

Ṛtucaryā

Seasonal Practices Part Two — Summer and Fall

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Part one of this two-part article appeared in the Winter, 2008, issue of *LOAJ* and covered Ayurvedic-appropriate lifestyle practices for Winter and Spring. To review, *ṛtu* means the movement of time in its seasonal aspect. The movement of time combines with light to move through cyclical polarities of day and night, youth and old age, and inhalation and exhalation, among many other polarities.

Seasonal cycles are governed by the laws of cosmic *prāṇa* and *apāna*, governing involution and evolution respectively. Time brings changes in the *guṇas* or primordial qualities, and in the *doṣas* or psycho-biological humors. These seasonal changes influence all living organisms. Our normal health can be maintained by seasonal rituals to bring us into attunement with cosmic consciousness. *Ṛtu sandhi*, or seasonal junctions are times of change and are approached with care and caution. Cleansing rituals such as *pañcakarma*, the five cleansing therapies of Ayurveda, are favored at these junctures because cleansing and rejuvenation bring change. The outward seasonal changes facilitate the inward changes that take place during cleansing rituals. The need for caution is why only experienced practitioners are advised to supervise *pañcakarma*.

In this article, we will consider practices conducive to good health during the summer and fall seasons.

Summer

In summer, solar energy predominates and can bring increases in heatstroke, hives, peptic ulcer, violence, colitis, diarrhoea, sweating and boils. It is better to avoid vigorous exercise and favor swimming, taking exercise during the early morning and descending sun hours, especially after the heat of the day has passed.

It is advised to awaken early by about 5:00 a.m. and follow a seasonally adapted *dinacaryā* (daily health program), using a silver tongue scraper for *jihvā*

(tongue) *nirlekhana* (scraping away of toxins), and drinking cool water from a silver cup.

Yoga āsana practice for summertime can give emphasis to the camel, fish, cobra, boat, bow, cow and palm tree poses. Moon salutations are suggested for helping cool the nerves, bones and muscles to withstand the increase in environmental *pitta*, along with avoidance of inverted poses.

Performing *śītalī prāṇāyāma* with inner retention at the navel can help cool the gastrointestinal (G.I.) tract, especially the small intestinal region where *pitta* dominates. *Samyad darśana* is a passive meditation on the equal observation of inner and outer phenomenon, and is very helpful for removing judgement and criticism from the mind.

Use coconut oil for *abhyāṅga* or oil massage, which penetrates to the sweat glands and helps avoid sunburn, rashes and hives. *Piṇḍa*, sunflower and neem oils are also cooling. Neem oil is said to have the effectiveness of a SPF 35 sun block when frequently applied. Avoid direct exposure to hot sun in mid- to late-summer days.

Favor cool showers followed by application of sandalwood essential oil to the crown, third eye, throat, heart, solar plexus and navel. Other sites sensitive to *pitta doṣa* are the carotid, temporal, radial, brachial, femoral, tibial and popliteal arteries, where *prāṇa* is released into the aura and electro-magnetic field.

Consider dressing in white, light blue or light-colored, loose-fitting clothing of cotton or silk. The thermo-dynamic action of silk is cooling in summer and warming in winter. Use green or gray tinted sunglasses to protect the eyes from photosensitivity, and a wide-brimmed hat to help protect the back of the neck (medulla oblongata) from excessive sun exposure.

Take one teaspoon of bitter ghee on an empty stomach on first hunger to help cleanse the liver, a

prominent pitta site of pitta doṣa. A light breakfast taken about 8:00-10:00 a.m. can include barley or wheat cereal cooked with holy basil, mint, cardamom, ghee and/or coconut. Fruit snacks can be apples, pears, figs, melons, blueberries, prunes, sweet cherries or purple grapes. Fruits should be taken separately from other foods.

Work until hungry for lunch, then take *khicaḍī* with coconut, fresh squeezed lime juice and fresh cilantro. Avoid cooking at noontime, but have the food prepared about late morning, or later, when the heat begins to wane. A cooling *lassi* made of 1/4-cup fresh yogurt and equal amount of cool water, with a pinch of fresh cilantro and a pinch of cumin powder can be taken with lunch or as a mid-afternoon snack to help digestion. Another recipe is to add fresh rose water and a teaspoon of maple syrup to the yogurt and water before blending.

Avoid making decisions or having heated discussions at noontime. Avoid signing divorce papers in summer. Instead, make decisions in the cool part of the morning or evening, or wait until winter for cool-headedness, when compassion and forgiveness come more naturally. *Kledaka kapha*, in the stomach, can dry out, along with the other kaphas. Therefore, it is permitted to take a short nap of about fifteen minutes after lunch.

Avoid sour foods such as citrus, garlic, onions, red wine, tomatoes. Also avoid salt, chillies and other heating spices in summertime. Take dinner by sunset or about 7:00 p.m., Okra, cucumber, broccoli, fresh *rāyatā*, yams, and salads are sweet, cooling, bitter or astringent and help balance *pitta*.

Take a pleasant evening, moonlight stroll, wearing white flowers like jasmine or gardenia, and jewelry of pearls, sandalwood, amethyst, moonstone, silver or malachite. Summer is more for romance than sex, which can be too heating and induce the spread of more STD's (sexually transmitted diseases).

Bedtime can be about 11:00 p.m., after rubbing the soles and crown with a little coconut oil, and taking about 1/2 teaspoon of *āmalakī*, or Indian gooseberry, with warm water. *Āmalakī* helps assimilation and elimination. Or take cooled milk, which has been first boiled, and then steeped with a pearl in a silver glass or

cup. Sleep on the right side for cooling the nervous system and on the left for a warming effect.

Fall

During the vāta-like autumn season, clear, light, emptying, windy, rough, dry, mobile qualities affect all living beings. Consciousness undergoes adaptation and variation of perception in the body and mind as it begins to turn inward. One becomes prone to constipation, cracking joints, arthritic pain, insomnia, loneliness, and increased fear and confusion.

It is wise to arise about 6:00 a.m. when stillness prevails. Use a brass or copper scraper for cleaning the tongue to remove any fermented *āma*, or toxins. Swish warm sesame oil in the mouth for about three minutes, then massage the gums with the index finger to help take care of any tendency of *bodhaka kapha* to dry out the mouth.

Gargle with a solution of 1/4-cup warm water with 1/3 teaspoon of *harītakī* to remove *āma* and strengthen the teeth and gums, which are subject to weakness and recession in this vāta-dominant season. Drink a half cup of warm water that has been steeped with 1/2 teaspoon of *harītakī* from the previous night, to help ensure complete elimination of the colon, the principal site of vāta.

Yoga āsana is selected to help strengthen the pelvis as the main seat of vāta, and to help remove systemic vāta. Do gentle forward and backward bends, gentle spinal twists, and camel, cobra, cow, and cat poses. Gentle sun salutations are especially suitable to increase the heart rate, promote sweating, strengthen the joints and ligaments, strengthen the endocrine (glandular) system, regulate the hormonal system, strengthen the abdominal muscles, and calm the mind, while balancing all five sub-doṣas of vāta.

Shoulderstand and headstand can be done in moderation, depending on the individual's neck strength, age, etc. Lotus and hero poses help to increase devotion, quiet the mind and prepare for a calm day. Always complete your yoga stretching in *śavāsana* to slow the heart rate, and be reminded the beats will cease at a measured point in time. Bring your attention to the whole body from the head to the toes, to release any remaining tension into the ground

below. Sit up gently by turning to the left, to come to sit in easy pose, resolving to maintain calmness and centredness throughout the day, and to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Prāṇāyāma can be alternate nostril breathing with gentle inner retention and the top and bottom of the breath, helping to increase relaxation and oxygenation of the central nervous system. Meditation can be to observe the breath as it merges together at the third eye, giving rest, mental equilibrium and quietness to the mind.

Use warm sesame or *mahānārāyaṇa* oil to rub generously onto the whole body and leave the oil on for about 21 minutes in a warm room, to help it penetrate to all seven tissue levels. Continue to rub the oil into the body, especially the joints and abdomen; then shower with comfortably hot water, but no soap, except perhaps for the private parts. Dry yourself with a vigorous towel massage. Dress with clean, warm clothes in several layers, choosing warming colors and avoiding black and blue garments, because these can increase an undue feeling of vastness and emptiness.

On first hunger, chew a handful of hulled sesame seeds to provide bio-available calcium and other trace minerals to help strengthen the teeth, hair and bones. For breakfast, take oatmeal, tapioca, cream of wheat or soupy foods, and sip hot water to help lubricate your digestion. Protect your ears from the wind when going outdoors.

Lunch is best taken about 11:00 to 12:00 noon, with hearty servings of *khicaḍī*, steamed vegetables with oil, soup, *capāttī* and a little hot water with lemon juice. A short rest is all right after lunch, to help slow the heart rate and respirations, and help build up *śleṣaka kapha* to nourish and protect the joints.

Supper is best from about 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., consisting of rice, ghee, soups, and perhaps a concurrent desert of *halavā* or almond paste. Tea of cumin seed, fennel seed, clove, cinnamon and/or ginger will help improve digestion and maintain warmth in the belly. Avoid cold foods like salad.

Gentle evening activities such as home movies, activities with children, preparation for tomorrow and early bedtime of about 9:30 or 10:00 p.m. help to ensure a good rest and a feeling of satisfaction with the day. In

vāta season or with vāta aggravation, avoid vigorous exercise such as jogging, marathon running and heavy weight lifting.

At bedtime, choose a sedative beverage of hot, spiced milk taken about an hour before sleep to provide tryptophan to help with sound sleep. Add 1/2 teaspoon of ghee for its vāta-soothing and *ojas* (immunity) building properties. Another choice is to take *triphalā* or *haritakī* tea to help ensure a complete bowel movement on rising the following morning.

General principles for vāta management include avoiding loud music, fast driving, excess sex, cold drafts, excess traveling, old food, cold drinks, over-fasting, over-exercising and over-talking.

As stated in part one of this article, the general principles described here also apply to the life seasons of childhood (kapha time), puberty to middle age (pitta time) and menopause to old age (vāta time). Time is a causative factor, according to Vaiśeṣika philosophy, and causes each of us to spend our breaths until the last moment of the earthly sojourn. The quality of our daily and seasonal decisions governs the quality of our passing from this planet.

Om Śāntī.

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