

The Channel of the Mind

Ayurveda and the Mind-Body Connection



Have you ever wondered just how much impact your state of mind has on your health? This has long been debated, and is somewhat difficult to study empirically. But the short answer, at least according to Ayurveda, is that the mind has a very powerful influence on our overall health and well-being. Ayurveda defines health not only as an absence of disease, but also as a very holistic level of vitality throughout our lives. As a result, the Ayurvedic approach to treating any single aspect of our health begins with taking into account the whole of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. Similarly, the Ayurvedic tradition recognizes that any of these three aspects of self—body, mind, or spirit—can either support or undermine our well-being, making the mind one of three equally influential players in our overall health. Further, Ayurveda considers even minor disturbances in the mind to be deeply influential, with the very real potential to compromise the quality of our lives, and to more directly cause any number of diseases—physical and otherwise.

Thankfully, Ayurveda also provides us with a very elegant and insightful perspective on the mind, and on the art of fostering its health, which is considered to be a thriving state of mental, emotional, and even spiritual well-being. The Ayurvedic tradition also offers us a number of practical, and powerfully effective, tools for balancing common disturbances of the mind.



So whether you are interested in fine-tuning the habits of your mind, strengthening your mental acuity, rejuvenating your mind and mental capacities, or just cultivating a more wholesome state of mind in general, you've come to the right place. We will begin by introducing, and briefly exploring the Ayurvedic perspective on the mind—and conclude with links to several useful resources geared toward supporting you in cultivating vibrant mental and emotional health.

The Channel of the Mind

According to Ayurveda, substances and energies move throughout the body via distinct *channels*—both physical and energetic—known as *srotamsi*. Remarkably, one of the primary channels named in the Ayurvedic tradition is the *channel of the mind*, known in Sanskrit as *mano vaha srotas*. The fact that there is a channel of the mind at all should elicit some suspicion that Ayurveda views the mind as an important participant in our overall health and longevity. And in fact, the more we explore the particulars of this channel, the more significant it seems to become.

But before we delve into the Ayurvedic perspective, let's examine our own personal and cultural preconceptions for a moment. Briefly reflect on this idea of “mind.” What are your natural associations with it? And where in the body do you imagine the mind resides? Here in the West, most of us think immediately of the head. Our culture tends to associate the mind with the brain itself, and so we are naturally inclined to envision the “mind” (at least to a large degree) residing within the confines of the cranium. But in no way does Ayurveda subscribe to these same limitations. Instead, the Ayurvedic tradition defines the mind far more broadly. Ayurveda's map of the mind quite elegantly reveals its significance in the broader landscape of who we are—both in terms of its level of importance, and also in terms of its vast field of influence on our overall mind-body ecology.

Ayurveda's Map of the Mind

For each of the major *srotamsi*, Ayurveda describes a root (*mula*), a pathway through the body (*marga*), and an opening (*mukha*). These aspects of each channel (*srotas*) serve to orient us to its prominent locations in the body, illuminate important influences upon it, and can inform our approach when it comes time to restore balance to an individual channel.

The Root of the Mind

In general, the root of each channel is seen as the developmental center, or point of origin, for that particular *srotas*. As such, it tends to hold a unique significance for the channel system as a whole. Think back to where you first imagined the mind might be located in the body. Great. Now, consider this: according to Ayurveda, *mano vaha srotas* is rooted—not in the brain—but in the *heart*. Let me say that one more time. *The channel of the mind is rooted in the heart* (and in the *ten great vessels*, but we'll get to that in a moment). So actually, as soon as we begin to explore the channel system of the mind, Ayurveda asks us to get out of our heads, and in fact, to step into our hearts.



This is incredibly significant because the Vedic sciences of Ayurveda, Yoga, and Tantra all view the heart as a critically important energetic hub in the body—a meaningful intersection of a diverse range of physical and energetic pathways. Picture a wagon wheel with the heart at the center, each spoke representing a different system, channel, or substance that either originates from, resides within, or passes through the heart. For example, of the thirteen srotamsi present in both men and women, three of them are rooted in the heart. This is notable because it is actually rather unusual for the physical location of distinct channels to overlap at all. Incidentally, the three channels rooted there also happen to permeate the entire physical body—which is also rare.

So we are beginning to get a sense of the heart as the powerhouse organ and energy center that it is. The heart is intimately connected to every cell and tissue throughout the body, three different times, through three distinct channels. No other organ in the Ayurvedic srotamsi shares that level of integration with the entire body. The heart center is also said to be the very seat of our emotional experience, home to our purest form of self, and, of course, the heart chakra (*anahata chakra*) is associated with our capacity for unconditional love. As the root of the mind, all of these energies that are associated with the heart take on a newfound significance. In truth, Ayurveda invites us to adopt a fundamentally expanded view of the mind as a whole.

The fact that the mind is also rooted in the ten great vessels (an important set of subtle energetic pathways that inform the subtle body) is a testament to the profound level of influence that subtle energies have upon the mind. While this is a vast and meaningful topic, we will keep our exploration brief. For now, it is important to understand that, of the ten great vessels, three (the solar, lunar, and central channels of *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna*, respectively) are said to be the most important.¹ These *nadis* (subtle energy channels) travel from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, intersecting at each of the seven chakras, and are said to carry the flow of *prana*, establishing an important relationship between *prana*, the *subtle body*, the heart, and the mind. Interestingly, when we practice *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises), *ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna* are among those pathways that are most profoundly activated, cleansed, and balanced.² This is why *pranayama* so powerfully supports the our psycho-spiritual health.

As we can see, *mano vaha srotas* extends far beyond the boundaries of the rational mind. In fact, as we continue to explore the Ayurvedic map of the mind, this channel's immense field of influence only expands further.

The Pathway of the Mind

According to Ayurveda, the pathway (or physical location) of *mano vaha srotas* is the *entire body*—making it the most overtly all-encompassing srotas of them all. The mind quite literally affects, and is affected by, every cell and tissue throughout the body, meaning that there is a direct relationship between the mind and our overall health and vitality. And this field of influence travels in both directions. In other words, yes, mind influences matter, but our physical health also very much affects our state of mind. In this way, our every experience has the potential to either support or disturb our overall state of balance—both mind and body.



Doorways to the Mind

The channel system of the mind also has a number of important openings (*mukhas*) to the exterior of the body. These doorways significantly influence the channel of the mind, and, when necessary, can be used strategically to help restore balance to *mano vaha srotas*. First among these openings are the five sense organs (the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the skin). This means that, when it comes to the mind (and to our psycho-spiritual health), the sense organs matter—as does the sensory input they receive on a daily basis. For better or worse, we tend to align (at least energetically) with the qualities of our day-to-day sensory experience. For instance, if we are exposed to a great deal of trauma, our systems develop a natural and familiar association with the energetic experience of trauma—and begin to anticipate its recurrence. On the other hand, if we are routinely surrounded by loving, inspiring relationships, our systems naturally tend to orient toward hope and possibility. Of course, each of us has a unique degree of sensitivity to these influences. For some, simply watching or listening to a news broadcast that is focused on the more disturbing elements of our society can cause a noticeable shift in the tendencies of the mind—especially when compared to times when we chose to limit our exposure to these types of inputs. Others are less sensitive. But for all of us, changing the overall quality of our sensory experience can radically alter our state of mind. If we are serious about inviting vibrant health and balance into the channel of the mind, the quality of our sensory input is certainly an important consideration.

Another important doorway to the mind is found in the *marmani*—a set of precise energy points on the surface of the skin that are connected to deeper, more subtle energetic pathways throughout the body. Each *marma* point offers a powerful access point for shifting the energy within the channel of the mind. And in this way, working with the marma points can be an effective means of restoring balance to *mano vaha srotas*.

The Big Picture

According to Ayurveda, the body is a crystallization of the mind. So just as impaired *agni* and indigestion are at the root of all diseases, the mind also plays a critical role in our overall health. In fact, mental *ama* (toxins) and unresolved emotions can lead to disease in very concrete ways. For example, unresolved anger can accumulate in the liver and impair its functioning, unprocessed grief can disturb the lungs, and chronic anxiety can upset the health of the colon. But these are only a few simple examples; there are countless ways that imbalances in *mano vaha srotas* can manifest as physical disease.

When it comes right down to it, the mind is incredibly important, broadly influential, and it has a very direct, and potent impact on our overall health and well-being—making the channel of the mind genuinely worthy of our sincere care and attention. And ultimately, our focused efforts to support the channel of the mind can't help but ripple out to positively impact our every cell, tissue, and subtle pathway throughout the mind-body ecology. It's no wonder that, throughout the Vedic sciences, there is such a universal emphasis on practices (such as meditation, yoga, and pranayama) that promote psycho-spiritual health.



Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas

Ayurveda names three *maha gunas* (universal attributes or qualities of consciousness)—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—that are especially pertinent to this conversation. Though these qualities are very subtle, they are present in our food, our experiences, and our overall state of consciousness. Together, sattva, rajas, and tamas are said to give rise to all phenomena in nature, and they have a profound influence on the subtle body and the mind.

- **Sattva** engenders equilibrium, clarity, light, intelligence, compassion, insight, and wisdom.
- **Rajas** ignites kinetic energy, movement, passion, and the ability to act.
- **Tamas** is responsible for inertia, darkness, heaviness, slowness, sleep, and decay.

Over the course of our lives, there is a natural place for all three of these energies. For example, tamas supports sleep; rajas engenders decisiveness and excitement in our lives; and sattva supports clarity of mind. But when it comes to our evolving psycho-spiritual health, the Vedic sciences reflect a clear preference for sattva, because it is more aligned with the qualities of liberation and enlightenment. Conversely, most mental imbalances can be attributed to an imbalance in rajas or tamas—usually an excess in one or both of them.

Mental Constitution

Just as each of us is born with a unique ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha in our constitution, we are also born with a distinctive proportion of sattva, rajas, and tamas. The relationship between the three becomes an individual baseline for what Ayurveda calls *manas prakriti*—the mental constitution. However, unlike the ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha in the constitution (which is established at conception and considered fixed from that point onward), the mental constitution can, and naturally does, change over time. This reflects our capacity, with practice, to develop more evolved states of consciousness throughout our lives. Of course, manas prakriti can also change for the worse, and will eventually do so if we consistently make poor lifestyle choices and surround ourselves with negativity.

This is where Ayurveda's map of the mind becomes an incredibly useful tool. It helps us to see the most potent places to direct our attention in order to support the evolution of consciousness—to encourage thriving mental and emotional health. As we have already discovered, some of the most effective tools in this realm include welcoming the heart center into the conversation, monitoring the quality of the sensory input we receive daily, being mindful of the quality of our relationships, working with the marma points, and engaging with practices that help to activate and balance the subtle pathways of the mind (like pranayama, yoga, meditation, and prayer). The specifics will largely be determined by the nature of each individual imbalance.





The Mind and the Three Doshas

As we move toward understanding more specific imbalances, the three *doshas* provide an important context for our exploration. Much like the three *maha gunas*, *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* each have an important role to play in our overall health (provided they remain in balance), and when provoked, each of them tends to cause a specific range of imbalances that can manifest either in the physical body or in the more subtle realms. As a result, *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* each have a particular flavor of influence on the mind, emotions, and overall consciousness, and each of them can either support or undermine our overall health—it all depends on whether or not they are in balance.

Vata and the Mind

Vata dosha, which governs the nervous system and the mind, is primarily made up of the air and ether elements. Not coincidentally, the mind is also primarily composed of the air and ether elements, making it especially susceptible to *vata* imbalances.³ When in balance, *vata* is generally associated with creativity, intuition, clairvoyance, the capacity to connect with the subtle realms, profound spiritual understanding, and a natural sense of expansiveness. *Vata* imbalances, on the other hand, typically manifest as a certain instability, agitation, or hypersensitivity in the mind, and often involve excess *rajas* as well.



Aggravated vata can cause rapid changes in mood, fear, anxiety, contraction, a sense of being scattered, a lack of direction, spaciness, ungroundedness, excessive speed in the thoughts and words, over-activity in the sympathetic nervous system, and a sense of loneliness or isolation. Excess vata also tends to draw us out of our bodies and can leave us feeling somewhat disassociated or disembodied, disturbing our sense of security and belonging to the material world.

Aggravations of vata in *mano vaha srotas* are often the result of overexertion, overworking, stress, trying to attend to too many things all at once, times of travel or transition, overstimulation (e.g., lights, crowds, technology, etc.), loud noises (or loud music), stimulants such as nicotine, caffeine, and recreational drugs, and excessive exercise or sexual activity. Vata can also be elevated in the mind as a result of a vata-provoking diet, which may include too many dry, light, and rough foods like raw vegetables, crackers, dried fruits, and the like.

Pitta and the Mind

Pitta dosha, which governs insight and intellect, is primarily made up of the fire and water elements. Pitta is closely associated with the gray matter of the brain and has a very important connection with the mind as a whole. Pitta is also closely aligned with a number of *rajasic* qualities, which can accumulate in the mind and cause very pitta-specific types of imbalances. Healthy pitta is generally associated with courage, confidence, will power, intelligence, leadership, a sense of vision, acceptance, contentment, satisfaction, enthusiasm, cooperation, and the capacity to surrender.

But when pitta accumulates in the mind, it tends to cause anger, hatred, irritability, frustration, impatience, resentment, envy, judgment, criticism, a rigid attachment to one's personal beliefs and perspectives, excessive ambition, and a ruthless desire for power.

Aggravations of pitta and rajas in *mano vaha srotas* are often caused by excess heat and upward moving energy in the body, imbalances in the liver, periods of intense focus or ambition, as well as a tendency to disregard the needs of one's body in favor of achieving one's goals. Pitta can also be elevated in the mind as a result of a pitta-provoking diet, which may include too many hot, spicy, especially sour, oily, or fried foods.

Kapha and the Mind

Kapha dosha, which governs structure and lubrication in the body, is primarily made up of the water and earth elements. Kapha is closely associated with the white matter of the brain, the adipose tissue that comprises the brain and nervous tissue, and is also strongly connected to our capacity for memory. As the densest of the doshas, kapha is also aligned with *tamas*, which can accumulate in the mind and cause very kapha-specific types of imbalances. Healthy kapha is generally associated with love, compassion, patience, groundedness, loyalty, steadiness, endurance, and an overarching sense of ease in one's life.



But when kapha accumulates in the mind, it tends to cause lethargy, complacency, laziness, depression, stubbornness, attachment, greed, emotional possessiveness, and a tendency to hoard material possessions.

Aggravations of kapha and tamas in mano vaha srotas are often caused by excess density and heaviness in the physical, mental, and emotional spheres, and can also involve an excess of downward moving energy in the body. Excess kapha in the mind is also triggered by an overly sedentary lifestyle, a lack of stimulation or interest in one's life, inadequate exercise, a sluggish digestive fire, or a kapha-provoking diet—which might include too many especially heavy, dense, or cold foods (like cheese, ice cream, and fried foods).

Correcting Imbalances of the Mind

The Ayurvedic tradition is a holistic approach to health and healing. As such, disturbances of the mind must be understood from a broader perspective that includes our physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual health. As a result, restoring balance to the channel of the mind can involve a diverse array of therapeutic strategies, and it can certainly be helpful to seek the guidance of a trained Ayurvedic practitioner. That said, there are a number of common imbalances that are worth exploring collectively. We hope that the links below will help to further inform your journey towards vibrant mental, emotional, and physical health. Feel free to pick and choose those resources that will best serve you in this moment. We also invite you to return to this department again and again to balance the ever-changing landscape of your mind, and to explore new material, as it is added. We sincerely hope that we can continue to support your quest for optimal health, as it evolves.

Additional Resources

The following resources are intended to serve as a starting place for correcting common imbalances in mano vaha srotas:

[Cultivating Calm: A Guide to Balancing Anxiety with Ayurveda](#) is a practical guide to quieting one of the primary manifestations of excess vata in mano vaha srotas. The strategies also invariably help to cultivate vata's more supportive mental and emotional characteristics, like expansiveness, creativity, intuition, excitement, and a connection to the divine.

[Surrender and Serenity: A Guide to Balancing Anger with Ayurveda](#) is aimed at helping to relieve mano vaha srotas of disturbances caused by excess pitta, and offers practical guidance for doing so. The therapeutic strategies also invariably help to cultivate pitta's more supportive mental and emotional characteristics, like courage, confidence, acceptance, surrender, and will power.

[Motivate! Overcoming Lethargy with Ayurveda](#) is a practical guide to expanding beyond the typical limitations of accumulated kapha in mano vaha srotas. The therapeutic strategies also invariably help to cultivate kapha's more supportive mental and emotional characteristics, like love, compassion, patience, groundedness, calm, and steadiness.



References

¹ Shiva Svarodaya, trans. Ram Kumar Rai (Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1997), ver. 36.

² Claudia Welch, *The Secrets of the Mind: The Ten Channels Revealed* (Big Shakti, 2005), PDF e-book, 24, <http://drclaudiawelch.com/estore/books-ebooks>.

³ David Frawley, *Ayurvedic Healing: A Comprehensive Guide* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1997), 250.



Cultivating Calm

A Guide to Balancing Anxiety with Ayurveda



Do you struggle with anxiety or fear? These are expressions of excess *vata* in *mano vaha srotas* (the channel of the mind). Balanced *vata* is credited with a number of positive mental and emotional capacities like creativity, joy, intuition, expansiveness, clairvoyance, and deep spiritual understanding. However, when aggravated *vata* accumulates in the channel of the mind, it tends to cause constriction—which can lead to fear, anxiety, contraction, and even loneliness. We will start by exploring how these imbalances occur in the first place, but the purpose of this article is to offer practical guidance on how to support a return to balance so that we can reclaim health and vitality throughout the mental and emotional spheres. If the channel of the mind is a new concept for you, you might appreciate reading [The Channel of the Mind: Ayurveda and the Mind-Body Connection](#) as a foundation for what follows.



Like Increases Like

Ayurveda operates on the premise that like increases like, and that opposites balance. Vata dosha is naturally light, cold, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear. Therefore, exposure to these qualities—whether through our diets, lifestyle habits, relationships, or experiences—tends to increase vata. On the other hand, vata is balanced by foods and experiences that are heavy, warm, nourishing, substantive, oily, stabilizing, and concrete (or tangible) in nature.

Balancing Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are among the most classic expressions of excess vata, and these imbalances are particularly likely to be triggered by excesses in the light, cold, and dry qualities. Therefore, using diet, lifestyle, and supportive herbs to increase our exposure to heavy, warm, and oily influences will generally serve to relieve fear and anxiety. These qualities help to ground, nourish, and lubricate aggravated vata.

Supportive Lifestyle Habits

Lifestyle therapies provide a potent means of calming vata. The fact that vata is the subtlest of the three doshas by nature means that it is more easily impacted by subtle energies than are *pitta* and *kapha*. This is particularly true when a vata imbalance is affecting a subtle channel like that of the mind. But lifestyle therapies are very useful in balancing vata for another reason, and that is that elevated vata also tends to inhibit *agni* (the digestive fire), and can leave one's digestion rather irregular and unpredictable. Unfortunately, when the digestive fire is compromised, the efficacy of any food or herb-based therapy suffers. After all, even the most perfect food or herb cannot reliably foster a return to balance if we cannot digest it properly. By contrast, even small adjustments in our lifestyle habits often serve to quickly and efficiently pacify elevated vata. In truth, these types of therapies frequently help to calm vata enough to strengthen digestive health, and can help to prepare us to successfully introduce foods and herbs that will further promote balance. The following lifestyle habits are particularly adept at calming vata in the mind.

A Daily Routine

Nearly everywhere we look in nature, there are creatures engaging in some sort of consistent daily routine that is deeply influenced by the rhythms of nature—the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the seasons, and the underlying impulses directing the broader community of life. While there is often some degree of seasonal variation, many plants and animals embrace a predictable daily rhythm and, as a rule, live by it. As humans, we have largely gotten away from this habit. We engage with life at all hours of the day and night, and many of us have jobs and other obligations that *require* us to keep irregular schedules.



But at the most fundamental level, our physiology is very much adapted to—and supported by—some sense of regularity. Actually, this is precisely why the daily routine is such potent medicine, particularly for anxiety. The routine itself has a very grounding and stabilizing effect on the system; it creates a number of familiar and comforting reference points throughout each day that send a resounding affirmation to the deep tissues of the body that all is well, that we can be *at ease*. When the body becomes accustomed to—and learns to count on—a daily routine that includes things like adequate rest, appropriate exercise, and a nourishing spiritual practice, the mind and the nervous system naturally begin to relax.¹ This alone serves to calm vata in the mind.

But adopting a daily routine is also a very purposeful and enduring act of love and self-care. Each day, our routines provide us with a tangible opportunity to prioritize our own health and well-being, regardless of what else might be going on in our lives. They become poignant reminders that we are, in fact, worthy of a healthy dose of loving attention every single day. The cumulative effect of caring for ourselves in this way is quite powerful, very vata-pacifying, and for many, results in a greatly improved sense of wellness in a very short period of time.

But because vata tends to be scattered, and can have a difficult time following through on commitments, simplicity is equally important. In other words, when vata is aggravated, less truly is more. Consider starting with just a few simple adjustments:

- Wake up at the same time from one day to the next.
- Eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at about the same times each day.
- Go to sleep at a consistent time.
- Choose just one or two of the below strategies to complement this foundation.

You can always add more to your routine as the anxiety settles down and your system comes into better alignment with your natural state of balance. But for the time being, biting off more than you can chew is very likely to backfire. Pay attention to those practices you are particularly drawn to and inspired by.

Mindfulness Practices

It takes both time and focused attention to re-pattern the mind, and daily practice is one of the best ways to ensure your success. Remarkably, as little as fifteen minutes per day is enough to be transformative, and committing to a daily practice will deliver results rather quickly. If you are serious about alleviating your anxiety, choose one of the following practices and commit to doing it on a daily basis:

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* (the vital breath) throughout the system, and encourage the proper digestion of food, thoughts, and emotions—all of which can help to relieve anxiety. If you do not have an established practice, [So Hum Meditation](#) is very helpful in calming anxiety, and is a wonderful practice suitable to most anyone. For additional support, you might try focusing your attention at the crown of the head while you practice.²



Pranayama

Stimulated by and carried on the breath, prana infuses every cell and tissue throughout the body with life. Interestingly, disturbances in prana are usually directly tied to the emergence of fear and anxiety. Therefore, the practice of specific *pranayamas* (yogic breathing exercises aimed at balancing the movement of prana throughout the system) can be quite a potent means of calming anxiety. 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 calm the mind and reduce fear and anxiety. Start with just ten to fifteen 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.

Yoga

Yoga positively impacts the mind in very similar ways. It moves prana in the body, helps to dissipate tension, clears stagnation, and encourages fluidity throughout the tissues, the subtle body, and the mind. Yoga also stimulates circulation, and serves as a balanced form of exercise, which is important when trying to balance anxiety. Favor [vata-pacifying yoga](#), with a particular emphasis on restorative poses like [savasana](#) to clear accumulated vata from *mano vaha srotas*.

Marma Points

As one of the openings to the channel system of the mind, the *marmani* (precise energy points on the surface of the skin that are connected to deeper, subtle energetic pathways throughout the body) provide a particularly potent means of correcting imbalances in *mano vaha srotas*. One marma point that provides a simple access point for balancing anxiety is known as *tala hrida marma*, and is located in the palm of the hand. To find it, make a fist with your left hand and notice where the left middle finger touches the left palm, (between the second and third metacarpals); this is *tala hrida*.³ Simply press the thumb of the right hand firmly into this marma point for about a minute to calm the mind, relieve anxiety, and support concentration.⁴



Nasya

Nasya, the practice of applying medicated oil to the upper nasal passages, is actually seen as a way of offering a deeply influential therapy directly to the tissues of the brain. Nasya soothes the delicate tissues of the nose, fosters unobstructed breathing, relieves accumulated stress, promotes mental clarity, and generally supports the mind. **Nasya Oil** generally helps to pacify vata in *mano vaha srotas*, and has a very calming effect on the mind and the nervous system. Nasya should not be performed by pregnant or menstruating women. Otherwise, apply three to five drops into each nostril (ideally, in the morning on an empty stomach). If you are new to the practice of nasya, please see our helpful [instructional video](#).

Abhyanga (Ayurvedic Oil Massage)

Abhyanga, the ancient practice of self-massage with oil, calms the nervous system, lubricates and rejuvenates the tissues, and promotes healthy circulation throughout the body. It is no coincidence that the Sanskrit word for oil, *sneha*, also means love. Abhyanga is a profound practice of rejuvenation and loving self-care that benefits both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness. In addition, the oil itself forms a protective sheath around the body that can help to buffer the nervous system and the mind against undue stress or anxiety. Each morning, before a shower or bath, massage about ½ cup warm **Vata Massage Oil** or **Organic Sesame Oil** into the skin, hair, and scalp. You will find more detailed instructions on this rejuvenating technique and a helpful instructional video [here](#).

Simplified Oil Massage: Oil the Feet and Scalp Before Bed

If a full-bodied abhyanga is sometimes too involved, consider applying a calming oil such as **Brahmi Oil** or **Bhringaraj Oil** to the soles of the feet and (if desired) to the scalp before bed. This practice helps to relax the mind, ground the energy, and encourage sound sleep—all of which help to alleviate anxiety. Don't forget to protect your sheets by wearing a pair of old socks and a hat (or cover your pillow with an old towel).

Ginger Baking Soda Bath

A bath relaxes the nervous system, releases tension, and helps to quiet the mind. A ginger baking soda bath helps to reduce anxiety because it is deeply vata-pacifying. The ginger and baking soda make this bath particularly soothing and heating; their qualities encourage circulation, sweating, and detoxification, and are especially helpful in offsetting the cold and dry qualities so often associated with anxiety. Simply add 1/3 cup baking soda and 1/3 cup **ginger powder** to a hot bath and soak for ten to fifteen minutes.⁵ If your pitta is high, you may not want to stay in the bath as long.

Appropriate Exercise

When engaged appropriately, exercise can be a panacea for improved health. Proper exercise helps to warm the body, improve circulation, release accumulated tension, and move stagnant mental and emotional energy. It also kindles *agni* (which is essential to optimal health), improves digestion, bolsters the body's detoxification mechanisms, and encourages proper elimination, relaxation, and sound sleep—all of which help to curb anxiety.





Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that the type, duration, and intensity of exercise that is most balancing for each of us depends largely on our [constitution](#) and [current state of balance](#). For most people with anxiety, a vata-pacifying exercise routine that is gently paced and grounding is most appropriate. Calming activities such as walking, [vata-pacifying yoga](#), chi gong, or tai chi are usually supportive options. 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.⁶ 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.

A Supportive Diet

Learning to eat a balanced diet can be an overwhelming and time-consuming endeavor. But when we're dealing with chronic anxiety, our lives are often rather complicated, and (because opposites balance) our systems will generally respond better to solutions that are comparatively simple. To balance vata, the diet needs to be a wholesome source of warmth, nourishment, and grounding. While you can certainly study the nuances of eating a [vata-pacifying diet](#), as well as [specific foods to favor and avoid](#), it is probably best to focus on emphasizing healthy, whole foods while minimizing processed foods, stimulants, and refined sugars—which we often reach for when time is short and our bodies crave nourishment. Soups, stews, root vegetables, and other warm, simple, grounding foods are usually good choices. Or, choose prepared foods that are aligned with the healthy, whole food model. Asian restaurants and the prepared foods section of many health food stores often have a good range of options.



Herbs for Calming the Mind

Tranquil Mind

[Tranquil Mind tablets](#) are specifically formulated to soothe and calm the nerves without creating dullness or lethargy. This powerful blend of herbs pacifies vata in the mind, promotes peace and well-being, and helps to bolster equanimity in the face of everyday stressors.

Stress Ease

[Stress Ease tablets](#) offer strength, resiliency, and tone to the neuromuscular system, helping the body to better cope with stress and anxiety. This potent blend of herbs introduces rejuvenative qualities that buffer the body against weakness, fatigue, and overwhelm—helping us to face physical, mental and emotional challenges alike with greater ease. It also offers a sustained source of natural energy that can help us cope with the demands of daily living.

Ashwagandha

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

Bacopa

[Bacopa](#) is an excellent rejuvenative for the mind and the nerves. It is renowned for soothing the nervous system, while promoting memory, intelligence, concentration, and an overall balanced state of mind. Bacopa is also available as a [liquid extract](#).

Healthy Vata

[Healthy Vata tablets](#) help to balance vata systemically and can certainly help to calm excess vata in the mind.

Additional Resources

Keep in mind that anxiety does not develop in a vacuum. It occurs only within the larger context of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. If you feel inspired to study the bigger picture, we have a number of other articles that may further inform your journey towards optimal health. The following resources are particularly relevant to the topics of fear, anxiety, and elevated vata in the mind:

[An Ayurvedic Guide to Stress Management](#) explores fantastic tools for reducing stress and for changing our relationship with stressful situations. Stress and anxiety are often closely linked, so this resource might very well support your healing process.

[An Ayurvedic Guide to Balanced Sleep](#) is an extremely useful resource if you feel that your anxiety is negatively impacting your ability to get adequate rest.



[Vibrant Heart](#) explores the critical connection between the mind, the heart, and the subtle channels of the energetic body. It can be an insightful resource for balancing anxiety and excessive mental chatter by tending to the heart center.

[The Importance of Healthy Digestion](#) introduces the concept of agni (which is the very foundation of health) and offers an in-depth exploration of the importance of tending to yours.

Our [Guide to Healthy Elimination](#) is relevant due to the natural connection between overall health and digestive health—which, of course, is reflected in the quality of our elimination.

[Building a Healthy Immune System](#) can inform a natural approach to bolstering ojas and immune health, which are often compromised by elevated vata.

Our [Fall Season Guide](#) suggests a number of strategies for pacifying vata and for staying warm, grounded and nourished—both mind and body—during the potentially aggravating autumn season.

Address Anxiety Your Way

Remember, one of the primary tenants of Ayurveda is that the best results come when we treat individuals—not their symptoms. Balancing anxiety is no exception. While the above suggestions are aimed at curbing tendencies toward anxiety, each of us has a different constellation of influences affecting our overall health. Factors such as [constitution](#), [current state of balance](#), age, environment, *khavaigunyas* (personal weaknesses), and the season, can be important considerations in crafting an effective treatment plan. This is why working with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner can be invaluable. Rather than sifting through a long list of possible remedies, you can focus on those that would most deeply serve your system in particular. Even if you are navigating an Ayurvedic lifestyle on your own, it is critical to understand that who you are is far more important than the particular ailments that you may be trying to correct. This is your adventure. Chances are that the therapeutic strategies that most resonate with you will have a particularly potent impact on your state of balance. So listen to your body, your heart, and your intuition. Trust your gut. Follow your inspiration. Keep it simple. Go slow. And most importantly, enjoy the process. We sincerely hope that we can continue to support you in cultivating a calm, balanced mind, and vibrant overall health.



References

¹ Claudia Welch, *Balance Your Hormones, Balance Your Life: Achieving Optimal Health and Wellness through Ayurveda, Chinese Medicine, and Western Science* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 45.

² Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 128.

³ Vasant Lad and Anisha Durve, *Marma Points of Ayurveda: The Energy Pathways for Healing Body, Mind and Consciousness with a Comparison to Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Albuquerque: The Ayurvedic Press, 2008), 202.

⁴ Lad, *Home Remedies*, 127-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶ Claudia Welch, *Dinacharya: Changing Lives Through Daily Living* (Self-published, 2007), PDF e-book, 11, <http://drclaudiawelch.com/estore/books-ebooks>; Lad, *Home Remedies*, 56-64.



Surrender and Serenity

A Guide to Balancing Anger with Ayurveda



Do you struggle with anger, or frequent irritability? These are both expressions of excess *pitta* in *mano vaha srotas* (the channel of the mind). Balanced *pitta* in the mind is credited with a number of positive mental and emotional capacities like will power, courage, confidence, contentment, satisfaction, enthusiasm, cooperation, acceptance, and surrender. However, when aggravated *pitta* accumulates in the channel of the mind, it tends to cause accumulating heat, and can lead to anger, irritability, and other fiery emotions like envy, criticism, and excessive ambition. We will start by exploring how these imbalances occur in the first place, but the purpose of this article is to offer practical guidance on how to support a return to balance so that we can reclaim health and vitality through the mental and emotional spheres. If the channel of the mind is a new concept for you, you might appreciate reading [The Channel of the Mind: Ayurveda and the Mind-Body Connection](#) as a foundation for what follows.



Like Increases Like

Ayurveda operates on the premise that like increases like, and that opposites balance. Pitta dosha is naturally light, hot, sharp (or penetrating), oily, liquid, spreading, subtle, and clear. Therefore, exposure to these qualities—whether through our diets, lifestyle habits, relationships, or experiences—tends to increase pitta. On the other hand, pitta is balanced by foods and experiences that are heavy, nourishing, substantive, cool (even cold), dry, stabilizing, and concrete (or tangible) in nature.

Balancing Anger

Anger and irritability are among the most classic expressions of excess pitta, and these imbalances are particularly likely to be triggered by excesses in the hot, sharp, and spreading qualities. Therefore, using diet, lifestyle, and supportive herbs to increase our exposure to cool, slow, and stabilizing influences will generally serve to relieve anger and irritability. These qualities help to balance excess heat, while softening, grounding, and containing pitta's intensity.

A Supportive Diet

Learning to eat a balanced diet can sometimes feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. And when it comes to anger and irritability, a [pitta-pacifying diet](#) that prevents the accumulation of excess heat in the body is one of the most potent therapies around. In particular, it is important to avoid hot, spicy foods (e.g., cayenne pepper, chilies, etc.), very sour or acidic foods (like pickles or vinegar), citrus fruits, fermented foods, alcohol, and caffeine.¹ These foods simply tend to be too intense, heating, and pitta-aggravating. Instead, the diet should be soothing, nourishing, and grounding, favoring foods that are simple, [energetically cooling](#), and relatively bland. This fare can be complemented by cool drinks, which are ideally taken between meals. Favor the [sweet](#), [bitter](#), and [astringent](#) tastes. Minimize the [sour](#), [salty](#), and [pungent](#) (spicy) tastes. And focus on creating meals from healthy, whole foods, while minimizing processed foods, stimulants, and refined sugars. For more detailed guidance, please see our list of [specific foods to favor and avoid](#) when following a pitta-pacifying diet.

Chamomile Tulsi Rose Tea

Ingredients:

- Dried chamomile flowers, 1 part
- [Tulsi powder](#), 1 part
- Rose petal powder, 2 parts

This tea is soothing, calming to the mind, and deeply pitta-pacifying. Steep ½ teaspoon of the herbal mixture in a cup of recently boiled water for about ten minutes, cool, and enjoy (either warm or at room temperature) three times per day, after meals.²



Supportive Lifestyle Habits

Lifestyle therapies provide a powerful means of soothing pitta. The fact that pitta is subtle by nature means that it is rather easily impacted by subtle energies—especially when the imbalance is affecting a subtle channel like that of the mind. Even small adjustments in our lifestyle habits can often serve to quickly and efficiently pacify elevated pitta. The following lifestyle habits are particularly adept at soothing (and eliminating) elevated pitta in the mind.

A Daily Routine

Nearly everywhere we look in nature, there are creatures engaging in some sort of consistent daily routine that is deeply influenced by the rhythms of nature—the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the seasons, and the underlying impulses directing the broader community of life. While there is often some degree of seasonal variation, many plants and animals embrace a predictable daily rhythm and, as a rule, live by it. As humans, we have largely gotten away from this habit. We engage with life at all hours of the day and night, and many of us have jobs and other obligations that *require* us to keep irregular schedules.

But at the most fundamental level, our physiology is very much adapted to—and supported by—some sense of regularity. Actually, this is precisely why the daily routine is such an effective therapy for anger and irritability. The routine itself has a very grounding and stabilizing effect on the system; it creates a number of familiar and comforting reference points throughout each day that send a resounding affirmation to the deep tissues of the body that all is well, that we can be at ease. When the body becomes accustomed to—and learns to count on—a daily routine that includes things like adequate rest, appropriate exercise, and a nourishing spiritual practice, the mind and the nervous system naturally begin to relax, easing pitta's hold on the mind.³

But adopting a daily routine is also a very purposeful and enduring act of love and self-care. Each day, our routines provide us with a tangible opportunity to prioritize our own health and well-being, regardless of what else might be going on in our lives. They become poignant reminders that we are, in fact, worthy of a healthy dose of loving attention every single day. The cumulative effect of caring for ourselves in this way is quite powerful, deeply pitta-pacifying, and for many, results in a greatly improved sense of wellness in a very short period of time.

But because pitta tends to be overly sharp and perfectionistic, implementing change in a gentle, balanced way is extremely important. In other words, when pitta is aggravated, moderation and simplicity are key. Consider starting with just a few simple adjustments:

- Wake up at the same time from one day to the next.
- Eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at about the same times each day.
- Go to sleep at a consistent time.
- Consider adding just two or three of the below strategies to complement this foundation.

You can always add more to your routine as the anger and irritability settle down and as your system comes into better alignment with your natural state of balance. But for the moment, being overly ambitious (as is pitta's tendency) is very likely to backfire.



Mindfulness Practices

It takes both time and focused attention to re-pattern the mind, and daily practice is one of the best ways to ensure your success. Remarkably, as little as fifteen minutes per day is enough to be transformative, and committing to a daily practice will deliver results rather quickly. If you are serious about releasing your anger and irritability, choose at least one of the following practices and commit to doing it on a daily basis:

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* (the vital breath) throughout the system, release unresolved emotions, and encourage the proper digestion of food, thoughts, and experiences—all of which can help to ease tendencies toward anger and irritability. If you do not have an established practice, [Empty Bowl Meditation](#) can help to soothe a hot-tempered mind; this is a beautiful practice suitable to most anyone.

Pranayama

Stimulated by and carried on the breath, prana infuses every cell and tissue throughout the body with life. The practice of specific *pranayamas* (yogic breathing exercises aimed at balancing the movement of prana throughout the system) can be quite a potent means of soothing tendencies toward anger and irritability. In general, pranayama helps to restore fluidity and vitality to the subtle energy channels of the body, releases accumulated tension, fosters a sense of calm serenity in the mind, and is deeply supportive of 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 [sheetali pranayama](#) (cooling breath), which introduces a powerful cooling energy to the system and can help to more specifically balance anger and irritability. Start with just five to fifteen minutes each day and notice what happens.

Yoga

Yoga positively impacts the mind in very similar ways. It moves prana in the body, helps to dissipate tension, clears stagnation, and encourages fluidity throughout the tissues, the subtle body, and the mind. Yoga also stimulates circulation, and serves as a balanced form of exercise, which is important when balancing a tendency toward anger. Favor [pitta-pacifying yoga](#) with a particular emphasis on forward folds, twists, and pitta-pacifying poses like camel, [cobra](#), [free the cat-cow](#), [boat](#), and [bridge](#).⁴ If you prefer a flow, consider something cooling and grounding, like [moon salutations](#). It is best to avoid inverted postures and sun salutations when pitta is aggravated in the mind.



Nasya

Nasya, the practice of applying medicated oil to the upper nasal passages, is actually seen as a way of offering deeply influential therapy directly to the tissues of the brain. *Nasya* soothes the delicate tissues of the nose, fosters unobstructed breathing, relieves accumulated stress, promotes mental clarity, and generally supports the mind. Brahmi ghee has a particularly cooling, soothing effect on the mind and the nervous system, and is especially helpful for relieving anger and hot-headedness. Plain ghee can also be used. To perform traditional *nasya*, place either form of ghee in a dropper bottle and warm it in a hot water bath. Once melted, apply three to five drops to each nostril. Alternatively, three to five drops of *Nasya Oil* might prove very supportive. If you are new to the practice of *nasya*, please see our helpful [instructional video](#). If a simpler routine is more appealing, you can also place a small amount of ghee on your pinky finger to lubricate the insides of the nostrils, sniffing the ghee upward to more effectively soothe the mind.⁵ In either case, *nasya* should not be performed by pregnant or menstruating women. Otherwise, this practice is best performed in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Cooling Abhyanga (Ayurvedic Oil Massage)

Abhyanga, the ancient practice of self-massage with oil calms the nervous system, lubricates and rejuvenates the tissues, and promotes healthy circulation throughout the body. It is no coincidence that the Sanskrit word for oil, *sneha*, also means love. *Abhyanga* is a profound practice of rejuvenation and loving self-care that benefits both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness. The oil itself, which should be cooling to pacify pitta, forms a protective sheath around the body that can help to buffer the nervous system and the mind against being overly hot and reactive. Each morning, before a shower or bath, massage about ¼ cup *Pitta Massage Oil* or *Organic Coconut Oil* into the skin, hair, and scalp. You will find more detailed instructions on this rejuvenating technique and a helpful instructional video [here](#).

Simplified Oil Massage: Oil the Feet and Scalp Before Bed

If a full-bodied *abhyanga* is sometimes too involved, consider applying a calming, cooling, pitta-pacifying oil such as *Brahmi Oil*, *Bhringaraj Oil*, or *Coconut Oil* to the soles of the feet and (if desired) to the scalp before bed. This practice helps to ground and soothe the mind, pulls accumulated bodily heat downward and away from the head, and encourages sound sleep. Don't forget to protect your sheets by wearing a pair of old socks and a hat (or cover your pillow with an old towel).

Keep Cool Physically

Excess heat in the body can quickly become excess heat in the mind (which can cause a broad range of fiery emotions, including anger) so keeping the body physically cool is incredibly important. In general, pitta is fairly intolerant of prolonged sun exposure. Therefore, it is best to avoid being in the sun during the heat of the day, and to favor being outdoors in the morning and evening instead. When you are outside, shield your body from undue sun exposure by wearing lightweight, loose-fitting clothes that cover as much skin as possible. The head and the eyes are particularly sensitive to light and heat, so be sure to wear a sun hat and sunglasses.





During the hottest months, you can further cool the physical body by reducing the water temperature in your daily shower or bath. You might also consider applying some cooling essential oils (like khus or jasmine) to the crown of the head, and to the six other chakra points—which serve to cool the energetic body.⁶ Dressing in, and exposing yourself to, an abundance of cooling colors (greens, blues, purples and whites) will also help to cool pitta throughout the system.

Appropriate Exercise

When engaged appropriately, exercise can be a panacea for improved health. Proper exercise helps to release accumulated tension, clear stagnant mental and emotional energy, improve circulation, bolster the body's detoxification mechanisms, kindle agni, and encourage proper elimination—all of which help to ensure a balanced state of mind. But exercise can also very easily aggravate pitta and increase heat in the body—which would obviously be counter-productive when trying to balance excess heat and intensity in *mano vaha srotas*.

Thankfully, there is a way to exercise that will support balance—even when pitta is elevated. In fact, Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that the type, duration, and intensity of exercise that is most balancing for each of us varies according to our **constitution** and our **current state of balance**. 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.⁷ For most people who struggle with anger and irritability, a pitta-pacifying exercise routine that is moderately paced, grounding, and done with relaxed effort is best. Supportive types of exercise (as long as they are not done too intensely) include walking, hiking, swimming, cycling, tai-chi, chi-gong, and **pitta-pacifying yoga**. Try breathing through your nose for the duration of the activity as a way of ensuring that you are not pushing too hard. When pitta is aggravated, it is also extremely important not to exercise during the heat of the day (from about 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.). Exercise in the morning or evening (from



about 6-10 a.m. or p.m.) will be far more balancing. 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—body, mind, and spirit.

Herbs for Cooling and Soothing the Mind

Shatavari

Shatavari is a deeply rejuvenating herb with a strong capacity to pacify pitta. This is due to its cooling, grounding, and nourishing effects on the system. Shatavari is primarily bitter and sweet in taste and is very good at rejuvenating the digestive tract and the blood, particularly when they are disturbed by excess heat. This herb is also very sattvic (pure, harmonious) in nature and therefore helps to calm the mind while promoting love and devotion. If you prefer, **Shatavari tablets** and **liquid extract** are also available.

Amalaki

Amalaki is one of the three herbs in triphala, and it is particularly adept at eliminating excess heat from the digestive tract (which is the source of most heat in the body). Amalaki also gently removes natural toxins, provides a highly concentrated source of antioxidants, is deeply pitta-pacifying, and is a potent rejuvenative that nourishes all of the tissues. If you prefer, **Amalaki tablets**, **powder**, and **liquid extract** are also available.

Chyavanprash

Chyavanprash is a traditional Ayurvedic herbal jam made in a base of amalaki fruit. This balancing formula 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.

Neem

Neem is bitter in taste and is extremely cooling. It removes excess heat, destroys toxins, balances pitta in the digestive tract, purifies the blood, and helps to clear pitta's sharpness. If you prefer, **Neem tablets** and **liquid extract** are also available.

Liver Formula

Liver Formula tablets help to detoxify and rejuvenate the liver by delivering a powerful combination of cooling, cleansing, bitter, and deeply pitta-pacifying herbs. Interestingly, the liver is considered the seat of anger, so tending to the liver can very directly help to clear anger and irritability from the system.

Brahmi/Gotu Kola

Brahmi/Gotu Kola is tridoshic, incredibly sattvic in nature, and is renowned for its ability to support both the nervous system and the mind. It is a wonderful choice for soothing pitta in mano vaha srotas. Brahmi/Gotu Kola is also available as a **liquid extract**.

Bhringaraj

Bhringaraj is one of the best herbs for the head and is particularly adept at cooling, calming, and rejuvenating the mind while bolstering memory. In addition to taking this herb internally, **Bhringaraj Oil** can be massaged into the scalp and feet before bed to ground one's energy, and further pacify pitta in the mind.



Additional Resources

Keep in mind that anger and irritability do not develop in a vacuum. These emotional tendencies crop up only within the larger context of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. If you feel inspired to study the bigger picture, we have a number of other articles that may further inform your journey towards optimal health. The following resources are particularly relevant to the topics of anger, irritability, and elevated pitta in the mind:

[Love Your Liver](#) explores a full range of therapies to support clearing excess heat and pitta from the liver, which is actually the seat (home) of anger in the body. As a result, this resource is typically quite relevant to the process of balancing excess pitta in the channel of the mind.

[An Ayurvedic Guide to Stress Management](#) explores fantastic tools for reducing stress and for changing our relationship with stressful situations. Stress is frequently a trigger for anger and irritability. If this is the case for you, consider using this resource to support your healing process.

[Balancing Insufficient Sleep](#) is an extremely useful resource if you feel that your emotional volatility is negatively impacting your ability to get proper rest.

[Vibrant Heart](#) explores the critical connection between the mind, the heart, and the subtle channels of the energetic body. This article can be an insightful resource, and also offers practical guidance on how to balance emotional volatility with more attention on the heart center.

Our [Soothe Your Skin Guide](#) is full of practical solutions for inflamed and irritated skin, which is often a reflection of the same types of imbalances that lead to anger and irritability—excess heat and excess pitta both in the liver and throughout the system.

[The Importance of Healthy Digestion](#) introduces the concept of agni (which is the very foundation of health) and offers an in-depth exploration of the importance of tending to yours—which can be very useful when there is excess heat in the body. And yes, it is possible for agni to be too hot.

Our [Guide to Healthy Elimination](#) is relevant due to the natural connection between overall health and digestive health, which of course, is reflected in the quality of our elimination.

Our [Summer Season Guide](#) suggests a number of strategies for pacifying pitta and for staying cool, grounded and nourished—both mind and body—during the potentially aggravating summer season.



Address Anger Your Way

Remember, one of the primary tenants of Ayurveda is that we should treat individuals—not their symptoms. Balancing anger is no exception. While the above suggestions are aimed at curbing tendencies toward fiery emotions, each of us has a different constellation of influences affecting our overall health. Factors such as constitution, current state of balance, age, environment, *khavaigunyas* (personal weaknesses), and the season, can be important considerations in crafting an effective treatment plan. This is why working with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner can be invaluable. Rather than sifting through a long list of possible remedies, you can focus on those that would most deeply serve your system in particular. Even if you are navigating an Ayurvedic lifestyle on your own, it is critical to understand that who you are is a far more important consideration than the particular ailments that you may be trying to correct. This is your adventure. Chances are that the therapeutic strategies that most resonate with you will have a particularly potent impact on your state of balance. So listen to your body, your heart, and your intuition. Trust your gut. Follow your inspiration. Keep it simple. Go slow. And most importantly, enjoy the process. We sincerely hope that we can continue to support you in cultivating a serenely balanced mind, and vibrant overall health.



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¹ Vasant Lad, *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 124.

² *Ibid.*

³ Claudia Welch, *Balance Your Hormones, Balance Your Life: Achieving Optimal Health and Wellness through Ayurveda, Chinese Medicine, and Western Science* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 45.

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⁶ Vasant Lad, *Textbook of Ayurveda Volume 3: General Principles of Management and Treatment* (Albuquerque: The Ayurvedic Press, 2012), 116-8.

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Motivate!

A Guide to Balancing Lethargy with Ayurveda



Do you struggle with lack of motivation, complacency, or even lethargy? These are all expressions of excess *kapha* in *mano vaha srotas* (the channel of the mind). Balanced *kapha* in the mind is credited with a number of positive mental and emotional capacities like love, compassion, groundedness, loyalty, patience, and easefulness. However, when aggravated *kapha* accumulates in the channel of the mind, it tends to cause heaviness and cloudiness—which can easily lead to complacency, lethargy, and lack of motivation. We will start by exploring how these imbalances occur in the first place, but the purpose of this article is to offer practical guidance on how to support a return to balance so that we can reclaim health and vitality throughout the mental and emotional spheres. If the channel of the mind is a new concept for you, you might appreciate reading [The Channel of the Mind: Ayurveda and the Mind-Body Connection](#) as a foundation for what follows.



Like Increases Like

Ayurveda operates on the premise that like increases like, and that opposites balance. Kapha dosha is naturally heavy, slow, cool, oily, smooth, dense, stable, gross, and cloudy. Therefore, exposure to these qualities—whether through our diets, lifestyle habits, relationships, or experiences—tends to increase kapha. On the other hand, kapha is balanced by foods and experiences that are light, warm, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear.

Balancing Lethargy

Complacency and lethargy are very common expressions of excess kapha, and these imbalances are particularly likely to be triggered by excesses in the heavy, slow, cool, dense, and stable qualities. Therefore, using diet, lifestyle, and supportive herbs to increase our exposure to light, sharp, hot, and mobile influences will generally serve to balance tendencies toward lethargy. These qualities help to restore balance by stimulating and warming kapha, preventing stagnation, and encouraging proper circulation and movement throughout the mind and body.

A Supportive Diet

According to Ayurveda, *agni* (the digestive fire), is the very groundwork of optimal health, and also the root of all imbalances. Elevated kapha, with its heavy, slow, cool, and stable qualities, acts in direct opposition to agni's light, sharp, hot, and spreading nature, and can dampen the digestive fire—leaving it rather slow and sluggish. When this occurs, the entire system is affected. But precisely because kapha is the densest of the three doshas, it responds well to concrete, physical therapies. Ingesting balancing fluids, foods, and agni-kindling herbs offers a substantive, and effective means of pacifying kapha—while very directly supporting agni. In other words, it is important to address the diet in order to balance kapha.

Thankfully, even rather minor dietary adjustments can go a long way toward promoting balance, but a **kapha-pacifying diet** that prevents the accumulation of excess heaviness, density, and stagnation in the body is one of the most potent therapies around for balancing lethargy. The following dietary habits are particularly adept at eliminating excess kapha from the system.

- Favor foods and drinks that are both **energetically warming**, and served either warm or hot.
- Favor a wide-variety of heating spices, like chili, black pepper, cayenne pepper, **ginger**, **cinnamon**, and **cumin**
- Favor the **pungent**, **bitter**, and **astringent** tastes, while minimizing the **sweet**, **sour**, and **salty** tastes.
- Enjoy light, dry, and warm foods and drinks, and avoid drinks that are colder than room temperature.
- Build your meals around healthy whole foods, and include a wide variety of fresh vegetables.
- Avoid especially heavy, dense, oily, and cold foods and drinks.
- Minimize processed foods, fried foods, and refined sugars.



In addition, keep in mind that most spices are kapha-pacifying, so feel free to spice up your meals (and your life) with a plethora of herbs and spices—both familiar and exotic. Use ginger—either fresh or powdered—as often as you like, as it is very clarifying, agni-kindling, and detoxifying. And for further guidance, feel free to explore our more specific list of [foods to favor and avoid](#) when pacifying kapha.

Supportive Lifestyle Habits

Lifestyle therapies provide another powerful means of balancing kapha. While kapha is the densest of the doshas, the channel of the mind is rather subtle, and will generally be responsive to subtle changes in energy. Thus, relatively small lifestyle changes can often serve to quickly and efficiently alter the influence that kapha has on the mind. The following lifestyle habits are particularly adept at loosening and eliminating elevated kapha from the mind.

A Kapha-Pacifying Routine

Nearly everywhere we look in nature, there are creatures engaging in some sort of consistent daily routine that is deeply influenced by the rhythms of nature—the rising and setting of the sun, the cycles of the seasons, and the underlying impulses directing the broader community of life. While there is often some degree of seasonal variation, many plants and animals embrace a predictable daily rhythm and, as a rule, live by it. As humans, we have largely gotten away from this habit. We engage with life at all hours of the day and night, and many of us have jobs and other obligations that *require* us to keep irregular schedules.

But at the most fundamental level, our physiology is very much adapted to—and supported by—some sense of regularity. Actually, this is precisely why the daily routine is such an effective therapy. While kapha has to be careful not to get into a well-worn rut, and does well to change things up periodically, the fact remains that having a simple routine can be helpful. It creates a number of familiar and comforting reference points throughout each day, and sends a resounding affirmation to the deep tissues of the body that all is well, that we can be at ease. When the body becomes accustomed to—and learns to count on—a daily routine that includes things like adequate rest, appropriate exercise, and a nourishing spiritual practice, the mind and the nervous system naturally begin to relax, and can entertain more lightness and clarity.¹

Adopting a daily routine is also a very purposeful and enduring act of love and self-care. Each day, our routines provide us with a tangible opportunity to prioritize our own health and well-being, regardless of what else might be going on in our lives. They become poignant reminders that we are, in fact, worthy of a healthy dose of loving attention every single day. The cumulative effect of caring for ourselves in this way is quite powerful, deeply kapha-pacifying, and for many, results in a greatly improved sense of wellness in a very short period of time.

But because kapha tends to be overly habitual, it's important to implement a loose structural framework of a routine, with lots of room to accommodate (and encourage) inspiration and spontaneity. In other words, when kapha is aggravated, get a few basics in place, stick with them, and allow the magic to happen in the spaces in-between. Consider starting with this simple framework:



- Wake up at the same time from one day to the next, ideally before 6 a.m.
- Eat your meals at about the same times each day, knowing that, for some, two meals per day may be plenty.
- Go to sleep at a consistent time, preferably not before 10 p.m.
- To complement this foundation, choose two or three of the below strategies and commit to observing them daily.
- Stick with this framework for at least a month and observe the impact it has on your mind during that time.

Remember, you can always add more to your routine as the lethargy resolves and as your system comes into better alignment with your natural state of balance. For now, keep your commitments manageable, and remain open to *being inspired*.

Appropriate Exercise

When it comes right down to it, exercise is one of the most important therapies to implement when trying to balance excess kapha anywhere in the body, but especially in the mind. When engaged appropriately, exercise can be a panacea for improved health. Proper exercise helps to release accumulated tension, clear stagnant mental and emotional energy, improve circulation, bolster the body's detoxification mechanisms, kindle agni, and encourage proper elimination—all of which help to ensure a balanced state of mind.

Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that the type, duration, and intensity of exercise that is most balancing for each of us varies according to our [constitution](#) and our [current state of balance](#). 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.² For most people who struggle with lack of motivation, a kapha-pacifying exercise routine that is challenging, vigorously-paced, and stimulating is best. Supportive activities include brisk walking, jogging, hiking, swimming, cycling, martial arts, and other forms of strength-building, aerobic exercise. [Kapha-pacifying yoga](#) is also very appropriate. Exercise in the morning or evening (from about 6-10 a.m. or p.m.) will be the most supportive, as these are the kapha times of day. 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 brisk walk can do wonders for the entire system—body, mind, and spirit.

Nasya

Nasya, the practice of applying medicated oil to the upper nasal passages, is actually seen as a way of offering deeply influential therapy directly to the tissues of the brain. Nasya soothes the delicate tissues of the nose, fosters unobstructed breathing, relieves accumulated stress, promotes mental clarity, and awakens and generally supports the mind. [Nasya Oil](#) is balancing for all three doshas, but has an appropriate amount of stimulating energy to effectively pacify kapha in the mind. It is enlivening, uplifting, and balancing all at once. Start with 3-5 drops in each nostril in the morning, on an empty stomach. If you are new to the practice of nasya, please see our helpful [instructional video](#). Nasya should not be performed by pregnant or menstruating women.



Udvartana (Dry Powder Massage)

Udvartana is the practice of massaging the body with a dry powder (like chickpea flour), which is dry, light, stimulating, and very effective at clearing stagnation from the tissues. This practice balances kapha throughout the body, encourages the movement of the lymphatic tissue, promotes circulation, liquefies fat, and, if you practice *abhyanga* (Ayurvedic self-massage), helps to remove excess oil from the skin after an oil massage.³ A powder can be used instead of, or in conjunction with, traditional oil massage. Try chickpea flour, rice flour, or **Calamus powder**. This practice can be performed one to three times per week, or even daily. But for anyone prone to dryness, complement a daily practice with at least some oil massage to ensure that the tissues and the skin remain properly lubricated.

Kapha-Pacifying Oil Massage

If you are interested in adding an oil massage, which is a profound rejuvenative practice benefitting both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness, be sure to choose a kapha-pacifying oil like **Kapha Massage Oil** or **Sesame Oil**. In the morning, before a shower or bath, simply massage about ¼ cup of your chosen oil into the skin, hair, and scalp. Let the oil soak in for a few minutes, and then you can massage your entire body with a dry powder before you rinse off in the shower. For further instructions and a helpful instructional video on this rejuvenating technique, please [click here](#).

Mindfulness Practices

It takes both time and focused attention to re-pattern the mind, and daily practice is one of the best ways to ensure your success. Remarkably, as little as fifteen minutes per day is enough to be transformative, and committing to a daily practice will deliver results rather quickly. If you are serious about transforming your lack of motivation, choose at least one of the following practices and commit to doing it on a daily basis:

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 nourishing and enlivening flow of *prana* (the vital breath) throughout the system, release unresolved emotions, and encourage the proper digestion of food, thoughts, and experiences—all of which can help to ease tendencies toward lethargy. If you do not have an established practice, **So Hum Meditation** can help to bring light and focus to a cloudy and burdened mind; this is a beautiful practice suitable to most anyone.

Pranayama

Stimulated by and carried on the breath, prana infuses every cell and tissue throughout the body with life. The practice of specific *pranayamas* (yogic breathing exercises aimed at balancing the movement of prana throughout the system) can be quite a potent means of soothing tendencies toward complacency or lethargy. In general, pranayama helps to restore fluidity and vitality to the subtle energy channels of the body, releases accumulated tension, fosters a sense of clarity in the mind, and is deeply supportive of 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 [bhastrika](#) (bellows breath) and [kapalabhati](#) (skull shining breath), both of which help to awaken and clear the mind, cleanse the tissues, kindle agni, and awaken prana in the body. [Ujjayi pranayama](#) (breath of victory) is also very supportive. Start with just ten to fifteen minutes each day and notice what happens.



Yoga

Yoga positively impacts the mind in very similar ways. It moves prana in the body, helps to dissipate tension, clears stagnation, and encourages fluidity throughout the tissues, the subtle body, and the mind. Yoga also stimulates circulation, and serves as a balanced form of exercise, which is among the more important therapies when balancing lethargy. Favor [kapha-pacifying yoga](#) with a particular emphasis on standing poses, back bends, and especially kapha-pacifying poses like [breath of joy](#), [chair](#), [cobra](#), and [bow](#). Or, if you prefer a flow, [sun salutations](#) are often wonderfully supportive.



Herbs for Stimulating the Mind

Mental Clarity

Mental Clarity tablets offer deep support to both the brain and the nervous system. This formula helps to clear the mind while encouraging concentration, intelligence, mental health, and emotional stability.

Bacopa

Bacopa is an excellent rejuvenative for the mind and the nerves. It also promotes memory, intelligence, clarity, concentration, and awareness, while fostering a sense of balance in the mind. Bacopa is also available as a **liquid extract**.

Tulsi

Tulsi removes excess kapha from the body while promoting healthy circulation, and strong digestion. It is also very *sattvic* in nature and it serves to elevate awareness, mental clarity, and the energy of love. This plant is so highly revered in India that it is often kept in and around the home for its deeply purifying and beneficial properties. We offer both **Tulsi liquid extract** and **Tulsi powder**.

Triphala

Triphala is revered for its unique ability to gently cleanse and detoxify the digestive tract, while replenishing, nourishing, and rejuvenating the tissues. It encourages balanced agni throughout the system, helps to eliminate *ama* (toxins), and is a general tonic for good health. About half an hour before bed, take two **Triphala tablets** with a glass of warm water. If you prefer, steep ½ - 1 teaspoon **Triphala powder** in a cup of freshly boiled water for ten minutes. Cool and drink. Or try thirty drops of **Triphala liquid extract** in warm water before bed.

Healthy Kapha

Healthy Kapha tablets help to balance kapha systemically and can certainly help to calm excess kapha in the mind.

Kapha Digest / Trikatu

If excess kapha has accumulated in your digestive system, you can more specifically support balanced digestion and elimination (while clearing excess kapha from the gastro-intestinal tract) with **Kapha Digest tablets** or **Trikatu powder** (the powdered form of the Kapha Digest formula that can be taken alone or sprinkled on your food like pepper).

Additional Resources

Keep in mind that lethargy does not develop in a vacuum. This and other emotional tendencies crop up only within the larger context of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. If you feel inspired to study the bigger picture, we have a number of other articles that may further inform your journey towards optimal health. The following resources are particularly relevant to the topics of complacency, lethargy, and elevated kapha in the mind:



[The Importance of Healthy Digestion](#) introduces the concept of agni (which is the very foundation of health) and offers an in-depth exploration of the importance of tending to yours. As we have seen, tending to agni is often an important first step in balancing kapha.

Our [Guide to Healthy Elimination](#) is relevant due to the natural connection between overall health and digestive health, which of course, is reflected in the quality of our elimination.

[Allergy Free](#) is both an introduction to the Ayurvedic perspective on, and a practical guide to resolving (or minimizing), allergies. If allergies play a part in your lack of motivation or lethargy, you may find this resource especially helpful.

[Breathe Easy](#) is a guide to lung and sinus health, with practical tips for addressing any number of imbalances. Lung and sinus congestion are common signs of excess kapha, and these symptoms often go hand in hand with a heavy, foggy mind. If you struggle with these types of imbalances, consider this resource as a complement to your healing process.

[Achieving Your Optimal Weight](#) is an Ayurvedic guide to balancing body weight. Again, excess kapha and weight imbalances often go hand in hand. If you struggle with your weight, this resource may very well support your healing process.

[An Ayurvedic Guide to Balanced Sleep](#) is an extremely useful resource if you feel that your lack of motivation is causing you to oversleep, or if oversleep is contributing to your sense of lethargy.

[An Ayurvedic Guide to Stress Management](#) explores fantastic tools for reducing stress and for changing our relationship with stressful situations. Stress can be a trigger for lethargy and depression. If this is the case for you, consider using this resource as additional support.

[Vibrant Heart](#) explores the critical connection between the mind, the heart, and the subtle channels of the energetic body. This article can be an insightful resource, and also offers practical guidance on how to balance emotional discord with more attention on the heart center.

Our [Winter Season](#) and [Spring Season](#) guides suggests a number of strategies for pacifying kapha and for staying warm, dry, and engaged—both mind and body—during the potentially aggravating winter and spring seasons.

Address Lethargy Your Way

Remember, one of the primary tenants of Ayurveda is that we should treat individuals—not their symptoms. Balancing lethargy is no exception. While the above suggestions are aimed at curbing tendencies toward complacency, each of us has a different constellation of influences affecting our overall health. Factors such as [constitution](#), [current state of balance](#), age, environment, *khavaigunyas* (personal weaknesses), and the season, can be important considerations in crafting an effective treatment plan. This is why working with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner can be invaluable. Rather than sifting through a long list of possible remedies, you can



focus on those that would most deeply serve your system in particular. Even if you are navigating an Ayurvedic lifestyle on your own, it is critical to understand that who you are is a far more important consideration than the particular ailments that you may be trying to correct. This is your adventure. Chances are that the therapeutic strategies that most resonate with you will have a particularly potent impact on your state of balance. So listen to your body, your heart, and your intuition. Trust your gut. Follow your inspiration. Keep it simple. Go slow. Find ways to stay motivated. And most importantly, enjoy the process. We sincerely hope that we can continue to support you in cultivating an engaged mind, a contented heart, and vibrant overall health.



References

¹ Claudia Welch, *Balance Your Hormones, Balance Your Life: Achieving Optimal Health and Wellness through Ayurveda, Chinese Medicine, and Western Science* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 45.

² 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.

³ Welch, *Dinacharya*, 8-13.

