

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.

