



The essence of all beings is Earth;
the essence of earth is water;
the essence of water is plants and
the essence of plants is human being.
(*Chhandogya Upanishada*)

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The influence OF AUTUMN AND WINTER ON SKIN, *from an Ayurvedic perspective*

Ayurveda means “the science of life”. It is a science of life that encompasses the whole of life and which relates the life of the individual to that of the universe.

Ayurvedic philosophy puts an emphasis on the relation between our environment and us. Environmental factors include diet, exercise, lifestyle and change in seasons.

Seasons affect our bodies, the food we eat and our skin. With the skin being the largest organ of the body it acts as a protective layer and is often the first line of defence from the environment. Typically, autumn weather is dry, cold and windy. The leaves lose their moisture, dry and flake. Similarly, our skin feels the effects of the cold, dry wind and loses moisture.

Winter is generally cold and wet. It is a dormant time, and affects the human constitution reflecting a slower metabolism, indoor activity and resultant sluggishness.

This reflects in the skin with signs of dullness, dryness and general sluggishness.

The constitution, or dosha, that influences autumn is Vata – air and ether, and winter is Kapha – water and earth.

Vata skin is generally dry, cold to touch, and lacks nourishment. Vata skin loves the warmth and tans easily. It has a tendency towards fine lines. Kapha skin has a tendency towards congestion and is cool to touch.

The common quality between the two is cold. Therefore, they both need warmth – however Kapha also needs stimulation to encourage activity. Vata needs nourishment.

Herbs have been the prime ingredient used in traditional Ayurvedic therapies. Ayurveda approaches herbs in a systematic way. The characteristic of the herb is the key to successfully revitalising and balancing the skin – some herbs are heating, some are cooling and calming.

Any imbalances in the three doshas of Vata-Pitta-Kapha occur sometimes

from the mind (commonly, stress) and sometimes from the body's *dhatu* (tissues) and *mala* (toxin deposits).

The sages of ancient times led long, disease-free, and vigorous lives with the help of rasayanas. Rasayana comprises a very strict diet, changes in lifestyle and a group of rasayana medicines like amalaki, haritaki, trifala and ashwagandha; some examples of herbs, as well as bhasma (a ground mix) of various metals like gold, silver etcetera, which help build healthy tissues. They are also believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. There are many herbs and bhasmas that are considered rasayanas. Traditional treatments comprise of herbs and bhasmas that have this ability. For example, gold is used to increase the circulation, and bring a healthy glow to the skin, whilst silver is calming and cooling for inflammatory skin. Herbal body masks help to heal, soften and give vitality to the skin. Ayurvedic skincare

is based on the premise that nature has strong curative powers. Herbs, minerals, grains, fruits, roots, leaves have the ability to prevent and balance many skin conditions and act as anti-ageing agents. Herbal treatments can be mixed with fresh ingredients like carrots, cucumber, potato, full cream milk, yoghurt, honey, eggs and seasonal fruits to enhance the effectiveness of some of the treatments. The result is baby soft skin, increased elasticity, reduction of stress lines and improved complexion.

Among the written information on Ayurveda, the sage Charakh stated numerous medicinal plants that can be used to obtain glowing complexion and effective cure for skin disorders. These include:

- Chandana – sandalwood
- Khus – vetiver
- Manjistha – Indian madder
- Amalaki – Indian gooseberry
- Haridra – turmeric.

Examples of some treatments include head and face massage with medicated oils and creams, body massage with herbal oil, and medicated steam bath and herbal baths. These add a healthy glow to the skin, minimise wrinkles, help slow or reverse the ageing process, tone the skin, rejuvenate and strengthen all the tissues and improve Sattva (mental clarity).

SOME OF THESE TREATMENTS ARE:

- **Udwarthanam – dry herbal powder massage**
Herbal powders are massaged onto the body in a rhythmic motion. This therapy is largely recommended for dissolving excess fat, strengthening the body and for healthy skin. It helps to increase circulation, eliminate toxins and increase heat in the body.
Rejuvenative: cleanses and nourishes skin, provides firm muscle tone and increased circulation.
Dosha best suited: Kapha.
- **Abhyanga–traditional Ayurvedic massage**
A full body massage administered by trained therapists working in complete harmony using warm medicated herbal oils.
Rejuvenative: healthy, glowing skin and good sleep strengthens the body.
Dosha best suited: Vata, Kapha.
- **Pizhichil–oil bath**
Therapists lavishly pour warm oil and simultaneously massage the body with

rhythmic hand movements.

Rejuvenative: supple skin, calm and relaxed mind.

Dosha best suited: Vata.

- **Kati Vasti–warm oil reservoir**
An excellent therapy to alleviate stress, pain or swelling in the lower back. Warm medicated oil is poured into an enclosed area of the waist created with a bridge of dough.
Rejuvenative: de-stresses and relieves exhaustion
Dosha best suited: Vata.
- **Sarvangha Dhara–medicated full-body bath**
An invigorating therapy which comprises the pouring of medicated oil, milk or buttermilk over the entire body. Besides having excellent rejuvenating properties, it also gives relief from body ache, sprains and joint pain.
Rejuvenative: strengthens the body, arrests the ageing process and builds up immunity.
Dosha best suited: Vata/Kapha.

Some of the benefits of rejuvenation therapy are as follows:

- Increase in memory power.
- Glowing skin.
- Modulated voice.
- Calmness.
- Healthy immune system.
- Optimum strength of the body.

Vata skincare

For Vata skin to stay youthful, skin care products used should be very nourishing. They must include oils and herbs in combination, which can nourish and warm the skin and rehydrate it, otherwise it may be susceptible to wrinkles and premature ageing. Vata skin needs increased circulation, therefore herbs that are heating and nourishing will help.

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.

Drink lots of lukewarm water for internal hydration. Include a little fat such as ghee (clarified butter) in your diet for added lubrication. A warm, herbalised oil self-massage is excellent for keeping skin lubricated. Provide added deep lipid support with facial oil. Get plenty of rest so your mind, as well as your body, has the opportunity to recharge.

A suitable traditional Ayurvedic treatment is 24K Gold Facial. Gold helps to increase

circulation and brings a warmth and glow to the face. Intensely hydrating, the treatment regenerates cells. Ideal for dry skins, 24K Gold leaves the skin with a wonderful radiance and luminosity. Gold Facial treatments will include Gold Scrub, Gold Toner, Gold Cream, Gold Gel, Gold Mask which in combination gives the best results

Another traditional Ayurvedic treatment, Vatakizhi, is a unique treatment that combines massage and herbs to help relieve dryness of the skin in addition to treating stiff joints and muscle pain and back aches. Specially selected Ayurvedic herbs are wrapped into a small hand-sized cloth bag and steeped in warm herbal oil and then gently massaged over the entire body (or the area to be treated). The herbs relax the body, soothe sore muscles, reduce tension, relieve aches, pains and strains, stiffness in the joints and inflammation. In addition, the process aids in stimulating the circulation of the blood and improving dryness of the skin.

Kapha skincare

“Kapha skin 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.”

Buffing the skin with a gentle exfoliant can help external cleansing.

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 help stimulate digestion and balance Kapha. Avoid too many sweet foods or deep-fried foods, they add to the oiliness in the skin. Exercise every day to improve circulation. A daily warm oil massage with stimulating herbs can help stimulate circulation. Cleanse your skin twice every day; exfoliate at least once a week. Cooking with warming spices such as ginger and black pepper helps the digestive fire and inhibits the accumulation of toxins inside the body.

Rasayanam, or rejuvenative therapies, are important to help balance the body and skin seasonally. Vata and Kapha skin both need warming treatments especially in autumn and winter respectively; treatments that will help to increase circulation, like 24K Gold Treatment, Intensified thermal treatments, Udwarthanam and Kizhi for the body. Kapha skin will benefit from herbs that are drying, stimulant and heating. Vata skin will benefit from herbs that are heating and nourishing. **PB**