

ance their hot, pungent, sour, and aggressive nature.

Vata types fare well with moist, smooth, warm, and sturdy qualities and sweet, salty, and sour foods. These qualities offset the arid, cold, deprived, bitter, and insecure composition of Vata.

In the doshas, the principle of like increases like applies. The inherent tastes of each dosha will be reinforced if that dosha is fed its own tastes. For instance, Kapha will greatly increase with the sweet taste, and moderately increase with the sour and salty tastes. Vata will be most increased by the bitter taste, and to some extent by astringent and pungent. Pitta will be most increased by sour taste,

and then somewhat by pungent and salty tastes.

This does not mean that each type eats only foods with the specific tastes best for their body types. Since all three doshas operate in everyone, a combination of all six tastes is necessary in every person's diet. The proportions of these tastes are the determining factor in good health.

Think of the relationship of the doshas as analogous to the body, mind, and spirit. The harmony of these three diverse aspects is key to our happiness. The doshas are like three streams flowing into the one river of universal intelligence. That river is ourself.

PROCESS OF MATERIALIZATION

VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
<i>Space and Air</i>	<i>Fire and Water</i>	<i>Water and Earth</i>
Bodily air	Digestive acids and enzymes and fats	Body mass, structure, and fluids
Spatial cavities of the body	Protective fluids	

The three doshas are formed from the five elements, which are the basis of the body types. Each element is transmuted into the body with its corresponding functions, thus producing the original six tastes. Further, each type benefits from the tastes other than its own.

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THE DOSHAS AND THEIR NATURAL TASTES

VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Bitter	Sour	Sweet
Astringent	Salty	Salty
Pungent	Pungent	Sour

VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Salty	Bitter	Pungent
Sour	Astringent	Bitter
Sweet	Sweet	Astringent



THE SIX TASTES

The Sweet Taste

The sweet taste increases bodily tissues, nourishes and comforts the body, and relieves hunger. This taste is necessary for each body type, but the Pitta and Vata types can use more sweet foods than the Kapha types. Water and earth produce the sweet taste, which includes all carbohydrates, sugars, fats, and amino acids. Most grains and fruits are sweet. The primary element of life, which is water, is sweet. Milk is sweet. Almost all foods contain some degree of sweetness. This is the most dominant taste of all our forms of sustenance.

The Sour Taste

The sour taste is used in small quantities by everyone, but it is most beneficial for the Vata types. Small amounts may be used by Kapha, and minute amounts by Pitta. It aids in digestion and the elimination of wastes from the body. Sour is formed from the earth and fire elements. All organic acids are considered sour. Many fruits—such as lemons, limes, grapefruit, soursop, and strawberries—are considered sour with some sweetness. All fermented foods—such as miso, soy sauce, yogurt, and pickles—are sour foods.

The Pungent Taste

The pungent taste is most beneficial for the Kapha type. It is to be used in small amounts for Vata, and very sparsely by Pitta. The pungent taste stimulates appetite, and maintains the metabolism and balance of secretions in the body. This taste is formed from the elements of air and fire. Spices, such as garlic, ginger, asafoetida, peppers, and all volatile oils are considered pungent.

The Salty Taste

The salty taste is used in small quantities by all types, but it is mostly beneficial to Vata. This taste cleanses bodily tissues, makes the system limber, and activates digestion. The salty taste is formed from water and

fire, and exists in all salts and seaweeds. Most watery vegetables—such as zucchini, cucumber, and tomatoes—are naturally high in saline.

The Bitter Taste

The bitter taste is good for everyone in medicinal quantities. It detoxifies the body, tones the organs, cleanses the liver, and controls skin ailments. It is of most importance to Pitta, moderate importance to Kapha, and of very little use to Vata. This taste is formed from air and space, and exists in all bitter foods—such as turmeric, aloe vera, neem leaves, endives, and lettuce—and in alkaloids and glycosides.

The Astringent Taste

As with bitter, the astringent taste is to be used medicinally. Very small quantities can be used by each type. Pitta and Kapha can use more astringent foods than Vata. Astringency heals the body by its constrictive nature. It reduces secretion and is the most stark of the six tastes. It is formed from the elements of air and earth. Examples of astringent foods are those high in tannin, such as the teas made from the barks of trees. Most legumes contain the astringent taste along with the sweet taste. Most medicines are astringent in nature.

RASA: THE TASTES OF NATURE

Rasa has many meanings in Sanskrit. In the book *Diet for Natural Beauty*, I have defined rasa as the culmination of maturity—the beauty which is earned. It is the achievement of a calm and resolved being. In Ayurveda, rasa is the vital lymph fluid or plasma that nurtures the cells of the body.

The term *rasa* in Ayurveda also refers to the complex chain of reactions that occur from the initial registration of a perception by a sense organ to the stimulation of the brain cells that excite the appetite. Appetite is not simply the initial hunger for food—it is the total intelligence of the body acting in harmony



with the external environment. The correct response to the prompting of appetite begins with making informed choices from an array of healthy foods. Similarly, rasa is not merely the taste of foods. Taste is a tiny aspect of the prodigious spectrum within which rasa operates. Food is desired, ingested, digested, and its waste ejected. Rasa is present through all stages of this vital process.

The most important aspect of rasa is discrimination. Rasa is an intelligence to be learned, not the irresponsible throwing together of foods that appeal simply to the sense of sight and taste irrespective of ingestion and digestion. The proper "foreplay" of eating arises from (1) a knowledge of nature, its environs, and of the body; (2) a regard for the universe and the bounty of its grains and greens; and (3) the selection of seasonal and reparatory produce. The delicious taste that ensues from foods knowledgeably and cleanly prepared is only one of the many graces of rasa.

As food enters the system, it signals an immediate heating or cooling response. This factor, which is the active potency of food, is called *virya*. All pungent, sour, and salty foods lend a heating *virya*, the most heat being produced by those that are pungent. Bitter, astringent, and sweet foods yield a cooling *virya*, the coldest effect being produced by those that are bitter.

In addition to taste (rasa) and the heating or cooling energies of food (*virya*), each food has certain qualities or gunas. Each of the three basic doshas is nourished by foods having the following seven features:

Vata: moist/lubricating (guna)
heavy/solid (guna)
smooth/consistent (guna)
hot (*virya*)
sweet (rasa)
salty (rasa)
sour (rasa)

Pitta: substantial (guna)
aromatic (guna)
calming (guna)
cool (*virya*)
sweet (rasa)
bitter (rasa)
astringent (rasa)

Kapha: dry (guna)
light (guna)
uncloying/moderate (guna)
warm/stimulating (*virya*)
pungent (rasa)
bitter (rasa)
astringent (rasa)

By tracing the continuum of bliss that foods naturally afford us, the Vedic seers were able to define the properties and effects of food on the human system, and the causes of disease. This ancient science can be revived by the alertness of those who revel in nature. Food is known in Ayurveda as *ausadham*, that which is medicine. When food ceases to be medicine, medicine becomes impotent.

Once food has been digested, the action of rasa continues. The post-digestive effect of foods is called *vipaka*. Here the six tastes are synergized into three final tastes. Sweet remains sweet, in its *vipaka* state; salty becomes sweet; pungent, bitter, and astringent leave a pungent *vipaka*; sour remains sour. In essence, the sweet, pungent, and sour tastes are the three unchanging tastes from the beginning to the end of the process of rasa.

Occasionally certain foods or medicines do not follow these three stages predictably. When foods deviate from the established *virya* or *vipaka*, they are referred to by the Ayurvedic scholar Charaka as *prabhava*, the exceptions to the rule. *Prabhava* is most important in Ayurvedic pharmacology, since most ingredients with *prabhava* qualities are used to deliberately increase a specific dosha. In the Vedic diet, we generally attempt only to decrease the aggravated dosha. Certain foods, such as honey, lemons, bananas, and onions, are classified as *prabhava* foods. Honey, for example, has more of a pungent and volatile nature, even though it is considered sweet; for this reason, it has a hot *virya* instead of cold, like most sweets. Lemons are classified as sour, but have a cold *virya* instead of a heating energy. Bananas are considered sweet, but their subtle overriding nature is sour and thus their *vipaka* is also sour. Onions are classified as pungent, but have a sweet taste after they are cooked. I have discovered that many foods that are classified



as prabhava display much more of their subtle tastes when subjected to heat. Most foods with dubious prabhava, such as honey, lemon, tamari, and bananas, should not be cooked.

Ayurveda considers certain foods to be contradictory in nature and cautions us on combining them. The following foods should not be combined:

- Dairy products and salts or salted foods
- Dairy products and animal foods (especially fish)
- Fruits and any other foods
- Hot and cold foods
- Ghee and honey in equal quantity

Ayurveda also enjoins us not to ingest alkaline foods over a long period of time, and not to take honey with warm foods or liquids.

OJAS

The excellent essence of the dhatus beginning from plasma and ending in sukra is called ojas. Ojas is also known as *bala* in the context of medical science. This strength provides stability, and nourishment of the muscle tissue, and the individual remains undeterred in all efforts. He is endowed with excellence of voice and complexion. His internal organs and external senses are capable of performing their will to their full abilities.

Vaidya Bhagwan Dash

In review, the Ayurvedic concept of taste is observed in these three stages: the sensory stimulation and initial taste of the tongue (*rasa*); the heating or cooling energy that occurs during digestion (*virya*); and the post-digestive taste (*vipaka*), which reduces the six original tastes into three residual tastes of sweet, sour, and pungent. These three final tastes are transported within the nutritive plasma to the various organs and tissues of the body. After digestion and assimilation are completed, the singular essence known as ojas remains in the body. When the energies of the foods

or the mental attitudes are impaired, or the seasonal influences are not observed, ojas is greatly diminished. Without this residual essence of ojas in the body, the autoimmune system becomes vulnerable to disease.

When the doshas are all in balance, the health of the dhatus is excellent. When the dhatus are healthy, the male and female sperm and ovum dhatus (shukra and artava) are aglow with brilliance. When the doshas and dhatus are unhealthy, the shukra and artava are polluted and the aura is impaired. The sperm shukra is the food of fertility for the ovum artava. The shining health of a child depends entirely on the shukra and artava condition of the parents. The union between male and female is fundamental to the feeding of the female artava. Sexual union takes place for the replenishment of the artava, the nurturing of the female hunger, in order to procreate. When the conditions of the shukra and artava are weak and without nutrition, the female loses her fertility and the male his potency. The male can no longer feed the female, and even though children continue to be born, the basic intelligence and health of their nature is dramatically diminished because of the depleted shukra and artava.

DETERMINING THE TASTE AND ENERGETICS OF FOODS

Air, fire, and water are the three fundamental bases of life.

Sushruta

Each minute grain of sand has its own distinguishing feature, which makes it unique within creation. In observing nature, we are able to determine the inherent energy of each human, animal, vegetable, grain, bean, fruit, and seed.

Shape, size, color, scent, taste, temperature and season, as well as texture—these are the primary indicators used to determine a space, air, fire, water, or earth food. Like humans, most foods are a combination of



THE ANATOMY OF THE SIX TASTES

RASA	ELEMENTS	QUALITIES	VIRYA
Sweet	Earth/Water	Oily, cold, heavy	Cold
Sour	Earth/Fire	Oily, hot, heavy	Hot
Salty	Water/Fire	Oily, hot, heavy	Hot
Pungent	Fire/Air	Rough, hot, light	Hot
Bitter	Air/Space	Rough, cold, light	Cold
Astringent	Air/Earth	Rough, cold, light	Cold
RASA (Initial taste)	VIPAKA (Post-digestive taste)	EFFECT	MAIN FUNCTION
Sweet	Sweet	increases K decreases V, P	Increases body tissues
Sour	Sour	increases K, P decreases V	Increases appetite
Salty	Sweet	increases K, P decreases V	Makes body limber and cleanses body tissues
Pungent	Pungent	increases P, V decreases K	Reduces fluid in tissues
Bitter	Pungent	increases V decreases P, K	Purifies organs and controls skin ailments
Astringent	Pungent	increases V decreases P, K	Purifies and constricts body

THE THREE STAGES OF TASTE

RASA (Initial taste)	VIRYA (Energy of Food)	VIPAKA (Post-digestive taste)
Sweet	Cold	Sweet
Sour	Hot	Sour
Salty	Hot	Sweet
Pungent	Hot	Pungent
Bitter	Cold	Pungent
Astringent	Cold	Pungent

SUMMARY OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SIX TASTES

- Sweet remains sweet
- Sour remains sour
- Pungent remains pungent
- Salty becomes sweet
- Bitter becomes pungent
- Astringent becomes pungent



two dominant elements. By observation, we are able to distinguish and use foods that are different from our own nature, and thus maintain a dynamic stasis within our organism.

All plants and other life-forms are derived from the water element. Through the process of transmutation, the other four elements also exist in varying degrees. Water gives taste to life, and earth gives scent to it. Fire transforms the shape and visual characteristics of food. Air creates the skin, feel, and texture of the food. Space gives the food sound, hollowness, and resonance.

When we learn to plant seeds in our own garden and observe the growth of our grains, vegetables, beans, fruits, and herbs, we become attuned to the nature of each plant. We instinctively become alert to its distinguishing features. A wholesome life is sustained by the excellent marriage of each life-form to its proper food.

Food speaks to us. All we need to do is listen... to be still and observe the grandeur of nature in every blade of grass. Every food has its innate markings, color, vibration, and taste. The ripe peach shimmers on a tree. It is golden and red. Human lips are caressed by its fine fur before its sweet pulp is released. A red, round, firm apple crackles under our bite. It may be sweet and juicy or tart and firm. A banana turns into mush and lubricates the digestive system. The chili pepper, which bites by sight and scent, consumes the tongue and stomach with fire long after it is eaten. All foods speak to us—some loudly, others delicately. Be still and observe.

It is best to eat the foods that are in season and that grow either locally or in a similar climate. Occasionally, foods that grow in other climates and terrains may be used for variety and the celebration of our universal spirit.

ELEMENTAL FEATURES OF ALL FOODS

SPACE	AIR	FIRE	WATER	EARTH
Hollow	Mobile	Intense	Cool	Solid
Resonant	Rough	Hot	Dense	Dense
Translucent	Hard	Medium-size	Heavy	Heavy
Blue	Dry	Sharp	Large	Large
Cold	Variable	Light	Moist	Oily
Astringent	Fresh	Fluid	Smooth	Sour
Pungent	Wiry	Oily	Cloudy	Sweet
	Light	Fetid	Sticky	
	Compact	Red	White	
	Dark (gray/green)	Orange	Clear	
	Bitter	Pungent	Sweet	
	Astringent	Salty	Salty	

ENERGETICS OF EACH FOOD ARE DETERMINED BY

Shape	Color	Taste	Texture
Size (density/weight/buoyancy)	Scent	Temperature/season	

FIRE FOODS

All hot spices	All pickles, vinegars, and salts	All heating grains
All oily foods	All acidic foods /medicines	All nuts
All sour /pungent fruits and vegetables	All animal foods	All red foods

AIR/SPACE FOODS

Most leafy greens and lettuces	All hollow vegetables with tiny seeds*	All dry, rough, stale foods
All cabbage families	Most nightshade foods	
All bitter vegetables	Most dry, compact legumes	

*Except for peppers, which are fire/air/space foods

EARTH/WATER FOODS

All sweet, juicy fruits	All cool, milky foods	All sticky, cold foods
All salty and sweet watery vegetables		All sweets

The following examples are given so you may begin to use your own powers of observation and learn about the foods that are transformed into your body. Remember that in order to approach balance according to Ayurvedic principles you must select foods with energetic qualities different from those of your basic constitutional type. If you are predominantly a

space/air type (Vata), the foods most suited to you would be *other than* these energies. If you are a water/earth type (Kapha), your foods would be mostly of fire, air, and space. Once you learn the cosmic rule, you'll be intuitively deciphering the energies of all things with practice.

EXAMPLES OF TASTES ACCORDING TO THE ELEMENTS**LETTUCE: AIR/WATER FOOD**

Primary element: air	Color: green	Texture: airy, wiry
Secondary element: water	Scent: fresh	Good for Kapha and Pitta
Shape: variable	Taste: bitter	types; occasionally for
Size: thin, light	Temperature: cool, moist	Vata types (with dressing)

RED CHILI PEPPER: FIRE/AIR/SPACE FOOD

Primary element: fire	Size: small, medium, light	Taste: pungent, salty
Secondary elements: space/air	(with compact seeds)	Temperature: hot
Shape: triangular, hollow	Color: red	Texture: smooth, oily
(space) and variable	Scent: sharp and penetrating	Good for Kapha types; occasionally for Vata types

CROOKNECK SQUASH: WATER/EARTH FOOD

Primary element: water	Color: yellow; white flesh	Texture: smooth, oily
Secondary element: earth	Scent: sweet	Good for Vata and Pitta types;
Shape: crescent	Taste: sweet, astringent	occasionally for Kapha types
Size: medium, buoyant	Temperature: cool	

COCONUT: WATER/EARTH/SPACE FOOD

Primary element: water	Color: brown shell; white flesh	Texture: variable, dry
Secondary elements: earth/space	Scent: sweet, milky	Good for Pitta and Vata types
Shape: round	Taste: sweet	
Size: medium, hollow, resonant	Temperature: cool	

ACORN SQUASH: EARTH/WATER FOOD

Primary element: earth	Color: cloudy orange	Texture: smooth, dense
Secondary element: water	Scent: sweet, nutty	Good for Vata and Pitta types
Shape: multi-crescent	Taste: sweet	
Size: medium, large; solid	Temperature: cool	

GREEN BELL PEPPER: AIR/SPACE/FIRE FOOD

Primary elements: air and space	Size: medium, small, light (with compact seeds)	Taste: pungent, salty
Secondary element: fire	Color: green	Temperature: hot
Shape: triangular and variable, hollow (space)	Scent: sharp, pungent	Texture: smooth, oily
		Good for Kapha types; occasional for Pitta types

A REMINDER

**Tastes (Rasa) and Energy (Virya)
suitable (in order of preference) for each dosha:**

Good for Vata: salty, sour, sweet; heating

Good for Pitta: sweet, bitter, astringent; cooling

Good for Kapha: pungent, bitter, astringent; heating