

Glossary of Ayurvedic Terms

Abhyanga

Full body Ayurvedic oil massage; self-massage is an important component of an Ayurvedic daily routine.

Agni

One of the meaning is appetite or digestive “fire.” The third of five elements recognized in Ayurveda: the fire element; the principle of transformation; the digestive fire, which is responsible for digestion, absorption and assimilation; that which transforms food into tissues, energy, and consciousness.

Ahara

Diet or food.

Ama

Raw, undigested; a slimy, sticky, mucousy, toxic, disease-causing substance that can accumulate in the body when foods, herbs, emotions or experiences are not fully processed, digested, or assimilated.

Anabolic Metabolism

A constructive type of substance or metabolic process; a category of metabolic processes that synthesizes more complex molecules from simpler ones, builds up organs and tissues, produces growth and differentiation among cells, and that requires energy in order to occur.

Ayurveda

A thousands of years old system of healing with origins in the “Vedic” culture of ancient India. The Sanskrit word Ayurveda is derived from the root words “ayu”, meaning “life” or “longevity,” and “veda”, meaning “science”. Ayurveda literally translates as, “the science of life.”

Ayurvedic

Of or pertaining to Ayurveda.

Catabolic Metabolism

A deconstructive type of substance or metabolic process, a category of metabolic processes that breaks down more complex molecules into simpler ones, releasing energy in the process.

Dosha

One of three functional energies in nature: vata, pitta, and kapha. In the body, it is the unique ratio of these three “doshas” that determines an individual’s “prakruti” (constitution / mind – body type). When the doshas are present in “appropriate” quantities, they support the health and integrity of the body; when they are out of balance, they can cause illness and disease.

Kkapha.

One of the three “doshas” (functional energies in nature); kapha is made up of the earth and water elements and governs structure and cohesiveness.

Key words used to describe qualities of kapha are heavy, slow, cool, oily, smooth, dense, soft, stable, gross, and cloudy.

Panchakarma

A Sanskrit term literally meaning “five actions;” a deep Ayurvedic cleanse focused on returning excess vata, pitta, kapha, and ama to the digestive tract in order to be eliminated from the body. Panchakarma refers to the five traditional Ayurvedic cleansing actions that are used to eliminate these disturbances from the digestive tract: vamana (therapeutic vomiting), virechana (therapeutic purgation), basti (therapeutic enema), rakta moksha (therapeutic bloodletting), and nasya (therapeutic administration of herbs and oils to the nasal passages). Ayurveda Practitioners in most of the western countries may not be offering all five actions but a combination of “Purvakarma” (pre-actions including ayurvedic massage and steam treatments) and some of the actions of Panchakarma in their clinics.

Pitta

One of the three “doshas” (functional energies in nature); pitta is predominated by mainly fire and some air and water elements, and it governs transformation.

Key words used to describe qualities of pitta are light, sharp (or penetrating), hot, oily, liquid, and spreading.

Prakruti (or prakriti or mind-body type)

Constitution; the unique ratio of “vata”, “pitta” and “kapha” doshas established at conception and resulting in a unique set of physical, emotional, and mental tendencies, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

Rejuvenation

The therapeutic process of offering deep nourishment to the cells, tissues, and organs of the body in support of their healing, renewal, and regeneration; this therapy is indicated in a number of different situations (e.g., after a deep cleanse like panchakarma) and is believed to enhance immunity, stamina, and longevity.

Rejuvenative

A substance or experience that nourishes and tones specific tissues, or in some cases, the entire body.

Snehana

The therapeutic practice of applying oil to the body—both internally and externally; an important part of the Ayurvedic cleanse known as panchakarma. Snehana softens the tissues, lubricates the srotamsi (channels of the body), and supports the release of deep-seated doshas, ama (toxins), and unresolved emotions from the tissues.

Svastha

Health, as defined by Ayurveda: a state of being situated in one's Self and experiencing bliss throughout the mind, soul, and senses, while sustaining perfect equilibrium among three doshas (functional energies of vata, pitta, and kapha), the seven dhatus (bodily tissues), the pathways of elimination, and agni (the metabolic fire).

Tridoshic

Pacifying or balancing for all three doshas: vata, pitta, and kapha.

A yogic breathing practice also known as “breath of victory,” which consists of inhaling and exhaling through a slight constriction at the back of the throat so

that the breath becomes mildly audible; this practice is slightly heating, deeply tranquilizing, pacifying to all three doshas, and is generally appropriate for anyone, and commonly encouraged throughout the practice of yoga asana.

Vata

One of the three doshas (functional energies in nature); vata is predominated by the ether and air elements and governs movement and communication; it is light, cold, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear.

Vayu

The second of five elements recognized in Ayurveda: the air element; wind; the principle of movement; an alternate name for vata.

Vedic

Of or pertaining to the Vedic period in ancient India, from approximately 1750–500 BCE; the time during which the Vedas were composed, including the oldest ancient texts of Ayurveda and Yoga.

Vikruti (viruti or imbalance)

An individual's current state of health; the specific ratio of vata, pitta, and kapha that currently exists within one's body—as opposed to the natural ratio of the three doshas represented by one's prakriti (constitution).

Yoga

A Sanskrit word that literally means “to yoke” or “to bind” together—“to unite;” the practice of yoga is a collection of physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines intended to transform and liberate the mind-body organism. In the West, the word yoga usually refers to the third limb of yoga, as described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras: the practice of asanas (physical postures).

Yogic

Of or belonging to the Vedic tradition of yoga.