

Cleansing Excess Pitta from the Body

by Shannon Mooney

According to Ayurveda, health is our natural, balanced state. Ayurveda defines the many substances and influences, both internal and external, that are beneficial and detrimental to our bodies. While avoiding every substance or situation that is unhealthy is nearly impossible in today's world, the wisdom of Ayurveda can boost your understanding of health and support choices that lead to a balanced state of being. Ayurveda offers knowledge to increase awareness of the factors that may cause imbalance and ways to create balance by regulating the systems of the body through diet, lifestyle, herbs, yoga and meditation.

The Ayurvedic scope of health is holistic, encompassing a balanced body, mind, and spirit. The experiences we have in our relationships, including thoughts, feelings and emotions, can be equally as influential on our state of health as are foods and other ingested substances. It can be as difficult for a pitta individual to digest a hurtful criticism from their spouse, for example, as it is to digest a plate of greasy french fries. When pitta dosha flares, the body may express this imbalance as an itchy, red rash, excess heat, impatience, or even an emotional explosion of anger.

Ayurveda teaches that routine detoxification can be invaluable for maintaining good health during seasonal changes. Summer is the season where pitta dosha accumulates in the body. Particularly if an individual's constitution is pitta predominant, the increase in excess heat can become reactive, settle in the tissues, and manifest as an imbalance if it is not properly eliminated. Ayurveda offers solutions to help the body dispose of toxins as nature intended before they have a chance to take hold and cause disorder.

When there is an excess of pitta dosha and a health problem arises, toxins usually accompany it. Common toxins are bacteria, viruses, drugs, heavy metals, pesticides, chemicals, and other environmental pollutants. Toxins are also formed when we eat foods that are difficult to digest or of poor quality. Ayurveda defines this type of toxic material as ama, a heavy, sticky, undigested residue that can weaken digestion and disturb proper tissue formation.

Excess pitta can manifest in the body as:

- Fever
- Infection
- Inflammation
- Indigestion, constipation or diarrhea
- Skin rashes, sores or ulcers
- Fungi, parasites
- Bad breath and body odor
- Excessive sweating
- Bleeding
- Hyper-acidity

A person's complexion may also be an indication of whether or not there is a toxic overload in the body. Excess pitta in the blood can result in breakouts on the skin such as hives, acne, and red rashes. Cleansing the body, particularly the liver and blood, through diet and herbs can result in clear, radiant skin and more balanced pitta dosha.

There are many causes that contribute to an excessive amount of pitta in the body including:

- Eating a pitta-provoking diet
- Exposure to chemicals
- Too much sun exposure, sunburn
- Emotional stress

As with any imbalance, Ayurvedic treatment involves first removing the cause and then applying the therapeutic remedies necessary to bring the body back into balance. Ayurveda offers simple and gentle dietary, herbal, and lifestyle guidelines to assist the body in removing excess pitta dosha and cleansing the body of toxins. The therapies to balance pitta are both cooling and reducing.

Diet

The stomach and small intestine are two common sites for pitta dosha to accumulate. Ayurveda uses a pitta-soothing diet as the first line of action when addressing excess pitta. When it comes to reducing pitta, choose foods that will be cooling and cleansing to the body.

Simple dietary guidelines to help your body detox:

- Choose sweet, juicy fruits like melons, plums, and peaches.
- Include vegetables that are bitter and astringent such as collards, kale and asparagus.
- Add digestive spices to your food such as cumin, coriander, fennel and turmeric.
- Limit hot, spicy, fermented, salty, oily, fried foods.
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol and caffeine. These substances are both sharp and hot, provoking to pitta dosha.
- Drink plenty of cool, fresh water. Staying well hydrated helps the body to flush away toxins.

Herbs

Neem is one of the most powerful herbs for reducing pitta and eliminating toxins in the blood. Traditionally Neem is used for inflammation of the skin and cooling fevers. It is detoxifying, anti-parasitic, anti-viral, and anti-bacterial. It is an extremely bitter herb and is indicated in cases of excess pitta and whenever a cooling, reducing therapy is needed. Because neem is such a strong herb, it is rarely taken by itself. Neem oil and neem soap can be used as topical treatments to help calm inflammatory conditions of the skin.

Amalaki is recommended to cleanse excess pitta from the GI tract and help keep the colon clean. This gentle detoxifying herb supports regular bowel function and removes toxins from the body. Amalaki is also rich in antioxidants, supporting immune function.

Lifestyle

Ayurveda offers several tips to help balance pitta, allowing you to stay calm and cool throughout the summer months. Establishing a regular routine, including going to bed before 10pm (pitta dosha kicks into high gear from 10pm-2am), eating meals at regular times, and daily oil massage with pitta massage oil, sunflower or coconut oil can help balance the body. Here are some additional tips for keeping pitta dosha under control:

- Take a dip in cool water. If a natural spring, lake or ocean is not accessible, have a cool soak in a pool or your own bathtub.
- Take breaks, meditate, chant, or sing to quell the reactive emotions of high stress situations or stressful job environments.
- Seek out pleasantly sweet company.
- Wear cooling colored clothing, such as blue or purple. White can also be beneficial for pitta.
- Try not to exercise during the heat of the day. Plan to exercise in the cool morning, or evening hours.
- Avoid exposure to chemicals or fumes.
- Limit sunbathing and try moon-bathing. The moon's cooling light helps to balance pitta.

Yoga

Check your competitive nature and bring qualities of softness and compassion to your yoga practice. For beginners, adding forward bends, such as Uttanasana to your practice will bring more cooling energy into your body. For seasoned yogis, Moon Salutations are the ideal series of postures for balancing pitta dosha. A spinal twist helps to massage the liver and spleen, both organs of pitta dosha that work to purify and protect healthy blood.

Meditation

Meditating is a wonderful way to channel pitta's naturally sharp focus. The practice of sitting quietly and bringing your attention inward is profoundly beneficial in relieving stress and relinquishing control. When pitta runs high, an individual is prone to excessive criticism, judgment, anger, and envy. Meditation can increase your awareness and ability to monitor these negative emotions. Regular practice can aid in the transformation and release of unwanted emotions, bringing clarity and offering insight into your mental processes. Meditation can also help to relieve mental and emotional toxicity brought about through harmful relationships and/or stressful jobs. Practicing meditation can be useful in cultivating patience and compassion. As you bring these quiet qualities to your own mind, peace will echo all over the world.