

# Can you eat what you like and still be slim?

**There is an obsession with weight. At six in the morning my neighbours are running through the streets with instruments strapped to their wrists to monitor every heartbeat and every calorie spent. The gyms open at five in the morning and possibly worst of all, emaciated, anorexic movie stars are our role models. Ok I may exaggerate, but there is truth in this.**

**W**ith the warmer days, thoughts are beginning to turn to beach bodies; more accurately losing weight is one of the goals of many of us before summer time is actually upon us. It is not all about looking good; the more sinister consequences of obesity are well documented. Even being slightly overweight has been shown to be detrimental to health. Of course, there are the usual ways to lose weight – meal replacements, joining a class, fad diets and counting calories, but what does nature or Ayurveda have to offer? Are there any natural ways to lose weight?

Ayurveda describes eight types of bodies, which are considered unhealthy. Out of the eight, the two people most commonly complain about are very thin and very fat. It has been proved that out of these two those who are very fat have most diseases and health troubles. This is because the extra fat puts a strain on the heart, kidneys, liver and the joints such as the hips, knees and ankles. Overweight people are susceptible to several diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, gout, liver and gall bladder disorders. The chief cause of obesity or overweight is often not just overeating, but irregular eating habits and not following the rules of eating including improper mixing of food items in one meal, or not incorporating the six tastes into each meal.

A plan that is simple to follow will be more successful in producing weight loss rather than one that relies solely on deprivation. When we did our research we found there is a difference in weight between people on fast or Western food diets compared to those on Eastern diets – be they Japanese, Chinese or Indian. We explored further and came up with a plan to guarantee weight loss based on natural principles and diet.

This is the theory... it is simple really. The universe like humans is made up of five elements

– water, earth, air, ether (space) and fire. We are all composed of these five elements but we do not all have the same amount of each of these elements. It is found that we have two elements more than the others. These two elements create doshas or energies. There are three doshas or energies – vata, pitta, and kapha.

The doshas are the three primary energetic principles which regulate all physiological and psychological processes in the body. A harmonious state between the doshas or energies results in the foundation for good health while a disharmonious imbalance results in a variety of signs and symptoms, one of them being weight gain and even obesity.

The elements ether and air combine to form the dosha or energy vata. Fire and water form pitta while water and earth constitute kapha. Therefore vata, having the light elements of ether and air, has the mobile characteristic of air and ether; pitta acquires the energy of fire and water (helps control digestive fire) while kapha inherits the solid or stable elements of water and earth.

## **Eat according to your constitution: one way of controlling weight**

In Ayurveda weight gain is a kapha imbalance; however, the root problem is often not kapha. Individuals with a vata imbalance easily gain weight when stressed, overwhelmed or overworked. When vata is out of balance, additions to food are common. Vata people need regular meals, warm nourishing foods, with warming spices and adequate amounts of nutritious unsaturated oils or healthy fats.

Pitta individuals should ideally not skip meals or they can get irritable! They need regular meals that are lightly cooked with plenty of dark green bitter vegetables, asparagus, green beans and mild spices such as fennel or coriander.

Kapha individuals are good-natured, stable and

not easily stressed. They need to get to improve their metabolism. Warming spices and foods are recommended as well as bitter leafy greens and fresh herbs.

## **What to eat and when: eating at the correct time enhances weight loss**

Breakfast should be warm, nutritious, satisfying and cereal based. Ayurveda recommends eating your big meal at midday, which will give you long-lasting energy to overcome prime craving time in the mid to late afternoon. Dinner should be the lightest meal. Digestion is much weaker in the evening, plus lying down to sleep a few hours later further slows down digestion, metabolism and circulation. The body simply cannot assimilate large evening meals properly. The result is that much of the food is digested poorly and eventually creates toxins, fat and excess weight.

Especially avoid in the evening: cheese, yogurt, rich desserts, red meat, leftovers and large salads.

## **Conscious eating habits**

How you eat your food is even more important than what you eat. Even foods that normally cause imbalances will be digested reasonably well if the proper rules are followed: chewed thoroughly, meals that are not rushed. Likewise if you eat the correct food in the wrong way your digestion will be compromised. Agni (digestive fire), one of the most important concepts of Ayurveda is damaged or low and formation of ama or toxins will follow. From an Ayurvedic perspective when agni is damaged vata is unbalanced and there is body and mind disturbance. If you believe you do not have the time to enjoy a fresh, lovingly prepared sit-down meal, take a look at your life and shift priorities where possible. Every meal should be a sacred ritual, according to Ayurveda. Take a moment to breathe, relax and say a blessing at every meal. No phone, TV, newspaper or work while eating. Your body digests food best when you relax, so eat slowly and sit quietly for 10 minutes after you eat to aid digestion.

## **Internal cleansing or Panchakarma**

Panchakarma is recommended for detoxification and to stimulate and enhance all functions of the body. This will have a direct result on weight loss. The massage, steam treatments and internal cleansing therapies of Ayurveda can be done twice a year to prevent toxins from accumulating and eliminating their build-up in bodily tissues. Panchakarma will result in healthier eating habits, balanced weight and increased energy levels.

## **Exercise - Yes, can't get away from it**

Enjoy your exercise activity and it will be easier to stick to it. Also, remember that all of us don't benefit from the same amount or type of exercise. Choose your exercise programme according to your constitution. The ideal exercise options to balance vata should incorporate slow movements, not be too tiring, and help settle the





mind and body. Slow dancing, low-impact aerobics, tai chi, leisurely swimming in warm water, walking and yoga are examples of vata-balancing exercise activities. While walking is universally beneficial, a pitta person may prefer water sports, e.g., swimming while kapha individuals need to add something really energetic such as brisk walking or jogging.

### Stress reduction

There are many ways of reducing stress in today's often frantic lives such as aromatherapy, massage, acupuncture, meditation, tai chi, breathing exercises and simple yoga poses that will boost your energy and stimulate your metabolism. Just take a few minutes to breathe deeply and focus inwards on a daily basis.

### Ayurvedic herbs

An Ayurvedic practitioner may suggest herb formulas that gently detoxify the system while kindling the digestive fire, allowing proper digestion, absorption and assimilation. Excess kapha in the form of fat and water can be successfully reduced as the herbs contribute to stronger pancreatic, splenic, hepatic and renal functions. Strengthening and cleansing these organs may lead to a more efficient metabolism and regular elimination.

### Triphala is an ancient Ayurvedic herb that is composed of three dried Indian super-fruits that work synergistically together:

- ☉ **Amalaki** works as a natural antioxidant and removes excess inflammation from the body. It also helps to increase lean body mass and maintain healthy blood sugar levels.
- ☉ **Haritaki** supports the body's natural cleansing process by gently removing toxins that accumulate in the colon.
- ☉ **Bibhitaki** is particularly effective in reducing the accumulation of fat and fluids in the body.

Triphala can be used daily for rejuvenation and detoxification. Popular for its unique ability to gently cleanse and detoxify the system while simultaneously replenishing and nourishing it, this traditional formula supports the proper functions of the digestive, circulatory, respiratory and genitourinary systems. Most people can benefit from adding triphala to their regime.

### Fennel

Fennel removes mucus and fat from the intestinal tract, and is a natural appetite suppressant.

### Fenugreek

Fenugreek seeds burn fat and help absorption.

They are useful for dissolving fat within the liver. They are one of nature's super-foods due to their beneficial effect on fat metabolism, blood sugar and also their cancer-fighting properties.

### Fresh curry leaves

Improve functioning of the stomach and small intestine. They are mildly laxative and thus can tackle multiple digestive problems caused by food intake. They are directly added to food or as an extract in the form of juice and can be consumed at the end of a meal.

Putting on excess weight is a kapha imbalance. The cellular fire in the tissue is low. Excess food and calories consumed by the person are not burned and these turn into adipose or fat tissue. This makes the person overweight and obese. Our diets should therefore comprise spices that decrease the kapha dosha or energy in the body and increase our biological fire pungent, so bitter and astringent foods will help. What this means is that you eat your normal healthy foods emphasising the kapha-reducing foods and making sure the food contains all tastes.

### How does one do this?

To understand how to do this we need to know that all foods have six tastes to them and if we are not eating all six tastes daily this causes an imbalance in the body.





Each food produces its own energy. How much of each dosha or energy our body produces depends greatly on how much of each taste we have eaten. Once ingested, tastes work on even after digestion has occurred. They continue to influence our physical and emotional balance. Spices can be safely added to anyone's daily diet to bring about these changes too.

There are spice mixes available that give all the six tastes when added to meals. The Coolherbals Kapha Spice Mix is one. It consists of specially blended spices all working synergistically to promote more efficient digestion and fulfill the six tastes when they are not fulfilled by our food. By satisfying the six tastes, cravings and overeating is curtailed. Once the target goal has been achieved, continue to eat foods from the six tastes every day.

To reduce kapha you want to increase foods that are bitter, pungent and astringent. All foods have their own qualities. Warm, dry, lighter foods reduce kapha by stimulating and increasing warmth to help a sluggish digestive system. Eating more of the bitter foods such as green leafy salads and pungent foods such as hot peppers, black pepper, onions, garlic and ginger and astringent foods such as lentils, chickpeas, beans, yellow split peas, okra and turmeric will help. **CHW**

### The six tastes are:

- ☉ **Salt**, e.g., pickles, meat, soy sauce
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** calming and enhances digestion
- ☉ **Sweet**, e.g., sugar, honey, certain grains (wheat, rice, barley, cornmeal, millet, rye, quinoa), milk, sweet fruits (apples, berries, pears, grapes, sweet melons), sweet vegetables (corn, carrots, onions, sweet potatoes)
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** calming and soothing to the system
- ☉ **Sour**, e.g., Tomato sauce, yogurt, lemon, tomatoes, vinegar, some fruits are sweet and sour (strawberries, grapes, oranges, pineapple, papaya, rhubarb)
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** stimulates digestion.
- ☉ **Bitter**, e.g., salad, celery, olives, spinach, turmeric, lettuce
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** creates lightness and clarity

- ☉ **Pungent**, e.g., cayenne pepper, garlic, onions, ginger, carrots
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** decongests the system increasing digestion
- ☉ **Astringent**, e.g., beans, lentils, chickpeas, cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, carrots, corn, soy beans, celery, spinach
- ☉ **Effect on the body:** creates lightness.

Extracted from *Slimmer in 1 Hour...Slimmer Forever* by Ravi Bhanot and Sushma Bhanot. For further information, contact Sushma Bhanot at [sushma@coolherbals.com](mailto:sushma@coolherbals.com) or by call 0208 579039.

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