

Your Elemental Nature

Vata Dosha

The main *gunas* or qualities of Vata are:

- Expansive
- Clear
- Subtle
- Mobile
- Cold
- Light
- Dry

Vata is one of the Tridosha of Ayurveda.

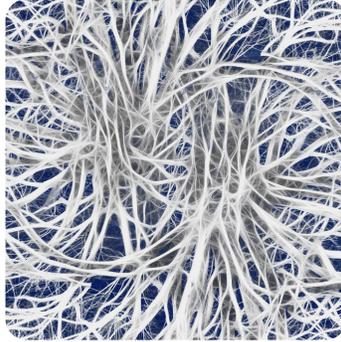
Like everything in the manifest universe, it is made of all 5 elements, but it is mostly a combination of space and air and is, therefore, the lightest of the body types.

Elemental qualities express in a balanced or imbalanced way.

In **balance**, Vata expresses as openness, curiosity, clarity, enthusiasm, quick understanding, intuition, creativity, flexibility, ease of movement, lightness of body, heart, and spirit, and a sense of being connected to spirit. **When Vata is in balance we are able to make connections easily, and move with grace.**

Out of balance, Vata shows up as spacey, scattered, forgetful, fearful, moving in too many directions at once/muscle spasms, distracted, constipation, bloating, emaciation, excessive dryness, cracking joints, anxiety, and fear. Out of balance vata looks anxious, scattered, cold, dry, and lonely.





Vata represents all movement in the body and has an affinity for the nervous system.

Vata fills all the spaces in the body and resides everywhere, but is concentrated in the pelvis, lower back, lower abdomen, colon, and thighs, It is also concentrated in the brain, ears, joints, nerves, bones—pain anywhere, and especially in any of these areas, signifies a Vata imbalance.

The subtle quality of Vata makes it especially sensitive and responsive to even small changes in the environment. Vata is therefore imbalanced easily. During any transition like travel or the change of seasons, managing Vata helps smooth the transition (less jet lag or seasonal maladies).

Vata imbalance is at the heart of 80% of all disorders because, like the wind, Vata pushes the other doshas out of balance. Much of the daily routine we practice in Ayurveda, called *dinacharya*, is designed to keep Vata calm and stable.

Early Stages of Vata Imbalance

High Vata, in the early stages, appears in the mind as anxiety, spaciness, forgetfulness, and an inability to focus. In the digestive tract, it shows up as variable digestion, gas, and constipation. High Vata shows in the skin as excessive dryness; in the bones as cracking and popping, in the nervous system as restlessness, frenetic activity (you might feel that you're always busy but not really accomplishing anything), and difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Emotionally, high Vata shows up as fear, loneliness, and isolation. Spiritually, it can show up as shaky faith, Self-forgetting, and self-doubt.

- Are these qualities you can relate to in yourself? Which qualities characterize you? For how long?





Balancing Vata

A primary principle in Ayurveda is like increases like and opposites balance.

When we add more of the same to Vata, like more dryness, coldness, or excess movement, we get excess of these qualities and high Vata. But when we add the opposite qualities, we regain balance.

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Vata's Qualities

Expansive

Clear

Mobile

Subtle

Light

Cold

Rough

Dry

Balancing Qualities

Contained

Cloudy

Steady or Unmoving

Gross

Heavy

Warm/Hot

Slimy

Oily



One of the main ways we calm Vata is by maintaining a regular rhythm in our daily life. Regularity and rhythm counter the excessive movement of Vata.

Waking, sleeping, eating, working, and exercising at regular times all help calm Vata. It doesn't mean we have to do the same exact thing every day, but consistency in when we do these things helps stabilize our organism which helps it to function optimally.

The opposite is also true: Inconsistent rhythm, changes in environments, travel, stimulants, skipping meals, dehydration, too much dry, cold or raw food, all staying up late at night, poor sleep, loud noise, rough clothing, inadequate intake of oil are recipes for Vata imbalance.

A second major way we calm Vata is using oil, both externally and internally. Oil counters the dry, rough nature of Vata. Applying oil to the skin, called abhyanga, is calming, grounding, and nourishing for Vata.

Whole body self oil massage, and especially applying a little oil to the crown of the head, the ears, the nostrils, and the hands and feet, help to counter Vata's dry, rough nature. In warmer weather, we use a cooling oil, like coconut or sunflower and in colder weather, we use a warming oil like sesame or mustard.

Ingesting good quality oil like ghee, olive oil, and mustard oil helps keep the body moist from the inside and counters Vata.



Vata has an affinity for our sense of hearing (associated with ether/space) and touch (associated with air), and therefore to our sense organs, ears, and skin. Soothing sounds and touch and soft warm clothing that fits our bodies calm Vata because they counter the rough, subtle nature of Vata.

The main way we remove excess Vata from our system is with basti, an Ayurvedic enema. Rather than just calming Vata, bastis help remove the dosha all together. For these, we can use an herbal tea decoction of Vata-balancing herbs to ground Vata and gently cleanse and then follow with oil to soothe and nourish.





Vata and Cycles of Time

Vata time of day is 2 - 6 am/pm. During this time of day/night, the qualities of space and air predominate. Getting up during Vata time of morning for meditation and gentle exercise is soothing and grounding. Taking a break in the late afternoon and attending to hydration or a protein-rich snack (if hungry) is grounding and balances the “mid-afternoon slump.”

Vata time of year is Fall—where the qualities of air and space predominate. Fall is a time of transition and change. The winds pick up, it gets colder and the days shorten. Attending to a balancing daily routine, staying warm and covered in the wind and eating more warm food helps keep vata in balance during the fall.

Vata time of life is older age where dryness, stiffness, memory problems, underweight, and frailty can become problematic. Vata-pacifying routines support healthy aging.

Yoga to Balance Vata



Balancing Pose



Standing Pose



Forward Bends



Other Keys to Calming Vata

Key Vata Balancing Practices

- Regularity and Rhythm (sleep times, wake times, meal times...)
- Oil (external and internal)
- Warmth
- Warm, unctuous freshly prepared food
- Slow, mindful activity
- Good quality touch
- Quiet or soothing sounds
- Plenty of hydration
- Plenty of rest
- Treating any constipation/gas

Vata and Prana

The subtle essence of vata is prana, the life force. In balance, prana resides in the innermost pathways in the core of the body coordinating all of the movement in the body. When deranged, prana becomes vata dosha and moves to the periphery of the body where it is erratic and destabilizing. Yoga, meditation and time in nature help correct this by supporting prana to flow back within, supporting healthy circulation.

Vata and prana are subdivided into 5 subdoshas, aligned with a particular part of the body and a function.

Prana refers to prana which comes in via the inhale and circulates up into our brains and spinal cord.

Udana refers to prana as the exhale, moving up from the diaphragm and connected also to speaking and self confidence

Samana refers to prana in the belly, and the movement of the digestive organs, including the opening and closing of valves between segments of our intestines.

Vyana refers to prana as circulation, moving from the heart, to the periphery of the body, and back to the heart

Apana refers to prana in the pelvis which holds (baby, menses, semen, feces, etc) and releases down and out.



Self-Inquiry

1. Which of the qualities of balanced Vata do you recognize in yourself now and in the past? Do these run in your family?
2. Which of the qualities are out of balance at this time? For how long?
3. What aggravating substances/activities are adding to the vata imbalance?
4. What is one balancing action you will take this week?