

Ayurvedic Nutrition: 6 RASAS (tastes)

balanced diet =>
balanced elements (doshas) =>
balanced digestion = >
HEALTH

All food is Nature's offering of nourishment to us. Ayurveda views food as a source of *prana*. And teaches that, indeed, our food choices should be based on how much *prana* (life force) we get out of food we eat. *Prana* in food is basically a condensed form of light - tomato didn't become tomato until the vine it grew on absorbed and transformed sunlight into color, taste, texture and nutritional value of tomato fruit. So, the more recently the food we eat was sunlight, the more *prana* it has for us. Also - food that is rich in *prana* will give rise to more life - a grain of rice, if planted, will give rise to another stalk of rice. But, if we plant a potato chip ... we are not likely to grow another potato.

There are 2 main principles of ayurvedic nutrition:

~ Since Yogi is a *PRANI* (one whose spine is full of energy), in food we are after prana.

~ You are only as young as your digestion is strong.

Or: you are not what you eat, but rather, what you can digest.

Ayurvedic food is termed **AHARA** = food, which nourishes your body, your essence of life, food that has *prana*. Food is pure *Brahma* (consciousness). *Ahara* nourishes our *doshas* (bioenergies of Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and *dhatu*s (bodily tissues).

Of 3 pillars of life **SLEEP - SEX - FOOD** - *Ahara* is one.

Vedic *ahara* is meant to heal your body, emotions, soul and karma - it is food that has *prana*. Vedic *ahara* is medicine. Never eat till you are too full, that is disrespecting *ahara*.

Hot foods foster *pitta* emotions, dry foods - *vata* emotions, heavy foods - *kapha* emotions.

The food you eat should be food that you can digest, assimilate, and eliminate.

When *doshas* live in their house, there is no disease and your food cravings are good. And when *doshas* are imbalanced - you have false cravings that take you further out of balance.

In food we consider balancing elements: for example, airy dispersed stool will need to be pulled together - so we need foods that will increase earth and water elements.



Important considerations:

Who is preparing the food?

Food should be prepared with joy. Food is ritual, and should be offered to Divine (in you) first, then consumed.

How is it going to make me feel on: psychical, mental, emotional planes?

What environment do I eat in: Rushing? Calm? Bites between chores?

You should sit down and calm yourself before eating.

You should chew your food 32 times.

Eat food that has prana: fresh, cooked, warm, less time between harvest and table, locally grown food.

Eat food that is easy to digest: you will not have bloating, tissues will be nourished, goodness will be assimilated and not just go into elimination.

Avoid (or limit) eating food that DOES NOT have prana (pranically "dead" food): leftovers, frozen, canned, dried, processed - they have dead agni (pre-digestive fire).

Eating times:

breakfast 7-7:30am, lunch 11am-1pm (your biggest meal, as digestive fire is strongest at that time), dinner 6-7pm. WALK 1000 steps after a big meal.

Eat based on elements and their qualities - rather than doshas, balance the elements (earth, water, fire, air, space) and their qualities. Example: if I feel "heavy" and "wet" - I will eat foods that are "light" and "dry", etc.



6 RASAS (=tastes)

Ayurveda groups all foods into 6 tastes, which are considered universal, and under which all foods fall. Like *doshas*, 6 *Rasas* also are made of 5 elements, and possess their qualities.. By eating foods of a certain taste - we are increasing it's elements in our body. Remembering the elemental makeup and qualities of 3 *Doshas* will reveal how 6 *Rasas* affect the *doshas* and will help us eat in a way that maintains doshic balance.

Here are the 20 qualities (gunas - not to be confused with 3 Maha Gunas of Tamas, Rajas and Sattva). Sages distilled the diversity of the entire universe down to 10 fundamental pairs of opposing qualities which can be observed in everything - and everything can be described by them. The 20 gunas describe 5 Elements => 3 *Doshas* => 6 *Rasas*. And, if we only just look at the qualities we need to balance, then we are not stuck to working with just a *dosha* (*doshas* are too general), and we can get more precise about our practice - balancing the qualities we feel with those we want to feel. Here are the 20 qualities of perceivable reality and elements/*doshas* they describe:

The 20 Gunas









Pick 1 quality to describe your current state now: _____

Now you can balance it with it's opposing quality through: asana, pranayama, meditation, lifestyle and FOOD! OK let's get on to the tasty stuff.



Here are the 6 Rasas and their qualities, elements, common food sources and effects on Vata, Pitta, Kapha:

GUNAS	TASTE	Elements	Source examples	VĀTA	PITTA	KAPHA
heavy oily sticky cool	SWEET (madhura)	 Earth and Water	Honey, rice, sugar, nuts, fruit, carbohydrates, grains, natural sugars, milk	↓	↓	↑
moist hot light	SOUR (amla)	 Earth and Fire	Yogurt, citrus fruits, ascorbic acid, vitamin C, vinegar, cheese, fermented foods	↓	↑	↑
heavy hot sharp oily	SALTY (lavana)	 Fire and Water	Seaweed, tamari, table salt, sea salt, sea vegetables	↓	↑	↑
dry hot sharp light	PUNGENT (katu)	 Air and Fire	Cayenne, chile pepper, black pepper, ginger, garlic, herbs and spices	↑	↑	↓
dry cool light	BITTER (tikta)	 Air and Ether	Turmeric, dark leafy greens, herbs and spices	↑	↓	↓
dry cool heavy	ASTRINGENT (kashāya)	 Air and Earth	Alum, green banana, legumes, raw fruits and vegetables, herbs	↑	↓	↓

Eat according to ayurvedic considerations for proper intake of AHARA as medicine (above) AND to balance whatever quality of imbalance you are able to pinpoint within yourself through deep listening!

Note on digestion of 6 rasas (rasa=essence): healthy digestion will process the food in approximately 6 hours time. And the 6 rasas are digested by our bodies in following order:

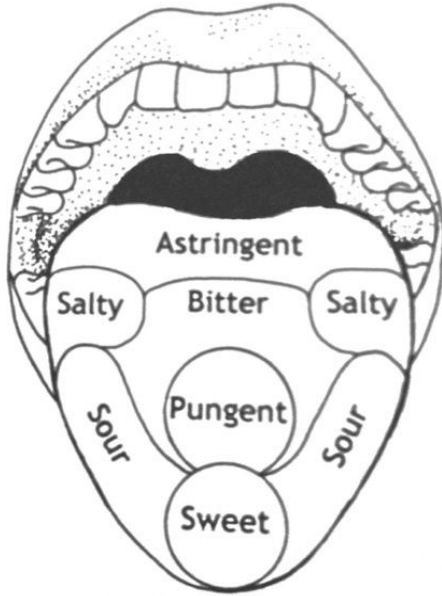
- sweet (1st hour)
- sour (2nd hour)
- salty (3rd hour)
- pungent (4th hour)
- bitter (5th hour).
- astrigent (6th hour)

So, your meal should be consumed in that order as well: from sweet to astrigent.



*** **Life Hack:** On the menu of a good Indian restaurant there will be *thali*: plate of several small dishes arranged by tastes in order of digestion - so you know how to eat them :)

Areas of Six Tastes on the Tongue



But regardless of the exact order you eat your meal in - just try to make sure that each meal contains all 6 tastes, so that your *rasas* are balanced (as your meal should be).

Your TONGUE tastes the 6 Rasas in designated areas. In other words, now we can truly taste what is in that wine... by simply observing how different areas of tongue respond to a single sip with increased salivation...

But nevermind the wine - how about that AMA (toxins)?

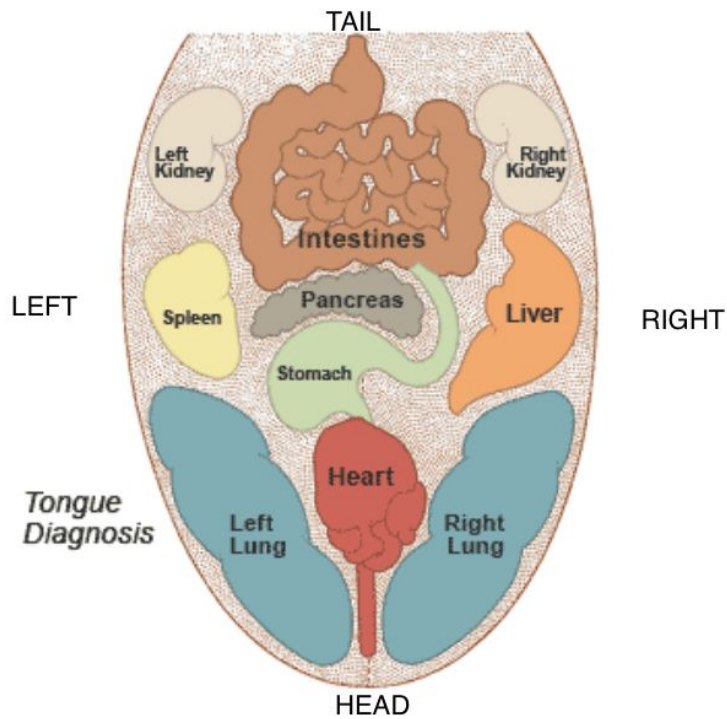
Each area on the tongue also corresponds to an organ - which, of course, happens to be the site of a dosha! Whoah...

This puts a whole another spin on tongue scraping. The ama of vitiated dosha shows up on your tongue as coating - and you should scrape it off, reducing the increased dosha... See how doshas and their corresponding seats in viscera are arranged on your tongue:

VATTA

PITTA






KAPHA



The following table provides an overview of the 6 tastes; the upper row naming the positive effects of the taste, the row below naming the effects when taste is consumed in excess. Pure forms of the tastes will aggravate your dosha more easily than complex versions and thus should be used with care. **EXAMPLE: yoghurt is sour, sweet and heavy which makes it a complex taste and will less likely aggravate the Kapha Dosha than pure sugar.**

Taste		Physical Effect	Mental Effect	Source	
earth, water	Sweet	nourishes, builds and strengthens body tissues	soothing, calming, satisfactory	Carbohydrates, Protein, Fat Grains, pasta, rice, bread, starchy vegetables, dairy, meat, chicken, fish, sugar, honey	
	VP-K+ thyroid	fat diseases, obesity, diabetes	lethargy, anxiety		
water, fire	Salty	lubricates tissues, softens, maintains mineral balance and holds water	enhances appetite and other tastes, enthusiasm, calms nerves and stops anxiety	Mineral salts Table salt, soy sauce, salted meats, fish, seaweed	
	V-PK+ kidneys	wrinkles, thirst, loss of strength, baldness	cravings, anger, impatience, lethargy		
earth, fire	Sour	stimulates appetite and digestion, strengthens heart, relieves thirst and satiates	enhances intellectual activities	Organic acids: ascorbic acid, citric acid, acetic acid Citrus fruits, berries, tomatoes, pickled foods, salad dressing, yoghurt, alcohol	
	V-PK+ lungs	loss of strength, fever, thirst	resentment and jealousy, anger, impatience, hot temper		
fire, air	Pungent	warms body and promotes sweating, improves metabolism and relieves nerve pain	opens mind and senses	Essential oils Peppers, chilies, onions, garlic, cayenne, black pepper, cloves, ginger, mustard, salsa, raddish, wasabi	
	VP+K- stomach heart	thirst, depletion of reproductive fluid and strength, fainting, waist/back pain	irritability, anger, impatience		
earth, air	Astringent	cleanses blood and helps maintaining healthy blood sugar level, dries moisture and fat	cools fiery minds, clears senses and emotions, removes lethargy	Tannins Lentils, dried beans, broccoli, green apples, pears, grape skins, cauliflower, cabbage, pomegranates, tea	
	V+PK- colon	gas or constipation, heart pain, thirst	anxiety, worry, fear, insomnia		
ether, air	Bitter	cleanses and detoxifies, reduces fat and water excess, relieves thirst and fever, antibiotic	helpful in managing food cravings, clears senses and emotions	Alkaloids or glycosides Green leafy vegetables, green and yellow vegetables, kale, celery, broccoli, sprouts, beets	
	V+PK- liver spleen pancreas	gas or upset stomach, tissue depletion	anxiety, fear, insomnia		

Some foods should not be consumed together, as they are incompatible and create problems for digestion. Foods to NOT combine (according to ayurveda):

FOOD TYPE	INCOMPATIBLE WITH...
FRUIT 	All other foods! Fruit is best eaten by itself at least 30 minutes before a meal or at least 2 hours after a meal. This is quite possibly the most important Food Combining Rule of all!
LEGUMES	Fruit, cheese, eggs, fish, milk, meat, yogurt. Legumes are recommended to be eaten with starches (i.e. rice) however to create a “perfect” protein.
EGGS	Fruit (especially melons!) , beans, cheese, fish, kitchari, MILK, meat, yogurt
GRAINS	Fruit, tapioca
HONEY 	Honey should never be cooked, heated, baked, or boiled as this causes the molecules to become a toxic non-homogenized glue that is unrecognizable and indigestible to the body; mixed with equal amounts of ghee by weight is also considered toxic
LEMON	Cucumber, milk, tomatoes, yogurt
MILK 	BANANAS, cherries, melons, sour fruits and fruit juices; bread with yeast, fish, kitchari, meat, yogurt
NIGHTSHADES 	Cucumber, dairy products, melon; In general, nightshades should be avoided by anyone with an inflammatory condition such as arthritis or IBS and also minimized by one with a Pitta condition or increased fire in the body.
TAPIOCA	Fruit , especially banana and mango; beans, raisons , jaggery
YOGURT	Fruit, cheese, eggs, fish, hot drinks, meat, MILK, nightshades
PROTEINS 	Starches, high carbohydrate foods, other proteins (eat only one protein type at a time as all proteins require the different enzymes for digestion), high fat foods as fat inhibit the secretion of the necessary enzymes needed to digest the proteins.
STARCHES AND GRAINS	Proteins, high sugar food
VEGETABLES	Fruit, raw veggies with cooked veggies, combines well with both starches or proteins

Why? Because of their reactions: bloating, gas, fatigue, constipation, nausea, stomach ache.



All of the above may seem overwhelming. As always, Nature has help for us =>

TRIPHALA.



Triphala is an herbal mixture that's been used for thousands of years in Ayurveda. Traditionally used as a bowel tonic, it's often prescribed as a mild laxative. But while its laxative qualities are most widely known, the other benefits of this herb are perhaps even more noteworthy.

The name Triphala means "the three fruits" and it's comprised of the Indian fruits *amalaki*, *haritaki*, and *bibhitaki*.

Amalaki (*emblica officinalis*) is an Ayurvedic treasure in itself and widely used. This little baby, the Indian gooseberry, has been one of Ayurveda's prized rejuvenators since ancient times. It's been shown to help lower cholesterol and is loaded with vitamin C. While appropriate for all doshas it's particularly effective for balancing Pitta.

Haritaki (*terminalia chebula*) is known as the Tibetan "king of medicine." Many depictions of the healing Buddha show him extending a handful of this fruit indicating its longstanding medicinal usage in Asia. It's believed to have a variety of positive health effects on the heart and brain. It can be used as a laxative by itself, but also has an anti-diarrheal treatment. It's an anti-inflammatory and is calming to Vata.

Bibhitaki (*terminalia bellerica*) is another powerful ancient rejuvenator with detoxifying qualities on the blood, muscles, and fatty tissue of the body. *Bibhitaki* is very useful with conditions involving excess mucous in the system and is also good for quality bone formation. This fruit is known as "the one who keeps away disease" owing its name to the multiple benefits it has on Kapha.

As we see, *triphala* is *tridoshic* (balancing for all 3 doshas) - and is a wonderful daily supplement to your dietary ritual.

But it's biggest impact is, perhaps, the health benefits as they relate to digestion. This mixture encourages balanced, full elimination, by pulling stagnated *Ama* or toxic residue from the digestive tract and increasing the colon's absorption functions.

The colon is seen as the seat of Vata, so medicine that helps the function of the colon is beneficial to general Vata disorders. Several bowel diseases start out as Vata imbalances, even if later fueled by Pitta or Kapha issues. Triphala's balancing effect on the "wind" of your digestive tract can not only get things moving but also help your bowels find the appropriate pace for optimal absorption.

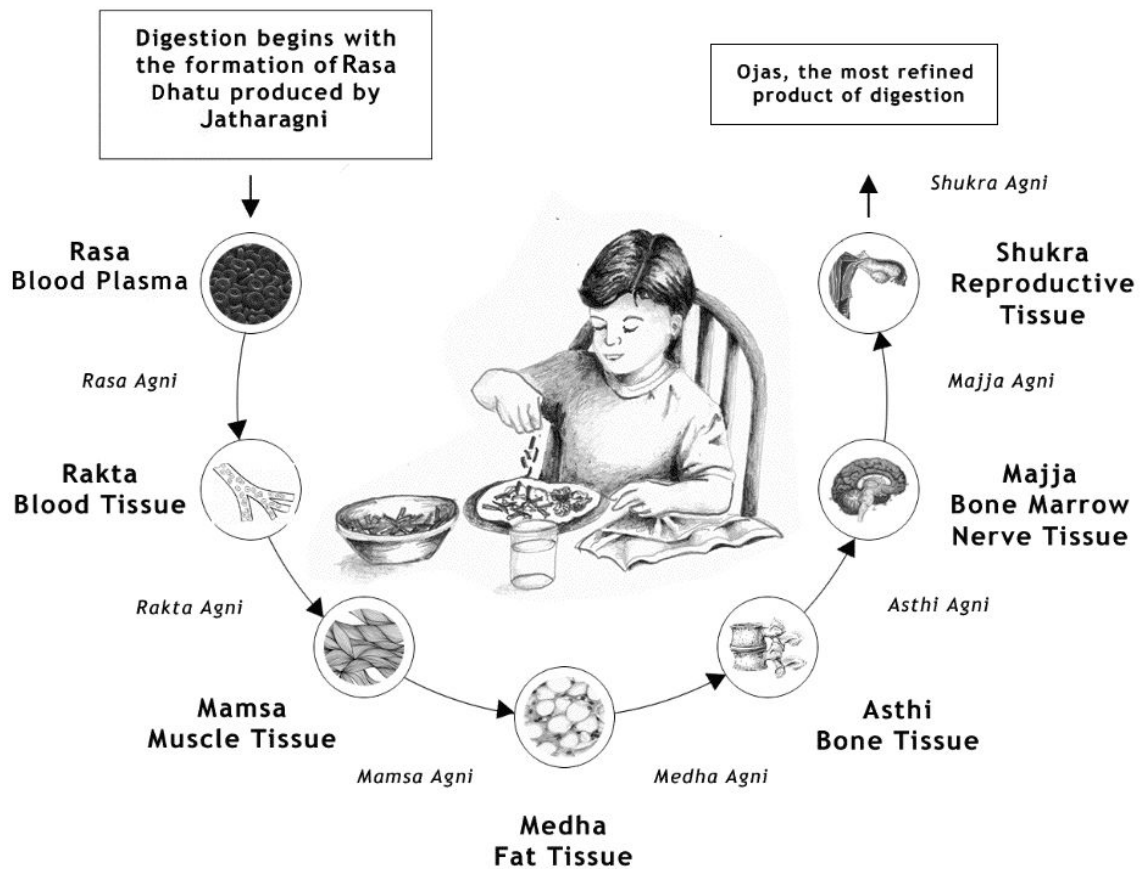


Basically, Triphala promotes digestive regularity. The importance of this cannot be understated, especially for those who suffer from irregular elimination and other forms of bowel related disorders.

Here is how TRIPHALA can be used for DOSHA BALANCING:

This is due to its relationship with your ability to taste, and your plasma (*rasa dhatu*). The information conveyed by your tongue is multilayered and more complex than just the literal taste of the food itself.

We know that Sanskrit word for taste is *Rasa*. This is also the word for plasma as well as emotions or mood. Like so many other Sanskrit terms, this connection of using the same word for taste, plasma, and emotions carries a deeper meaning. Since your plasma cells are the first of the bodily tissues to be nourished as food digests, the plasma holds all six tastes within it. Your ability to taste is directly affected by the quality of the plasma in your body. In order to have healthy, nourishing plasma to feed your other bodily tissues you must try to get a steady supply of all six tastes. This dynamic is part of what allows the taste-holding Triphala to have its unique effect. Here is how digestion moves through the 7 tissues (*saptadhatu*) in the body - before it becomes *Ojas* (the vital essence of *kapha* - substance that nourishes your very structure!)



Now Triphala contains the following tastes:

- Sour
- Pungent
- Bitter
- Astringent
- Sweet

When you take it nightly—half-teaspoon in powdered form in cup of warm water –you will experience a different taste each time. The idea is:

whatever you taste in the Triphala is the taste missing from your plasma and therefore your diet

With this information you can better plan meals and incorporate the appropriate tastes in your diet for your best balance. Note that you will very rarely taste sweet—but if and when you do – it's time to stop using Triphala.

This yogi trick is very simple, and worth deploying not just for physical benefits of healthy digestion and elimination, but for emotional balance as well! Because FOOD makes MOOD. The effect of food we eat on our emotional states can not be denied: pay attention to you dreams, for example: you may notice that when your diet has become heavy with meat, you may start having "heavy" (fearful, even violent) dreams. A closer look at how food affects our emotions:

Taste as an Emotional Barometer

You can use your ability to taste as a tool to balance not only your physical body but also your emotional life. There is no separation between your physical body and your mind. In order to truly see food as medicine and the signals from your body as messages of conscious awareness, you have to take everything, including the signals from the tongue, as valid sources of information. While these signals are biological in nature, the psychology of taste should be taken into consideration, too.

Since Triphala is essentially clueing you in on a deficiency in your diet, you may exhibit this deficiency in your emotional or mental life as well. For example, a bitter taste may mean that it's time to draw your mind inward and discipline your life in certain directions. A pungent taste from Triphala may mean that there's room for more enthusiasm or vigor in your life.

Below is a list of the six tastes and their corresponding emotions. Notice which emotions have the most presence in your life and begin to pay attention to the tastes that are most prevalent in your diet. Also be sure to note whether these tastes are showing up in a balanced or imbalanced form in your life.



Taste

Balanced

Out of Balance

Sweet
Sour
Salty
Pungent
Bitter
Astringent

Nurturing
Stimulating
Earthy
Passionate
Disciplined
Witty

Cloying
Caustic
Hedonistic
Hostile
Resentful
Cynical

*** Common side effects of Triphala include loose or runny stools and stomach cramping. However, like most herbal remedies, negative side effects are usually the result of improper or misinformed use. If you begin to experience any of these side effects, stop use immediately and your system should return to normal.

