

# beYogi

## THE DOSHAS DEMYSTIFIED

Ayurvedic Secrets  
for Yoga Teachers



# INTRO

The ancient healing system of Ayurveda is rooted in the concept of the three doshas: vata, pitta, and kapha. These energy forces reside within each of us and also exist in all of nature. With a deeper understanding of the doshas, you can manifest health and happiness, deepen your yoga practice, and inspire your yoga classes.

Start by taking the dosha quiz to determine your mind-body type, and then dive into the specifics of all three. Find out how the doshas are affected by your diet, lifestyle, the seasons, and even the time of day. Then learn how to apply this knowledge to your yoga classes by choosing poses and pranayama practices that best complement the effects of nature. Our hope? That you walk away armed with the wisdom to transform not only your own life but also the lives of your yoga students.

—The beYogi Tribe

# CONTENTS

- 3 MEET THE THREE DOSHAS**  
Journey into Ayurveda with an introduction to the three doshas and the concept of prakriti, or our unique doshic makeup.
- 4 WHAT'S YOUR PRAKRITI?**  
The doshas come together in various proportions, explaining why we don't all look and think the same. This quiz examines your physical and emotional attributes to determine your prakriti.
- 5 AIR AND SPACE: YOUR INNER VATA**  
Vata is the harmonious union of air and space. Similar to these elements, those who are heavy in vata love change and tend to be free-spirited.
- 6 FIRE AND WATER: YOUR INNER PITTA**  
As their fire element indicates, pitta types are fiery and vibrant. They have a strong intellect and the capacity to fearlessly transform ideas into reality.
- 7 WATER AND EARTH: YOUR INNER KAPHA**  
Kapha types are motivated by the need to help others. Their earthy quality manifests as stability and calmness in moods, speech, and goal-setting.
- 8 HOW TO TUNE YOUR CLASSES TO NATURE'S DAILY RHYTHMS**  
If you truly want to help your students, it's time to teach according to nature's daily rhythms. By harmonizing your classes each day, you can literally practice yoga in sync with the universe.
- 10 WHAT EVERY TEACHER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SEASONAL YOGA**  
Apply these seasonal yoga tips to your classes to balance the effects of nature. Without this Ayurvedic wisdom, you might be causing your students harm.

# MEET THE THREE DOSHAS

**A**t the heart of Ayurveda lies the concept of the three doshas: vata, pitta, and kapha. The doshas are subtle energy forces, or bodily humors, that govern both the functioning and decaying of the body.

They are the forces behind our internal machine. The doshas operate in a subtle dimension, but we understand their existence and ongoing through their qualities and functions. Their examination

When our doshas are in balance, we experience health. When they increase, decrease, or vitiate, we experience imbalance that leads to disease.

is the basis for the complex, sophisticated science of Ayurveda.

When our doshas are in balance, we experience health. When they increase, decrease, or vitiate, we experience imbalance that leads to disease. Armed with an understanding of our own unique doshic makeup—called our *prakriti*—we can choose a diet and lifestyle that supports our physical, emotional, and spiritual harmony. We can even prevent disease.

Everyone has all three doshas operating within. But each of us has either more vata, more pitta, or more kapha. And very rarely, some have an equal combination of all three. This doshic makeup is what grants us our uniqueness in both body and mind. ●



# WHAT'S YOUR PRAKRITI?

The quiz below will help you to determine your prakriti by examining both your physical and emotional attributes. While it's ideal to have someone well-trained in Ayurveda determine your prakriti, this chart serves as a good start.

Even though we experience many different physical and mental states throughout our lives, our prakriti

remains the same. Keep this in mind as your answer these questions. Base your responses on your life-long tendencies, not how you feel in this moment alone.

For some questions, you might fit into more than one category. Check all boxes that apply. If you do not fit into any of the categories, leave the question blank.

FEATURES	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA
Skin Texture	Rough, dry	Soft, normal, or oily	Smooth, thick, oily
Complexion	Darker	Pink, reddish	White, pale
Body Temperature	Cold	Warm	Cool
Body Weight	Thin, difficult to gain weight	Moderate, easy to gain lose weight	Heavy, difficult to lose weight
Muscles	Wiry, stiff	Medium, flexible	Firm, well-developed
Veins	Very prominent	Somewhat visible	Not visible
Hair Texture	Dry, thin, frizzy, brittle	Straight, fine, shiny	Thick, oily, wavy
Eyes	Small, gray, brown or unusual color	Medium, penetrating, light brown, green, or hazel	Big, sensual, black, blue, or dark brown
Teeth	Small, crooked, protruded	Moderate, straight	Regular or big, very white
Appetite	Variable, unpredictable	Good, intense	Low but steady
Thirst	Changing, irregular	More	Less
Digestive Power	Variable	Fast	Slow but good
Elimination	Irregular, dry, hard, easily constipated	Semi-solid to regular, often more than once a day	Regular, smooth, bulky
Sleep	Light, easily disturbed	Moderate, sound	Long, deep
Eating Speed	Fast	Moderate	Slow
Walking Pace	Fast	Moderate	Slow
Physical Endurance	Fair	Good	Excellent
Weather Preference	Aversion to cold and wind	Aversion to heat	Aversion to cold and damp
Mental Activity	Quick, restless	Sharp, aggressive	Stable, calm
Reaction to Stress	Fear, anxiousness	Irritability, aggressiveness	Calmness, indifference
Goal Achievement	Easily distracted or changing	Focused, determined	Slow, steady
Competition	Doesn't like competitive pressure	Natural competitor	Deals easily with competitive pressure
Moods	Changes quickly	Changes slowly	Stable
Relationships	Many casual	Intense	Long, deep
Memory	Learns quickly, forgets quickly	Learns quickly, forgets slowly	Learns slowly, forgets slowly
Dreams	Flying, fearful, running	Fiery, violent, intense	Watery, sensual, romantic
Speech	Fast, talkative	Clear, sharp, decisive	Slow, clear, smooth

## Totals

Tally up! The highest number determines your predominant dosha. The runner up is usually your secondary dosha. And very rarely all three may be equal, making you tridoshic. So, you might be vata, pitta, kapha, vata-pitta, vata-kapha, pitta-vata, pitta-kapha, kapha-vata, kapha-pitta, or tridoshic. ●

# AIR AND SPACE: YOUR INNER VATA

**W**e call those with more vata, *vata types*. So what is vata?

**ELEMENTS:** Vata is the harmonious union of air and space.

**QUALITIES:** Just like air and space, vata is light and mobile. It's also dry, cold, subtle, and rough.

**FUNCTIONS:** While the doshas have many functions, they each have their own primary domain. Vata is responsible for movement. This makes it not only the dominant dosha, as without it the other doshas are paralyzed, but also the dosha most likely to move out of balance.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** As you might guess, vata types have more vata qualities in their bodies. Formed by the wind, they're often thin and angular or wiry. Dryness shows itself in their hair, which is usually thin and frizzy. Their skin tends toward dryness and cracking. They have darker complexions and tan easily. As vata is cold, vata types are often cool to the touch and feel cold more than most. And as vata is light, they have trouble putting on weight.

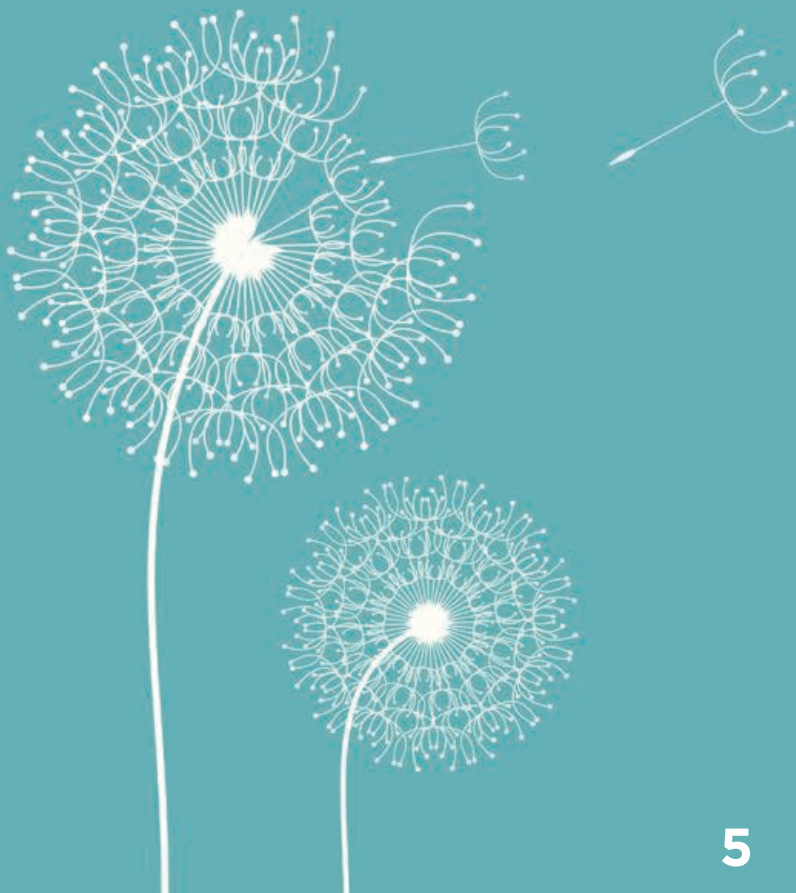
**EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES:** Vatas also have more vata qualities in their minds. They love change and tend to be free-spirited. Their mobile qualities make them adaptable and flexible toward whatever life brings. They are creative, energetic, and spiritually attuned. When out of balance, vata types tend toward fear, worry, and anxiousness.

**DISEASE TENDENCIES:** The vata dosha is responsible for 80 different diseases, the most of any dosha. When aggravated,

it can cause pain and dryness. It governs the colon and its excess can lead to constipation and gas. It's also responsible for arthritis and osteoporosis; and since vata governs the nervous system, its imbalance can be cause for insomnia and mental disorders.

**DISEASE PREVENTION:** Although least likely to implement a daily routine on their own, vatas are the ones who need it the most. Regularity in sleep and mealtimes helps to balance their innate mobility. They should also keep warm, eat warm and unctuous foods, practice slow and calm yoga, and massage themselves daily with sesame oil.

**FAMOUS VATA TYPES:** Uma Thurman, Keira Knightly, Adrien Brody ●





# FIRE AND WATER: YOUR INNER PITTA

**W**e call those with more pitta, *pitta* types. So what is pitta?

**ELEMENTS:** Pitta is the harmonious union of fire and water.

**QUALITIES:** Like fire, pitta is hot, sharp, and light. Like water, it is oily, viscous, fluid, and spreading.

**FUNCTIONS:** The doshas have many functions, but pitta is primarily responsible for all forms of transformation in the body.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** Pitta types have more pitta qualities in their bodies. Their solar energy gives them pinkish or reddish skin, and they tend to run hot. Their hair is

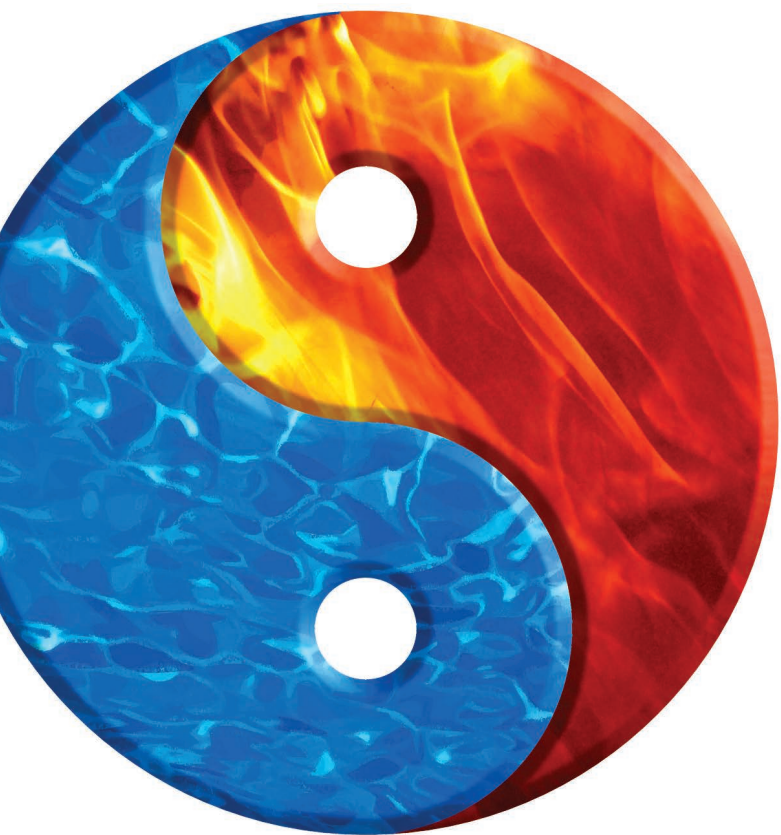
usually thin, straight, and shiny, and tends toward early graying or baldness. Pittas have athletic, well-proportioned bodies. They're generally medium-sized and of medium height. Their inner fire gives them an excellent digestive capacity, and they can eat more than the other dosha types.

**EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES:** As their fire element indicates, pitta types are fierce and vibrant. They have a strong intellect and the capacity to fearlessly transform ideas into reality. Pittas are goal-setters and determined goal achievers. They have a natural competitive edge, which teeters toward aggressiveness when imbalanced. They easily become irritable and angry when out of balance, too.

**DISEASE TENDENCIES:** Aggravated pitta relates to burning sensations—conditions such as acid reflux, heartburn, and stomach ulcers. Pitta types tend toward inflammation, infections, skin rashes, bleeding disorders, and diarrhea.

**DISEASE PREVENTION:** Pitta types need a cooling lifestyle that keeps their fire element in check. They do well with cooling, sweet activities like evening meditation and basking in the moonlight. Although attracted to competition, pittas do better with moderate-paced, noncompetitive morning yoga. Cooling foods like melons and cucumbers help to keep pitta in balance, while spicy and sour foods aggravate their internal heat. Since their digestive fire is so strong, they do best with a snack in between meals.

**FAMOUS PITTA TYPES:** Jennifer Aniston, Madonna, Tom Cruise, Justin Timberlake ●





# WATER AND EARTH: YOUR INNER KAPHA

**W**e call those with more kapha, *kapha types*. So what is kapha?

**ELEMENTS:** Kapha is the harmonious union of water and earth.

**QUALITIES:** Like water, kapha is unctuous, soft, and cold. Like earth, it is heavy, stable, thick, and slow.

**FUNCTIONS:** While the doshas have many functions, kapha is primarily responsible for stability in the body.

**PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES:** As you might guess, kaphas have more kapha qualities in their bodies. Their earth element manifests as a sturdy, well-developed body, and they tend to be overweight. Kapha skin is fair and smooth. Their facial features resemble the roundness and softness of the moon. Watery qualities give them big, sensual eyes and abundant, lustrous hair. Kaphas have a low but steady appetite. They have the strongest physical endurance of any of the three types, and are the most fitted to vigorous exercise.

**EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES:** Kapha types are motivated by

the need to help others. They are warm and nurturing with an inherent maternal quality, ever-ready to listen and comfort. Their earthy quality manifests as stability and calmness in moods, speech, and goal-setting. Though their grasping power is not as agile as vata types, once a kapha learns something, they will never forget it. When out of balance, they tend toward attachment and depression.

**DISEASE TENDENCIES:** Aggravated kapha leads toward excess phlegm, respiratory diseases, itching, and heaviness. Due to its water component, in excess, kapha can cause swelling, edema, and obesity.

**DISEASE PREVENTION:** Stable, steady kaphas need the right amount of stimulation to counteract their inherent heaviness. They must firmly commit to a nonsedentary life. Kaphas benefit from rising early, practicing invigorating morning yoga, eating a large and healthy lunch, and having a light dinner. A warm and light diet supports kapha's low digestive fire.

**FAMOUS KAPHA TYPES:** Oprah Winfrey, Scarlett Johansson, Shaquille O'Neal ●



# TUNE YOUR CLASSES TO NATURE'S DAILY RHYTHMS

**A**yurveda explains that nature profoundly influences our bodies and minds. Good health is only possible if we are in sync with nature. Correspondingly, a yoga practice is out of sync with nature's daily rhythms can lead us to disharmony and disease. Make sure that you're leading your students toward health and balance rather than the other way around.

To harmonize with nature's daily ebbs and flows, you need to understand the three doshas, each comprising two of the five elements. Let's recap:

- **Vata** is made up of air and space. It's light, mobile, cold, dry, and subtle.
- **Pitta** is made up of fire and water. It's hot, light, fluid, viscous, and sharp.
- **Kapha** is made up of water and earth. It's heavy, slow, stable, cold, and soft.

The doshas reside within us and also exist in all of nature. They even influence the day, becoming dominant during two, four-hour periods.

## EARLY MORNING

Hours: 2 – 6 a.m.

Dosha: Vata

## MORNING

Hours: 6 – 10 a.m.

Dosha: Kapha

## MIDDAY

Hours: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Dosha: Pitta

## AFTERNOON

Hours: 2 – 6 p.m.

Dosha: Vata

## EVENING

Hours: 6 – 10 p.m.

Dosha: Kapha

## NIGHT

Hours: 10 p.m. – 2 a.m.

Dosha: Pitta

The doshas impose their subtle energies on the quality of the day during their period of domination. Using this knowledge, you can teach yoga classes that help balance the doshas' inherent qualities.

Ideally, yoga would be taught on an individual basis according to each student's dosha, their imbalances, the time of day, and the season. But that's

rarely possible in modern yoga. Since we usually teach large group classes, we'll have to make some generalizations.

## RISE AND SHINE IN KAPHA TIME

Let's begin with the morning hours: 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. During this time, kapha inflicts its slow and heavy qualities on the day and our bodies. This is the best time to teach a vigorous, energetic practice that mitigates kapha's sluggish effects. Lead your students





through energetic Sun Salutations and playful, challenging asanas.

Incorporate postures like Bridge and Fish, which focus on the chest and upper torso—kapha's main locations. End class with a shorter rest in Savasana, though never too short, and give students the option to place a bolster under their upper chest for a heart-opening experience. Pranayama practices like *kapalabhati* (skull-shining breath) and *bhastrika* (bellows breath) are excellent for invigorating mind and body, as well as balancing kapha.

### PITTA DURING THE DAY

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., we're in pitta time. When this dosha is too high or out of balance, pitta tends to cause not only excess heat, but also aggressiveness, anger, and a competitive nature. Much of modern yoga is inherently pitta-aggravating, so teachers should be especially cautious during the pitta hours. Help students keep cool by turning the heat down or off. Teach a light-hearted, cooling class with less focus on precision of alignment, and more focus on inner awareness. Incorporate poses that spotlight the navel like spinal twists and forward bends. Headstand is a particularly heating posture, so either skip it or keep the hold very short. End the practice with *sheetali* (cooling breath) or *sheetkari* (hissing breath) pranayama to cool down any acquired heat.

### VATA IN THE LAZY AFTERNOON

In the late afternoon, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., we enter vata time. In excess, vata can lead to anxiety, nervousness, and fear, so this dosha naturally benefits from calming, grounding practices. Pitta and kapha types can probably handle something more vigorous during these hours, but teachers must heed to all students. Slow down the normal class pace a few notches. Encourage students

to flow through poses as if they're moving through honey. Remind them not to fidget during or between asanas, as movement aggravates vata. Incorporate balancing and seated postures that focus on the colon and pelvis. Lead students through a nice long Savasana, and end class with soothing *anuloma viloma* or *nadi shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing) pranayama.

### CALL IT A NIGHT WITH KAPHA

From 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., we again move into kapha time. However, this is also the time of day when we should be winding things down and preparing our minds and bodies

**Encourage students to flow through poses as if they're moving through honey.**

**Remind them not to fidget during or between asanas, as movement aggravates vata.**

for bed. A vigorous, energetic morning kapha practice would not be appropriate in the evening. Kapalabhati, for example, can prevent sleep. In general, follow the guidelines for a vata-balancing class. The later the time, the more calming and grounding the class should be. End with a long rest in Savasana or even better, a relaxing *yoga nidra* (yogic sleep) session. Incorporate soft ujjayi, anuloma viloma, or nadi shodhana pranayama—all of which are great pre-bedtime practices.

By harmonizing yoga classes to the rhythms of each day, your students can literally practice yoga in sync with the universe. They will experience greater internal balance and a healthier body and mind. ●

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEASONAL YOGA

**U**sing the wisdom of yoga's sister science Ayurveda, you can teach yoga classes that are harmonious with nature's daily and seasonal energetic ebbs and flows. This is knowledge that all yoga teachers need to understand, not only for the benefit of their students but for their own practice as well. Without it, yoga can be more harmful than helpful and actually cause physical and mental imbalance. This becomes especially true if you ignore nature's seasonal manifestations.

Ayurveda explains that whatever exists within nature also exists within each of us. Our minds and bodies are greatly affected by each season. Without adjusting our lifestyles accordingly, we can easily become imbalanced and disease can manifest.

This is where Ayurveda's wisdom of the ritucharya, or seasonal routine, comes into play. Ayurveda teaches that *like* increases like, and the ritucharya brings balance to each season's accumulated or aggravated dosha by using the principle of opposites.

You can apply ritucharya to your yoga classes to help students balance the seasonal effects of nature and feel their best. Below you'll find yoga recommendations that will help to counteract any given season's inherent qualities.

These seasonal recommendations are generalized, and they will likely vary with your local climate. Adopt an ongoing mindfulness of the nature around you so you can structure your classes accordingly.





### SPRING SHOWERS BRING KAPHA POWERS

Spring shares many traits of the kapha dosha: the atmosphere is moist, the air is cool, and the general energy is soft, heavy, and slow. Because *like* increases *like*, this is the time of year when kapha tends to get aggravated.

Be aware that although spring is generally a kapha season, it's also a period of transition. Some days might take on more vata or pitta qualities.

**CLASS TONE:** Energetic, vigorous, challenging, playful, and expansive

**SURYA NAMASKAR:** Energetic and fast-paced

#### ASANAS:

- Poses that focus on the abdomen, chest, and upper back
- Warrior series, chest openers, and backbends
- Bridge, Shoulderstand, Lion pose, Fish pose, Peacock pose, Cobra
- Less rest between poses

**SAVASANA:** Shorter rest with a bolster under the upper torso to open the heart

**PRANAYAMA:** Kapalabhati, surya bhedana, and bhasrika

### SUMMERTIME, AND THE PITTA'S EASY

Summer and pitta share many of the same traits: heat, transformation, and moistness or humidity. Depending where you live, the pitta season might even continue through early fall. It's important to keep a cool, calm mind and body in the summer so that pitta stays in balance.

**CLASS TONE:** Cooling, light-hearted, focused on inner awareness rather than competition, less attention to perfection of alignment

**SURYA NAMASKA:** Moderate pace

#### ASANAS:

- Poses that focus on the navel region and solar plexus
- Spinal twists and forward bends
- Cobra pose, Half Lord of the Fishes, Seated Forward Bend, Shoulderstand, Plow pose, and Child's pose
- Shorter holds in Headstand

**SAVASANA:** Moderate rest

**PRANAYAMA:** Sheetalī or sheetkari







### **WHEN IT RAINS VATA, IT'S FALL**

During fall, the weather takes on distinctively vata qualities. The atmosphere is cool, dry, windy, erratic, and clear. Vata tends to be aggravated during fall and early winter, but the right yoga practice can help immensely to keep vata balanced.

#### **CLASS TONE:**

Calming, gentle, grounding, fluid, stable

#### **SURYA NAMASKAR:**

Slow, gentle, and relaxed

#### **ASANAS:**

- Poses that focus on the colon and pelvis
- Balancing and seated poses
- Tree pose, Mountain pose, Thunderbolt pose, Wind Releasing pose, Garland pose, and Child's pose
- Shorter holds in Warrior poses
- Avoid jumping and big backbends

#### **SAVASANA:**

Longer rest, covered with a blanket to stay warm

#### **PRANAYAMA:**

Soft and gentle ujjayi, anuloma viloma, and nadi shodhana

### **WINTER, 'TIS THE SEASON OF KAPHA AND VATA**

Winter generally takes on characteristics of kapha. The weather is cold and often moist with rain or snow. There's a sense of heaviness which we feel in winter's dark and cloudy days. Even the animals take on a kapha nature, as they slow their entire systems down and go into hibernation.

However, winter can also take on characteristics of the vata dosha. In some places, winters can be very cold, dry, and windy.

When teaching yoga during winter, be mindful of the weather, your own energy, and the energy of your students. Try to understand if it's kapha or vata that needs to be brought back into balance.

#### **CLASS TONE:**

- Kapha - expansive and energetic
- Vata - calming and grounding

#### **SURYA NAMASKAR:**

- Kapha - energetic and quick pace
- Vata - slow and gentle

#### **ASANAS:**

Warrior series, Bridge pose, Cobra pose, Bow pose, and Fish pose

#### **SAVASANA:**

- Kapha - shorter rest with a bolster under the upper torso to open the heart
- Vata - a longer rest

#### **PRANAYAMA:**

- Kapha - kapalabhati, surya bhedana, or bhastrika
- Vata - anuloma viloma ●







## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JULIE BERNIER** helps people find wellness from the inside out. She lives and teaches the ancient sciences of Ayurveda and yoga, and combines the two to help clients naturally restore their inner balance for lasting well-being. Julie has journeyed to India many times over to study this wellness wisdom at its source. Although based in Los Angeles, her gypsy spirit keeps her traveling to far away lands more often than not. Connect with Julie on her blog Mahi Mata, Facebook, or Instagram. ●

### References:

- Frawley, Dr. David. *Ayurvedic Healing: A Comprehensive Guide*. Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 2000.
- Stiles, Mukunda. *Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy*. Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 2007.
- Tiwari, Maya. *Love Your Body Type The Ayurveda Way*. New York: Mother Om Media, 2012. PDF file.

# ALL-INCLUSIVE INSURANCE FOR YOGA TEACHERS



**B**eYogi Insurance Plus offers the most inclusive yoga liability coverage available to yoga instructors, therapists, and trainers at the lowest cost.

In yoga, we learn to honor where we are in the present moment, to not mimic another's journey but follow our own—and that lesson doesn't end in the classroom. We took our practice off the mat and created an insurance program that protects you at every step of your professional journey. •

**beYogi** Insurance<sup>+</sup>  
**PLUS**

CLICK [here](#) to learn more  
about beYogi Insurance Plus  
or call 800.516.8822.

# beYogi

## CONTACT US



**[beyogi.com](http://beyogi.com)**



**[facebook.com/beyogitribe](https://facebook.com/beyogitribe)**



**[@beyogitribe](https://twitter.com/beyogitribe)**



**[@beyogitribe](https://www.instagram.com/beyogitribe)**



**[eleni@beyogi.com](mailto:eleni@beyogi.com)**