

DOSHA DESCRIPTIONS RELATIVE TO THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

Ayurveda books go into greater detail about the functioning of the doshas and can be consulted for more information in this regard. Dr David Frawley looks into the doshas below relative to the practice of yoga.

Vata Dosha

Vata, which literally means wind, is the primary dosha or biological force. It is the motivating power behind the other two doshas, which are lame or incapable of movement without it. *Vata is primarily ether in substance and air in motion.* It exists as the air that we hold in the empty spaces of the body, like in the hollow organs, joints, and bone cavities, particularly the hips and lower back. On an inner level, vata is both the life-force and the energy of thought that moves in the space of the mind.

Vata's sense organs are the ears and skin and its motor organs are speech and the hands, which relate to the ether and air elements and tanmatras. On an inner level vata governs sensory, emotional and mental harmony balance, and promotes mental adaptability and comprehension. vata endows us with positive traits of creativity, enthusiasm, speed, agility and responsiveness that allow us to achieve our goals in life.

Vata's primary physical site is in the colon. Vata is a positive factor in the energy produced through the digestion of food. As a toxin or disease causing factor, it is the excess gas resulting from faulty digestion. *Disturbed vata causes mental, nervous and digestive disorders, including low energy and weakening of all bodily tissues.*

Yet vata is not separate from the other doshas. Like the wind that moves with the clouds in the sky, vata contains within itself subtle particles of water and the potential of fire in the form of electric force. After all, it is changes in temperature (fire) and pressure (water) that make the wind blow. **The clouds of vata generate the lightning or fire that gives rise to pitta and the watery particles or rain that give rise to kapha. Vata is the origin of the other two doshas.** Proper balance of vata depends upon the right amount of pitta and kapha held within it, just as the amount of heat and water in the wind determines how it blows.

The key to managing all the doshas is to care for vata. The cosmic vata, or Vayu, energises and upholds dharma or cosmic law. Similarly, the proper control of vata brings dharma or natural order to all the workings of the body and mind.

Pitta Dosha

Pitta means "the power of digestion or cooking" – that which causes things to ripen and mature. As fire cannot exist directly in the body, pitta exists in the body in the medium of oily and acidic secretions and so is said to contain an aspect of water as well. *Pitta is responsible for all forms of digestion and transformation in the body, from cellular level to the workings of the gastrointestinal tract. Pitta governs digestion on mental and spiritual levels as well* – our capacity to digest emotions, impressions and ideas in order to arrive at a perception of truth. Pitta endows us with positive traits of intelligence, courage and vitality. Without it we lack the decisiveness or motivation to accomplish our goals.

Pitta is located in the small intestine and stomach among the organs, the sweat and sebaceous glands, and the blood and lymph among the tissues. Its sense organ is the eyes and its motor organ is the feet, which relate to the element and tanmatra of fire. Its site of accumulation is in the small intestine, where it builds up as acidity. Pitta is produced as the positive energy or heat of the blood. As a disease factor, it manifests through excess or toxic blood that gives rise to inflammation and infection.

Pitta depends upon vata for its enervation and movement and on kapha for its support, just as fire requires both oxygen (air) and fuel in order to burn properly. It holds some degree of vata or nervous energy within it and grounds itself with the appropriate kapha or water.

Kapha Dosha

Kapha, which also indicates mucus or phlegm, means “what makes things stick together” and refers to the power of cohesion. *Kapha serves as the bodily container for pitta and vata, or energy and heat.* Kapha itself, as water, is held in the medium of earth, the skin and mucous linings, affording it a secondary earth element as well.

Kapha is located in the chest, throat and head in the upperbody, the sites of mucus production, but also in the pancreas, sides and middle of the body where fat accumulates, and in lymph and fattissues generally. Its sense organs are taste and smell, the nose and tongue and its motor organs are the urino-genital and excretory organs which relate to the water and earth elements and tanmatras. Kapha endows us with emotion and feeling. This gives love and caring, devotion and faith, which serve to keep us in harmony internally and unite us with others. Kapha allows us to retain what we have achieved through our efforts.

Kapha’s primary physical site is the stomach, where mucus is produced, which then overflows into the lungs and lymphatic system. Kapha is produced through plasma, which is the main kapha tissue in the body, providing hydration and nourishment to all the tissues. As a disease factor, Kapha manifests through excess plasma that becomes mucus. This causes overweight, edema, lung diseases, swollen glands and other kapha disorders.

Kapha depends upon vata for its stimulation and movement. It requires pitta for warmth. The body, though primarily composed of water (kapha), is a special form of water in which heat (pitta) and the vital energy (vata) are contained. Water that is cold or does not move cannot sustain life.