active. Consider the suggestions below, and if you want more, please explore our resource on creating a [Vata-Pacifying Daily Routine](#).



Oil Up

Oil can be a powerful rejuvenative and—being unctuous, heavy, stabilizing, and smooth—is incredibly balancing for vata. Applied warm, an oil with a warming energetic (like [Sesame Oil](#)) also does wonders to counter vata's cold nature. There are a number of traditional Ayurvedic practices that capitalize on the soothing and nourishing influence of oil, all of which are very supportive of vata. Here are some ideas:

Oil the Scalp and Feet Before Bed.

Though simple, this practice really can help to calm the nervous system, and ground one's energy. It is also a natural way to support sound sleep. Consider using plain [Sesame Oil](#), [Sleep Easy Oil](#), or [Bhrami Oil](#).

Do Abhyanga.

This ancient practice of self-massage with oil is incredibly soothing to vata, deeply rejuvenating for the tissues, and profoundly calming to the nervous system as a whole. Our resource on [Ayurvedic Self-Massage](#) offers more information about this highly revered Ayurvedic practice, including suggestions for appropriate oils to use for different constitutions, imbalances, and seasons.

Practice Nasya.

Nasya is the practice of applying an herbal oil such as [Nasya Oil](#) to the nasal passages, which has a very direct impact on the mind and the nervous system, while delivering all the benefits of oil itself. If the practice of Nasya is new to you, please see our helpful [instructional video](#).

Love Your Joints

The joints are one of the main sites of vata in the body and are particularly vulnerable to imbalances caused by vata-provoking exercise. Offering your joints a little extra care can go a long way toward protecting them. Consider taking a few minutes to gently rotate the joints before and after exercise. In addition, you can apply a supportive oil or balm to heavily-used joints as needed. Consider treating your joints to the soothing experience of a massage with [Mahanarayan Oil](#) or [Joint Balm](#).

Pamper Your Muscles

The muscular system is inherently active during exercise and requires proper rest and recovery in order to maintain optimal health and integrity. You might consider offering your muscles a little extra care with regular massage, steam baths, Epsom salt baths, or with the application of soothing balms.

Prioritize Rejuvenation

Ayurvedic rejuvenation is the process of offering deep nourishment to the tissues. Adding a rejuvenative to your daily routine can be particularly supportive in balancing the inherently lightening influences of exercise. Consider taking a teaspoon of [Chyavanprash](#) or two [Ashwagandha tablets](#) each morning, about thirty minutes before breakfast. Or explore our [Rejuvenation Department](#) for additional ideas.



Quiet Your Mind

Anything you can do to settle the mind helps to balance vata. Consider lying in [Savasana \(Corpse Pose\)](#) for a few minutes each day, committing to a few minutes of [So-Hum Meditation](#), or practicing *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises) daily. In particular, consider working with [Full Yogic Breath](#), [Nadi Shodhana](#), or [Bhramari](#).

Embrace What's Right for You

At the end of the day, Ayurveda is a tradition that encourages each of us to embrace our uniqueness. Your path toward balance should be appropriately tailored for what you need, who you are, and also what will work best for you. Exercise is simply another area of our lives where we can use the wisdom of Ayurveda to support our overall health and well-being. If like increases like and opposites balance, there are countless ways to introduce balancing energies into our fitness routines (and our lives). Your task is to find your way. Make this journey your own. Experiment with what speaks to and nourishes you, and celebrate this opportunity to bring more support and inspiration into your life.



A Pitta-Pacifying Approach to Fitness



Pitta is slightly less delicate than vata, but more so than kapha, with moderate stamina. Qualitatively, pitta is hot, sharp, light, oily, liquid, spreading, and clear, which means that pitta has a fair amount in common with exercise. If like increases like, this means that, particularly for those of us who have a lot of pitta in our constitutions or who are currently dealing with a pitta imbalance, exercise has a strong potential to exacerbate the situation—especially if we approach our activities in a pitta-aggravating way. But the benefits of exercise are undeniable, so the solution lies in making more conscious and intentional choices that help to keep the system cool and calm, while grounding and pacifying pitta—making exercise a win-win. The best way to do this is to start paying attention to the various qualities that we can bring into our fitness routines and into our lives—and to begin to favor those that will promote balance.



Pitta and Exercise: A Qualitative Comparison

Qualities of Pitta	Qualities of Exercise	Balancing Qualities
Fire + Water	Air + Fire	Earth
Hot	Hot	Cold
Sharp	Sharp	Slow/Dull
Light	Light	Heavy (Grounding)
Spreading	Mobile	Stabilizing
Clear	Clear	Substantive
Oily	Dry	N/A
Liquid	N/A	N/A

How to Balance Pitta with Exercise

In general, a pitta-pacifying approach to physical activity should be grounding and moderately-paced, should avoid significant accumulations of internal heat, and should aim to steer clear of overly competitive attitudes. For pitta, it is important avoid exercising from 10-2 a.m./p.m., when the qualities of pitta are elevated in the natural world. While exercising at the kapha time of day (from 6-10 a.m./p.m.) is certainly the most supportive, any time outside of the mid-day period helps to minimize one's exposure to heat and other pitta-aggravating qualities. Movements should be appropriately challenging, but executed in a relaxed manner (without strain), should emphasize fluidity (which counters pitta's sharpness and rigidity), and should feel stabilizing and pleasantly nourishing. Focus on bringing as many of the following influences into your workouts as possible:



Relaxed Effort.

This is pitta's key to success. Pitta is naturally aligned with ambition and strength of character. With a lot of pitta in your system, you may quite enjoy a good challenge, and you may know your iron will to be capable of pushing through every imaginable obstacle. Unfortunately, taken too far, this mentality often comes at the expense of the body's physical needs, and pitta is actually far more delicate than a pitta mind likes to admit. Thus, it is essential to balance pitta's capacity to overcome adversity (along with its natural desire to get it "right") with an intention to *relax*. Surrendering to a space of enjoyment—even when working hard physically—can make a huge difference. This is about softening pitta's sharpness and intensity, rounding out the experience, and inviting a little more fun and pleasure into your workouts (and your life, in general). It is absolutely fine—important even—to challenge yourself physically, as long as the mental and emotional spheres are more soft and spacious than they are sharp.

Groundedness.

Make a conscious effort to develop a connection with the earth element. Because of its inherently grounding nature, the earth can be tremendously supportive as you exercise. Activities that help us to connect with the earth include:

- lying down—either on a firm floor or (when weather permits) outside, directly on the earth.
- placing the feet purposefully on the floor (or ground, when outdoors) and directing your full attention toward the connection between the feet and the earth.
- exercising outdoors and in nature, and specifically inviting your senses to fully receive the natural world around you.
- always practicing yoga bare-footed.
- embracing standing, balancing, and supine poses in your yoga practice to more purposefully connect with the earth, and closing your practice with several minutes in [Savasana \(Corpse Pose\)](#).

Fluidity.

Pitta's sharp, willful way of navigating the world can cause a lot of tension. Bringing a smooth fluidity to your movements helps to counter these tendencies, and invites a sense of grace and ease into the system. For example, tai chi and swimming are far more fluid and pitta-pacifying forms of exercise than bodybuilding. In any activity, try using the breath to create a sense of freedom and flow throughout the body, and explore alternative ways of moving that break your entrained patterns. The yoga pose [Cat-Cow](#) illustrates beautifully how this might be accomplished.

Flexibility.

Much like fluidity, cultivating flexibility can help to release unnecessary tension or tightness. Be sure to stretch before and after your workouts in order to prevent undo strain or constriction. And use the breath to encourage the release of unnecessary tension.

Rest and Rejuvenation.

Pitta is also deeply supported by balancing periods of activity with adequate rest and recovery. If you are a committed athlete, consider taking a day off between your more intense workouts, or at least alternating them with more gentle activities. Also, in conjunction with adapting *how* you exercise, be sure to offer your body plenty of pitta-pacifying qualities outside of your exercise regimen.



Exceptionally Balancing Activities

Given the qualitative nature of pitta-pacifying exercise, some activities are naturally more balancing than others. If you are unattached to a particular form of exercise, consider brisk walking, hiking, tai chi, swimming, jogging, cycling, skiing, snow-shoeing, and [pitta-pacifying yoga](#). If you are embarking on a new exercise routine, keep in mind that it need not be complex or time-intensive. Even a daily twenty-minute walk can be incredibly supportive for your entire being—body, mind, and spirit. On the other hand, if you are already in the habit of practicing a form of exercise that you love, do your best to do it in a pitta-pacifying way. And if the activity tends to be inherently pitta-aggravating, be sure to bring some additional support for pitta into other areas of your life.



Additional Practices to Support Your Body

As you might imagine, the exercise itself isn't all that matters. Any regular influences that help to pacify pitta systemically can help support your overall sense of balance and can even serve to counteract some of the more aggravating aspects of exercise, ensuring that you reap the full benefits of being active. Consider the suggestions below, and if you want more, please explore our resource on creating a [Pitta-Pacifying Daily Routine](#).



Calm and Quiet the Mind

Anything you can do to keep the pitta mind cool, calm, and quiet helps to balance pitta systemically. Consider a few minutes of [Empty Bowl Meditation](#). Experiment with the impact of lying in [Savasana \(Corpse Pose\)](#) for a few minutes each day. Or commit to a regular daily practice of *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises). For pitta, [Full Yogic Breath](#), [Nadi Shodhana](#), and [Sheetali](#) are especially supportive. Whichever of these practices speak to you, know that even five to fifteen minutes per day can be transformative.

Nourish Yourself: Body, Mind, and Spirit

Appropriate nourishment can take many forms—all of which serve to counter pitta's light, spreading, and clear qualities by helping to ground, stabilize, and provide substance to the system. Pitta thrives on a nutritive diet of healthy, whole foods. It can also be quite impactful to eat mindfully—to bring conscious awareness to the act of receiving nourishment, and to cultivate gratitude for that process. Of course, the pitta mind craves nourishment as well, so finding ways to engage the mind that are relaxing, enjoyable, and that feel nutritive to us can serve a similar purpose. And the same goes for our spiritual cravings. Finding ways to nourish the soul with meaning and purpose—in ways that bring stable, grounding, and substantive energies into your experience is an equally valid form of nourishment. Whether you choose to focus on one of these areas or all three, the effect is sure to be pleasantly pitta-pacifying.

Pamper Your Muscles

The muscular system is inherently active during exercise and requires proper rest and recovery in order to maintain optimal health and integrity. You might consider offering your muscles a little extra care with regular massage, steam baths, Epsom salt baths, or with the application of soothing balms.

Prioritize Rejuvenation

Ayurvedic rejuvenation is the process of offering deep nourishment to the tissues, and is a particularly potent way of nourishing the system. Adding a rejuvenative to your daily routine can be particularly supportive in balancing the inherently lightening influences of exercise. Consider taking a teaspoon of [Chyavanprash](#) each morning about thirty minutes before breakfast. Or explore our [Rejuvenation Department](#) for additional ideas.

Slow Your Pace and Enjoy Yourself

Slowing down and taking pleasure in the unfolding of each moment softens pitta's sharpness and intensity. Making this a regular practice is a great way to embrace relaxed effort throughout your life.



Embrace What's Right for You

At the end of the day, Ayurveda is a tradition that encourages each of us to embrace our uniqueness. Your path toward balance should be appropriately tailored for what you need, who you are, and also what will work best for you. Exercise is simply another area of our lives where we can use the wisdom of Ayurveda to support our overall health and well-being. If like increases like and opposites balance, there are countless ways to introduce balancing energies into our fitness routines (and our lives). Your task is to find your way. Make this journey your own. Experiment with what speaks to and nourishes you, and celebrate this opportunity to bring more support and inspiration into your life.



A Kapha-Pacifying Approach to Fitness



Kapha is the sturdiest of the three doshas, with an abundance of natural strength and stamina, which can be preserved and amplified through healthy exercise. Qualitatively, kapha is heavy, slow, cool, oily, smooth, dense, soft, stable, gross and cloudy, which means that appropriate exercise is one of the most fundamentally kapha-pacifying activities around. Nevertheless, making conscious and intentional choices around how we exercise can undoubtedly intensify its benefits. Once we understand what kapha needs, exercising to promote a sense of balance becomes very intuitive and natural.



Kapha and Exercise: A Qualitative Comparison

Qualities of Kapha	Qualities of Exercise	Balancing Qualities
Water + Earth	Air + Fire	Earth + Water
Heavy	Light	N/A
Slow	Sharp	N/A
Cool	Hot	N/A
Stable	Mobile	N/A
Gross	Subtle	N/A
Cloudy	Clear	N/A
Smooth	Depends	Rough
Dense	N/A	N/A
Soft	N/A	N/A

How to Balance Kapha with Exercise

In general, a kapha-pacifying approach to physical activity should be vigorous and challenging, but also inspiring and fun. Otherwise, kapha can easily trick us into lying on the couch instead. You may notice that exercising during the kapha times of day (6-10 a.m. and p.m.) is especially beneficial in that it helps you to shake off the heaviness and sluggishness that often descends during these times of day. On the other hand, where kapha is concerned, all that really matters is that you do, in fact, exercise. If the kapha time of day doesn't work with your schedule, any time of day will do. But whatever you do, commit to an exercise schedule and stick with it. Focus on bringing as many of the following influences into your workouts as possible:



Fun.

Where kapha is concerned, making exercise fun and engaging is critical to your success. “Fun” means a lot of different things to different people, and what it means to you matters most, but consider making your activities adventuresome, social, playful, or unique in order to maximize your level of enjoyment.

Variation.

Kapha can cause lethargy and lack of motivation. One of the best ways to counter this energy is to make sure that your exercise routine always has a few surprises up its sleeve. Change up your route. Explore different activities you think you might enjoy. Bring a friend, a pet, or a friend’s pet along. And always be on the lookout for other other ways to keep things fresh. Be sure to stretch before and after your workouts in order to encourage circulation and flow throughout the body.

Endurance.

Find ways to celebrate kapha’s natural strength and endurance. This is one of kapha’s innate gifts, and it will serve you well in your fitness routine—allowing you the freedom to engage with longer adventures and explorations. You do not have to push yourself beyond your capacity. Instead, try to honor both your current level of endurance, and the benefit of a good challenge.

Accountability.

Because kapha tends to dampen our desire to be active, it can be very helpful to create some level of accountability for yourself. Consider having an accountability partner, an exercise partner, or the support of a group that can help you keep your commitments. Even the right pet can be a strong motivational force.

Celebration.

As best you can, make your fitness program a celebration. Celebrate your life, your body, your adventures, and your community. Anything you can do to bring joy and pleasure into your activities will be helpful. Not only does this energy support you in staying active, it is also broadly kapha-pacifying and will likely bolster your overall well-being.

Exceptionally Balancing Activities

Given the qualitative nature of kapha, most types of physical activity are going to be balancing. If you are unattached to a particular form of exercise, consider brisk walking, running, hiking, cycling, martial arts, [kapha-pacifying yoga](#), and other forms of strength-building, aerobic exercise. If you are embarking on a new exercise routine, keep in mind that it need not be complex or time-intensive. Even a daily twenty-minute walk can be incredibly supportive for your entire being—body, mind, and spirit. On the other hand, if you are already in the habit of practicing a form of exercise that you love, keep at it, and play with how you might make it even more kapha-pacifying. If by chance some aspect of the activity tends to be inherently kapha-aggravating, be sure to bring some additional support for kapha into other areas of your life.





Additional Practices to Support Your Body

As you might imagine, the exercise itself isn't all that matters. Any regular influences that help to pacify kapha systemically can help support your overall sense of balance. Consider the suggestions below, and if you want more, please explore our resource on creating a [Kapha-Pacifying Daily Routine](#).

Change Things Up

In general, kapha benefits from breaks in routine, monotony, and complacency. So anywhere that you can intentionally bring some excitement, spontaneity, and playfulness into your day will help to balance kapha systemically. Wherever you find yourself in a bit of a rut, you can consciously choose to change things up to encourage a return to balance.



Seek Invigoration

Kapha is very steady and stable by nature and is balanced by invigoration—physical, emotional, and mental. You can decide how you invite more stimulation and excitement into your life, but here are some ideas:

Practice Invigorating Pranayamas.

[Kapalabhati](#) and [Bhastrika](#) are yogic breathing exercises that invigorate the mind, the body, and the digestive capacity alike. Consider making a daily practice of them to balance kapha systemically.

Massage the Body with Dry Powder.

Massaging the body with soft powders (like chickpea or rice flours), balances kapha by stimulating the lymphatic system, encouraging circulation, and liquefying fat. It also supports the health of the skin, and lends strength and tone to the tissues of the body. You can do this before a shower, or after an oil massage, in which case, it can also help to remove excess oil from the skin.

Do Abhyanga.

This ancient practice of self-massage with oil is a practice in self-love. It calms the nervous system, rejuvenates the tissues, encourages circulation, and helps to counteract stagnation in the body. Consider using [Kapha Massage Oil](#) for additional herbal support. Our resource on [Ayurvedic Self-Massage](#) offers more information about this highly revered Ayurvedic practice, including suggestions for appropriate oils to use for different constitutions, imbalances, and seasons.

Practice Nasya.

Nasya is the practice of applying an herbal oil such as our [Nasya Oil](#) to the nasal passages, which has a very direct impact on the mind and the nervous system. Especially practiced in the morning, nasya awakens the mind and the senses while casting off any lingering sluggishness. If the practice of Nasya is new to you, please see our helpful [instructional video](#).

Pamper Your Muscles

The muscular system is inherently active during exercise and requires proper rest and recovery in order to maintain optimal health and integrity. You might consider offering your muscles a little extra care with regular massage, steam baths, Epsom salt baths, or with the application of soothing balms.

Balance Your Mind

Anything you can do to awaken and balance the mind helps to balance kapha systemically. Consider a few minutes of [So-Hum Meditation](#), or balancing *pranayamas* like [Full Yogic Breath](#), [Ujjayi](#), or [Nadi Shodhana](#). Whichever of these practices speak to you, know that even five to fifteen minutes per day can be transformative.



Embrace What's Right for You

At the end of the day, Ayurveda is a tradition that encourages each of us to embrace our uniqueness. Your path toward balance should be appropriately tailored for what you need, who you are, and also what will work best for you. Exercise is simply another area of our lives where we can use the wisdom of Ayurveda to support our overall health and well-being. If like increases like and opposites balance, there are countless ways to introduce balancing energies into our fitness routines (and our lives). Your task is to find your way. Make this journey your own. Experiment with what speaks to and nourishes you, and celebrate this opportunity to bring more support and inspiration into your life.

