

The Ayurvedic diet

HEALTH
HUB



The Ayurvedic diet is an eating pattern that's been around for thousands of years.

It's based on the principles of Ayurvedic medicine and focuses on balancing different types of energy within your body, which is said to improve health.

Unlike many other diets, the Ayurvedic diet provides personalized recommendations about which foods to eat and avoid based on your body type.

It's also popular because it's not only said to promote better health for your body but also your mind.

WHAT IS THE AYURVEDIC DIET?

Ayurveda is a form of holistic medicine that's focused on promoting balance between your body and mind.

According to Ayurveda, five elements make up the universe — *vayu* (air), *jala* (water), *akash* (space), *teja* (fire), and *prithvi* (earth).

These elements are believed to form three different doshas, which are defined as types of energy that circulate within your body. Each dosha is responsible for specific physiological functions.

For example, the pitta dosha controls hunger, thirst, and body temperature. Meanwhile, the vata dosha maintains electrolyte balance and movement, while the kapha dosha promotes joint function.

The Ayurvedic diet is a component of Ayurveda and has been practiced for thousands of years. It's based on determining your dominant dosha and eating specific foods to promote balance between all three doshas.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Ayurvedic diet is a type of eating plan that sets guidelines for when, how, and what you should eat based on your dosha, or body type.

Here are some of the main characteristics for each dosha to help you determine which type matches you best:

- **PITTA (FIRE + WATER).** Intelligent, hard-working, and decisive. This dosha generally has a medium physical build, short temper, and may suffer from conditions like indigestion, heart disease, or high blood pressure.
- **VATA (AIR + SPACE).** Creative, energetic, and lively. People with this dosha are usually thin with a light frame and may struggle with digestive issues, fatigue, or anxiety when out of balance.
- **KAPHA (EARTH + WATER).** Naturally calm, grounded, and loyal. Those with a kapha dosha often have a sturdier frame and may have issues with weight gain, asthma, depression, or diabetes.

According to this diet, your dosha determines which foods you should eat to promote inner balance.

For example, the pitta dosha focuses on cooling, energizing foods and limits spices, nuts, and seeds.

Meanwhile, the vata dosha favours warm, moist, and grounding foods while restricting dried fruits, bitter herbs, and raw veggies.

Finally, the kapha dosha limits heavy foods like nuts, seeds, and oils in favour of fruits, veggies, and legumes. Red meat, artificial sweeteners, and processed ingredients are limited for all three doshas. Instead, the Ayurvedic diet encourages eating healthy whole foods.

BENEFITS

Here are a few of the potential benefits of the Ayurvedic Diet.

✓ ENCOURAGES WHOLE FOODS

Although the Ayurvedic diet has specific guidelines for each dosha, the diet encourages eating whole foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes.

This can benefit your health greatly, as these foods are rich in many essential nutrients.

The diet also minimizes processed foods, which often lack fibre and important vitamins and minerals.



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✓ COULD PROMOTE WEIGHT LOSS

Given that the Ayurvedic diet emphasizes nutrient-rich whole foods, it might boost weight loss. While limited research is available on the Ayurvedic diet and weight loss, some studies have found that it may be effective in this regard.

For example, one study in 200 people with pitta or kapha doshas showed that following the Ayurvedic diet for three months led to significant weight loss. These people supposedly tend to be heavier than those with vata doshas.

Another small study found that following an Ayurveda-based lifestyle modification program, which included dietary changes and yoga classes, resulted in an average weight loss of 13 pounds (6 kg) over 9 months.

✓ PROMOTES MINDFULNESS

In addition to what foods you eat, mindfulness is another major part of the Ayurvedic diet. Mindfulness is a practice that involves paying close attention to how you feel in the present. Mindful eating emphasizes minimizing distractions during meals to focus on the taste, texture, and smell of your food.

According to one small study in 10 people, practicing mindful eating reduced body weight, depression, stress, and binge eating. Mindful eating may also enhance self-control and promote a healthy relationship with food.

NEGATIVES

Although there are several benefits associated with the Ayurvedic diet, there are drawbacks to consider:

✗ CAN BE EXTREMELY CONFUSING

One of the major issues with the Ayurvedic diet is that it can be confusing and difficult to follow. Not only are there specific food lists for each dosha but also many additional rules to follow. For example, the recommendations regarding which foods you should eat and avoid change throughout the year based on the season.

There are also suggestions for when, how often, and how much you should eat, which can be challenging — especially for those just getting started on the diet.

✗ MAY FEEL OVERLY RESTRICTIVE

On the Ayurvedic diet, there are extensive lists of foods that you are advised to eat or avoid depending on your

dosha. This can mean cutting out healthy, whole foods or entire food groups that are thought to aggravate specific doshas.

Other ingredients like red meat or processed foods are also left out, which may require you to make significant modifications to your current diet.

This can feel overly restrictive and less flexible than other meal plans and may make it difficult to stick to the diet long term.

✗ OFTEN SUBJECTIVE

Another issue with the Ayurvedic diet is that it's subjective. The diet is centred around determining your dominant dosha, which is based on a set of physical and mental traits.

Although there are plenty of guidelines and online quizzes available to help ease the process, figuring out your dosha is not fool proof. As the recommendations for the diet are tailored to each dosha, choosing the incorrect dosha could negatively impact your results.

Furthermore, no evidence currently supports the concept of doshas or the claim that your personality traits determine which foods you should eat and avoid. Therefore, it's unclear how beneficial the diet is, even if you correctly determine your dosha.

FOODS TO EAT

In Ayurveda, foods are categorized based on their physical qualities and the way they are said to affect your body. This helps determine which ingredients work best for different doshas. Below are some of the foods you should eat based on your specific dosha.

PITTA

- ✓ **PROTEIN:** poultry in small amounts, egg whites, tofu.
- ✓ **DAIRY:** milk, ghee, butter.
- ✓ **FRUITS:** sweet, fully ripe fruits like oranges, pears, pineapples, bananas, melons, and mangoes.
- ✓ **VEGETABLES:** sweet and bitter veggies, including cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, zucchini, leafy greens, sweet potatoes, carrots, squash, and Brussels sprouts.
- ✓ **LEGUMES:** chickpeas, lentils, mung beans, lima beans, black beans, kidney beans.



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- ✓ **GRAINS:** barley, oats, basmati rice, wheat.
- ✓ **NUTS AND SEEDS:** small amounts of pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, sunflower seeds, coconut.
- ✓ **HERBS AND SPICES:** small amounts of black pepper, cumin, cinnamon, cilantro, dill, turmeric.

VATA

- ✓ **PROTEIN:** small amounts of poultry, seafood, tofu.
- ✓ **DAIRY:** milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, ghee.
- ✓ **FRUITS:** fully ripe, sweet, and heavy fruits, such as bananas, blueberries, strawberries, grapefruit, mangoes, peaches, and plums.
- ✓ **VEGETABLES:** cooked vegetables, including beets, sweet potatoes, onions, radishes, turnips, carrots, and green beans.
- ✓ **LEGUMES:** chickpeas, lentils, mung beans.
- ✓ **GRAINS:** cooked oats, cooked rice.
- ✓ **NUTS AND SEEDS:** any, including almonds, walnuts, pistachios, chia seeds, flax seeds, and sunflower seeds.
- ✓ **HERBS AND SPICES:** cardamom, ginger, cumin, basil, cloves, oregano, thyme, black pepper.

KAPHA

- ✓ **PROTEIN:** poultry in small amounts, seafood, egg whites.
- ✓ **DAIRY:** skim milk, goat milk, soy milk.
- ✓ **FRUITS:** apples, blueberries, pears, pomegranates, cherries, and dried fruit like raisins, figs, and prunes.
- ✓ **VEGETABLES:** asparagus, leafy greens, onions, potatoes, mushrooms, radishes, okra.
- ✓ **LEGUMES:** any, including black beans, chickpeas, lentils, and navy beans.
- ✓ **GRAINS:** oats, rye, buckwheat, barley, corn, millet.
- ✓ **NUTS AND SEEDS:** small amounts of pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, flax seeds.
- ✓ **HERBS AND SPICES:** any, including cumin, black pepper, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, basil, oregano, and thyme.

FOODS TO AVOID

Here are some of the foods you should limit or avoid based on your dosha.

PITTA

- ✗ **PROTEINS:** red meat, seafood, egg yolks.
- ✗ **DAIRY:** sour cream, cheese, buttermilk.
- ✗ **FRUITS:** sour or unripe fruits, such as grapes, apricots, papaya, grapefruit, and sour cherries.
- ✗ **VEGETABLES:** chili peppers, beets, tomatoes, onions, eggplant.
- ✗ **GRAINS:** brown rice, millet, corn, rye.
- ✗ **NUTS AND SEEDS:** almonds, cashews, peanuts, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts, sesame seeds.
- ✗ **HERBS AND SPICES:** any spices not included in the list other list.

VATA

- ✗ **PROTEINS:** red meat.
- ✗ **FRUITS:** dried, unripe, or light fruits, such as raisins, cranberries, pomegranates, and pears.
- ✗ **VEGETABLES:** any raw vegetables, as well as cooked broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, mushrooms, potatoes, and tomatoes.
- ✗ **LEGUMES:** beans, such as black beans, kidney beans, and navy beans.
- ✗ **GRAINS:** buckwheat, barley, rye, wheat, corn, quinoa, millet.
- ✗ **HERBS AND SPICES:** bitter or astringent herbs like parsley, thyme, and coriander seed.

KAPHA

- ✗ **PROTEINS:** red meat, shrimp, egg yolks.
- ✗ **FRUITS:** bananas, coconuts, mangoes, fresh figs.
- ✗ **VEGETABLES:** sweet potatoes, tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers.
- ✗ **LEGUMES:** soybeans, kidney beans, miso.
- ✗ **GRAINS:** rice, wheat, cooked cereal.
- ✗ **NUTS AND SEEDS:** cashews, pecans, pine nuts, Brazil nuts, sesame seeds, walnuts.
- ✗ **HERBS AND SPICES:** any spices not included in the list other list.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

The Ayurvedic diet is a meal plan based on the principles of Ayurvedic medicine, a form of traditional medicine dating back thousands of years.

The diet involves eating or restricting certain foods based on your dosha, or body type, which is claimed to boost weight loss and support mindfulness.

However, it can be extremely confusing and restrictive, and it's based on subjective assumptions about your personality and body type. Plus, its theories are not supported by scientific evidence.