



Skincare in balance

Yasmin Sadikot, creator of Omveda Ayurvedic Skin & Hair Care, gives some insight into Ayurvedic skincare.

Ayurveda is entirely based on the laws of nature. Ayurveda considers man as a miniature replica of the universe. This theory of “macrocosm-microcosm continuum” (loka-purusha samya) is the most important principle of Ayurveda. Man and the universe are made up of five basic elements called Panchamahabhuta. They are akasha (ether/space), vayu (air/motion), teja (fire/radiant energy), ap (water/cohesive factor) and prithvi

(earth/mass). The individual (purusha) and the universe (loka) remain in constant interaction with each other. They derive and draw materials from each other to maintain their normality and homeostasis.

HUMAN CONSTITUTION

The five elements manifest in the human body as three principles, or humours, known as Tridosha:

AIR + ETHER = VATA

FIRE + WATER = PITTA

EARTH + WATER = KAPHA

Together, they govern all biological, physiological and physio-pathological functions. When out of balance they contribute to the disease process.

In order to live, we need each of the elements, but there is usually a dominant quality in each one of us. The best way to determine our overall Prakriti, or constitution, is to consult an Ayurvedic doctor who will do a pulse diagnosis and determine your unique individual constitution. In the case of skin and hair treatments, we are best to focus on the presenting qualities of the elements known as Vikriti; as that is what the condition is currently. As seasons change, our lifestyles change and so does our constitution.



KNOW YOUR AYURVEDIC SKIN TYPE

The first step in the holistic Ayurvedic approach to skincare is finding out your Ayurvedic skin type. Vata skin is generally dry, thin, delicate and cool to the touch; easily gets dehydrated, and is very vulnerable to the influence of dry, windy weather. Vata skin may age faster and tends to be dry, rough and flaky when out of balance.

Pitta skin tends to be fair, sensitive, soft, warm, and of medium thickness, with less tolerance to hot food and fieriness in temperament. Pitta skin types tend to be more prone to freckles and moles than the other skin types. When out of balance, Pitta skin can flare up in rashes, rosacea,

acne or sunspots. Kapha skin tends to have all the qualities of water and earth – it can be oily, thick, pale, soft, cool and more tolerant of the sun. Kapha skin tends to age slower and form less wrinkles than the other two types. Kapha skin types may struggle with dull complexion, enlarged pores, excessive oil, blackheads, pimples, moist types of eczema and water retention.

“Combination” skin can be Vata-Pitta; skin that is both dry and sensitive. Kapha-Pitta-skin is oily and sensitive and Vata-Kapha skin is generally dry with some oily zones.

The Ayurvedic approach to caring for combination skin takes into account environmental and seasonal factors. For example, a person with Vata-Pitta skin would follow the recommendations for Pitta skin in summer and Vata skin in autumn. The Kapha-Pitta type would follow Pitta recommendations in summer and Kapha recommendations in winter. The Vata-Kapha type would be best served by generally following Vata guidelines, with extra cleansing of the oily zones.

VATA SKINCARE

For Vata skin to stay youthful, skincare products used should be very nurturing. They must include some essential oils or herbs in combination, which can nourish the skin and rehydrate it; otherwise it may be susceptible to wrinkles and premature ageing. Going to bed on time, eating regular meals, and following a regular daily routine are essential components of a holistic approach to Vata skincare, as are eating foods that help balance Vata and nourish the Vata skin.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING FOR VATA SKIN:

Vata skin types will want to eat more warm, unctuous foods and favour the sweet, sour and salty tastes to balance the dry, rough, moving Vata dosha. Provide added nourishment to your skin by including organic milk, whole grains and green leafy vegetables in your diet. Drink lots of lukewarm water every day for internal hydration. Eat plenty of sweet, juicy fruits – they help cleanse the body from within and provide hydration as well. Include a little healthy fat such as ghee (clarified butter) or olive oil in your diet for added lubrication. A warm oil self-massage is excellent for keeping skin lubricated. Use a gentle, all-natural moisturiser to keep facial skin hydrated. Provide added deep lipid support with facial oil. Get plenty of rest so your mind, as well as your body, have the opportunity to recharge. Use a gentle, moisture-balancing cleanser and splash your face with water several times when you cleanse.

PITTA SKINCARE

The Pitta skin type needs both cooling and nurturing. Use skincare products that help enhance resistance to the sun. Avoid tanning treatments and therapies that expose your delicate, sensitive skin to steam for extended periods of time. Ayurvedic herbs like sandalwood can help protect Pitta skin from photosensitivity. But like other Ayurvedic herbs, it needs to be used in combination with other herbs for a balanced effect on the skin.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING FOR PITTA SKIN:

If you have a Pitta skin type you will thrive on sweet, bitter and astringent tastes found in sweet, juicy fruits, rose petals or silver, and cooked greens. Avoid hot, spicy foods. Stay away from harsh, synthetic cosmetics – they can damage sensitive skin and cause breakouts. Avoid an excess of deep-fried foods – they add heat to an already fiery constitution. Eat lots of sweet juicy fruits and have some rose petal jam in cool milk every day. The rose is considered cooling for mind, body and emotions. Use herbalised massage oils that have cooling properties. Cook with cooling spices such as fennel and licorice. Take extra care to protect your skin when you go out in the sun. Use gentle, natural skincare products for cleansing and moisturising. Provide added lipid support, such as facial skin oil, every other day.

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KAPHA SKINCARE

Kapha skin, because of its thickness and oiliness, is more prone to accumulate *ama*—toxins under the skin. People with Kapha skin need to detoxify on a regular basis; both internal detoxification and external detoxification to flush toxins from the skin. Scrubbing the skin with a gentle exfoliating clay can help external cleansing. Kapha skin types may also need to take herbal formulations to cleanse the skin from within.



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SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING FOR KAPHA SKIN:

The oiliness of Kapha type skin calls for a diet that is warmer, lighter, less oily and free of heavy, hard-to-digest foods. Eating more bitter, astringent and pungent tastes helps stimulate digestion and balance Kapha skin. Avoid too many sweet foods or deep-fried foods, as they add to the oiliness in the skin. Exercise every day to improve circulation. A daily warm oil massage can also help circulation. Eat plenty of organic vegetables and fruits to help cleanse the body from within. Cleanse your skin twice every day; exfoliate with a mud mask at least once a week. Cook with warming spices such as ginger and black pepper to stoke the digestive fire and inhibit the accumulation of toxins inside the body.

NOURISHMENT FOR SKIN

Besides following the diet for your skin type, the following foods are terrific skin-enhancers: leafy green vegetables; easily-digested proteins such as paneer, milk, tofu, sunflower seeds; foods high in zinc such as quinoa; and beta-carotene-rich foods such as carrots and sweet cherries. Almonds and walnuts support the skin with their protein and lubricating fat content. Some skin-friendly spices include turmeric to nourish the first four layers of the skin; cumin to rid the body of toxins; black pepper to cleanse the channels, and fennel to balance the skin's transformational ability. All antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables, such as pomegranate, apple, pear and bitter, green leafy vegetables are also excellent for the skin. Eat only fresh, whole and organic foods. Stay away from packaged, canned, frozen, processed and packaged foods.

THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON SKIN

There are three types of stress and all three impact the skin in different ways.

Mental stress starts a chain reaction that ends in drying out the moisture in the skin. Thinning, dryness and the shrinking of the shrotasa (microchannels) that carry nutritive fluid to the skin result in wrinkles and stress lines.

Emotional stress also affects the skin – just notice how anger or embarrassment can turn your face red. This shows the connection between emotions and the skin. If emotional stress becomes chronic, the result is acne, sun sensitivity and other Pitta-based problems.

Physical stress, such as exercising too much, working too much, or straining the body over a period of time causes physical stress. This causes the drying out of skin moisture and rough, aged skin. To counteract mental stress, maintain a Vata-pacifying diet and daily routine. To bring emotional stress into balance, follow a Pitta-pacifying diet and routine.

For physical stress, try to limit exercise or work to 50 percent of your physical stamina.

WHAT AYURVEDA SAYS ABOUT DRY SKIN

According to Ayurvedic texts dry skin is caused by Vata dosha. When Vata dosha increases in the body it reduces Kapha and makes the skin dry and wrinkled. (Kapha keeps skin soft and smooth whereas Vata makes the skin dry and rough. Vata dosha's qualities are opposite to Kapha dosha qualities.)

THE CAUSES OF INCREASED VATA DOSHA IN BODY:

- Exposure to cold and dry climate
- Controlling natural urges like urination, defecation, hunger, thirst, etc.
- Staying up late, irregular food habits.
- Excess physical and mental exertion.
- Consumption of spicy, dry, bitter food.

AYURVEDIC BEAUTY

Ayurvedic beauty is indigenous to India and is derived from the Vedas, within which Ayurveda is written. It has been a part of Indian culture for centuries and every family would have their own special recipes for keeping the skin young and healthy. Ayurvedic beauty is the balance between the inner and outer, and in its highest sense creates awareness of self. Ultimately the goal is self-realisation and understanding what makes one feel and look healthy; providing the means to maintaining that throughout life.

In India, the woman of the house is considered Lakshmi (Goddess of beauty and wealth), and the way she presents to the outer world is of great significance. Therefore, grooming and beautification is a normal part of everyday life. Indian women are renowned for lustrous hair, beautiful skin, clear eyes, grace and beauty. It is not just genetic, but a lifestyle steeped in traditional beauty and health rituals. **PB**