

# What's the alternative?

# AYURVEDA

In the latest in our series on different ways to improve your wellbeing, features editor Katherine Watt explores how Ayurvedic principles can boost your wellbeing.

## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Often referred to as the sister science of yoga, Ayurveda is a 5,000-year-old holistic approach to medicine originating from India. 'It's believed that the wisdom of Ayurveda was initially passed down to sages through deep meditation,' says practitioner Geeta Vara. 'Sages then passed this knowledge on to their students orally, until the knowledge was eventually transcribed into the earliest authoritative written texts around 1,000 BC.'

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

'Ayurveda is based on the principles that all existence is formed from the five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth,' says Geeta. 'Their different combinations give rise to three bio-energetic forces, called doshas, which govern everything that happens in your mind and body.'

Once you understand your dosha, you can make certain diet and lifestyle tweaks to keep your body balanced. You can also identify your vikruti, which is the imbalanced state that results when your body is out of kilter with itself and with your natural balances state, your prakruti. This rebalancing means you'll feel better emotionally, mentally and physically – and even prevent diseases from forming.

### WHO'S OUR EXPERT?

Geeta Vara is a British-born Ayurvedic practitioner inspired by her Indian roots. She has a clinic and holds workshops on Ayurvedic medicine in London, and has just released her first book *Ayurveda: A practical guide to optimal health, healing and vitality* (£14.99, Orion).

## WHAT DOES IT TELL US?

To find out your dosha type there are simple online tests you can do, but for a true definition, visit a practitioner who will ask about your history and also look at your body habits such as digestion, as well as temperament, and even hair and nail health.

My dosha type was defined as pitta for both Vikruti and Prakruti, although vata was very close. Pitta dosha is dominated by the element of fire, which means I tend to overheat or get tired, which has certainly been true lately!

## HOW CAN IT HELP RIGHT NOW?

As well as having your own personal doshas, the doshas also influence the seasons. 'Summer is the pitta season, which means increasing heat, lightness, sharp and penetrating qualities in the atmosphere as well as in your body,' says Geeta.

'This means it's a time when you can overheat, sweat more, get irritable, experience indigestion and acidity, and also be susceptible to getting sun burn and skin irritations.'

Getting back in balance can be as simple as eating and doing things that are the opposite to pitta qualities. So choose cooling foods (see panel opposite), as well as grounding and relaxing activities. 'Cooling aromas such as sandalwood, jasmine and rose are perfect for balancing pitta,' says Geeta. 'Try spritzing your face with a refreshing and cooling rose water. It's also the perfect time to spend time in nature, especially in the early hours of the morning when it's cooler, with a focus on low-intensity, calming activities.'

Try a cooling breath – sheetali pranayama – over summer. Stick your tongue out to create a tube shape and draw in breath gently to your full lung capacity, then breathe out through your nose. Do several rounds to invoke a cooling sensation for your mind and body.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To really know your dosha and discover specific health advice for to it, see geeta vara.co.uk or visit the list of qualified practitioners at apa.uk.com

## HOW CAN I USE IT TO FEEL GOOD?

You can use principles of Ayurveda to stay happy and healthy in each season. Here are Geeta's summer Ayurvedic health tips...

**CHOOSE:** cooling foods over the summer to balance the heat of the

pitta season. These include watermelon, avocado, cucumber, mint, aloe vera juice, milk, ghee, coconut, fresh sweet fruits, leafy greens, and some light salads. Make sure to stay hydrated with plenty of fluids.

**AVOID:** alcohol, spicy foods and caffeine, chillies, citrus, sour or unripe fruits, vinegars, excessive onion, garlic, ginger and salty food.

**MEALS TO TRY:** enjoy a seasonal fruit salad, or some buckwheat pancakes with toasted coconut for breakfast; coconut chicken and vegetable curry or asparagus and soy bean risotto for lunch; roasted sweet potato with a lentil salad, or a Middle Eastern mezze platter for dinner; and things like crudités with tzatziki and dried fruit and nuts for snacks.