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Your Health and Wellbeing Success Starts Here!

Are you a health-conscious consumer, looking to come into the industry or looking for a suitable treatment? Find out what the experts say and read.

A cycle of life

Ayurvedic approaches to women's health



Prakruti – the innate nature of each individual – is established at conception and does not change over time. What is in constant flux is Vikruti. In Ayurveda, we closely examine Vikruti and the various internal and external forces that threaten the balance of doshas necessary to maintain the optimal health and wellness of our unique selves.

Like everything in nature, the female form flows in cycles and rhythms. Some health conditions are unique to women, including dysmenorrhea (painful periods), leucorrhoea (vaginal discharge), menorrhagia, menopause, bloating, PMS, PCOS, vaginal dryness, infertility, UTI, weak bladder and more.

Ayurvedic intervention is particularly effective when it comes to encouraging the body's natural cycles by balancing the doshas and supporting a lifestyle according to one's prakruti (constitution). Ayurveda specialises in treatment for conditions unique to the arthava (female organs), as mentioned.

High levels of physical, emotional and mental stress, chemicals in the environment, poor diet, incomplete digestion, impaired elimination, disturbed or poor sleep and non-conducive lifestyle factors can all create dosha disturbances.

Women's health conditions can be loosely assigned to an imbalance by a dominant dosha.

Vata

With qualities such as light, cold, rough and dry, vata can create conditions of infertility, difficult menopause, disturbed menstrual flow, amenorrhea (absence of menstruation), dysmenorrhea, an irregular or scanty menstrual cycle, short flow, bloating and cramping and vaginal dryness.

Pitta

Menorrhagia (heavy bleeding), prolonged flow, cramping and PMS are conditions due to excess pitta. Qualities of the pitta dosha are oily, sharp, hot, liquid and acidic.

Kapha

With qualities of heaviness, dull, moist, cold, sticky and static, the tendency for menstrual

clotting, thrush, bloating, water retention, respiratory conditions and weight gain are prevalent when there is a dominance of the kapha dosha.

Once you know your prakruti and vikruti, diet and lifestyle adjustments can be made to target the respective ailments.

According to Ayurveda, we want to ensure:

- 🕒 A healthy diet
- 🕒 Strong digestive agni
- 🕒 Attention to routines and dosha balancing lifestyle
- 🕒 Management of underlying stress and a balanced nervous system
- 🕒 Adequate physical activity through exercises and breathing practice
- 🕒 Strengthening the body's natural immune mechanisms.

Here is an overview of two common female health conditions according to Ayurveda.

Dysmenorrhea

Difficult menses, often with cramping, is commonly a vata dominant condition. However, an imbalance of pitta and kapha can also be a cause. In Ayurveda it is known as 'raja pravriti' or 'raja kriccha'. Since pain is the main symptom in the arthava, antispasmodics, emmenagogues, pain relieving and muscle relaxing herbs are used. Associated symptoms would include: spasms, uterine dryness, bloating, gas and constipation.

The herb of choice in vata dominant dysmenorrhea would be musta (cyperus rotundus), which is very effective in relieving cramping pains. Shatavari and yasthi madhu (liquorice) can enhance the effects of musta as it is a demulcent. Other useful herbs include

turmeric, guggulu, kumari (aloe vera), jatamamsi, valerian and asafoetida.

A vata pacifying diet and lifestyle is recommended with an emphasis on pranayama and meditation to manage the nervous system and active mental vata.

In cases of pitta dominance, where stagnant blood can cause obstructions and burning, cooling herbs such as turmeric, saffron, passion flower and brahmi can be used.

If there is kapha dominance with obstructions and oedema, heating herbs such as ginger, pippali, calamus, cinnamon and guggulu can be used.

Leucorrhea

This is a common issue for many women. There is whitish discharge from the female vaginal tract which can be of various types: thick, watery, odorous, white, yellow or greenish in colour. It is known as 'swetapradara' in Ayurveda and it is suggested that women with high levels of oestrogen have a heavy, white vaginal discharge. Vaginal discharge is more commonly a pitta and kapha dominant condition. Kapha dosha maintains the balance of fluid content in the body and any imbalance may cause excessive excretion of fluid from the body; in this case from the vaginal tract.

Some common causes can include diet-related factors such as foods that are heavy, oily, fried, spicy or sour and excessive tea, coffee, alcohol or carbonated drinks. Other causative factors include sexually transmitted diseases, pelvic inflammatory disease, unhygienic toilet habits, fungal infections or other cervical conditions. Stress can also be responsible. An abnormal discharge could be due to an undetected underlying condition and medical attention should be sought.

The Ayurveda line of treatment would include restoring the body's digestive fire, clearing the toxins and restoring balance to kapha dosha. A

General and female signs of dosha imbalance:

Vata	Pitta	Kapha
Emaciation Loss of appetite Dry skin/coldness Insomnia Bloating Constipation Pruritus Anxiety, nervousness Vaginal dryness Mood swings Food cravings	Excess hunger/thirst Liver disorders Inflammation Restless sleep Skin conditions Burning sensations Easily angered Hot flushes Excessive bleeding Excessive body heat	Lethargy Heaviness Nausea after eating Coughs and colds Excessive sleep Mucous conditions Paleness Weight gain Water retention



herbal churna (powder) called pushyanuga is very useful in cases of leucorrhea as is ashokaristha, a herbal wine preparation. A vegetarian diet with plenty of fresh green vegetables, curds, milk and ghee is helpful as well as an increase in consumption of water, soups and juices that are not too sweet. Sugars, mushrooms, hot and spicy foods and alcohol should be avoided. A light diet with plenty of water helps to flush out the toxins. Maintain proper genital hygiene, wear clothes made from

natural fibres and use natural products. Take regular stress-preventing measures such as pranayama and meditation as well as regular light exercise.

Treatment in Ayurveda for many gynecological conditions can include medicated vaginal douching, fumigation and a sitz bath. Triphala decoction is a simple choice and is effective for cleansing the vaginal area. Other supporting treatment options include massage with medicated oils and steam treatment with

medicated decoctions to relieve obstructions, pacify vata dosha and relax the surrounding tissue.

Overall, there are numerous useful herbs available for female conditions used in Ayurveda including the following:

Ashoka (*saraca indica*)

This is a very useful uterine tonic made from the bark of the small, evergreen ashoka tree. It has an astringent quality and its name means 'no grief'. It is used for cases of menorrhagia, leucorrhea, dysmenorrhea and PMS and, since the bark is rich in ketosterol, it is used to treat uterine fibroids. The bark also contains chloroform and methanol, amongst other properties, that are useful in cases of bacterial and fungal infections. It is usually prepared as an alcoholic extract called an arisam and administered with other herbs.

Shatavari (*asparagus racemosus*)

This creeper belongs to the asparagus family. It has sweet, bitter and cooling qualities and contains phytoestrogen compounds that help balance the female hormone levels. Shatavari is useful for menopausal women with low oestrogen levels. Due to its stabilising and rejuvenating properties, shatavari is also a great herb for premenstrual symptoms, infertility, dysmenorrhea, irregular menstrual cycles and lactation. Shatavari is considered to be a great female rejuvenative; it nourishes and cleanses the blood and the female reproductive organs and maintains healthy hormonal balance.

Amalaki (*emblica officinalis*)

Amalaki, which has multiple health benefits, is the Indian gooseberry which grows on a medium-sized tree. It has high anti-oxidant, anti-viral and anti-microbial properties and a high content of vitamin C. It has a bitter taste and is predominantly used for digestive problems, ulcers, heartburn, gastritis and colitis. However, in this remit, amalaki can help abnormally heavy and prolonged periods that occur at regular intervals as well as leucorrhoea.

To specifically address a health condition unique to women, please consult a qualified Ayurveda practitioner who can prescribe specific herbs that will correspond to your prakriti, imbalanced doshas and specific condition.

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© As a member of the APA, Geeta Vara is a fully qualified Ayurvedic practitioner who works in Central SW London and Kent, providing personalised consultations, treatments and corporate and small group workshops.

For more information about Ayurvedic treatment for female health concerns or other health concerns, please visit: www.geetavara.co.uk.