



How to Determine Your Constitutional Type

(Taken from *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies* by Vasant Lad)

Characteristics of the Vata Individuals

Vata individuals have light, flexible bodies. Their frame is on the small side, with light muscles and little fat, so that they tend to be slim or even underweight. They often appear to be “too tall” or “too short,” or they may appear physically underdeveloped, with flat chests and less strength and stamina than the other types. Their veins and muscles are often quite prominent.

Vatas generally have dry skin tending toward roughness. Their circulation is poor, with the result that their hands and feet are often cold. Because vata dosha is cold, dry, light, and mobile and people with a vata constitution tend to lack insulating material (the fatty tissue under the skin), they are uncomfortable in cold weather, especially if it is dry and windy, and they much prefer spring and summer.

These individuals have a variable appetite and thirst and variable digestive strength. They are often attracted to astringent food such as salads and vegetables, but their bodies actually need sweet, sour, and salty tastes. Raw vegetables increase, rather than balance, vata. Vata individuals often experience digestive difficulties and problems with absorption of nutrients. They tend to produce scanty urine, and their faeces are hard, dry, and small in size and quantity. Constipation is one of their most common ailments.

Vatas are the most likely of the body types to fast or to eat very little, but this actually increases vata and tends toward imbalance.

Other physical characteristics typical of vata types include small, recessed eyes, which are often quite lusterless; dry, thin hair, often curly or kinky; dry, rough skin and nails; cracking, popping joints; and teeth that may be irregular, broken, or protruding.

Vatas walk quickly and are always in a rush. Due to the mobile quality of vata, they do not like sitting idle but prefer constant activity. They also like to do a lot of traveling. Not doing anything is a punishment for them. They are attracted to jogging, jumping, and vigorous physical activity, but because they tend to have less stamina, they can easily get strained or overtired.

Vatas are drawn toward a lot of sexual activity. But excess sex is one of the causes of aggravated vata. Vatas generally have a difficult time prolonging sex, and vata men may experience premature ejaculation.

Vata individuals sleep less than the other body types and have a tendency toward interrupted sleep or insomnia, especially when vata is aggravated. Nevertheless they generally wake up feeling alert and fresh and ready to go.

Psychologically, vatas are blessed with quick minds, mental flexibility, and creativity. They have excellent imaginations and excel at coming up with new ideas. When in balance, they are joyful and happy. Vatas tend to talk quickly and to talk a lot. They are easily excited, alert, and quick to act—but may not think things through before acting, so they may give a wrong answer or make a wrong decision with great confidence.

Vatas are quite loving people, but may love someone out of fear and loneliness. In fact, fear is one of the symptoms of unbalanced vata. These individuals may experience fear of loneliness,

darkness, heights, and closed spaces. Anxiety, insecurity, and nervousness are also common among them. They are worriers.

One of the main psychological qualities of vata individuals is readiness to change or, to put it the other way, difficulty with stability and commitment. They often change furniture, housing, jobs, or towns, and get easily bored. They don't like to stay in any place more than a year! Their faith is also quite variable. Vatas may be low on willpower and often feel unstable or ungrounded.

Clarity is one of the attributes of vata, and vata individuals generally are clear-minded and even clairvoyant. Along with their lively minds and fertile imaginations, they are usually highly alert and grasp new ideas quickly. However, they are also quick to forget. They think and speak quickly, but are restless and easily fatigued. They generally have less tolerance, confidence, and boldness.

Vata types tend to make money quickly, but they spend it quickly, too, often impulsively or on trifles. A vata may go to the flea market and come home with a lot of junk! They are not good savers. Nor are they good planners, and as a consequence they may suffer economic hardship. The word vata is derived from a root that means "to move," and this gives an important clue to the character of vata individuals. As the principle of mobility, vata provides the motive power for all our mental and bodily processes. It regulates all activity in the body, from the number of thoughts we have to how quickly and efficiently food moves through our digestive tract.

The behavior that vatas are drawn to—travel, erratic hours, continual stimulation, frequent change—can easily upset their balance and lead to vata disorders such as constipation, gaseous distention, weakness, arthritis, pneumonia, excessively dry skin, dry lips, dry hair, dry, cracked nipples, and cracked heels. Nerve disorders, twitches and tics, mental confusion, palpitations, and breathlessness, as well as muscle tightness, low backache, and sciatica, are also due to aggravated vata. Excess vata makes the mind restless and hyperactive. Loud noises, drugs, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol also derange vata dosha, as does exposure to cold weather and cold foods. Excess vata is a major factor in PMS (premenstrual syndrome). When, as her period approaches, a woman experiences bloating, low back ache, pain in the lower abdomen, rams, pain in the calf muscles, and insomnia, and emotionally she feels anxiety, fear, and insecurity, this is due to aggravation of vata dosha.

Like the wind, vata types have a hard time settling down and staying grounded. When their vata becomes aggravated, it is difficult to calm them down. Sticking to a routine is difficult for them, but it is vital if they are to remain healthy. The dry, cold, windy seasons of autumn and winter tend to increase and aggravate vata dosha, so at these times vata individuals need to be particularly careful to stay in balance. They need to dress warmly and eat warm, heavier foods. Warm, moist, slightly oily foods are beneficial, as are most warming spices. Steam baths, humidifiers, and moisture in general are helpful.

General Guidelines for Balancing Vata

Keep warm

Keep calm

Avoid raw foods

Avoid cold foods

Avoid extreme cold temperatures

Eat warm foods and spices

Keep a regular routine

Characteristics of the Pitta Individual

The pitta body type is one of medium height and build, though some individuals are slender with a delicate frame. They seldom gain or lose much weight. Their muscle development is moderate, and they are generally stronger physically than vata types. Pitta eyes are bright and may be gray, green, or copper-brown, and their eyeballs are of medium prominence. These individuals tend to have ruddy or coppery skin and may have reddish hair, which tends to be silky. They often experience early graying or hair loss, so that a pitta man frequently has a receding hairline or a big, beautiful bald head!

Moles and freckles are common on pitta skin, which tends to be oily, warm, and less wrinkled than vata skin. Pittas have sharp, slightly yellowish teeth and frequently have bleeding gums. The normal body temperature of people with a pitta constitution is a little higher, and their hands and feet are usually warm and may be sweaty. Pittas may feel quite warm when both vatas and kaphas are cold. They perspire quite a lot, even when it's 50 degrees, while a vata person will not perspire even at a much higher temperature. Their body perspiration often has a strong, sulfury smell; their feet also perspire and may have a strong smell.

This heat is the main characteristic of pitta types, which is not surprising as the word pitta is derived from the Sanskrit word taa, which means to heat. (The word can also be translated as "austerity," and pitta individuals can be quite austere.) They have a low tolerance for hot weather, sunshine, or hard physical work. Although they are a fiery type, their sex drive may not be very strong. Pittas may use sex to release anger.

Pittas have a strong appetite, strong metabolism, and strong digestion. They consume large quantities of food and drink, and they also produce large quantities of urine and feces, which tend to be yellowish and soft. When out of balance, they crave hot spicy dishes, which are not good for them. They should eat food with the sweet, bitter, and astringent tastes. When hungry, a pitta person needs to eat soon, otherwise he or she will become irritable and hypoglycemic. Pitta sleep is of medium duration, but it is uninterrupted and sound. These individuals like to read before they go to sleep and often fall asleep with a book on their chest.

Girls with a pitta constitution begin menstruating and reach puberty early. They can start menstruation as early as the age of ten.

Pitta physical ailments tend to be related to heat and the fire principle. They are prone to fevers, inflammatory diseases, acid indigestion, excessive hunger, jaundice, profuse perspiration, hives and rashes, burning sensations, ulceration, burning eyes, colitis, and sore throats. All "itises" are inflammatory disorders and are due to excess pitta. These individuals are susceptible to sunburn and do not like bright light.

Pitta-type PMS symptoms include tenderness in the breasts, hot flashes, hives, urethritis, and sometimes a burning sensation when passing urine.

Pitta individuals are alert and intelligent and have good powers of comprehension and concentration. Their intellects are penetrating and keen, and their memories are sharp. They have good, logical, investigating minds. They love to go deeply into problems and find solutions. Their minds are always at work, and they like to solve problems and puzzles of all kinds. They also tend to be good speakers. They are lovers of knowledge and have a great capacity for organization and leadership.

Pittas are night people. They become alert around midnight and love to read late at night. Orderliness is important to them. A pitta person's home or room is always clean and neat. Clothes are kept in a designated place, shoes are in orderly rows, and books are arranged according to height or another definite system.

Pittas love noble professions. They are doctors, engineers, lawyers, judges—very bright, brainy

people. They have good administrative abilities and like to be in a leadership role. They are good planners and are ambitious and disciplined. Aggressive by nature, they easily take charge of situations. They may become political figures. They have a lot of charisma. People are attracted to them.

Pittas are often wise, brilliant people, but they can also have a controlling, dominating personality. They have a tendency toward comparison, competition, and aggressiveness, and they are meticulous and perfectionistic. Everything has to be done on time, and correctly! Pitta individuals never yield an inch from their principles, which sometimes leads to fanaticism. They tend to be critical, especially when pitta dosha is aggravated; if there is no one to criticize, pitta people will criticize and judge themselves.

A pitta's life span is only moderately long. These individuals burn their life energy through too much mental activity, perfectionism, aggressiveness, and the constant search for success. They have a deep-seated fear of failure. They don't like the words no or fail and therefore may be highly stressful. They are the typical workaholics.

Pittas generally seek material prosperity and tend to be moderately well off, though they spend rather than save their money. They like to live in luxurious homes and drive fancy cars; they love perfumes, gems, jewelry, and other costly items; and they enjoy exhibiting their wealth and possessions.

A number of factors can increase pitta to the point of aggravation. One is simply eating too much spicy food, including black pepper, cayenne pepper, curry peppers, and jalapeno peppers. Pitta can also be increased by sour and citrus fruits, such as grapefruits and sour oranges. Eating rancid yogurt, smoking cigarettes, and drinking sour wine can also be harmful. Working near fire or lying in the sun are causes of increased pitta.

Eating fatty fried food, or oily food such as peanut butter, can create nausea or headaches for a pitta.

Summer is the most difficult time for pitta individuals. In hot humid weather pitta dosha can easily become aggravated. Heat builds up in the system, and pitta individuals become more susceptible to the heat-related ailments mentioned above. They may become quite irritable and are easily agitated and angered. Tempers flare. Their sharp minds become hypercritical and judgmental. Jealousy and envy may blaze up. They need to cool down!

General Guidelines for Balancing Pitta

Avoid excessive heat

Avoid excessive oil

Avoid excessive steam

Limit salt intake

Eat cooling, nonspicy foods

Drink cool (but not iced) drinks

Exercise during the cooler part of the day

Characteristics of the Kapha Individual

Kapha people are blessed with a strong, healthy, well-developed body. Their chests are broad and expanded, and they have strong muscles and large, heavy bones. With their larger frames and constitutions dominated by the water and earth elements, kaphas tend to gain weight and have difficulty taking it off. To complicate matters, kaphas generally have a slow digestion and metabolism. As a result, they tend to carry excess weight and to be on the chubby side. A kapha person may even do a water fast and gain weight!

In addition to their large frames, kapha individuals have strong vital capacity and stamina and tend to be healthy. Their skin is soft, smooth, lustrous and thick, and it tends to be oily. Their eyes are large, dark, and attractive, with long, thick lashes and brows. The whites of their eyes are very white. They have large, strong, white teeth. Their hair tends to be thick, dark, soft, wavy, and plentiful. They have hair everywhere!

Individuals with a kapha body type have a steady appetite and thirst, though digestion is slow. They can comfortably skip a meal or work without food, while it is difficult for a pitta person to concentrate without eating.

Because of their slow metabolic rate, kaphas who maintain health and balance generally enjoy a long span of life, longer than the other two doshic types, who tend to “burn out” more quickly. However, if kapha dosha is allowed to become aggravated, the person is likely to become obese, which is one of the main causes of diabetes, hypertension, and heart attack. Such a person cannot live a very long life.

Kaphas have quite a sweet tooth and love candy, cookies, and chocolate. They are generally attracted to sweet, salty, and oily foods, but these contribute to water retention and weight gain, their bodies need lighter fare and do better with the bitter, astringent, and pungent tastes.

Because of the cloudy and heavy qualities of kapha, these individuals often feel heavy and foggy in the morning and may find it hard to get going without a cup of coffee or tea. Morning is not their time. They prefer midday, yet might feel like taking a nap after lunch¹ they often feel lethargic after a full meal. Unfortunately, daytime sleep increases kapha and is not good for them.

Kaphas evacuate slowly and their stools tend to be soft and pale in color. Their perspiration is moderate, more than vatas but less than pitta types. Their sleep is deep and prolonged.

Despite their strong bodies and great stamina, kaphas shun exercise. Vigorous exercise is good for them, but they prefer to sit, eat, and do nothing! Rather than jog, they prefer to walk—slowly! Kaphas do tend to like swimming, but it is not particularly good for them, as their bodies will absorb some water. When they do exercise, they become hungry afterward and will want to eat. After a workout at the gym they will go to a restaurant for a snack.

Kapha dosha is slow and steady in every way. These individuals move slowly and talk slowly (their speech pattern may become monotonous). They eat slowly and are slow to decide and slow to act. They move slowly and gracefully.

Kapha individuals are blessed with a sweet, loving disposition. By nature they are peaceful, patient, tolerant, caring, compassionate, and forgiving. They love to hug people. Kaphas are stable, solid, and faithful. Their spiritual or religious faith is deep and abiding, and their minds calm and steady.

One of the dominant qualities of kapha is softness, which manifests as soft skin, soft hair, soft gentle speech, a soft nature, and a soft, gentle, loving look. A pitta person’s look is sharp and penetrating. A vata’s look is spacy! But a kapha person looks calm, quiet, grounded, stable. He or she is here, right now!

Kaphas can be slow to comprehend, but once they know something, that knowledge is permanently retained. They have excellent long-term memories.

Although a kapha individual is forgiving, if you insult them or hurt their feelings, they will forgive you, but they will never forget! A kapha person will tell you, “On the twenty-fourth of January, 1972, at three-thirty in the afternoon, when we were having tea, you said such and such to me—but I have forgiven you!”

Their tendencies toward groundedness and stability help them to earn and hold on to money, and they are good at saving. Their extravagances are minor, mostly in the area of spending a little on cheese, candy, and cakes.

A kapha person has a steady sex drive, and he or she can enjoy sex for hours at a time, without dissipation of energy, without orgasm or ejaculation of semen. It may take them some time to become interested, but once they are stimulated, they tend to stay that way.

Kapha dosha is aggravated by kapha producing food, such as watermelon, sweet fruits, candy, cookies, yogurt, and other dairy products. Cold and frozen food and chilled water, sleeping in the daytime, and sitting and doing nothing all increase kapha. Sedentary work, especially when combined with steady munching at the desk, produces too much kapha in the body. Excess kapha slows digestion and metabolism and lowers the digestive fire, and the person may become chubby or even obese.

The difficult time of year for kapha individuals is winter and early spring, when the weather is heavy, wet, cloudy, and cold. Then kapha accumulates in the system and leads to physical, emotional, and mental imbalances of the kapha variety. Physical problems will tend to be related to the water principle, such as colds, flu, sinus congestion and other diseases involving mucus, such as bronchial congestion. Sluggishness, excess weight, diabetes, water retention, and sinus headaches are also common.

Emotionally, when kapha becomes unbalanced, these individuals may suffer from greed, attachment, envy, possessiveness, lust, and laziness, leading to kapha-type depression.

Interestingly, kapha can become aggravated as the moon gets full because, as biologists have discovered, there is a tendency toward water retention in the body at that time.

Kapha women may suffer from PMS symptoms such as excessive emotionality, water retention, white vaginal discharge, and overurination. They may feel attachment, greed, and lethargy at that time and will probably have a tendency toward excess sleep.

General Guidelines for Balancing Kapha

Get plenty of exercise

Avoid heavy foods

Keep active

Vary your routine

Avoid dairy foods

Avoid iced food and drinks

Avoid fatty or oily foods

Eat light, dry food

How to Use This Knowledge

Knowing your Ayurvedic constitution (prakruti) has many benefits for your life and health:

- Self-understanding, which is the foundation of life, is greatly increased. Ayurveda says that every person is a unique and divine book. To read that book is a great art. The knowledge of prakruti can help you to read your own book, which is your life. By understanding your constitution, you can better understand your psychological tendencies, your strengths, and your weaknesses, as well as your physiological strong and weak areas.
- You may see that your habits and tendencies, such as erratic lifestyle and schedule (vata), irascibility (pitta), or laziness (kapha), or physical problems such as overweight (kapha), ulcers (pitta), or constipation (vata), are directly related to your constitution. The tendency toward such imbalances is inherent in the way your mind-body system is designed.
- When you can anticipate the kinds of illnesses and imbalances you are likely to have, you can take precautions to prevent them from arising. You can adjust your lifestyle— daily routine, diet, amount or type of exercise, and so on—to keep your doshas in balance and your health at its best.
- You can also use the knowledge of constitutional types to understand others with whom you are related, whether in your personal life or at work. To succeed in relationships, which is such a confused and problematic area today, it is helpful to know the constitution of your husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend. Understanding one another brings clarity, clarity brings compassion, and compassion is love. Such a relationship brings happiness, joy, and longevity. Using this knowledge of prakruti, if your spouse is upset and angry you can say to him or her, “Honey, it’s not you, it’s your pitta!” That will open a new dimension of understanding of emotional reactions in the relationship.

Use the knowledge of your prakruti as a baseline, to see where you should be. Then look at your vikruti, your current imbalances, as a clue to help you restore balance, using the food charts, yoga postures, herbs, recommend, exercises, and the like, presented throughout this book.

For instance, if your vikruti shows more pitta than your prakruti, you will want to follow the guidelines for pacifying pitta. If you have a disorder that is caused by excess vata, pitta, or kapha, follow the guidelines for pacifying that dosha. For sinus congestion, for example, follow a kapha-reducing diet until the condition subsides.

If your prakruti and vikruti seem about the same, then choose the diet and lifestyle guidelines for your strongest dosha.

Finally, remember that “balance” does not mean equal amounts of vata, pitta, and kapha; rather, it means maintaining your proportion of the three doshas, according to your constitution. It is not a static state, but a dynamic equilibrium that needs constant renewal.