

SPRING CLEANING

Ayurveda-Style

Fatigue, achiness, skin problems, and frequent headaches or colds are signs you might need to detox



By Sara Avant Stover

Our ancestors lived in harmony with nature's changing seasons. In lieu of fancy spas and healing retreats, they relied on plants, prayer, and rituals to heal themselves. Today, we've lost our connection to that wisdom. The frenzied pace of the modern world, our increased exposure to environmental toxins, and a growing alienation from nature have caused most of us to fall out of alignment with an optimal state of health and happiness. But each new year brings another opportunity to perform the time-honored ritual of internal cleansing. Spring, which celebrates rebirth and lasts approximately from March 15 to May 15 in the Ayurvedic calendar, is the perfect time for detoxification. And if you suffer from headaches, indigestion, frequent colds, constipation, acne, bad breath, disturbed sleep, PMS, or sluggishness, a spring detox could be just the thing to get you back on track.

Cleansing the Ayurvedic Way

According to yoga's sister tradition, Ayurveda (the ancient Indian science of holistic healing), health means a body that is clear of toxins, a mind that is at peace, emotions that are calm and happy, organs that are functioning normally, and wastes that are efficiently eliminated. Panchakarma, or PK, the Ayurvedic method of detoxification, aids in reversing the effects of daily living and restoring good health.

The core regime of PK consists of adherence to a diet that's appropriate for your psychosomatic constitution (or dosha), sweating and purgation therapies, and internal and external oleation (oil massage). These methods gently cleanse the body's tissues of toxins to open the subtle channels (or nadis) and bring life-enhancing energy that increases vitality, inner peace, confidence, and well-being. For the full PK experience, you must visit an Ayurvedic clinic, but there are truncated versions you can safely follow at home, including this version, which has been adapted from renowned Ayurvedic physician Vasant Lad's *Ayurvedic Home Remedies* (Three Rivers Press, reprint edition, 1999).

Setting the Stage

To do Panchakarma at home, you must set aside 10 days during which you will be able to slow down and disengage from the world. If you can't fully disconnect, you must, at the very least, cut way back on your responsibilities. Take care of as much business as possible before you begin: Catch up on email and phone messages; let friends and family know that you will be withdrawn from relationships for a short while; gather all or most of the supplies that you will need prior to beginning; clean your home and fill it with fresh flowers, inspirational reading material, and soothing music to support the healing process.

Before you begin, it's essential to determine your Ayurvedic constitution, or dosha. You can do this most accurately through a diagnosis with an Ayurvedic physician. The next-best thing is taking a test, found in introductory books on Ayurveda (see Resources Box, page 88) or online at www.naturesforumulary.com/divya/test1.html. This information is necessary for ascertaining which foods and herbs you should take during PK. If you are a combination of two, decide which is dominant.

You can find most of the ingredients you'll need at your local health-food store. Whenever possible, use organic. If you're not able to find some of the specialty herbs, you can order them from one of the companies listed in the Resources Box. A general word of advice:

Throughout the 10 days, get plenty of rest, eat a light diet, and take responsibility for your own healing.

Know Your Dosha

In Ayurveda, the five elements—space, air, earth, fire and water—make up everything in the universe, including the human body. These elements come together to create three different constitutional types, or doshas: Vata (airy), Pitta (fiery), and Kapha (earthy).

Knowing your dosha will help you select the optimum foods, exercises, and lifestyle choices that will

support and nurture your health and avoid the ones that can cause imbalance.

The most accurate way to learn your constitution is through an examination by an Ayurvedic doctor, who can also provide specific recommendations. A full diagnosis is more accurate than a self-test, because most people are actually a combination of doshas.

Benefits of Detoxification

- Strengthens your immune system to become more resistant to illness
- Reverses the negative effects of stress and slows the aging process
- Induces deep relaxation and peace of mind
- Enhances your self-reliance and self-esteem
- Helps you become more enthusiastic for life
- Inspires you and others to take better care of yourselves
- Lets you feel more connected by getting in touch with nature's cycles
- Fosters creativity

Panchakarma

Days 1-3

1. Early in the morning, consume 2 ounces of warmed, liquefied ghee (clarified butter, which can be found in health-food or Indian specialty stores). If you're Vata, take ghee with a pinch of rock salt or sea salt; if Pitta, take ghee plain; if Kapha, take ghee with a pinch of trikatu (an Ayurvedic herb).

2. Eat 2 to 3 meals a day at regular times in a relaxed environment. Choose foods according to your doshic diet (online at www.ayurveda-for-you.com). Avoid white sugar, caffeine, alcohol, and refined table salt; preservatives and artificial colors; refined carbohydrates including white flour, artificial and refined oils; conventionally grown, pesticide-laden produce; processed meats; and pharmaceutical drugs. (If you are on medication, consult your primary-care physician before embarking on this or any cleansing program.) Emphasize organic fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and seeds (except peanuts, which are too acidic and slow the the metabolic rate of the liver), whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, millet, and amaranth), organic cold-pressed or unrefined oils, and wholesome protein sources such as legumes (lentils, split peas, and split mung beans).

3. During these three days and throughout the cleanse, drink plenty of fresh water. Adding lemon juice to water stimulates the body's digestive juices and has a slight laxative effect, which is important for detox. Squeeze a wedge or one-quarter of a lemon into warm water and drink immediately after rising in the morning. Throughout the day, you may also sip herbal teas, such as burdock (a blood cleanser), dandelion (for the liver), red clover (a blood purifier and expectorant), corn silk (a diuretic to flush the kidneys), Yogi Detox, or any flavor you enjoy.

Days 4-6

1. For 15 to 20 minutes each morning, apply 7 to 8 ounces warmed oil from head to toe, rubbing it gently but thoroughly. For Vata types, sesame oil is recommended; for Pittas, sunflower oil; Kapha types should use corn oil.

2. After the oil is absorbed, take a hot bath or shower. A sauna or steam room is an even better alternative. The oil helps draw toxins out of the tissues, and sweating helps eliminate them through the skin. Leave some oil on the skin after bathing.

3. Consume one bowl of kitchari (see recipe, *below*), a one-pot meal of seasoned rice and mung dal, two to three times a day. According to Vasant Lad, "Kitchari

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Kitchari

According to Ayurveda, this is one of the most nutritious and easiest foods to digest, perfect for a detox. Yields 4 servings

1 cup white basmati rice
1 cup split mung beans
1 tablespoon ghee
¼ teaspoon cumin seeds
¼ teaspoon brown mustard seeds
¼ teaspoon turmeric
¼ teaspoon rock salt or sea salt
4 cups water

1. Rinse the rice and mung beans until the water is clear.
2. In a saucepan over medium heat, heat the ghee and add the mustard seeds and cumin seeds. Stir a moment until the seeds pop.
3. Add the rice, mung beans, turmeric, and salt, and stir until well blended with the spices.
4. Add the water and bring to a boil. Boil for 5 minutes, uncovered, stirring occasionally.
5. Turn down the heat to low and cover, leaving the lid slightly ajar. Cook until tender, about 20-25 minutes.

(Adapted from *Ayurvedic Cooking for Self-Healing*, by Usha Lad and Vasant Lad (Ayurvedic Press, 2nd edition, 1997)

Precaution: It is important to see a primary health care practitioner for a thorough assessment prior to undertaking any detoxification. Panchakarma is not intended for pregnant or nursing women, children, or the elderly.

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is the Sanskrit word for 'food of God.' *Ki* also means 'space,' and *chari* means 'move,' so kitchari helps you move into the inner space, the inner sky of consciousness. It's a wholesome, balancing food that promotes cleansing and detoxification. Also, kitchari improves clarity of perception and promotes a calm, quiet, loving, and compassionate state of mind."

4. Every night, at least one hour after dinner, take one-half to 1 teaspoon of triphala powder (an Ayurvedic herb), dissolved in hot water and allowed to steep for 10 to 15 minutes (or take 2 to 3 capsules).

Days 6-8

1. Continue with your schedule from days 4-6.

2. Add a medicated enema, or basti, to your regimen each day after your oil massage. To prepare the enema,

boil 1 tablespoon of dashmoola (an Ayurvedic herb) in 1 pint of water for five minutes. When it cools, strain it. Use the remaining liquid as an enema. Retain the liquid for as long as you comfortably can.

Day 9

You may cease the oil massage and enema. Enjoy kitchari for your three meals, adding steamed vegetables.

Day 10 and beyond

Begin to integrate more foods back into your diet. Go slowly so you don't overwhelm your system.

Ease out just as you eased in during the first three days, favoring fresh produce and whole grains that agree with your dosha.

Detoxification cleanses the senses, so you can look forward to a new, heightened appreciation for the smells and tastes of your food. 🙏

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Conscious Eating

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With practice, this will become a ritual that you won't want to live without!

Some things to keep in mind....

- Maintain a consistent mealtime schedule as best you can.
- Be mindful of your conversations during meals. While it is best to eat in silence during meals, if this is not possible, at least try not to talk while you are chewing and to engage in calm, soothing conversations.
- Be attentive to your digestion during meals by not eating when you are upset or when you are not hungry.
- Allow a few hours to pass between meals and bedtime.
- Sit on your heels for 15 minutes after meals in the yoga pose Vajrasana; or take a short walk to facilitate proper digestion.
- Never eat while standing up, lying down, or on the run!

Food Blessing from The Bhagavad Gita

Brahmarpanam brahma havih
Brahmagnau brahmana hutam
Brahmaiva tena gantavyam
Brahmakarma samadhina
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

Brahman is the offering.
Brahman is the oblation.
Poured out by Brahman into the
fire of Brahman.
Brahman is to be attained by the
one who contemplates the
action of Brahman.

(Brahman refers to Pure Consciousness)

Alternately, you can recite a food blessing from your own faith or create one of your own! The important thing is that it has meaning for you. 🙏

Resources

Suggested reading for more support and information:

- **The Path of Practice** (Wellspring/Ballantine, 2001) and **A Life of Balance** (Healing Arts Press, 1994), by Maya Tiwari
- **Ayurvedic Home Remedies** (Three Rivers Press, reprint edition, 1999), by Vasant Lad
- **Yoga and Ayurveda** (Lotus Press, 1999), by David Frawley
- **Ayurveda and Panchakarma**, by Sunil V. Joshi
- **Essential Ayurveda: What It Is and What It Can Do for You** (New World Library, 2003), by Shubra Krishan

To order Ayurvedic herbs and supplies:

www.banyanbotanicals.com • www.himalayahealthcare.com
www.ayurveda.com

Where to go for Panchakarma in the United States:

www.theraj.com • www.kripalu.org
www.ayurveda.com • www.treoflife.nu (for vegan Panchakarma)