

Ayurvedic Body Treatments

An overview

Anne Williams

Looking for a massage and bodywork experience influenced by Eastern cultures? Look no further than Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old healing system from India that is both a traditional medical system and a philosophy that creates harmony and balance in life. Many spas and massage clinics adopt elements of ayurveda that focus on positive life choices, general detoxification, relaxation, enhanced spiritual awareness, and gentle exercise.

Ayurvedic body treatments might be viewed as an intervention to shift awareness, restore vital energy, and promote mental harmony. The foundation of traditional ayurveda is the belief that everything in the universe is

their ayurvedic-inspired body treatment. To find out your personal dosha makeup, log on to www.massagetherapy.com and download the dosha questionnaire, then compare your findings to the dosha profiles described below.

Vata Profile

People with vata as their dominant dosha are influenced by the elements of space and air. The word vata means to move or to enthuse, and so it is not surprising that vata is the dosha most likely to become unbalanced, as vatas tend to move quickly and often. Vatas are highly active and have difficulty gaining weight despite the fact that they are fond of

*"Tension is
who you think
you should be.
Relaxation is
who you are."*

-Chinese Proverb



Oil is incorporated into many ayurvedic treatments.

composed of five elements: air, fire, earth, water, and ether. These elements intermix to form three doshas (vata, pitta, and kapha) that govern a person's body type, mental and emotional characteristics, and personality.

In most spa and massage settings, a questionnaire is used to gather general data about clients' dosha states before

sweet foods. The vata mind is restless, sensitive, and flexible, and a balanced vata is creative, filled with enthusiasm, artistic, and open-minded. This sensitivity of mind however often causes the unbalanced vata to experience conditions like emotional insecurity, anxiety, and panic attacks.

Continued on page 2

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In this Issue

**Ayurvedic Body Treatments
Be Smart with Smartphones
The Case for Chocolate**

Continued from page 1

Vatas are easily aggravated by situations that are overstimulating and should minimize their exposure to noisy social gatherings, overindulgence in TV or Internet surfing, confrontational situations, and intense or stressed friendships. If vata is your dominant dosha, seek quiet calming music, people who talk gently, warming foods, and a structured routine.

In the spa or massage clinic, a vata is treated with firm, slow massage strokes that calm the body's energy. A classic treatment for vata is the shirodhara treatment, which pulls the mind's eye to one point, promoting calm, clear thought. The purpose of the treatment is to center the mind and body, to increase relaxation and inner peace, and to settle vata disorders like anxiety and insomnia. Shirodhara leaves the client feeling open, clear, grounded, and focused, but a period of quiet rest is required after the session.

Pitta Profile

In Sanskrit, pitta means to heat or to burn, so pitta is considered the dosha of transformation and is composed of the elements fire and water. The pitta mind is aggressively sharp with a clear memory and the ability to precisely articulate thoughts and ideas. Pittas are ambitious, organized, and focused, with a tendency toward emotional intensity, irritability, and jealous behavior. When pittas are in balance, they are confident, bold, and brilliant. When they are out of balance, they are irritable, aggressive, impatient, and critical. Pittas tend to drive themselves and those around them, sometimes to overexertion, and so time for relaxation must be planned.

If pitta is your dominant dosha, avoid overheated rooms, overexposure to the sun, and warm, restrictive clothing. Eat small but regular meals (every two hours), drink plenty of cool water, and balance mental activity with outdoor time in shady cooling environments. While pittas are strong and determined in an argument, too much confrontation leads to imbalance.

At the spa or massage clinic, a pitta will respond to the soothing aromas of jasmine, lemongrass, sandalwood, and gardenia. A classic ayurvedic treatment for the dominant pitta is pinda, where muslin bags full of rice, herbs, and milk

are used to massage the client. The heat from the mixture warms the muscles and stimulates local circulation, thereby decreasing muscle and joint pain. The unique and unmistakable scent of the herbal mixture is soothing for the mind and senses.

Kapha Profile

Kapha means to keep together, to embrace, and also phlegm. Kapha is the most stable of the doshas and this stability functions as both physiological and psychological strength in the human body. Kaphas speak slowly and precisely after carefully considering their position on a topic. They are the most loyal, patient, and compassionate of the dosha types, with a loving and emotionally secure nature. The stability and grounded nature that gives kaphas their reserves of strength and their steadiness of personality also makes them reluctant to change or release possessions. When

kaphas are out of balance, they sleep too much, overindulge in food, have a predisposition to laziness, and may exhibit greedy, possessive behavior.

If you have a dominant kapha dosha, get plenty of vigorous exercise, paint your rooms in bright colors, and play upbeat music. Overeating, oversleeping, and eating very salty or very sugary foods aggravate kapha and lead to boredom and listlessness.

In a spa or massage clinic, kaphas respond to vigorous massage techniques and stimulating body treatments. A classic treatment for kaphas is udvartana, in which herbal powders or pastes are rubbed into the body to stimulate circulation and cell renewal, smooth the skin, tone the body's tissues, support detoxification, and relax the body. After the session, the client is likely to feel invigorated and energized.



Discover your dominant dosha type at massagetherapy.com.

Be Smart with Smartphones

Tips for Avoiding Injury

Have you ever noticed that your neck gets cranky after an extended Angry Birds binge? Or your thumb starts to throb the day after sending 40 emails from your phone during a particularly boring meeting? With more people spending more time on their smartphones, stories of repetitive strain injuries like these are on the rise.

Certified Hellerwork practitioner and licensed massage therapist Joseph Hunton has seen, and experienced, the results of overuse and improper ergonomics when it comes to these devices. "I had been sitting and standing with my head bent over the phone while holding it and making fine finger movements for hours at a time," Hunton says of the days that followed the arrival of his new smartphone. "This was a recipe for strain and pain."

Being Smart

Hunton encourages smartphone users to stretch and take frequent breaks, and cautions that improper use may result in a stiff neck, sore upper back, and tight

arms. Here are some more smartphone ergonomic tips to avoid the pain:

- Bring the phone up to your line of sight to keep your head aligned with your spine.
- Use a wireless headset to prevent arm strain.
- Never hold the phone between your head and shoulder.

Frequent smartphone use can also cause repetitive strain injuries of the thumb. Hunton reminds us to use our smartphones intelligently. "Although it can perform many functions, it is not really a computer, gaming station, or video monitor," he says.

Options for Relief

Stretching, limiting your smartphone use, and receiving frequent massage are all successful ways to alleviate the strain caused by repetitive use. Listen to your body, and communicate with your massage therapist about any pain or discomfort that might arise from the use of these devices.



Follow these guidelines to stay pain-free.

The Case for Chocolate

New Studies Show Health Benefits

It's not like we need a specific reason to eat chocolate, but it doesn't hurt that studies are finding increasing health benefits associated with the popular indulgence. While chocolate is high in sugar and saturated fat, it does contain chemical compounds with proven benefits, so enjoy--in moderation--and expect to reap some of these rewards.

Improved Heart Health

A study in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that women over 70 who ate chocolate at least once a week were 35 percent less likely to suffer from heart disease during the survey period. Researchers suspect that the flavonoids found in chocolate, which are known to reduce blood pressure, likely improve overall cardiovascular health.

Reduced Liver Strain

These same flavonoids in dark chocolate that help decrease blood pressure can also reduce post-meal abdominal blood pressure spikes that strain the liver by widening and relaxing blood cells. A Spanish study of patients with end-stage liver disease showed that dark chocolate helped reduce some of the risks associated with conditions like cirrhosis.

Safer Pregnancy

Dark chocolate has been shown to help pregnant women avoid preeclampsia--a significant complication where blood pressure spikes to dangerous levels--by nearly 40 percent when consumed five times a week. Dark chocolate is especially rich in theobromine, which relaxes

muscles and dilates blood vessels. As an additional benefit, it also seems to improve circulation in the placenta.

Increased Endurance

Research out of the University of California, San Diego, demonstrated that mice given epicatechin, a flavonoid found in dark chocolate, could run for 50 percent longer than those who only drank water. The mice also grew new capillaries and mitochondria in their muscles, changes that explain their enhanced endurance capacity. Unfortunately, perhaps, for chocolate lovers, is that researchers say just one-sixth of 1 ounce of chocolate each day is the ideal serving size to receive this benefit.

"Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength."

-Frances de Sales

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